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To Regain Paradise by Lifting a Veil

Keiko Fujie

Unfallen man is unclothed, for there is no sin to be covered. The convention of cover comes in with the Fall. The cover functions not only as concealment but also as separation; separation of man from man as well as of man from God. Adam and Eve before the Fall lived in peace, hand in hand, under the grace of God, for there was no concealment or veil to separate them from each other and from God. The Fall of Man brings discord among men and loss of the grace of God, because the cover intercepts the communication between men and God and men. Therefore it becomes possible for a man to reconcile himself with God and with other men by lifting the veil. To lift a veil is to reveal one's own sin. It is a way to regain Paradise where there was no veil. Many 19th century American writers used veil imagery in respect to the Fall of Man. There is no veil in the world of Whitman, who denied the Fall. Hawthorne and Melville, who recognized the Fall, used much veil imagery. This essay aims to trace veil imagery in respect to the Fall and to discuss how the proposition of lifting a veil is related to regaining Paradise.

A writer who clearly combines the idea of man's goodness and the non-existence of the concealing veil is Walt Whitman. He deified himself by singing aloud, "divine am I inside and out."¹ He felt it better for us to rid ourselves of a sense of guilt, as he exclaimed in "Song of Myself":

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and
self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God, (p. 59)

There is no cover where there is no sin. Walt Whitman tried to re-establish

unfallen man in the New Paradise by singing aloud in praise of the naked body:

As Adam early in the morning,
 Walking forth from the bower refresh'd with sleep,
 Behold me where I pass, hear my voice, approach,
 Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass,
 Be not afraid of my body. (p. 94)

There is no veil of separation in the world where there is no veil of concealment. The world of Whitman in which there is no cover to conceal is a world of unity and fellowship:

The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
 The lands to be welded together. (p. 286)

The convention of cover begins with the Fall of Man. It is exemplified in the veil the minister lowers in "The Minister's Black Veil" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The minister who suddenly lowers a veil one day never lifts it nor mixes with other men. He dies in isolation. The black veil is a symbol of the concealment of the Original Sin. The veil functions at once as concealment and as separation; separation of man from man as well as of man from God. It brings discord and isolation among men and a fall from the grace of God. The fallen world in which the Original Sin brought all human sorrows is intrinsically separated by the veil physically and metaphorically.

Hence much veil imagery is used in various figures such as mask, masquerade, mantle, screen, etc., by Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville. They are, as Harry Levin²⁾ discusses, the standard bearers of "power of blackness" — a power which "derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free."³⁾ The veil brings in tragedy since it separates man from the grace of God. The mantle of lady Eleanor in "Lady Eleanor's Mantle" by Hawthorne brings smallpox just as the red masque in "The Masque of the

Red Death” by Poe brings red death. In “Bartleby” by Melville, the scribner who has the name of the title never comes out of the screen and dies in isolation. The imposter in *The Confidence Man*, under some masquerades, cheats the passengers on board the ship out of money. Intrinsicly there is veil in the fallen world. The veil prevents man from making peace with other men and from receiving the grace of God.

Hence, the proposition of reconciliation between man and man, and between man and God by lifting a veil, is established, and thus man regains Paradise. The reconciliation can be achieved simply by the removal of the cover, that is, by revealing one’s sin. To reveal one’s sin is to recognize and admit that one is imperfect and tainted. This is the realization of true humility. Whitman was fully aware of this possibility when he sought to establish Paradise in the West:

All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told,
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook’d and
link’d together, (p. 288)

Hawthorne seems to order the minister to make peace with other people by lifting the veil with his idea of brotherhood – a bond of love which begins with the recognition of his own evil: “Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest,” Hawthorne writes in “Fancy’s Show Box,” since, “though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity.”⁴⁾ This bond of love never allows pride nor insistence on self. Hawthorne’s worst sinners are those who are “in want of love and reverence for the Human Soul” (*CE*, VIII, 251), and who commit the Unpardonable Sin of Ethan Brand: “The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God” (*CE*, XI, 90).

