The Deconstructible Allegory of the Failed Author-Reader Communion: Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil: A Parable”

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So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face.
Nathaniel Hawthorne. “Mosses from an Old Manse.”

Introduction

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In 1836, one year after the publication of “The Young Goodman Brown” in New England Magazine, “The Minister’s Black Veil” appeared in The Token. The successive publication of the works seems to suggest they shared a particular theme in common. True or not aside, Goodman Brown fantasizes that the people, young and old, men and women, people whom he thinks pious and lofty, gather in the woods to participate in a Black Mass. Brown completely ceases to rely on the goodness of the people, including his allegorically named wife, Faith, after hallucinating “their secret deeds: how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their houses; how many a

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woman, eager for widows’ weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers’ wealth; and how fair damsels...have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden [the Satan], the sole guest to an infant’s funeral” (X: 89) Unlike the immature Goodman Brown, who innocently believes in human goodness and is ultimately betrayed, it can be argued that the Reverend Hooper first dons the veil out of a belief in total depravity, one of the Puritan tenets, and virtually validates the interpretation of Michael J. Colacurcio, who “singles out ‘Young Goodman Brown’ and ‘The Minister’s Black Veil’ as the crowning achievements of Hawthorne’s first period” (Martin 232). Colacurcio contends that “Hooper’s career can fairly be said to begin where Brown’s ends” (317), but he concedes that Hooper, having proceeded one step further from Goodman Brown, “is evidently doomed to solipsism and rejection of life as utterly as is Goodman Brown” (317). We hope that “The Minister’s Black Veil” will give us clues to understand Hawthorne when we recall that Colacurcio identifies Hooper “in his absolutism...a Digby figure [Digby is a protagonist of “The Man of Adamant”] and situates him somewhere “beyond Goodman Brown and on his way to being Dimmesdale [the protagonist of The Scarlet Letter]” (318).

Indeed Hooper recognizes himself and is seen by others as a laudable spiritual (religious) guide. This is chiefly because Hooper takes a stand as a minister, as a shepherd for the flock, who are alleged to be moral deviants. Ironically, he is all the more qualified to do so by the rumor of his crime, a serious crime associated with Mr. Joseph Moody, a historically extant minister who accidentally killed his friend. From here a problem springs up: does Hooper deserve to be called heroic, the praiseful word used by the existentially bent critics? If we interpret this story from the Existentialist viewpoint of G. A. Santangelo and Raymond Benoit, we may be temporarily inclined to define Hooper as an Existential hero. Yet here we are immediately checked from jumping into unqualified praise by remembering that Existentialism lost its power in the argument between Jean-Paul Sartre the Existentialist and Claude Lévi-Strauss the Structuralist. Hue and cry is directed against Hooper by critics such as N. S. Boone, Samuel Coal, Michael J. Colacurcio, Richard H. Millington, Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, E. Earle Stibitz, and Judith P. Saunders. Hooper’s unrated performance thus continues to provoke critics, myself included.
While turning over the issue of Hooper’s (un)heroicness in my mind, I encountered a hedging statement that seemed somewhat idiosyncratic to the reclusive Hawthorne. The expression is extracted from “Mosses from an Old Manse” (1846) in Mosses.

Has the reader gone wandering, hand in hand with me, through the inner passages of my being? and have we groped together into all its chambers and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. . . . So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face; nor am I, nor have I ever been, one of those supremely hospitable people who serve up their own hearts, delicately fried, with brain sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public. (my italics, X: 32–33)

The above-citation validates Robert Milder’s comment that “Hawthorne’s closing moral [in The Scarlet Letter] — ‘Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world . . . some trait whereby the worst might be inferred!’ (I: 260) — is misleading” (31). Then, is it possible to postulate the correspondence of Hawthorne to the veiled author of “Mosses from an Old Manse,” and, by inference, to the veiled minister, the reverend Hooper in “The Minister’s Black Veil”? If so, how close is Hawthorne to Hooper? Does the above citation suggest the posture of the two toward their readers . . . the posture of Hawthorne the professional writer of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” and the implied story teller of “Mosses from an Old Manse”? Is it also suggestive of the obstinate posture taken by the (anti-)heroic minister Hooper toward his flock? Is the relation between the two, Hawthorne and his readers, allegorically depicted in the relationship between the maverick (anti-)hero Hooper and his congregation?

Hypothesizing that Hawthorne is closely relevant to Hooper, if not his double, I define my goal in gauging how successfully or poorly Hawthorne managed to maintain or shorten the distance between himself and his readers, himself and the outer world in general. This has something to do with the problem forging a relation between the subject—if taken favorably, an individualist; if not, an eccentric isolato—and others. As is generally known, this problem has continued to attract philosophers, modern and postmodern alike. In approaching to this task, I will refer to (post-)modern philosophies (Existentialism and Deconstruction).
tionism) and (Lévinas’) ethics, and then disambiguate some of the remarkable dispositions that Hooper shows: the dispositions that make Hooper (plausibly) appear to be an existentially praiseworthy maverick divine, but simultaneously leave him vulnerable, both psychologically and ethically. In this paper, I will start by viewing “The Minister’s Black Veil” from the perspective of Existentialism, the driving force and landmark of modernity. Then, after verifying the minister’s unheroicness as a proto-/pseudo-Existentialist, I will take the standpoint of Postmodernism/Deconstructionism and Lévinas’ ethics to interpret the veiled minister in a different way.

The analysis of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” one may think, will be a stepping stone not just for understanding Hawthorne’s other works, but for Melville’s works as well. Recall that in Melville the veil is symbolically exchangeable with the mask. In his American Notebooks, Hawthorne differentiates veil from mask, but in “The Minister’s Black Veil,” as Clark Davis indicates (14), “Hooper’s ‘veil’ is or becomes a ‘mask.’” In Moby-Dick, the anti-heroic protagonist(s) Ahab (and perhaps Ishmael, as well) is resolutely determined to “strike through the mask” (164), and confronts/unmasks/unveils the mysterious and monstrous being, Moby Dick. In Pierre, the eponymous anti-hero encounters his putative half-sister, the girl who unveils herself as Isabel, the name weirdly resonant with Jezebel, the evil wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament. Isabel exposes to him her “mysterious, haunting face” (37) a face which, according to Lucy, Pierre’s (ex-)fiancée, “thou [Pierre] once told’st me [Lucy], thou didst thrice vainly try to shun” (37), so that Isabel may demand her half-brother to acknowledge her. Both cases, Ahab’s[ / Ishmael’s] and Pierre’s, reflect a similarly problematic mechanism in reality perception/distortion. I hope this paper will open new territory in clarifying the face/personality perception mechanism as a clue for understanding the veiled/masked other(s) in Melville’s works.

I. Hooper as an Existential Hero

Before commencing discussion, it will be useful to succinctly review the “The Minister’s Black Veil.” This is a short story about a minister who frightens his parishioners by concealing his face with a black veil. In spite of the torment he brings upon himself by frightening and bewildering his parishioners, the min-

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ister adamantly repudiates their requests to remove the veil, even the requests from his fiancée Elizabeth and the Reverend Mr. Clark. Elizabeth, the "one person in the village unappalled by the awe with which the black veil had impressed all beside herself" directly urges him to "lay aside your black veil: then tell me why you put it on" (45). Her urging proves to be fruitless. "[W]ith this gentle, but unconquerable obstinacy did he resist all her entreaties" (46). Much later, "the Reverend Mr. Clark . . . of Westbury, a young and zealous divine, who had ridden in haste to pray by the bedside of the expiring minister" (50) implores, "Before the veil of eternity be lifted, let me cast aside this black veil from your face!" (51) Then, "exerting a sudden energy, that made all the beholders stand aghast, Father Hooper snatched both his hands from beneath the bedclothes, and pressed them strongly on the black veil, resolute to struggle, if the minister of Westbury would contend with a dying man" (51–52). In accordance with Mr. Hooper’s wishes, he is not unveiled when brought to his tomb.

