

## Minister Hooper's Melancholic Virtue

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n11p679

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**Abstract:** Hawthorne's 'The Minister's Black Veil' is one of his short stories whose protagonist has sunk in a gloomy depression. Since most of the male characters in such stories follow a procedure for a type of self awareness (this may happen out of the plot, as in Mr. Hooper whose insight has occurred before the story begins), the result of their journey within themselves is darkness and depression. The present study sought the footprint of true virtue in drawing the character into such deep thoughts that resulted in his everlasting coverage of his face by a black veil. One of the best approaches which proved the truth of the minister's virtue was the definition that Immanuel Kant presented through his *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Kant made use of the theory of the four temperaments which influence human mental and behavioral traits. In his attitude, a melancholy is, among the other personality, the most virtuous and capable for the feeling of the sublime. In accordance with the characteristics represented by Kant for each temperament, reverend Mr. Hooper is regarded as a melancholy. With his deep thoughts, most realistic insight, and black moods, the minister of the story exhibits a truly virtuous personality.

**Key Terms:** True virtue, virtuous, temperaments, melancholy

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### 1. Introduction

In consonance with assorted ethical schools, philosophies and theories, virtue includes numerous categories and definitions. This term which originates in Latin signifies moral excellence. Virtue is the very gist and principle of our lives, the content of our personality and the truest interpretation of our souls. For human beings of all ethnicities, cultures and beliefs, virtue is the essence of genuine success. Virtue is the core element of the human spirit. It grows stronger whenever one uses it. The idea of virtue returns to the ancient era when Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* defined virtue as a "balance point between a deficiency and an excess of a trait" (Robinson, 2010, p. 121); private and individual virtue carries the fundamental values that embody some categories; for instance, ethics most commonly regard binary oppositions such as virtue- vice, right- wrong, and good- evil; some doctrinal categories concern chiefly religious, social, ideological or political values. On the other hand, there are some other categories that indicate the aesthetic values as well as inborn genius.

Ancient Socratic model of human excellence is explained as celestial and sacred one, because such a person does not concern with the necessities involved in sustaining his body. Spenser, in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, portrays courtesy as a factually ethical virtue. It results not only from gentleness, that is, an innate inclination to seek what finely benefits others, but also from the conscious and deliberate choice of a deed that best meets the requirements of

particular circumstances. One of the primary concerns of courtesy is the aid that one man should give to others. The books on the gentleman rarely mention courtesy and provide some other virtues such as justice, charity, and general moral duty in poor and overlapping descriptions.

Spenser carefully differentiates among these virtues, contrasting the areas governed by justice and courtesy in parallel episodes in Books V and VI. Courtesy, then, is not "merely" a social grace; it is a virtue suffused with a grace and comeliness of manner. Both the courteous action and the manner in which it is performed draw men together in good will and form a foundation for human society. (Woodward Culp, 1971, p. 73)

Rousseau, another theorist who possesses lines in terms of virtue, in his primary depiction of virtue presents heroic images. He appears to offer that deeds challenging or even surpassing the might of God, and gallant sacrifices for honor are needed if characters are to be considered truly virtuous. "Heroic virtue is understood to produce beautiful deeds." (Emberley, 1984, p. 732)

Western thought also has a classification for virtue; 'temperance' as moderation in thought, feeling and behavior represents virtue. The other measure for virtue would be 'prudence' or to be able to discipline and manage one's life using logic. To confront and overcome fear, misery and danger suggest 'courage'; moderation between selfishness and selflessness refers to 'justice' as the last class of virtue. Nietzsche, the philosopher and classical philologist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century says:

Genuine honesty, assuming that this is our virtue and we cannot get rid of 'perfection' ourselves in our virtue, the only one we have left: may its glory come to rest like gilded, blue evening glow of mockery over this aging culture and its dead and dismal seriousness. (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 2009, trans. Helen Zimmern, p. 227)

