Young Goodman Brown Study Guide

Young Goodman Brown by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Introduction

"Young Goodman Brown," written in 1835 by Nathaniel Hawthorne, is known for being one of literature's most gripping portrayals of seventeenth-century Puritan society. The tale first appeared in the April issue of *New England Magazine* and was later included in Hawthorne's popular short story collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in 1846.

"Young Goodman Brown" tells the tale of a young Puritan man drawn into a covenant with the Devil. Brown's illusions about the goodness of his society are crushed when he discovers that many of his fellow townspeople, including religious leaders and his wife, are attending a Black Mass. At the end of the story, it is not clear whether Brown's experience was nightmare or reality, but the results are nonetheless the same. Brown is unable to forgive the possibility of evil in his loved ones and as a result spends the rest of his life in desperate loneliness and gloom.

Though a work of fiction, "Young Goodman Brown" is widely considered to be one of the most effective literary works to address the hysteria surrounding the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Hawthorne is also remembered for helping to establish the short story as a respected form of literature and as a proponent of instilling morals and lessons into his writing.

Author Biography

Hawthorne was an American fiction writer best known for his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804, he was one of those rare writers who drew critical acclaim during his lifetime. Today, readers still appreciate Hawthorne's work for its storytelling qualities and for the moral and theological questions it raises.

Throughout his lifetime, Hawthorne felt guilt over certain actions of his ancestors. Critics view his literary preoccupation with Puritanism as an outgrowth of these roots. The first Hawthorne to immigrate to Massachusetts from England was William, a magistrate who once ordered the public whipping of a Quaker woman. Shortly thereafter, William's son, John, served as a judge in the Salem witch trials of 1692. Hawthorne's own father was a ship's captain who died when Hawthorne was only four years old. As a result of his family history, Hawthorne filled much of his work, including "Young Goodman Brown," with themes exploring the evil actions of humans and the idea of original sin.

After graduating from Bowdoin College in Brunsick, Maine, in 1825, Hawthorne moved back to Salem where he lived with his mother and served a twelve-year literary apprenticeship. Though he wrote regularly, he destroyed most of his early work. Only the unsuccessful *Fanshawe* was published in 1828. Hawthorne later sought out and burned every available copy. It was during this bout of obscurity and insecurity that Hawthorne first published "Young Goodman Brown." Critics have since recognized it as one of his most successful short stories. In 1846 Hawthorne published it again as part of a collection of stories titled *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody, a neighbor who admired his work, in 1842. The couple had two daughters and a son. In their first year of marriage they moved to the Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, a community known for its liberal atmosphere and for being the home of other several other famous writers and philosophers. Hawthorne worked diligently there for three straight years, producing *American Notebooks* and the essay "The Old Manse." He later described this period as the happiest of his life

Family debts forced Hawthorne and his family to move back to Salem in 1945, where he filled the first of two presidentially-appointed posts. Under James K. Polk, he served as Custom House surveyor, but was discharged four years later by the Whig Administration. After losing his job, Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*. Controversy surrounding his discharge, and the content of the book itself, boosted sales. In 1851, the Hawthornes moved back to Concord, where they purchased and remodeled the childhood homestead of Louisa May Alcott, the author of Little Women.

When his college friend Franklin Pierce was elected president in 1853, Hawthorne was offered the U.S. Consulship to Liverpool, England. That term ended in 1857, and he and his family moved again, this time to a seaside village in England where Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun*, a book about his experiences abroad. During the last four years of his life, Hawthorne's health failed. He did write a well-received collection of

essays titled *Our Old Home*, but his passion for writing faded. Hawthorne died in Plymouth, New Hampshire, in 1864, at the age of 59.

Plot Summary

"Young Goodman Brown" opens with Young Goodman Brown about to embark on an evening's journey. His young wife, Faith, fearful for some unknown reason, beseeches him to delay his journey. Goodman Brown, however, stresses that he has a task that must be accomplished before sunrise, and so the newlyweds reluctantly part. As he walks down the street, Goodman Brown chides himself for leaving Faith while he goes on his journey and resolves that, after this night, he will stay by the side of his good and pious wife. Pleased with himself, Goodman Brown then hurries through the forest to accomplish some unknown task.

Deeper in the forest Goodman Brown spies an old man, who is actually the Devil in disguise, waiting for him. Goodman Brown blames Faith for making him late. The older man, who has a curious resemblance to Goodman Brown, carries a staff which resembles a black snake. When the older man urges Goodman Brown to take the staff to ease his walk, Goodman Brown expresses second thoughts and his intention to go home. The older man convinces Goodman Brown to walk with him, however and listen to the reasons why he should continue. Goodman Brown agrees and murmurs that his forefathers, good honest Christians, would never go on such a walk.

