

Solitude/Isolation in “The Minister’s Black Veil” and Hawthorne’s Life

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In the Nathaniel Hawthorne tale, “The Minister’s Black Veil,” we see and feel the solitude/isolation of the minister, Reverend Mr. Hooper. Is this solitude not a reflection of the very life of the author?

According to A.N. Kaul in his Introduction to [Hawthorne](#) – A Collection of Critical Essays, the themes of isolation and alienation were ones which Hawthorne was “deeply preoccupied with” in his writings (2).

At the outset of the tale, “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the sexton is tolling the church bell and simultaneously watching Mr. Hooper’s door, when suddenly he says, “But what has good Parson Hooper got upon his face?” The surprise which the sexton displayed is repeated in the astonishment of the onlookers: “With one [accord](#) they started, expressing more wonder. . .” The reason is this: “Swathed about his forehead, and hanging down over his face, so low as to be shaken by his breath” is a black veil. The 30 year old,

unmarried parson receives a variety of reactions from his congregation:

“I can't really feel as if good Mr. Hooper's face was behind that piece of crape”

“He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face”

“Our parson has gone mad!”

Few could refrain from twisting their heads towards the door. . . .

. . . more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meeting-house.

Hawthorne, after exposing the surprised people to the sable veil, develops the protagonist through a description of some of his less exotic and curious characteristics:

Mr. Hooper had the reputation of a good [preacher](#), but not an energetic one: he strove to win his people heavenward by mild, persuasive influences, rather than to drive them thither by the thunders of the Word. The sermon which he now

delivered was marked by the same characteristics of style and manner as the general series of his pulpit oratory.

However, on this first day of wearing his black veil there is some peculiar difference in Hooper's sermon:

But there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made it greatly the most powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor's lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr.

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