Hooper’s logic for wearing the veil, reasonable to him but unintelligible to the parishioners, seems to be partly based on the holdover effect of Puritanism or dogmatic total depravity. Just before his death Hooper exclaims, "lo! on every visage a Black Veil!" (52) The minister (mis)understands that every parishioner "loathsomely treasur[es] up the secret of his sin," hiding it with a black veil, "vainly shrink[ing] from the eye of his Creator," averse to show "his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved" (52). From this last-ditch desperate effort, it turns out that he deserves to be "deem[ed] . . . a monster" (52). While painfully sensitized to his inability to escape from his own Puritan dogma, dogma he must have negatively inherited from his witch-hunting ancestors, Hawthorne took an anthropocentric stance. As if a precursor to Freud, whose theory dwells on the negative but inescapable effects of the suppressed amoral desires of the unconscious, Hawthorne compared the human heart to something dark and hideous, something to be hidden (Hagiwara 10, 28–30). In "The Haunted Mind," he writes, "In the depth of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide" (IX: 326). Hooper, and probably Hawthorne, are pressured to disabuse the parishioners, the sexton, the younger clergyman Mr. Clark, and Hooper’s former fiancée, Elizabeth, of their conscious or unconscious escape into the trivialities of daily
life to avoid directly facing the hidden (abortive) sins. Hooper can admittedly be likened to a slightly grown figure of Goodman Brown, the protagonist of Hawthorne’s previous story. Brown sees illusory phantasmagoria and becomes (dis)inclined to recognize what he sees, while Hooper decides to don the veil to symbolize the dark sides of the human heart that Hooper recognizes in all persons.

In a sense, Hooper should be evaluated from an existential perspective. With a mindset similar to an Existentialist’s, Hawthorne writes as follows in *The American Notebooks*:

Indeed we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream—till the heart be touched. That touch creates us, then we begin to be; thereby we are beings of reality.

(my italics) Salem, Oct. 4th, 1839. Union Street [Family Mansion], *The American Notebooks.*

Hawthorne, it seems, recognizes that one could live a consummate life if only one confronted the disagreeable reality of one’s own psyche. The psyche is made up of conflicting elements, but one is and will be unsure of what element will dominate the other. Put in a different light, if one chose not to adopt, borrowing the Heideggerian terminology, “Existence,” or the state of “being able to identify with a mode of [meaningful] being”... one would reduce “Existence” to a mere presence and lose the moment of reflecting on oneself (Carreira). As I have previously mentioned, Hawthorne suggests that acute awareness of one’s dark side makes it possible to draw nearer to the state of “Existence,” the state in a Heideggerian sense. By donning the veil, Hooper takes a preliminary step toward understanding the dark/sinful aspect of his being, a step that promises him a new relation with most, if not all, of his parishioners. This explains the following scene:

His converts always regarded him with a dread peculiar to themselves, affirming, though but figuratively, that, before he brought them to celestial light, they had been with him behind the black veil. Its gloom, indeed, en-
abled him to sympathize with all dark affections. Dying sinners cried aloud for Mr. Hooper, and would not yield their breath till he appeared. (50)

As a man who deliberately strives to confront all aspects embraced by his heart and thereby to live his own subjective life, Hooper silently accuses the people around him of apathetically but self-complacently living half-lives (spiritually slothful lives) in delusory worlds. Hooper’s mentality, which allocates the initiated/awakened only to himself and the uninitiated/unawakened to his flock, is no different from Brown’s in the author’s previous work. With the veil and its synonymous “crape” (a type of cloth for mourning) alternately used in the story, Hooper tries to suggest that the black veil/crepe is a euphemism for death. Raymond Benoit also points out that the death symbolized by the black veil is equivalent to blindness to and delusion of sin and evil. Those in the Freudian school of thinking, Frederic Crews for instance, would assume that the veil is symbolic of the libidinous (carnal) nature of the human psyche. If we follow the Existentialist minded Benoit or Freudian scholar Crews, we can say that a meaningful life is made possible only when one deliberates on death (the death drive (“Thanatos”) and the essentially carnal nature of humans). Without such deliberation, one would be unable to live out one’s own individual life or to prove one’s uniqueness among the multitude. Hooper seems to recognize, as Heidegger did, that the uniqueness and possibilities of one’s own life depend, paradoxically, on an awareness of death. This realization forces Hooper to live in a realm next door to death itself. The realization dramatically comes to light on two occasions, the funeral and the marriage ceremonies held on the very day when Hooper first dons the veil over his face. A marriage ceremony generally symbolizes an opening of the status of “being alongside” or “being with” other entities in one’s engagement with the world, and thus functions as a preliminary step for what Heidegger may call “Existence.” A funeral, in contrast, embodies how “being” finally becomes one’s own and achieves a Heideggerian Existence. Thus, Hooper’s awareness of the significance of both the marriage ceremony and funeral qualifies him as a precursor to the Existentialist. Hawthorne, meanwhile, holds his judgment over Hooper’s stance in suspense by putting the final touch on the last page of “The Minister’s Black Veil”: “awful is still the thought that
it [Hooper's secret sin] mouldered beneath the Black Veil!” (53)

II. Suspicion about Hooper’s Existential Stance

To verify whether Hooper is an Existentialist in the genuine sense and to understand what prevents Hawthorne from fully appraising Hooper, let us first direct our attention to, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–55), the precursor to Existentialism, and then consider the criticism against Kierkegaard by Albert Camus (1913–60), the existentialistic writer who kept his distance from the Existentialists. We see here Camus detect and expose a certain falsehood and pitfall hidden in Kierkegaard...a paradoxical blind spot. As Camus sees it, the Existentialism-infected Kierkegaard willfully accepts “pain.” The pain referred to is the constant cautionary reminder of malefic arrogance, as described in chapter 12, verse 7 of the Second Corinthians: “...lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.” Kierkegaard accepts the pain so as not to forget the danger of arrogance, but he is likely to turn the pain around into the very cause of arrogance. Camus writes:

[Kierkegaard] refuses consolations, ethics, reliable principles. As for that thorn he feels in his heart, he is careful not to quiet its pain. On the contrary, he awakens it and, in the desperate joy of a man crucified and happy to be so, he builds up piece by piece lucidity, refusal, make-believe a category of the man possessed. (The Myth of Sisyphus, 24)

In a word, a self-tormenting Existentialist becomes a being similar to yet different from Jesus Christ: a masochistic Satan who derives pleasure from self-torment. This pathology urges the sufferer to concentrate on himself, which not only wrests from him his ability to see himself objectively, but also isolates him from others and causes him to appear to them all the more satanic. To be accurate, Hooper is blind to himself. As E. Earl Stibitz designates (182), “[the] irony is compounded in that Hooper’s sin is a hidden one...hidden not only from his fellows but from himself.” This ironic symptom reminds us of some other protagonists in Hawthorne’s works. Young Goodman Brown, after witnessing the Black Mass in the woods, strives in vain to keep himself uncontaminated by
the evil-hiding community members and ultimately turns into the misanthropic Old Badman Brown. Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini, the reclusive yet power-aspiring pharmacologist in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” incarcerates his daughter in a mock Edenic herb garden to put her out of touch with evil society, then uses his homeopathic skills to inject her with poison that makes her resilient to evil. Rappaccini intends, like God, to create a spotless and evil-rejecting creature (his daughter Beatrice), but later Beatrice is killed when her young lover Giovanni Guasconti, a stand-in for the secular-world, induces her to take a lethal antidote. Hooper, Brown, and Rappaccini are those who give their allegiance to Satan in their attempt to assume the role of god.