To his surprise. Brown finds this is not true. His companion tells him that he is well acquainted with the Brown family and that he helped Brown's father and grandfather commit acts such as the punishment of religious dissenters and the massacre of Indians. While Goodman Brown expresses surprise, his companion continues to speak of the good Christians of New England with whom he is acquainted: deacons, town leaders, even the governor. Goodman Brown is amazed but tells his companion that were he to continue on this journey, he still would not be able to meet the eye of his minister. Hearing this, the older man breaks into a fit of laughter.

The two men then see Goody Cloyse, the old woman who serves as Goodman Brown's moral adviser. Not wanting to explain who he is with and where he is going, Goodman Brown hides in the woods. Again, Goodman Brown is surprised; the woman knows his companion, who has now taken on the appearance of Goodman Brown's grandfather. The two older people talk of a witch's recipe and the meeting that will take place this evening. Goodman Brown realizes that Goody Ctoyse is a witch.

The two men continue walking through the forest. At a hollow in the road, Goodman Brown refuses to go any further, declaring he would rather be on the side of Faith than Goody Cloyse. His companion leaves him to think over the matter. Goodman Brown realizes that his decision to stop will enable him to meet his minister and deacon with a clear conscience. As he continues these comforting meditations, a carriage passes by on the road. Two men, who reveal themselves to be the minister and the deacon, speak of the evening's meeting and the young woman who will be joining. After the carriage has passed, Goodman Brown feels faint as he realizes that these men, too, are in communion with the Devil. Now he questions whether or not heaven really exists. Yet his love for Faith gives him the willpower to resist going to the meeting.

While he is lifting his hands to pray, however, he hears Faith's voice. He calls out for her, and she answers with a scream. He realizes that Faith is going to the meeting, and he decides to attend the meeting too because all good is now gone. Soon he reaches a clearing with a crude altar surrounded by the "saints" and "sinners" of Salem. While the Devil's congregation sings an evil hymn rejoicing in sin, Brown waits, hoping that he can find Faith. At a call for the new members he steps forward, and Faith is led forward by two women. A dark figure speaks of sin. He commands the newly weds to look at each other and then declares that they now know virtue is but a dream and evil is the nature of mankind. Goodman Brown cries out to Faith to resist this evil.

He never finds out, however, if Faith does resist. As soon as the words are out of his mouth, Goodman Brown finds himself alone in the forest. The next morning he returns to Salem. Everywhere he goes he sees people who attended the meeting, but he turns away from them. He even turns from Faith.

Though Goodman Brown never finds out whether or not he dreamed the meeting in the forest, the experience still has a profound effect on him. After that night, he becomes a stern, sad, and distrustful man. He rejects the faith he once had in his religion and even rejects his own wife. At his death, no hopeful words are carved upon his tombstone. He has lived a life of gloom, seeing sinners and blasphemers everywhere he looked.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Young Goodman Brown is leaving his home when Faith, his wife, asks him to delay his journey until the morning. She doesn't want to sleep alone. However, Brown demurs. This journey must be done before sunrise. He asks if she doubts him already after being married just for three months. She gives him her blessings and he leaves.

He does not go far, but sees her still staring at him, as he is about to turn a corner. She has a melancholy way about her and he feels sorry for her, noting how lovely she looks in her cute pink bonnet. However, Goodman Brown was not happy about his journey or about leaving his angelic wife. No doubt he was on an evil mission. The path he took along a dark and gloomy forest matched his mood. It was lonely and dreary and there could be danger lurking behind the trees and branches.

As he walked, he kept glancing around, peering through the forest. What if there were an Indian or the devil himself besides him? He would never know until it was too late. Finally, he came upon the man he sought in the dark forest. It was an older man, perhaps fifty or so- and similar to him in his features. He chastised him for being fifteen minutes late. Brown gave his wife as his lame excuse. As they walked, every bit appearing like father and son, the young man simple and direct, the older man with an air of worldliness about him. And as the elder walked with the younger man, his strange, snake staff seemed to come alive in the dim light. It was a strange illusion.

Brown wanted to turn back but his companion said they should walk together and he should hear out his proposition. Young Goodman protests that never in the life of his family has one ever, since the days of the Martyrs, participated in such an errand in the dark forest.

His companion begs to differ. Did he not help Brown's grandfather when "he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem?" Did he not bring Brown's own father the bit of wood to burn down the Indian village during King Philip's war? They were most certain his friends. Would not Goodman be his friend, too?

Young Goodman was shocked to hear that- and more, as his older companion now recounted his associations with deacons, selectmen and persons of the Court. Perhaps even the Governor- Of this, the stranger would no more speak.

However, now Young Goodman brought up his dear wife and how she would be affected by their association. However, the stranger demurred, saying he would not wish to harm his wife even for twenty of Goody Cloyse, an old woman who was now before them, making her way through the forest. She was Young Goodman's spiritual adviser, along with his minister and Deacon Gookin. Indeed, she had taught him the catechism. Young Goodman leaves the path but watches his companion as she approaches her.