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* helps to explain the importance of that humility which leads to love. Satan’s fall to Hell is a result of his pride and his ambition to be equal with God. Eve, tempted by Satan, eats the Fruit of Knowledge because of her proud desire to be like God. After they have committed the Sin, Adam and Eve, swollen with pride, covered with fig leaves, spend fruitless hours in mutual accusation. They never condemn

themselves. Their Sin influences even the natural world. Winds rage and animals begin war because "Discord" is "first Daughter of Sin."⁵) But Adam and Eve regain peace by Eve's humbling herself; by her acknowledging her own fault. They beg reconciliation with God by prostrating humbly:

What better can we do, than to the place
 Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
 Before him reverent, and there confess
 Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, (X, 1086-9)

The praise of the virtue of humility is summed up in Raphael's warning, "be lowly wise"(VIII, 173). And to Adam and Eve, who are now humble and are about to leave Eden, Michael stresses the need of love:

... add Faith
 Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, and Love,
 By name to come call'd Charity, the soul
 Of all the rest; then wilt thou not loath
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
 A Paradise within thee, happier far. (XII, 582-7)

Indeed, there is no concrete imagery of lifting a veil when they confess their sin, but they surely lift their veils of concealment metaphorically. To lift a veil is a way to redemption, a way to regain Paradise.

A hero who splendidly lifts the veil and is saved is Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*. Dimmesdale hides the letter A, a symbol of his sin, with his ministerial clothes. As if hiding it doubly, he is always putting his hand over his breast. He is always suffering from the dilemma whether or not to confess his sin. The last scaffold scene is impressive. At last, he lifts his veil and confesses his sin: "With a convulsive motion he tore away the ministerial band from his breast. It was revealed" (*CE*, I, 255). This recognition of his own evil by lifting a veil directly brings about reconciliation with God as well as with Pearl, from whom he has been completely estranged until then: "Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken" (*CE*, I, 256). Hester Prynne asks him, "Tell me what thou seest" (*CE*, I, 256). What he sees is God's mercy: "He is merciful," he said, "He hath proved his mercy most of all in my afflictions. . . . Praised be His name!

His will be done" (CE, I 256–7)! Dimmesdale is not a particular person nor is his sin a particular one. In the "Conclusion," Hawthorne suggests that Dimmesdale's sin is the Original Sin: "... he had made the manner of his death a parable, in order to impress on his admirers the mightily and mournful lesson, that, in the view of Infinite Purity, we are sinners all alike" (CE, I, 259). Among many morals which can be learned from Dimmesdale's experience, Hawthorne singles out a special moral for the book: "Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred" (CE, I, 260)! Dimmesdale's acknowledgement of sin by lifting the veil brings about reconciliation. Removal of the cover simultaneously brings about reconciliation. Dimmesdale is saved by lifting the veil although it is at the cost of his own life.

In contrast, *The Confidence Man* and *Moby Dick* support my argument from opposite approach. The Confidence Man and Ahab, far from revealing their sins, by lifting their veils, are swollen with pride and go to Hell.

The Confidence Man, under such masquerades as the Black Guinea, the man with a weed, the man in the gray coat and white tie, etc., cheats the passengers on board the steamer out of money by demanding Christian virtues such as confidence, faith, trust, goodness, charity, etc. Yet no one claims to have been cheated. Because of the veil he lowers, his diabolical nature is hardly visible – not at all to most of his dupes, and only by inference to the reader. Unlike Dimmesdale, who revealed his worst and accomplished the moral, "Be true," the Confidence Man remained false. He is a type of the Fall of Man with cover. k