According to Camus, if one can explain a world with one’s reason [/ belief / ideology], no matter how far-fetched, one can live comfortably in the world, with all of its unbearable conflicts or, to use Camus’ word, absurdities. If one loses the tools by which to explain the world, one feels oneself as an outsider in the world, suddenly drained of illusion and light. In the case of “The Young Goodman Brown,” this illusion and light corresponds to Brown’s naïve belief / faith in Faith’s [his wife’s] moral innocence [sexual purity], the goodness of the parishioners, and by extension Puritanism. Here, his wife Faith allegorizes not the dogmatic Puritanism but the secularized easy-to-accept Christianity. Losing the illusion and light, Brown becomes an outsider. In stark contrast to Brown, Hooper doubts the innocence of the people from the outset. In this respect Hooper has already outgrown Brown, though only slightly. Throughout his life, Hooper sticks to his belief / ideology / illusion that all people, without exception, himself included, are to be damned. Both the world where Hooper lives and the people around him appear to be explained by his cherished illusion / ideology. That said, Hooper resembles Brown. In both characters, the total depravity doctrine is unduly operative, and therefore “by the sympathy of [their] human hearts for sin [they] shall scent out all the places ... whether in church, bedchamber, street, field, or forest ... where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot” (X: 87). In the implied narrator’s descriptions, Hooper also resembles Brown as an outsider apart from society: “All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world: it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman’s love, and kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart” (50).
Hooper hints at not only his own secret sin, but also those of the parishioners, and he exhorts them to reveal it. He appears, ironically enough, to be concealing something evil with his veil while letting the parishioners conjecture saucy stories about what the veil conceals. Some of them boldly exclaim, “Our parson has gone mad!” Richard H. Fogle succinctly sums up: “The vulgar interpret the meaning vulgarly, the complacent complacently, and man of good will regretfully” (36). From his very first moments wearing the veil, Hooper tries to demonstrate with the veil the undeniable and ineligible presence of evil. Putatively, the source of the image transmitted through the black veil is Hooper’s sin, but the image remains ambiguous to the beholders: “[A] cloud seemed to have rolled dizzily from beneath the black crape, and dimmed the light of the candles” (43), when Hooper shows up before the throng at the wedding ceremony. Hooper, at this moment, is ambiguous to the deputation of the church, whose duty is to persuade the minister to remove the veil, that “piece of crape... [that] seemed to hang down before his heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between him and them” (45). Thus, Hooper’s isolation deepens.

The parishioners’ response to Hooper will seem understandable to readers within the historical setting of the story, the first half and middle of the eighteenth century. The time frame is confirmed by the narrator’s references to the two figures, Joseph Moody (1700–53) and Governor Belcher (in office: 1730–41). Readers are told that “about eighty years” have passed since the death of Moody, a clergyman with “the same eccentricity” who allegedly killed a man (53). In addition, Hooper is appointed to preach the election sermon during Governor Belcher’s administration, a period when two sects vied for predominance, traditional Puritanism reinforced by the Great Awakening Movement versus enlightenment or secular-minded Deism. These two sects are represented by the two authoritative men in both history and in Hawthorne’s story. Belcher, the personification of traditional Puritanism, was influenced by George Whitfield, the driving force, along with Jonathan Edwards of the Great Awakening. The personification of secular-minded Deism is “Old Squire Saunders, [who,] doubtless by an accidental lapse of memory, neglected to invite Mr. Hooper to his table, where the good clergyman had been wont to bless the food, almost every Sunday since his settlement” (41). According to Colacurcio (351), “Old Squire Saunders” is a reflection of “Poor Richard” Saunders of Benjamin Franklin’s
Almanac. By withholding an invitation to Sunday dinner, Saunders’ shows his embarrassment at seeing Hooper’s anachronistic stance.

The educated naturally must have imbibed Neoclassicism, the eighteenth-century zeitgeist that overemphasized reason, the zeitgeist in whose name, as Michel Foucault formulates, the abnormal were expelled and incarcerated/institutionalized. “By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice, it [Hooper’s veil] was reckoned to be merely an eccentric whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational, and tinges them all with its own semblance of insanity” (50). There must have been, however, a greater number of ignorant people. Though living in the age of emerging Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century Puritans must have been disconcerted by this diabolic figure endowed with the potential power to make their hidden veils/sins visible and tangible. Similarly, the parishioners in “The Minister’s Black Veil” are urged to protect themselves from the terrifying special power emanating from the minister’s veil by reducing the enigmatic into the mundane. They react to Hooper irrationally and impolitely. “[T]he gentle and timid” would turn aside to avoid him” (50). Ambushing the minister at the burial ground to which he takes his customary walk at sunset, the impertinent secretly enjoy “peeping at his black veil” while “he leaned pensively over the gate” (50). His parishioners, decent or indecent, intelligent or unintelligent, react to the minister in exactly the same way, either summarily rejecting his message of the black veil or avoiding direct confrontation with the image of their own sinful minds reflected in the veiled face of the minister. To these people, Hooper appears to be a “bugbear” (50). Prone to the inescapable influence from the adults around them, even the children “babbled of it [Hooper’s black veil] on their way to school,” and “fled from his approach, breaking up their merriest sports, while his melancholy figure was yet afar off” (50). One “imitative little imp covered his face with an old black handkerchief, thereby so affrighting his playmates that the panic seized himself, and he well-nigh lost his wits by his own waggery” (44). In addition, “[s]trangers came long distances to attend service at his church, with the mere idle purpose of gazing at his figure” (50). We witness how Hooper, rumored behind his back, secretly ridiculed, mockingly imitated, and ambushed to be peeped at, is reduced to such a shameful state. Hawthorne’s humane subject is degraded into a ridiculous object: Hooper is, in Hawthorne’s
phrase, \textit{(un)pardonably} wronged by a rude herd of parishioners.

All the people, children and adults, strangers and local residents alike, almost unanimously react by showing the same cliche’d pattern of behavior. Their reaction to Hooper is expected from the beginning. By conforming to the cliche’d pattern of behavior and perception, they lose their independent subjectivities and become mesmerized automata. For that matter, the Reverend Hooper also loses his subjectivity by yielding to the behavioral pattern that cliche demands. Veil-less externally (but veiled internally) though they are, and veiled though he is, there is no difference between the two, the mob and the minister. Because communion consists of two parties, the minister and the congregation, both automata, it is almost impossible for Hooper to make a direct appeal to the congregation. Hence, he suffers unavoidable isolation. While isolation is the anticipated outcome of the awakened Existentialist, Hooper’s isolation seems to too exorbitant to overlook.

III. Isolation from the Other(s)

What prevents Hooper from carrying out his responsibility of keeping in contact with the world, or to use the word of Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{Engagement} (in French)? One of the causes for Hooper’s isolation is his solipsism, a trait I will elaborate later in this paper. First, however, I need to propose an argument on some of the other causes. The reader will recall how isolated the minister is from the parishioners, his fiancée, God, and even himself. We have already seen his isolation from his parishioners in their disrespectful and somewhat comical reaction toward him. In the following, we note that Hooper’s reverence for the authentic Puritanism does not necessarily signify that he stands beside God. To the contrary it suggests that the minister is far from being a servant of God. For starters, we will investigate the relation between Hooper and his fiancée Elizabeth to glean clues for understanding how distant the minister actually is from God.