The importance of the issues related to virtue has risen so high that even computer experts who believe in Christianity have programmed a game entitled *Saints of Virtue*. Players of this game experience a virtual 'Pilgrim's Progress' in which they learn how to ask others for help, to attempt with more courage and to think. The player has to overcome vices such as fear, pride and vanity. Also, the multitude of attitudes indicating virtue in public relations and political behaviors manifest it as a critical point so that "thinkers such as Hobbes, Lock, Montesquieu, and Hume conveyed a powerful critique of traditional virtues to their non-philosophic citizens" (Lutz, 1997, p. 556). Among numerous philosophers and thought leaders who have concerned moral attitudes and virtue, Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804) puts forward the definition that in a number of ways includes various points of view.

## 2. Background

In his 1764 treatise, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (OBS)*, Kant, the prominent and inspiring philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, introduces finer feeling which differs critically from everyday feeling in that it is subjective and universal. In terms of such feeling, Kant admits that it is "of a more delicate sort, so described either because one can enjoy it longer without satiation and exhaustion; or because it presupposes a sensitivity of the soul, so to speak, which makes the soul fitted for virtuous impulses;" (*OBS*, trans. Goldthwait, 2003 , p. 46). Through this statement, Kant foreshadows the second section of his book in which he describes people who are capable to feel sublime, or in other words, those who are truly virtuous. In progression of his speech, Kant articulates that one who possesses courage, honesty, simplicity and esteem conveys and feels sublimity. People with such traits are gifted with true virtue. In Kantian terms, a virtuous heart is not merely one with benevolent and gentle passions; true virtue is to have the ability to judge fairly and to behave according to principles. For further clarification, Kant represents an example:

"...good- natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind. For suppose that this feeling stirs you to help a needy person with your expenditure. But you are indebted to another, and doing this makes it impossible for you to fulfill the stern duty of justice. Thus the action obviously cannot spring from a virtuous design;" (*OBS*, 2003, p. 58)

The question already is how it is possible to distinguish a truly virtuous character from the rest. Kant answers this question by introducing four human temperaments and their capability to feel the beautiful and the sublime. Many philosophers and scientists, prior to Kant, have arisen some opinions about four humors and their influence upon human thoughts and behavior. The origin of this theory goes back to ancient Egypt; however, we are said that Hippocrates (400-370 BC) the Greek physician, developed it into a medical theory. Also, the Persian scientist, Avicenna (980- 1037) in his *The Canon of Medicine* wrote that the four humors influence "emotional aspects, mental capacity, moral attitudes, self

awareness, movements and dreams" (Lutz, 2002, p. 60). Kant explains how an individual with a particular characteristic and temperament differs from others in terms of true virtue and performing principled actions. Among people, those with phlegmatic temperament possess no finer taste and they have absence of virtue. Sanguine people, on the other hand, with their tendency to decoration and superficiality are gifted with the feeling of the beautiful. Two remaining temperaments, choleric and melancholy, have both strong tastes for the sublime; nevertheless, people with choleric traits possess showy sublime, that is, the outward appearance and the attitude of others is so crucial for these people. On the other hand, a person with melancholy temperaments "has above all a feeling for the sublime" (OBS, 2003, p. 64). It was formerly mentioned that only virtuous people are capable to feel the sublime, and that true virtue means to think and behave according to principles; but, what type of principles? Where do they come from? Are they included within the domain of written laws or unwritten ones? In response to these questions, Kant believes that these principles do not include theoretical rules, "but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast and extends itself much further than over the particular grounds of compassion and complaisance" (OBS, 2003, p. 60). Kant summarizes all expressions and defines true virtue as "the feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature. The first is ground of universal affection, the second of universal esteem" (1764, p. 60). Kant sets up two types of virtue including adoptive and genuine. The former lives in a kind heart and possesses beautiful and charming traits, while the latter appears in noble heart and it is sublime and venerable and it is the second type which Kant calls true virtue. He continues "... genuine virtue based on principles has something about it which seems to harmonize most with the melancholy mind in the moderated understanding." (OBS, 2003, p. 63)