She recognizes him as the Devil, in the form of Young Goodman's grandfather. The pious woman is upset because she feels an "unhanged witch" has stolen her broomstick and that, when she was anointed with wolf's bane and other herbs. She asks for his arm on the long journey, but he says he cannot but that he will give her his staff. She disappears, obviously aided by his implement, which had been used with distinction before with the Egyptian Magi.

Now, his staff has been given away, his companion now begins to form a new one, whittling it from a maple branch. Mysteriously, as stripped the branch, it began to dry up and wither as if it had been in the sunshine. When Young Goodman further questions his choice, his companion throws him the new staff in case he wants to move quickly and then disappears himself. Suddenly, Young Goodman hears horses. Amazingly, he recognizes the voices of his minister and Deacon Gookin. They are talking about a strange meeting they are about to go to, along with travelers from Connecticut and Rhode Island- and, indeed, from the Indian Powwows who know about deviltry? Deviltry? Young Goodman hears how they will be taking a young lady into their communion that very night.

Young Goodman realizes how alone he is, in this dark and evil place, and vows that he will take a stand against the devil. As he did this, a black cloud formed in the sky, blotting out the sky and carrying with it the voices of his townspeople, both those he deemed good and those he deemed not. The cloud then receded, but then again the voices started up- the voice of his wife, Faith, entreating those around him for a favor. Those about her, both bad and pious, seemed to encourage her. Then, there was a scream and a pink ribbon, off her cap, floated down from the sky onto a nearby branch, which he now held in his hand.

Furious beyond recognition, Young Goodman Brown takes now the maple staff and charges through the dark forest. Despite the cries of strange creatures and the noises of the trees and wind, it is Goodman Brown that is the "horror" of this night's show as he races towards the Devil and his minions.

There he comes to a setting in the forest, emblazoned with the light of flaming trees, a ghostly congregation that fades in an out of darkness. They are enjoined by a dark figure to see how many are there who have been reverenced in the naiveté of youth. He recounts the lust of the very old for the very young; the murderous intent of wives against their husband; how young men have hastened their father's death to partake of their wealth.

He stands beside his wife besides a cursed altar, ready to take communion from the Devil himself. They are told that evil is inherent in the human condition. That is to evil they must now devote themselves, as is the fate of their entire race.

At the last moment, he turns to Faith and asks her to "resist the wicked one." Whether she does or not is not clear for suddenly he is yanked from this terrible tableau to the quiet of the forest besides a still rock, listening to the wind in the distant forest.

He returned to Salem where he encountered Goody Cloyse, the minister and good Deacon Gookin going forth in the town following their normal Christian predilections, living the life he had known them to live before his strange encounter. Goody Gloyse is catechizing a young girl. The minister sees him and blesses him, as is his habit. He hears the Deacon praying, through a window. He passes by his wife, filled with life and love for him, so thrilled to see him that she nearly kisses him in public. However, he only looks at her.

However,, for whatever reason, after his vision of the forest, after his so-called bad dream, Young Goodman Brown was never the same and went to his death without a good note on his tombstone. There had been, for Young Goodman Brown, a life spent in the terror of omnipresent sin.

Analysis

When is a story so sinister and terrible that it becomes almost laughable- like the perfect satire? When the story is drafted by the master storyteller, Nathaniel Hawthorne. "Young Goodman Brown" is chilling and incisive no matter what one believes about the world. Yet, in a sense, it is so chilling that it borders on unbelievable hyperbole- but only after one has read and fully assimilated the story. The humor reveals itself only after reflection, making this story unique in my experience.

The reality of the story may be the result of Hawthorne's definitive grasp of the setting, his native Salem, Massachusetts and its surroundings, as well as its memorable native folklore, which seems to have been so deeply imprinted in his mind. There is a commanding verisimilitude in this fantastic story.

Young Goodman Brown is, as a character, fascinating from the very start. I think it's because he seems so blessed- with a beautiful wife and a sense of belonging to a community to which he is obviously a part of. The fact that he is so blessed stands starkly against his harried, fearful mood, creating chilling questions in the reader's mind. What terrible task is he off to in the dark woods in the middle of the night?

We are soon not disappointed for he is trafficking with the most fiendish force of all, the Devil himself, who has taken the form of his dear, departed Grandfather.

This is one of these stories that proves, without question, that Hawthorne's legacy of graphic horror became Stephen King's playground. *Needful Things* may owe a lot to this portrait of the Devil.

The power of this story with its remorseful and unyielding ending is the gigantic presence of evil perceived by poor Goodman Brown. He finds that his relatives, his father and grandfather, as well as several key citizens of Salem, are conscious members of a hellish congregation.