The Confidence Man is sometimes associated with the figure of a snake. For example, Pitch, after being cheated to hire a boy on his plantation, associates him with a snake in his reverie: "the insinuator's undulating flunkyisms dovetail into those of the flunky beast that windeth his way on his belly."⁶) Covered with a veil, the Confidence Man is a degenerate being who has Satan's works within him. He dominates the story while Christ the Redeemer is rejected. The dumb and deaf stranger who has a placard which claims the virtue of charity is a Christ-like figure; Melville describes

him as a "lamb-like figure" (p. 12). But his plea for charity is completely rejected, greeted with jeers and stares of people. This pattern can also be seen in the episode of China Aster and Orchis. China Aster is ruined by the loan from his friend, Orchis. As Daniel Hoffman points out,⁷⁾ the name of China Aster suggests the Star of the Orient and thus hints at Christ while Orchis has its origin in the Greek word for testicle and thus hints at Satan who has awakened man to sexuality. The occupation of China Aster is that of a candle-maker who, like Christ, brings light in the world, while Orchis's is that of "a shoemaker: one whose calling it is to defend the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things" (p. 214). Orchis is also a type of the Fall of Man with cover. The cover brought about the estrangement from his friend again. The Satanic figure predominates over the Christ-like figure. Christ the Redeemer, who makes intercession between God and the contrite, is rejected. There is no contrition nor redemption in the world of *The Confidence Man*. For a man, who, far from recognizing his own evil, is swollen with pride, Christ is not worth existing.

The Confidence Man, far from being contrite and revealing his tries diabolical nature by lifting his veil, pretends to be good by preaching to people the importance of Christian virtues. He, as it were, tries to usurp the role of God just as Satan tries to usurp the position of God. The Confidence Man's greatest fraud is that he makes a fraudulent use of the name of God. There is no redemption nor a bond of love where there is no humility. There is no bond of love where fraud is the response to confidence. Melville defines charity as "allowance for the insensible lee-way of human fallibility" (p. 164). This bond of love, just as Hawthorne presents in his idea of brotherhood, cannot be achieved unless a man lifts his veil and acknowledges his own evil. There is no redemption nor charity where a veil predominates, for the veil separates man from the grace of God and from other men. *The Confidence Man* is about a man who neglects humility before God. His proper place is Hell. Daniel Hoffman seems to me right when he argues that the last scene is Judgement Day: ". . . the consequences of man's traductions aboard the Fidèle will be revealed in hell on Judgement Day."⁸⁾

According to F.O. Matthiessen,⁹⁾ in one of the fragmentary comments in *The Confidence Man*, on the question of what is meant by an original character in fiction, Melville was virtually saying what he had intended in Ahab. Ahab in *Moby Dick* is also a type of the Fall of Man with cover, who goes to Hell because of his negligence of humility before God. Like the Confidence Man, he is associated with Satan. Ishamel describes the figure of Ahab as follows:

Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, vividly whitish.¹⁰⁾

According to an opinion by the old Manxman, the scar was a “birth mark,” which extended from “crown to sole” (p. 110). Melville seems to have used the idea of a birth mark for the Original Sin just as Hawthorne intended to express the notion of the Original Sin in Georgiana’s singular mark by birth in the center of her left cheek in “The Birthmark.” Or as Randall Stewart points out,¹¹⁾ this description of the mark recalls particularly Milton’s Satan, who was driven over the battlement of Heaven scarred by God’s thunderbolts. In any case, Ahab is a degenerate being who has Satan’s works within him.

Unlike the Confidence Man, Melville doesn’t explicitly suggest that Ahab is covered. But Ahab is surely covered, because he can’t see. Just as Arthur Dimmesdale couldn’t see God’s mercy until he lifted his veil, Ahab was blind to heavenly powers. Gazing out at the sunset, Ahab exclaimed: “This lovely light, it lights not me” (p. 147).

Ahab, far from being humble, swells in pride:

“There’s something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here, – three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; (p. 359)

Ahab, just like Satan and the Confidence Man, tried to usurp the position of God. He, just like Ethan Brand, “triumphed over the sense of

brotherhood with man and reverence for God.” Ahab’s character is well summed up when Captain Peley portrays him as “ungodly, god-like man” (p. 76).