Elizabeth is portrayed in the vein of a Domestic Angels, the woman as the paragon object of the nascent middle-class feminine culture, over-idealized though slightly insensitive in Hawthorne’s works, the type of women best represented by Annie in “The Artist of the Beautiful” and Phoebe in \textit{The House of the Seven Gables}. The unbalance between Head [the Rational, Scientific-Objectivity-
oriented, Cold Hearted] and Heart [the Emotional, Sympathetic, Humanely Warm] has often been reiterated in the criticism of Hawthorne’s work. In most cases, scientists such as Aylmer in “The Birth-Mark,” Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter, and Westervelt in The Blithedale Romance, are blamed for their overgrown heads and their byproduct arrogance, whereas female characters like Georgiana, Hester, and the Priscilla/Zenobia sisters are victimized by the intelligent but egocentric male characters. Here, in “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the problem turns out to be Hooper’s “Heart,” not the overgrown head of a scientist. Just as Hester does towards the Reverend Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter, Elizabeth in “The Minister’s Black Veil” redresses the blown-up heart of minister Hooper, who sticks to the anachronistic Puritan dogma. Unlike Hester, who succeeds to a certain extent in her effort to redress and encourage Dimmesdale, Elizabeth is spurned by Hooper, and Hooper flatly rejects her request to remove the veil. If Elizabeth cannot mollify this adamant minister, no one can. Estrangement from Elizabeth symbolizes the minister’s detachment from God, as well, as the biblical name Elizabeth connotes a woman who faithfully serves God (Stein 389). Due to his erroneous stressing of individualistic Existentialism, Hooper deepens his isolation from God as well as from Elizabeth and the parishioners. He remains blasphemous in the realm of absurdity while holding fast to the “celestial hopes” (42) that “though this veil must be between us here on earth … It is but a mortal veil … it is not for eternity!” (47) Hooper undauntedly and mockingly imitates God, who says to Moses, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33.20). Thus, Hooper rejects his fiancée with the name of Elizabeth, the female faithfully serving God … though the God in question seems to be secularized in the emerging capitalist society of eighteenth-century America. This means that Hooper turns his back on God, and deviates from the teaching of St. Paul passed on by William Bysshe Stein in his citation of the Second Epistle to Corinthians 2.17, “in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.” Hooper gives a smile, “which always appeared like “a faint glimmering of light, proceeding from the obscurity beneath the veil.” The New Testament describes not “a faint glimmering light,” but a light commanded to shine out of the darkness by God, who “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4.6). With momentary light emitting from his “faint” and “sad” smile, Hooper
reveals his infirm belief in God and in himself. Unlike God who “hath shined in our hearts,” Hooper “gives a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things” (38), and “seeks to hide his secret sin from the dread Being whom he was addressing” (39). Here, we may come to suspect whether Hooper is truly determined to carry out his objective, which is proving God’s power to detect all of the sins secretly committed or (abortive) crimes planned by the congregation. Returning once more to the Second Corinthians (3.18), we see that Hooper’s behavior directly opposes the advice on behavior to pious Christians from St. Paul, who writes, “we all, with open face beholding in a glass the glory of the Lord.” As such, we would be remiss to ignore as groundless the rumor from the unenlightened villagers, that “ghost and fiend consorted with him” (50). When St. Paul goes on to say, “we all ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord,” we are induced to see Hooper as a figure far from the “the same image,” as Hooper has already “transformed” into a satanic being. His terror upon “catching a glimpse of his own figure in the looking-glass” (43) as he raised the wine to his lips at the wedding ceremony is a natural reaction, as wine suggests Christ, whom Hooper probably sees as a detector and punisher of satanic sinners.

Let us turn again to Hooper’s initial intention of wearing the veil, and then to the unintended and negative effects that his veil confers upon him. This analysis will be helpful in understanding what prevents Hawthorne from taking sides with Hooper. As a Puritan minister, Hooper assumes that “they [parishioners], and himself, and all of mortal race” bear “secret sin, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them,” at “the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces” (42). As a tacit reminder of the difficulty of being saved, Hooper’s veil evinces the narrow-mindedness of Calvinism. Here, let us suppose the following: the veil that Hooper wears corresponds to the letter A [Adultery] that Dimmesdale hides; and the veil is figuratively equal to and substituted for a letter. In this case, we should change the biblical message of the Second Corinthian... “the epistle of Christ... written... with the Spirit of the living God; not in the tables of stone but in fleshly tables of the heart”... into this: Hooper’s message is not “written by the Spirit of the living God”; but as if carved “on tables of stone.”

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thus petrified.⁷

Throughout his entire life, Hooper is caged in his own Puritan view of total depravity, a view that he probably believes he has a perfect command over but that in fact commands him. Solipsistically, he misapplies this view to all the congregation, and succeeds to such an extent that “[e]ach member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened breast, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought” (40). Hooper’s inclination to solipsism or self-incarceration clearly proves that Hooper is not a genuine Existentialist. We will be able to reinforce this hypothesis when we attend an affinity between Hawthorne’s use of the veil and Melville’s use of the mask, and compare the opacifying effects of the veil and mask. Hooper’s veil, together with his incomprehensible identity, reminds us of two entities: the monstrous whale Moby Dick, the entity compared to an opaque mask, and its archenemy, Captain Ahab. Ahab exclaims, “If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall?” (164) The wall/mask [veil] figuratively represents a monstrous white whale, an entity of something mysterious, ambiguous, threatening, and impedimental to Ahab’s efforts to perceive, understand, reason, and define as such, an entity worthy of attack, an entity Ahab is justified in attacking. If one stands in front of this wall, deprived of the opportunity to see what exists on the other side of the wall, one will feel defeated and incarcerated. One fails to see the more realistic possibility that the wall is built by oneself … the mask worn by the mysterious other is not the other’s, but his own. Because of the wall (of one’s own (un)conscious making), one feels it impossible to stand outside (of one’s own wall/cage/self/ (sham-)essence) and fails to satisfy the condition of the Existentialist. The etymological significance of “Exist” is to “stand outside.” Ahab and Hooper both find themselves in this situation. Hence, the two turn out to be bogus Existentialists, caged in walls/veils/masks of their own making.

By trying to live out his own subjective life and keep himself from others for that very purpose, Hooper may be praiseworthy as a champion of trailblazing Existentialism, yet Hooper simply generalizes and erases the concrete particulars of his own life. With his face hidden, he reduces himself to the level of a faceless/anonymous mob. Furthermore, the minister’s solipsism drives him to
project his own Puritan-minded ... illusory if you like ... worldview onto his parishioners, to unnecessarily darken and mar their everyday life (including the merry mood of the wedding), to ignore the differences among individuals, to make the sweeping criticism that everyone, without exception, is a sinner, and to convince every member of his congregation of the universal prevalence of evil. Hence, in Hawthorne’s words, Hooper commits an (un)pardonable sin. Even at his deathbed, Hooper repeats the mantra-like jargon and blames the villagers for committing the very same crimes he himself has probably committed: “I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!” (52) Hence comes the fallacy of *petitio principii*, or begging the question. This fallacy is the identity imposition on others. The fallacy is further exemplified by Hooper’s own words in his conversation with Elizabeth. In answer to Elizabeth’s query, “then tell me why you put it on,” Hooper curtly replies, “if I cover it [my face] for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?” (46) As to the different modes of Existence that the other people could adopt, he takes nothing of it into consideration, stops thinking of it anymore, and, probably unawares but nevertheless not innocently, manifests a mindset similar to the totalitarian/imperialist, the mindset that sends all the Jews/sinners into the concentration camp, or into the hell that Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening, Hooper’s contemporary, would assume. Hooper reduces every member of the congregation to a sinner, or to put it differently, to the invariable essence. Existentialist though he might appear, he is exposed to critical eyes, even to those of the Existentialists, for his reductive way, for the deductive reasoning with which he looks upon the world and others, for a mode of perception based on essentialism, the critical target of both the Existentialists and Postcolonialists. Incidentally, Existentialism became widely acclaimed in the 1950s, 60s, and even 70s for its serious reflections on the totalitarianism and imperialism that led to World War II and the Vietnam War. In their pursuit of liberation from the identity-imposing Euro-American-centricity, Postcolonialists such as Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, and Homi K. Bhabha grabbed the attention of American academia in the late 1970s after America passed through the Civil Rights Movement of the roaring 1960s and the critical peak of the Cold War during the Vietnam War. Since the late 70s, criticism against Hawthorne has become more and more prominent.