Following these statements, Kant begins to count melancholy's characteristics; A melancholy is away from joys of life; he afflicts himself in dark depression. His feelings are evoked so powerfully that they easily terminate. "He has above all a feeling for the sublime" (OBS, 2003, p. 64). Even the beauty which pleases others must move him. He is always more effectively fascinated to the sublime than charmed by beauty. He has the most resolute personality; a person with melancholy frame of mind possesses power to bring his sensation under principle and to control it. Such a person behaves honorably with his wife; that illnesses or the pass of time may ruin her beauty is not important for him; as a matter of fact, he looks at her as a human rather than a woman. In being of assistance to others, a melancholy personality does not require later gratitude; he believes whatever befalls one individual, may one day concern him as well. "The man of melancholy frame of mind cares little for what others judge, what they consider good or true; he relies in this matter simply on his own insight" (OBS, 2003, p. 66); such a person is steadfast in his deeds. He possesses thoughtful silence and true friendship which is the feature of sublime. He respects everybody as human being who is dignified. A person with melancholy frame of mind feels ultimate freedom for himself and judges strictly both himself and others; that is why many times you see him deprived of himself or of people around. His heart is the safe home for many a secret. Such traits that demonstrate a notable heart belongs to a person with melancholy temperament.

Through Kantian introduction about melancholy frame of mind, one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804- 1864) characters is going to be studied. Mr. Hooper, the minister of Milford village, enters the meeting house with his face covered by a black veil becoming a mystery for all country people! He introduces this piece of cloth as a symbol and wears the black veil for his entire life; even his last testament appeals to bury him with the black veil. The reason for wearing the black veil happens before the story begins; however, it is probable to find it through Mr. Hooper's black moods and behavior.

### 3. The Analysis

The primary issue in 'The Minister's Black Veil' suggesting the nobility of Mr. Hooper is his occupation as a pious and respectable minister. Hawthorne initiates his short story with a religious and spiritual context which represents the feeling of honorability and tendency to divinity; in other words, from the very beginning, the story conveys the existence of a supernatural and mighty element dominating the mood of the story and this earnest aroma goes along with the plot to the end. Throughout the story, the concerning character is entitled Mr. Hooper, parson or reverend each of which exemplifying this Hawthorne-made character as a thoughtful, religious and venerable figure; even his manner of walking manifests his dignity:

"all within hearing immediately turned about, and beheld the semblance of Mr. Hooper, pacing slowly his meditative way towards the meeting house" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 18)

Hawthorne's pictorial style is evident in his creation of environmental elements that represent spirituality and link to divinity; tolling the bell, the meeting house, and the pulpit, all suggest connectivity between human and the Almighty, an invisible tie between the finite and the Infinite whose everlasting might conveys the feeling of the sublime. The effect of

this power on reverend Hooper appears as a microscopic perspective to his neatness of clothes and the way he "was dressed with due clerical neatness, as if a careful wife had starched his band, and brushed the weekly dust from his Sunday's grab" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 18). It is proved from the attention of people that Mr. Hooper is respected by everybody, and at the same time, he knows how finely to be well-mannered to others. This characteristic arises from truly virtuous frame of mind that is aware of human's general dignity:

He entered with an almost noiseless step, bent his head mildly to the pews on each side, and bowed as he passed his oldest parishioner, a white-haired great-grandsire, who occupied an armchair in the center of the isle. (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 18)

One major trait that Kant expresses for all sublime entities is that they all move, and this could be either subjective or objective. It might produce a shift in one's moods, behaviors, or belief or it may cause someone to move physically. The reverend-character of Hawthorne's story possesses such features and is consciously moved by an inner power; by something that makes him able to control himself, even while putting out his sermon, the black veil is moved "with his measured breath" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19)