The story of Ahab parallels that of Jonah told by Father Mapple early in the work. The sin of Jonah, like that of Ahab and that of Adam and Eve, is his “disobedience of the command of God” (p. 45). Father Mapple explains the sequence of Honah’s deliverance as follows: “it is a story of the sin, hard-heartedness, suddenly awakened fears, the swift punishment, repentance, prayers, and finally the deliverance and joy of Jonah” (p. 45). The latter part of the sequence has no parallel in the story of Ahab; Ahab did not repent, he did not pray, he was not delivered. Among many interpretations about the white whale, it seems to me right that Moby Dick is God’s whale, just as the whale which swallowed up Jonah is God’s whale.

“If man will strike, strike through the masque!” Ahab exclaimed, “To me, the white whale is that wall. . .” (p. 144). Later in chapter 42, Melville writes about the whiteness of the whale: “It is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind” (p. 169). To a fallen man with cover, God is invisible. Ahab can’t see God due to the veil of the whale God prepared for the sinners. The veil of Moby Dick is, in fact, a reflection of the veil which fallen man lowered himself. Unless a man lifts his veil by the virtue of humility, God is invisible; He is even a fear. Melville seems to support my assertion of a love that can be achieved by lifting the veil, when he writes, “this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright” (p. 169).

What Melville presents us through *The Confidence Man* and *Moby Dick* is a danger of the negligence of humility, or, to put it in another way, the importance of the recognition of one’s own sin. It is physically and metaphorically achieved by lifting a veil of concealment, which directly leads to reconciliation with God and with man. *The Confidence Man* and *Moby Dick* are reversed versions of *The Scarlet Letter*; *Moby Dick* with a tragic touch, *The Confidence Man* with a little bit comic touch. Fallen

man who, far from recognizing his own evil, swells in pride, is never saved nor gains love with God or with man, because the veil which conceals his sin separates man from God and from man.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn seems to have bid farewell to American classics as Hemingway declared "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." But, in his realization of mutual love between Huck and Jim on the raft, Mark Twain uses the proposition that it is possible to regain Paradise by lifting a veil.

Twain, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is partly mocking Christianity. Again and again he satirizes the inefficacy of formal religion. At a camp meeting, answering the preacher who tells the audience to come forward with a contrite heart, the King pretends to be a contrite pirate and cheats the crowd out of money by exciting their sympathy. Harvey, one of the brothers of deceased Peter Wilkes, is an English preacher, disguised as whom, the Duke plots with the King to inherit Wilkes' fortune. In the midst of the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, they, Huck included, go to church and listen to a sermon, whose theme ironically is brotherly love:

It was pretty ornery preaching - all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but every body said it was a good sermon, and they talked it over going home.¹²⁾

This is an obvious satire on a fallen society which lacks brotherly love. In contrast, Twain tries to realize the brotherly love between Huck and Jim on the raft away from society; the brotherly love is, as I have repeated in this essay, a bond of love which begins with recognition of one's own imperfection and taintedness.

Although the book was written in 1885, Twain set the background in 1845. Realization of mutual love between white and black was almost impossible at that time before the Emancipation. Fusion of black and white on the raft along the Mississippi was, as it were, the recovery of Paradise. Huck has *raison d'être* in his capacity of love for Jim; otherwise he would be only a runaway kid.

Huck's motive for going down the river with Jim under his protection is not to seek freedom in a positive sense. He just wants to escape from his cruel father and the termagant Miss Watson. He just wants some company because he is lonely:

I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead I got so downhearted and scared I did wish I had some company. (p. 13)

Huck is an ordinary child. Twain does not portray Huck as a sinner nor a Christ like figure. Indeed Twain was not strongly conscious of the Adamic myth unlike certain other classical American writers, but what he sought on the raft away from society was the recovery of a Paradise where there was no veil.

For a veil, Twain uses a fog; a fog which closed down just when Huck and Jim were coming to Cairo, where they had intended to go up the Ohio River to escape to a free state. As Leo Marx points out, the fog "obscures the road to freedom."¹³ For, due to the fog, they missed Cairo and couldn't get to other state. But there is more meaning in it. The fog which separates them physically is, in fact, an externalization of their spiritual separation. The fog is an externalization of a veil Huck and Jim have lowered.