The above-mentioned fatal arrogance and self-alienation seem to appear in
the strange smile that flickers on Hooper’s veiled face. Although his parishioners almost unanimously regard him as abnormal and think that they, not Hooper, are on the right track, Hooper acts the same. Both/Either Hooper and/or the parishioners might be on the right/wrong track. Yet Hooper thinks that no one but he is qualified to detect the truth, if you like, and that only he can pronounce judgment on goodness and badness. While Colacurcio argues that Hooper has outgrown Goodman Brown, the protagonist of Hawthorne’s previous fiction, Hooper proves himself to be ungenerous, uncooperative, and immature in this process of excluding the opinions of others. At the critical moments when others hound Hooper to explain the veil, he feels himself misunderstood and distanced and only lets them see “[a] sad smile gleam[ing] faintly from beneath the black veil” (41). Speaking of the smile, Thomas F. Walsh presumes that Hooper shows a smile for his faint hope of keeping liaison with others as well as for his lingering belief in salvation by God. This presumption does not seem to readily explain Hooper’s. Henri-Louis Bergson, a thinker known for his philosophy of life, explains the functions of laughter as follows. Joining the laughter that explodes in accordance with group dynamics, the laughter that breaks from a mass of people signifies mutual consent, or even complicity (in, for example, an uprising). This kind of smile/laughter recalls Robin in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” the young innocent who unwittingly laughs and jeers with the mob who are lynching his uncle Molineux for being loyal to England. To Robin, this is meant to be his initiation into the adult world. Hooper’s sad faint smile is quite the opposite from Robin’s laughter. Hooper’s smile alienates him from others while Robin’s laughter connects with others.

What estranges Hooper from others (community members) and further degrades his monomaniac solipsism are not just his arrogance and isolation, but also his problematical posture in thinking how he should negotiate with others. Judith P. Saunders cites the theory of social psychology to explain unnecessary suspicion harbored by the parishioners and the minister’s resultant separation from them. The theory holds that humans, in their competition for resources, status, and mates, are prone to protect themselves from possible enemies or biased realities of their own making. The bias in question, namely, that others may wish them harm, escalates in proportion to their uncertainty about the feelings and intentions that others, as possible enemies, may hide. As Saunders postu-
lates, "[w]earing a veil over his face, Hooper is bound to generate a high degree of uncertainty ..., thus activating this bias" in the congregation (424). Hence, the information/communication gap is widened far more. Hooper makes no effort whatsoever to bridge this gap, because, as N. S. Boone criticizes, Hooper ignores the essential nature of dialogue between the subject [himself] and the other(s) [the congregation], the give-and-take reciprocity. "[Hooper] lacks the ability to take from others the council, the comfort, and the love they can give" (Boone 170).

Hooper in the subject position indeed appears to have performed the responsibility for the other(s) as a substitute sinner so that he may be true to his profession. Generally speaking, this is the kind of ethical duty that Emmanuel Lévinas, the currently well-recognized ethicist, demands that the subject do for the sake of the other (or others). Hooper, however, does not live up to the Lévinas’ expectation. In the mind of Lévinas, the subject faces the others who lay bare their vulnerable (veil-less) faces. Since they reveal their vulnerable faces [/bodies/emotions] in calling for a reply from you, Lévinas demands that you respond to their call in order to activate communication with them. In approaching your neighbors/others and replying to their call, you are expected to fully expose yourself to them, to vulnerably lie at their feet and “uncover [your veil] beyond nudity” with “your skin laid bare” (49), because they would do or already have done the same for you.

Boone, however, points out a need to slightly revise Lévinas’ unwritten assumption that it is ‘the subject I’ rather than ‘the other(s)’ who can behave like a responsible agent: you can behave as the subject from your own or Descartesian [I-think-therefore-I-am] perspective, but if you reverse your view, you instantly realize that you are regarded not as a subject but as (one of) the other(s) by the people around you. Boone’s indication is appropriate. In the interest of give-and-take sociability, Hooper should concede his subject position to his parishioners as the case may be. Then, it follows that as one of the others Hooper does not humbly call out or respond to the people around him. With his decisive will, he declines bending an ear to any one of them. Nor does he expose his unveiled face to them. If allowed to extend the Lévinas’ ethics in a distorted way, it follows as a matter of course that Hooper should appear unqualified for the ideal “other” and unworthy of being answered in the eyes of his parishioners.
Here, let the problem... the problem of “who can be an ideal other? No one can”... pass for the moment.

As the minister in the subject position, Hooper ignores any call from the others or his parishioners, and declines to accept any proposals from them. He refuses to allow them any part of duty, the duty (they are obliged and willing) to take in consideration for their other(s) (Hooper included). A Feminist or Postcolonialist-minded critic would see him depriving his supposed “inferiors,” if you like, of their right to articulate themselves. From Hawthornian ethics, it follows that Hooper commits a(n) (un)pardonable sin. This pattern has been repeated in Hawthorne’s other works, for example, in the relation between Fanshawe and Ellen in his first work of fiction, Fanshawe, and the relation between Miriam and Donatello in his penultimate fiction, The Marble Faun.

IV. Allegory out of Order

Let us reconsider some other possible causes for the difficulty the parishioners feel in communicating with the Reverend Hooper. Their inability to correctly interpret the message the minister tries to send through the veil reflects Hooper’s inability to understand the limit or self-undermining nature of allegory. According to the traditional definition of the literary genre, abstract moral concepts like love and evil leave the form of characters visually and impressively appreciated. “The Minister’s Black Veil” is subtitled “A Parable,” that is, as a short allegorical story. Allegories are often categorized as religious writings akin to works such as the late 15th-century English morality play Everyone, Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene, or John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (the latter two of which Hawthorne avidly read). If “The Minister’s Black Veil” entirely conforms to the rule of the allegory, or to be exact, to the rule of “parable” in Hawthorne’s terminology, Gilbert P. Voigt is not, we should admit, a long way off the mark. In his critique of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” Voigt contends as follows. Recall the “rich old Hebrew” whom Hawthorne referred to in his works. Recall those Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, all of whom occasionally take symbolic action for oracle delivery. Then, you may justifiably surmise that the intention of the Rev. Hooper’s apparently nonsensical action of wearing a black veil over his face is to give a jolt to the insensitive sinner-like Milford parishioners and make them ready to convert
and repent. Hooper’s use of veil and his recourse to allegorical persuasion is obvious enough. The minister knows that as “the most patriarchal of poetic modes,” “[a]llegory inherently affirms (and, in effect, enacts) the hierarchy of meaning in the Law of the Father” (Williams 81).

As a newly awakened man during the years of the Great Awakening, Hooper, it appears, professes to be one of the “visible saints,” one of those who God promises to save but who first must narrate their experience of conversion before the congregation. He does not explicitly recount this, however. Instead, he tries to prove his visible sanctity with the black veil, the crape, a literal substitute for recounting. To the minister, the veil stands out for speechless speeches and functions like a symbol/letter/language, as does Hester’s scarlet “A.” In other words, Hooper’s black veil corresponds to Hester’s scrap of red cloth shaped into the letter “A.” To be daring, we can group the following three elements together, as one of a kind: Hooper’s veil, the parable/allegory, and the Word of God. Here we should make some quick references, however, to the etiological fact: 1) “Allegory” comes from the Greek word allegoria; 2) Allegoria, composed of the segments allos (other) and agoreuein (to speak), means figurative or veiled languages; and 3) the implication of speaking about something other than itself opens the way for Paul de Man to deconstruct the allegory proper, and this paper will follow how de Man deconstructs it. From its very beginning, the allegory involves the moment of its own deconstruction (to be explained in the next paragraph), and thus Voigt’s literal interpretation is to be de-constructed. Voigt fails to allow for the possibility of a deconstructible allegory, and Hooper is only half aware of it himself. Indeed, the allegory is a mode of some particular story narrated in a specific way in which the object referred to justifiably means some other object. As much as what is referred to falls within the controllable boundary of what is intended, allegory works effectively, and the canonical (traditional) works of allegory fall within this boundary. But as we find in “The Minister’s Black Veil,” allegory deconstructs itself once it goes amok in its process of what Derrida calls “Dissémination.”

