

In sin of ones self.
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In Nathaniel Hawthornes *The Ministers Black Veil*, the author chooses to mask the character of the minister with the black veil to construct an allegory that would compare sin concocted by imagination with unrecognized sin of ones self. With the story being set in the Puritan time period of the settlement of New England, as nearly all of Hawthornes stories are, the reader can logically infer a certain set of value judgements. For instance, these people, being very sincere about their religion, are likely to see anything out of the ordinary, such as a black-veiled minister, as a serious issue that undermines their faith.

On the surface the first sight of the veil not only confuses the congregation, but scares them as well. This man is supposed to be their most direct mode of communication with God, and to see him in what they perceive to be quite a bizarre condition, must make them feel that their religious lives may be in danger. Yet another character trait held by this community is its inability to cope with even the slightest bit of change. Something as trivial as a man covering his face with black crape paper literally whips this community into a frenzy. I dont like it(p. 102), cried the old woman, Our parson has gone mad(102), cried Goodman Gary. Without even the slightest bit of investigation into the issue these people have brewed in their imaginations all sorts of theories as to what is so wrong with the minister.

A third, and possibly most dangerous trait of the community, is its almost joyous inclination toward superstition. Whether you would like to call it Puritan myth or strait fact, this obsession with witchcraft and the supernatural is what made Puritan New England a dangerous place to live in the 17th century. This idea of the occult always seems to find its way into a

Hawthorne story, and *The Ministers Black Veil* is no exception. Even the good doctor cannot help but mention, the black veil, though it covers only our pastors face, throws its influence over his whole person, and makes him ghostlike from head to foot.

(p. 105). The true allegory arises from these beliefs of the community, but does not wholly manifest itself until seen from the ministers point of view. Though he may contend that the veil personifies sorrows dark enough to be typified by a black veil.(p.

109), it is possible to infer that the veil is actually somewhat of an experiment by the minister. On the surface he may explain its meaning by some undefinable scruples he may hold, but underneath it represents a test of the community. By donning the black veil the minister realizes his fear that the people of his community are more obsessed with a sin they are sure the minister is hiding from, than their own sins that they live in everyday. Even his fellow man of the cloth Reverend Clark believes the minister must have some horrible crime upon his soul(p.

113). Not a single person realizes the intent of the minister until his deathbed utterance that defiles the virtue of the community. Proof positive of this realization of their fault is the fact that while the minister was alive these people couldnt wait to remove the black veil, but once he is dead, unable to stop them from unmasking him, the veil follows him to his grave. Perhaps it is reverence toward the painful truth revealed by the minister that keeps the veil on his face, but more likely it is simply left on in the rush to bury the man who brought to light such a less than virtuous shortcoming.

Like so many of Hawthornes stories, the Ministers Black Veil personifies the fallible nature of a people so dedicated to living a life free of sin, when in fact they are simply ignoring the vices that rest under their own pillows.

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