Huck's attitude toward Jim is at first boastful and discriminating. Huck utters abusive language, "You can't learn a nigger to argue" (p. 85), because Jim can't understand why the French speak a different language. Just after that, the fog separates them. When they meet again, Huck plays a prank on Jim that Jim was dreaming, but he feels sorry because Jim is so anxious about him. He "humbles" (p. 90) himself and makes up his mind never to do him mean tricks again. Huck and Jim seem to have deepened their mutual love by Huck's humbling himself. Huck's humility, so to speak, cleared up the fog. On hearing Jim's humbling confession that he ill-treated his deaf daughter, Huck feels sympathy with Jim and is very moved to realize that blacks care for their family just as much as whites do. The veil between Huck and Jim seems to be completely lifted when Huck decides to save Jim by his self-sacrificing love: "I'll go to hell" (p. 210). Twain regains Paradise on the raft between Huck and Jim by lifting a

veil. The virtue of humility brings about reconciliation between black and white.

But even Huck couldn't lift the veil he had lowered between himself and his society. Huck was supposed to be dead during the whole time of his flight on the raft, and even at the Phelps' farm, he was under the disguise of Tom. He never revealed himself to his society. Huck, as it were, lowered a veil between himself and his society. Only once in the story does Huck humble himself to Miss Watson before God:

“What had poor Miss Watson done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you that you could treat her mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried to learn you manners, she tried to be good to you every way she knowed how. That's what she done.” (p. 92)

But, neglecting his humility to Miss Watson, he finally plans to escape to Indian Territory because Aunt Sally is going to adopt him and civilize him, and he can't stand it. Huck couldn't lift the veil he had lowered between himself and his society, whatever it was.

Indeed we can't attribute Huck's veil between himself and his society to his depravity. His society is more corrupt. This paradoxically shows the impossibility of the recovery of Paradise on earth. Even Huck couldn't lift the veil, still less the people in the society. Twain's pessimism lies in that he couldn't seek Paradise except in a world of romance.

So far in this essay, I have discussed veil imagery in the 19th century American literature. It has the origin in the Fall of Man. The cover which fallen man wears to conceal his sin separates man from man and from the grace of God. Revelation of sin by lifting a veil directly leads to reconciliation with man and God. To lift a veil is a way to regain Paradise where there was no veil. *The Confidence Man* and *Moby Dick* prove my proposition from the opposite approach. The protagonists of both works sink into Hell because they don't lift the veil. They, far from lifting the veil by the virtue of humility, swell in pride. Dimmesdale is saved, but it is at the cost of his own life. Twain can't realize Paradise except in the

world of romance. Whitman's Paradise is, as F.O. Matthiessen points out, "unreal,"¹⁴ because we are, in fact, clothed. These show the difficulty of regaining Paradise on earth.

Notes

- 1) Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Airmont publishing Co., Inc., 1965), p. 54. The following quotations are from this edition.
- 2) Harry Levin, *Power of Blackness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958).
- 3) Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and Hiss Mosses," *The Portable Melville* (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 406.
- 4) Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Fancy's Show Box," *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962-), vol. IX, p. 226. The following quotations are from this edition, hereafter cited as *CE*.
- 5) John Milton, *Paradise Lost, Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1957), X, 707-8. The following quotations are from this edition.
- 6) Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 138. The following quotations are from this edition.
- 7) Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable In American Fiction* (New York: Norton Library, 1961), p. 305.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 310. Daniel Hoffman infers from biblical echoes that the old man is St. John.
- 9) F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 447.
- 10) Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), p. 110. The following quotations from this edition.
- 11) Randall Stewart, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 91.
- 12) Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: New American Library, 1959), p. 112. The following quotations are from this edition.
- 13) Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 329.
- 14) F.O. Matthiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 652.