Facing the impossibility of precisely articulating what one needs to articulate, one cannot but accept every slight distortion of one’s message. This phenomenon is described as “Différance,” the jargon coined by Derrida from “Difference.” This distorted message is transmitted to a number of receivers
through their biases, and the distortion is amplified in the process [called Dissémination]. The amplification continues on and on, at least, to a certain extent, insofar as the patterns of the parishioners’ unsophisticated/clichéd/kitsched reactions can supply distorted meanings and reinforce “Dissémination.”

When taking these sorts of peculiarities exhibited by “Différence / (veiled) languages / letters / figures,” one should recall that the veil functions doubly, on the one hand helping Hooper suggest to his parishioners both their secret sins and his own, and on the other helping him misuse the veil to hide from sight what is inconvenient to him. From the former function of the veil, we can infer that Hooper gets stuck to the allegorical import [i.e., the total depravity] of the veil. Yet from the latter stems a doubt that Hooper may be calculatingly expediting the phenomenon of “Différence” in order to cover what is vitally critical [what is exactly signified] with inexact messages/interpretations [inappropriate signifiers countless cropping-up among the flock]. Hooper purposefully lets the people speak ill of him behind his back, for his masochistic pleasure. Contrary to Hester in The Scarlet Letter, the heroic woman who produces the phenomenon of “Différence” in a positive sense, transforming the letter A of Adultery to that of Able or Angel, Hooper produces “Différence” in a negative sense. In both positive and negative senses, neither the (scarlet) letter nor the black (letter-substituting) veil could express what is inside to the outside. Hooper is afraid of directly facing his unveiled self and accepting his own negative phase/face. He avoids his own image in the mirror. His parishioners witness that “he never willingly passed before a mirror, nor stooped to drink at a still fountain, lest, in its peaceful bosom, he should be affrighted by himself.”

Hooper’s involvement in or exploitation of “Différence,” however, produces side effects that go far beyond what he expects in advance (though they are within the expectations of third parties, including the author and readers of the day). A “scandal” spreads throughout Milford village. When the villagers witness Hooper shunning mirror(-like objects), they feel justified in trusting as plausible their groundless whispers that “Mr. Hooper’s conscience tortured him for some great crime too horrible to be entirely concealed” (38). What is absent or erased from the eyes of the parishioners is the initial cause that compelled him to don the veil. This absence/erasure is reflected by countless signifiers, signifiers that show up in the various ways people behave. Hooper makes the ab-
solute cause disappear, forces his parishioners to stay only in a frivolous realm where he shows them only the vestige of the *signified*, lets “[t]he vulgar interpret the meaning vulgarly, the complacent complacently, and man of good will regretfully.” Thus, if “[t]he allegorist personifies the speaking subject as totalitarian overlord of language who directs and manipulates his world according to a priori thoughts” (Williams 81–82), then Hooper fails to do so. And Hawthorne, eager to gain the status of a national icon as a canonical writer, masochistically depicted himself in the image of Hooper.

**V. Hawthorne’s Self-Portrait as the Veiled Minister**

According to the deconstructionists, among whom Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man are most famous, text is made up of figures or “signifier[s]/language/letter[s]/sign[s]/symbol[s]” that eternally fail to represent the “signified.” The relation between the “signified” and the “signifier(s)” is not given naturally, but rather arbitrarily. The arrangement of the signified to the signifier(s) has been made into text, more often than not, in the unconscious political dimensions or through what the Semioticians would call “codes.” The codes in question are “interpretive frameworks [… or what Michel Foucault calls *épistème* (metaknowledge) in his *The Order of Things*] which are used by both producers and interpreters of texts”; “In creating texts we select and combine signs in relation to the codes with which we are familiar ‘in order to limit… the range of possible meanings they are likely to generate when read by others’” (Turner 17).” In short, codes are fixers or deciders of meaning.

Though code does not appear as invulnerable to the Deconstructionist as it does to the Semiotician, and though meanings of any text may become less fixated and more ambiguous in the former’s opinion, Hawthorne may have been disinclined to unconditionally accept the Deconstructionist’s idea so straightforwardly as to leave the socio-historical code as unserviceable any longer. What if the socio-historical code partly and roughly corresponds to the concept of what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls Language Game? In this game theory, it follows that any rule change will affect the game; due to its foundation on the Language Game, society or human bond will also be affected by any change of a rule; and conversely, any materialization of a new game/society will change the old rule/society. Hawthorne may have noticed these phenomena.
Significantly, he did not forget to socio-historically enframe/arrange “The Minister’s Black Veil” or prepare for the condition of the erstwhile language game to be changed and replaced by the new.

In previous chapters we have already seen that Hooper can (not) be praised for his existential awareness of life, and that introducing existential aspects is not off topic when we observe Hawthorne’s seemingly nonchalant emphasis of socio-historical background of the story. In considering this story in the light of nineteenth-century Existentialism, Kierkegaard, a contemporary of Hawthorne’s, is noteworthy. As Santangelo mentions (62–63), though Hawthorne might not have read Kierkegaard, “they reacted to similar environments: a Calvinism [in America] or Lutheranism [in Denmark] that had lost meaning in a changing universe”... “a religion that faced the strong possibility of extinction in Arminian doctrines of accommodation.” At this stage both in America and in Denmark, and for that matter in other protestant European societies as well, Arminianism began to gain in influence. Absorbing Germanic idealism and Pelagianism, belief systems that stressed the freedom of human will, Arminianism diluted the notion of predestination espoused by Calvinism, and consequently weakened Calvinism. Yuki Kodaira indicates Hawthorne’s ambiguous attitude toward Arminianism and Calvinism. The point is, Hawthorne placed the story at the historically critical moment when the outdated Language Game (dogmatic Puritanism) was replaced by the new (liberalized or secularized Christianity) ... or when the transformation of Foucauldian épistème occurred.

Interestingly, when an earlier social system, patriarchy for example, becomes “weaker and internally contradictory,” “the ideological force,” which supports it, “strengthens” (Sedgwick 81–82). Then, it is no surprising that immediately before losing its momentum, the dogmatic Puritanism represented by Hooper makes a brief comeback. Seeing that the story unfurls at this historically, socially, religiously, and philosophically critical moment, we are prepared to set out to resolve our initial problem of how Hawthorne managed to maintain or shorten the distance between himself and his readers. But before setting it out, let us review what we have analyzed so far to double check our hypothesis that Hawthorne is closely relevant to Hooper.

Our analyses clearly shows that, in spite of the antinomic features of the enigmatic black veil (i.e., concealing and revealing at the same time), Hooper
symbolically substitutes the veil both for his own sins and the putative sins of his whole congregation. Yet Hooper’s performance mystifies the congregation. It even provokes quite a few of them, including school children, to react rudely to him. Whenever Hooper acknowledges that his message about the veil is distorted by his parishioners, *a sad faint smile* shows up. This smile arises due to either his resignation of being accepted or his arrogance that no one but he can recognize the allegorical import of the veil, and by extension, the Word of God. The assumed fact that “the Word of God” is transcribed in the form of Hooper’s veil, could signify that the Word is speciously represented by the veil, the interpretation of which … to use the Deconstructionists’ jargon … is inaccurately supplemented by each who sees it. Because (seemingly) countless interpretations about the veil are possible, it stands to reason that neither the veil of the minister nor the Word of God could be correctly appreciated. Worse, bringing up solipsism, Hooper’s failure to achieve communion worsens this deconstructive situation. By letting Hooper fail to perform the “Engagement” with society … this is what Sartre demands us to do … the solipsistic wall */veil* disables him from either standing outside of the solipsistic wall */veil* or observing himself from outside the veil */wall*. Hooper is thus left disqualified as an Existential hero even though he meets the initial condition as an Existentialist, namely, keen awareness of life, death, and individuality, or what can be described, in Heidegger’s terminology, a *Dasein* [the current existence,” in English].