The picture of black veil utilized by Hawthorne ironically refers to the sinfulness and shame of the character beseeching the Almighty for mercy and forgiveness; as Mr. Hooper's psalm "had reference to 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." (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 19); however, not only the minister of the story has not conceal his probable past sin, but also by wearing the black veil he is presenting a type of confession and is accepting the truth evidently and courageously. The narrator calls this piece of crape "mysterious emblem" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19), a piece of cloth that, although contains a mystery for the people who are observing their minister, it is meaningful for the deep insight of the melancholy mind of the minister himself. As it is commonly and truly believed, it happens for people with melancholy frame of mind to experience deep depressive and gloomy passions and usually no other person with different temperament has an insight deep enough to interpret and understand a melancholy mind. Perhaps that is why some people are habituated to call sorrowful individuals melancholic: "though reckoned a melancholy man, Mr. Hooper had a placid cheerfulness for such occasions," (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 20), or because something appears strange to them it falls out of the domain of human intellect: "something must surely be amiss with Mr. Hooper's intellects," observed her [a woman in the story] husband, the physician of the village." (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 20). People whose natures possess humors other than melancholy, feel despair and even sometimes afraid of the world of the persons with melancholy traits. In Hawthorne's story as well, there are statements that explicitly express the melancholic features of Mr. Hooper. Once Hawthorne writes, "it [sermon] was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr. Hooper's temperament." (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19) and one other time he says:

Each 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... many spread their clasped hands on their bosoms. There was nothing terrible in what Mr. Hooper said, at least, no violence; and yet, with every tremor of his melancholy voice, the hearers quaked. (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19)

People of Minister Hooper's town, like all people around the world, possess different humors, and Hawthorne unveils them through their responses to the black veil after the sermons, when they leave the meeting-house. Some possess the features of choleric mind that tries to find the cause and depth of everything and then introduce itself as the conqueror: "a few [people] shook their sagacious heads, intimating that they could penetrate the mystery" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19). There are some others whose sanguine temperament illustrates itself as loud as their words and behavior: "... eager to communicate their pent-up amazement... some talked loudly, and profaned the Sabbath day with ostentatious laughter." (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19) There are also some people who lack any insight and according to Kant, they lack any finer taste; one or two people with phlegmatic personality "affirmed that there was no mystery at all, but only that Mr. Hooper's eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp, as to require a shade." (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19). By the weak understanding of such people an aroma of loneliness begins to appear. Hawthorne expresses the initial deserting behavior to Mr. Hooper:

Old Squire Saunders, 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. (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 19)

From now on the solitude of the Minister is manifested brightly, people look at their good preacher as a stranger, children are afraid of him, and there are some rumors around about his veil that might be as the result of an unknown and

shameful sin. The always beloved Mr. Hooper is known a stranger with a terrible black veil on his face; a trembling one that shudders every soul during his sermons. Separation from the villagers is still tolerable since Mr. Hooper still has got a confidant intimate friend; that is, his fiancée Elizabeth. With no fear, anxiety, or negative perspective, once, Elizabeth decides to enquire the reason for wearing the black veil. As a matter of fact, she is the only person to whom seeking the truth looks crucial, and at the same time, the only person on whom Mr. Hooper can rely and talk of his heart. The initiation of the conversation goes on by Elizabeth's sympathetic search for the reason and informing the Minister of what others think about him; however, as a melancholic person, Mr. Hooper pays a little smile on such rumors, for he possesses much higher and deeper reflections. Elizabeth's requests for removing the black veil fails and Mr. Hooper, though endearing her does not accept to remove the veil. He is a man with melancholy frame of mind, one who, by nature, is capable of depression and solitude. He is aware of the difference he has with others, and therefore, he does not want to miss the last chance, the last creature on the ground, her beloved Elizabeth. When refused to remove the veil, Mr. Hooper witnesses Elizabeth trembles, like other people, to the sight of the black veil. So when she turns to leave the room:

He rushed for forward and caught her arm. "Have patience Elizabeth!" cried he, passionately. "Do not desert me, though this veil must be between us here on earth. Be mine, and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness between our souls! It is but a mortal veil—it is not for eternity! O! You know not how lonely I am, and how frightened, to be alone behind my black veil. Do not leave me in this miserable obscurity forever!" (Hawthorne, 1889, p. 23)

She might be a woman with melancholy personality, Elizabeth would wait and think and perhaps feel Mr. Hooper's passion. These sorrowful and heartbreaking statements illustrate the depth of the Minister's loneliness on the earth. After Elizabeth there will be no hope for staying away from solitude. Mr. Hooper needs someone with the same depth of feeling and interpretation, and he thinks that Elizabeth is the most innocent one that can accompany him; on the other hand, Elizabeth is not a melancholic person, and as a result, she does not afford feeling such horrible countenance forever. Since then, Mr. Hooper's only intimate friend is his black veil. He continues his life as a minister, puts out sermons, observes ceremonies for weddings and funerals, and always has the deepest effect on addressee's heart. The black veil becomes a loyal friend that accompanies Mr. Hooper into his grave.

#### 4. Conclusion

As stated formerly, the present paper aims at finding the footprint of true virtue in the behavior of Mr. Hooper, and the reason for his depression that has resulted in wearing the black veil. The model and the definition used for finding such incidents are those of Immanuel Kant who believes that people with melancholy frame of mind are truly virtuous. It was proved through the analysis that the character is a melancholic man.

Hawthorne introduces his story as a parable, a story that tends to teach and can be similar to every one's life. The writer utilizes a melancholic minister as his protagonist to carry his plot. In the first glance, the reader comes across a respectable clergyman, neat in appearance, humble and polite in manner, and firm and at the same time passionate in feeling. One who has sunk in gloomy depression and suffers from a secret sin so shameful that has made him cover his face physically in front of the villagers. On the other hand, Mr. Hooper, when explaining the matter of the black veil for his beloved Elizabeth, calls it "a type and a symbol" and reminds the reader of the parable being read.

Indeed Hawthorne has created Mr. Hooper a truly virtuous character. In spite of being deeply passionate, he feels not sympathy and does not agree to remove the veil for anyone's sake. He is brave, persistent, and inattentive to the gossips. Above all, he is embarrassed of a probable and secret sin. Now the question is whether he is really sinful or not. There are some expressions in the story that manifest the Minister as someone who really is ashamed of his sins; particularly the scene in which the dead young lady trembles at his face and he hastily gets the veil back on his face, as if the corpse has been able to see him.

By a profound investigation beneath the surface of the story, one may conclude that, as the title suggests, this tale is purposed to teach its readers. Mr. Hooper is the preacher of Hawthorne's thoughts and beliefs. If the Minister was so deeply sank in his depressions and there was no person remained intimate for him, why, like other melancholic people, does not suicide or even does not once think about it? How he endures his job as a minister till he is aged? Mr. Hooper himself confesses in one sentence to Elizabeth that there is a vow in wearing the black veil. One party is the Minister, the other is not clear; it could be a promise between him and his God, or maybe he has secretly promised to one of his colleagues. In each case, there is a mission to be done, and Mr. Hooper uses the black veil to perform his job as best as possible. As a virtuous person, he is confidant and reliable and devotes himself to what he considers the best for him and

the people of his village. During the story, Hawthorne writes that the black veil has emphasized the influence of his sermons on the parishioners. Even this piece of crape becomes a type of advertisement for that small village and the meeting-house. Many strangers come to his church to attend their services. In this case, the black veil becomes a commercial and political means rather than a symbol for sinfulness and shame. Although it is reasonable for Mr. Hooper to ask Elizabeth to stay with him not to be alone, he might aim at making her a type of assistant in his preaches. However, above all, this character devotes his life to achieve his goal.

By this parable-tale, Hawthorne reminds many people of their duties, responsibilities and goals. He teaches his readers to be honest, kind, humble, firm, respectful and honorable, and above all to behave according to principles rather than impulses and sympathy. That is what Kant exactly calls a truly virtuous person.

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