To make himself or the purpose of his veil understood, Hooper forcibly imposes on every member of the congregation exactly the same identity … the sinner. He disallows the other(s) the right of self-articulation and holds them en mass with recourse to the Puritan concept of total depravity. The forceful identity-imposition would be helpful to the imperialist-minded, like Hooper, in colonizing the others. His consciousness of the self under the aspect of pervasive sin helps him behave in a paranoid but arrogant way, and this brings him to a totalitarian and imperialistic mindset. This identity-imposing mentality depends on an exact one-to-one correspondence between the signifying [identity labelling] and the signified [the thing labeled], and conforms to the principle of allegory. From the beginning, however, the allegory deconstructs itself from within as de Man explicates. Hooper, meanwhile, gets stuck to the allegory-activating mentality that leads him to the critical brink of becoming a totalitarian and imperialist in
whose mind the particularities of the other should be a controllable object, reducible to the “I,” “my thoughts,” “my possessions,” and “products of my knowledge” (Davis 4).

Here, let us turn to the harsh criticism that Hawthorne, like Hooper, submits to blame for his ambiguities. Hawthorne has been criticized for his ambiguous political stance toward both American imperialism and the problem of abolition. Hawthorne’s posture still remained latent in 1836, when he wrote “The Minister’s Black Veil,” but it surfaced in a rather ugly and prominent way during the antebellum period. Over that period, he dedicated his energies to the preparation of *The Scarlet Letter*, the work that elevated him to literary stardom. He lost his sinecure, however, in 1849, due in part to the change of government, but mainly to the hate campaign led by Charles Upham. Hawthorne became the focus of public attention as a victim of this scandal, and earned displeasure from the local people on account of the sardonic and yet unvarnished depiction of his ex-coworkers in “The Custom-House” of *The Scarlet Letter*. During this period he supported Franklin Pierce, the presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in 1852. Later, as president, Pierce audaciously unfurled a reactionary pro-slavery policy [e.g., the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Ostend Manifesto] in New England, an area imbued with the mood of abolitionism. Hawthorne’s support for, or undisclosed expectation of nepotism from, Pierce, one of his friends from his days at Bowdoin College, festered Hawthorne’s literary reputation (Pierce is now ranked among the three or four worst US presidents ever). Much later, in the 1980s and 90’s, it spurred and fed harsh criticism from Postcolonialists, Feminists, and other revisionist political critics, such as Jonathan Arac, Sacvan Bercovitch, and John Carlos Rowe. It follows that at the time, when Hawthorne was still an unknown writer in apprenticeship, he had already foreseen himself in the image of Hooper, the reactionary Calvinistic minister, the notorious object of finger-pointing in his community, and rendered his self-portrait in a caricatured way more than a decade ahead of the times. If so, he anticipated in Hooper the image of his self-parody in which he would stand in the breach of politically-minded critics about a half century ahead of the times. Hawthorne was aware that when the Language Game changes, the way they see the players (Hooper and Hawthorne), changes, and that yesterday’s heroes become today’s anti-heroes.
Here, when we conjoin Hawthorne with Hooper, we realize that both stand in a critical time when a transformation of \textit{épistême} is just about to happen: first, in the first half and middle of the eighteenth century, when the severity of patriarchal Puritanism represented by Hooper began to look obsolete amidst the secularization and feminization (to use the term of Ann Douglas) of religion in American society, and when Hooper befuddles the parishioners with his anachronistic and therefore unintelligible conduct, or threatens them with the face-covering black veil; and second, in the antebellum period, when the severe turmoil over slavery in America struck Hawthorne with a chance blow, and when Hawthorne, the previously reclusive and therefore innocuous novelist who wrote \textit{The Scarlet Letter}, was drawn violently out into the open as a man of letters in disgrace, (un)like Hester, the heroic woman with the letter A on her bosom. (Making a nuisance of himself, he managed to virtually oust himself from a misunderstanding public, just as Hooper estranges himself from his parishioners); and third, in the postmodern era starting about from the 1970s, when the Existentialist’s idea of free will and moral individualism lost its momentum, and when newly empowered postmodernistic thinkers, politically minded Feminists, and Postcolonialists were likely to be censorious of Hawthorne’s political stance and to conversely weaken the previously predominant literary critics who had helped Hawthorne establish canonical status.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Hooper’s behavior suggests that he is half aware of his own tragic phenomena: the impossibility of allegorically representing the w/Word(s) (of God), the entrapment in the erroneous system that overemphasizes God, the Word, the Origin, and the Cause (of sin). In a sense, Hawthorne predicted, exemplified, and was satirically resigned to Derrida’s contention that it is illusory to expect to entirely elucidate one’s own condition/will with the w/(W)ord. By extension, this also implies that the idea of human free will—stressed by Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Existentialism—was a mere illusion to the deconstruction-minded Hawthorne. Recall here that Jesus sows the Word of God[/the ultimate signifier (telos)] by using parables[/allegories or veiled languages] as integral instruments. Jesus’ parables and Hooper’s parabolic veil, the instruments Jesus and Hooper repeatedly use in their attempts to enlighten their followers, are
sometimes ill received. If Hawthorne had objectively positioned himself in the place of the reader and observed himself and Hooper inescapably caged in the absurdity of the w/ (W)ord, he would have concurred in advance with the remarks of Hillis J. Miller, another Deconstructionist: “Have I not ... through an ineluctable compulsion, unavoidably used as the ‘tool’ of reading the very thing I have most wanted to put into question, just that ideology of apocalypse with its associated figure of the veil and prosopopoiea?” (123). Hawthorne thus had to consign himself to the fate not only of being misunderstood and isolated (sharing the fate of Miller and Hooper in their own ways), but also of being lost in the realm of écriture [writing in English] despite and because of his position as a professional writer. In the deconstructive situation where allegory is impossible to maintain itself, Hawthorne paradoxically allegoricalized himself into the image of Hooper. Recall that the dialogical (though malfunctioning) structure composed of the two contrasting parties, the minister versus the parishioners who misunderstand him, reappears in two similar but slightly different forms. In one form, Hawthorne ran afoul of his contemporaries, who (un)duly charged him; in the other, Hawthorne pitted himself against his still unknown future readers, readers who were to be (un)justifiably censorious of him. In placing himself in parallel with Hooper, we could hear the echo of Hawthorne’s wail from the veil/wail of the Reverend Hooper, the wail that sounds self-cursing but is probably, like Hooper’s soundless wail, masochistic. Hawthorne’s wail perhaps went on to trigger a resonance in Melville. Melville showed his admiration to Hawthorne by echoing Hawthorne’s wail in the form of the whale book and dedicating to Hawthorne the book about the wail/whale [Moby Dick], and found himself wailing or, more properly, ranting and raving as his own father did on his deathbed or as Pierre does against his mother’s injunction to “Never rave, Pierre; and never rant. Your father [who in reality, ranted for his illicit daughter] never did either” (19).

Hawthorne wailed all the more because he was probably aware of the following ironical fact: pragmatically speaking, faithfully practicing Lévinas’ ethics, i.e., removing the veil and laying bare his face toward others for the communion establishment, was next to impossible, too naïve even for an allegedly naïve person like Hawthorne to accept, inasmuch as he engaged himself to the deceptive society (capitalistic market), where he had to make his work somewhat kitschy in
consideration of its readability, intelligibility, and marketability to the eyes of the multitudes. There is no innocent adult who does not disguise himself with a veil, and Hawthorne, as one of those whose foothold was in the literary realm, must have been pressured to admit the dividing line between ethics and literature. He was not simply wailing or veiling. Nor did he impose on his readers the exact Lévinas ethic, the moral imperative to “come-face-to-face with-others.” Rather, he was hoodwinking a feckless readership. To whom did this posturing of Hawthorne’s appear to be homologous to that of his own? To Melville. In his “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850), Melville pronounced in favor of Hawthorne: It is “Lear the frantic King [who] tears the mask, and speaks the sane madness of vital truth,” “to utter, or even hint of” things which that were “all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character” (407). In a letter to Evert Duyknick dated Dec. 14, 1849, Melville lamented, “What a madness & anguish it is that an author can never — under no conceivable circumstances — be at all frank with his readers” (149).

Seeing that the ideology or Lévinasian ethical imperative to remove the veil is not down-to-earth, but rather—as shown by the depiction of the parishioners’ rude reaction towards the minister—inconsiderate, insulting, and subjectivity-denying against the veiled, Hawthorne did not conform to the ideology of unveiling. As a precursor to Existentialism, the author let the minister rather willingly submit to the unavoidable fate of absurdity in which tragedy becomes a farce.

At a time of waning of a previously authoritative discourse like Puritan theology, a kind of master discourse that helps one establish one’s subject position, one is prone to justify and confirm one’s subject position by carrying out the new moral—not the old theological—imperative in practical parts of life. Theoretically, the imperative is practicable and should be practiced. Hence one sees this new imperative become all the more prerogative with the appearance of thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Emmanuel Lévinas. One is then likely to think, warns the postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard, that with this (theoretically) easy-to-do task, one dwarfs and resolves the problem of one’s ambiguous subject position. In the vein of Lyotard, Hawthorne did not believe that the moral imperative to unveil was a panacea. Hawthorne might have concurred with Miller’s deconstructive comment: “the ideology of unveiling must be unveiled” (89). He did not remove the veils from Hooper or from himself so that, in his
deconstructible allegory, he might invoke his readers’ generosity, or “sympathy” to use the rather hackneyed term from the nineteenth century onward in the critique of Hawthorne, in accepting the otherness/difference of the other (i.e., Hawthorne’s otherwise ambiguous nature) as it was, even if the other being was veiled. “Sympathy” should not be confused, it has to be quickly added, with “[s]entimental discourse[that] tends to function through the recognition of internal homogeneity: if people appear different, sentimentalism tells us, those differences mask a common humanity” (Silverman 347). In a Hawthornian sense, sympathy is not a kind of decent bargain between you and I, both eager to have the sympathy of/be sympathetic with the other. Hawthorne, indeed, was not so inconsiderate of the demands of the literary market, the salability of the book, as to neglect to saturate this already cliché-filled story. It is ironic and curious, however, that, Hawthorne fatally wounded Melville, the man who probably understood him better than anyone else. Melville was anxious to “come face to face with” Hawthorne; he waited for a sympathetic response from Hawthorne that never was to come. Regrettably, a full discussion of this problem would go beyond the scope of this paper.

In his works, “The Minister’s Black Veil” included, Hawthorne revealed the absurdity of veiling and simultaneously exposed “the ideology of unveiling,” both futile and violent. Therefore, he declared in “Mosses from an Old Manse,” “So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face” (X: 32). Aware of the deconstructible and therefore vulnerable nature of allegory, Hawthorne paradoxically allegorized his own nature of veiled otherness in his cliché-filled artifact to please and deceive feckless readers in the capitalist market society (hence, in a genuine sense, “The Minister’s Black Veil” is not necessarily a work of art per se, but rather a desacralized parable) and represented it through the Reverend Hooper.

Notes
1. Niwa Takaaki’s *Self-Portraits of Fear* gave me a crucial hint for my research.
2. If one is requested to help the other remove the veil/mask so that the other’s identity can be made known, then one’s veil/mask-removing conduct is justifiable, as is Pierre’s conduct toward his putative half-sister Isabel. On the contrary, if the other puts on the veil for the sake of his or her privacy, then those who intrude
into the sacred realm over the wall would commit, in Hawthorne’s terminology, an unpardonable sin, just as Chillingworth does in his disrobing the minister Dimmesdale and metaphorically committing homosexual rape on him for the decisive proof of the latter’s adultery with the former’s erstwhile wife. In this paper, I limit the discussion to the problem attributable to the person [“the Reverend Mr. Hooper”] who puts on the veil by his own will.

3. All subsequent references to this story will be parenthetically included in this paper.
4. Anthropocentrism in this context refers not to the attitude postmodernists are likely to criticize.
5. Similarly but conversely, Boone states as follows: “The irony of the veil, though, is that although its function is concealment of sin, it actually, in the minister’s case, functions to expose sin” (167).
6. Interestingly, Arthur Dimmesdale, the hypocritical minister in The Scarlet Letter, arguably has the letter A of Adultery “carved on fleshly tables of the heart” in a manner paradoxically true to the biblical description.
7. Citing the psychological theory of R. D. Laing, Michael Paul Rogin indicates that, in “protect[ing] the inner self from vulnerability,” “[p]etrification is one failed alternative to maturity ... and masquerade is another” (230).
8. In this respect, Hawthorne would not have endorsed, it seems, Myra Jehlen’s typological interpretation of American history: “In the familiar refrain, Americans would have ‘no sense of history,’ precisely because they had already done with history at the beginning” (197).
9. You might say that the Reverend Hooper’s wail is an echo of the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

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The Deconstructible Allegory  
of the Failed Author-Reader Communion:  
Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil: A Parable”  

Sasaki, Eitetsu

In “Mosses from an Old Manse” (1846), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64) paradoxically dropped off his mask to blurt, “So far as I am a man of really individual attributes I veil my face.” In making sure of his hidden undissembled intention regarding the author-reader communion, this paper treats “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), a short fiction written during Hawthorne’s apprenticeship to become a professional writer.

“The Minister’s Black Veil” depicts the unintelligible behavior of the Reverend Hooper, who wears a black veil. Critics are divided over the problem of whether Hooper merits praise or harsh criticism. Existentially aware of the meaning of life, or to use Heidegger’s phraseology, Dasein, Hooper warns his parishioners, it seems, of how foolish it is to stay ignorant in plausibly blissful daily activities. If closely inspected, however, Hooper is far from being an Existentialist. He forcefully imposes the same identity as sinners on one and all parishioners, in the name of Puritanism and its dogmatic doctrine, the notion of total depravity. He shows unawares his totalitarian inclination toward essentialism—the sort of attitude that Existentialists denounce. Furthermore, he neglects to hold communion with his parishioners and even with God, and thus incarcerates himself in his own solipsistic realm. When we recall the author’s above-mentioned confession of “I veil my face,” we confront this question: How close is Hawthorne to Hooper the veiled minister?

The Deconstructionist Paul de Man points out that, because of its etiological definition of speaking about something other than itself, the deconstruction of the allegory is part of the allegory itself. From this perspective, we can understand that it is impossible for Hooper to allegorically represent the w/Word(s) (of God), the Origin, and the Cause (of sin) with the use of his
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black veil, the proxy, symbol, letter, and or language with which he hopes to allegorically convince the congregation of the puritan notion of total depravity. Aware of how he appears to the eyes of his parishioners, Hooper stops associating with them. He is openly avoided and secretly ridiculed by men and women, young and old. In these adverse circumstances, the degree of their misapprehension over the reason for his veil deepens all the more. In a negative way, Hooper exemplifies the process of what the leading Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida calls “différence” and attests to Derrida’s insistence that allegory deconstructs itself.

More than a decade after publishing this story, Hawthorne became a canonical writer by dint of his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). But around this time he also suffered severe hardships, most of which sprang from misunderstanding on the part of his contemporaries: he was expelled from the sinecure position at the custom house, targeted in a hate campaign by Charles Upham, and incurred the displeasure of locals through his sarcastic depiction of the locally employed officers at the custom house. Moreover, since the 1980s, Hawthorne’s support for Franklin Pierce, the notoriously pro-slavery politician who went on to win the presidency, has induced left-minded critics to undermine the writer’s literary reputation.

In his apprenticeship to become a professional writer, Hawthorne already depicted his future self in the image of Hooper. Portraying both Hooper’s liability to be a victim of misapprehension and his resigned acceptance of this fate, the author predicted the fate that was to befall him later in life and after his death. Hawthorne paradoxically allegorized his own nature of veiled otherness in the form of desacralized allegory/parable and represented it through the Reverend Hooper.