In fact, in the forest, there is a classic encounter between the devil and Goody Cloyse, one of his spiritual advisors, a pillar of the Puritan community. She greets the Devil, once she recognizes him in the form of his grandfather, with unimpeachable familiarity.

Hawthorne was probably chuckling very hard when he drafted the story of this pious old lady, probably drawn from an elder lady in Salem, chatting with the devil about her lost broomstick. And, to add to the irony of this encounter, she comments on how her anointing with "smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf's bane" was distracting her during the theft. How familiar and chatty could two people possibly be? Nathaniel Hawthorne probably delighted in treating some pious woman to this terrible portrait.

However, that's how this entire story is, exaggerated in lurid, hellish colors to such a degree that it strikes one as more being wonderfully satiric than morbidly and irretrievably. On reflection, we believe that Hawthorne wanted us laugh at his story rather than tremble tearfully at the horrible fate of his tormented protagonist. The level of Young Goodman Brown's paranoia, at the end of the story, is as improbable as it appears real, for the moment, to the attentive reader.

Besides Stephen King, who perhaps derived some of his fire from Hawthorne, it is also possible that Hawthorne derived some of his Dante Alighieri, the Florentine poet of so many centuries ago, that delighted in committing his political enemies to the flames of his poetic hell. We do not know who the objects of Hawthorne's ridicule may have been, if indeed there were any. However, if they, indeed existed, as we expect they did, they probably never recovered from Hawthorne's stinging pen.

Characters

Faith Brown

Faith Brown serves an allegorical purpose in this story. It is Faith that Brown leaves behind, presumably for one night, in order to keep his appointment with the Devil. Explaining to the old man why he is late Brown says, "Faith kept me back a while." She represents the force of good in the world. Thus, when Brown perceives that she too has been corrupted, he shouts "My Faith is gone"' and rushes madly toward the witches's gathering.

The pink ribbons that decorate Faith's cap have drawn more critical attention than any other symbol in the story. On one hand they have been said to represent female sexuality, while on the other, innocence. Or, they may merely signify the ornament of a sweet and cheerful wife. Whatever their purpose, Faith's pink ribbons are integral to the story's structure. They are mentioned three times: at the beginning when Brown is leaving Faith behind, near the climax when Brown sees a pink ribbon floating down from the heavens, and at the end when Brown is greeted by his wife upon his return.

Young Goodman Brown

Much of this story's extensive body of criticism centers on its title character, whose name suggests he represents the average man. Brown makes his journey into the dark forest because he is curious and even tempted by the darker side of life. His brush with evil, however, leaves a permanently negative mark. Critics agree that whether the Black Mass really occurred or was dreamed, the impression on Brown is very real indeed.

At the beginning of the story, Brown appears confident in his ability to choose between good and evil, but once he stands before the Devil's altar, he can no longer believe that good always prevails. He becomes a profoundly disillusioned man, who sees wickedness everywhere, even in those closest to him. Some critics have interpreted Brown's resulting distrust and isolation as the result of a guilty conscience; he cannot forgive himself or others for hidden sinfulness. In the end, Brown is unable to accept the duality of human nature-that a person can possess both good and evil qualities—and for this he suffers.

The Devil

The figure of the Devil in "Young Goodman Brown" appears as an older—though not ancient—man who carries a twisted, snake-like staff. He seems to resemble Brown somewhat, and it has been suggested that he is a reflection of the darker side of Brown's nature. The Devil claims to know both Brown's grandfather, who participated in the persecution of Quakers, and Brown's father, who took part in an attack on an Indian village. Similar evil deeds were perpetrated in real life by Hawthorne's ancestors, and

the author's alignment of his forefathers with the Devil suggests his feelings of guilt concerning his family history.

Goody Cloyse, the Minister, and Deacon Gookin

All three of these characters serve as dramatic examples of the wickedness and hypocrisy that may hide in the souls of those who appear most virtuous. These three are distinguished from among the crowd of townsfolk at the gathering because they represent a standard of piety and godliness that is destroyed for Brown by his experience. Both Goody Cloyse and Deacon Gookin were real people who were involved in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

Themes

Guilt vs. Innocence

Hawthorne presents Young Goodman Brown's evening of diabolical revelry as the first and last fling with evil the inexperienced young man ever has. Early in the story, Brown says: "after this one night I'll cling to [Faith's] skirts and follow her to heaven." He believes Faith is an "angel" and one of the Puritan elect who is destined for heaven.

Unfortunately, Brown's experience in the forest makes him reject his previous conviction of the prevailing power of good. He instead embraces the Devil's claim—"Evil is the nature of mankind"— by crying out "Come, devil: for to thee is this world given." This acknowledgment, fueled by the discovery of hypocrisy in the catechist, clergy, the magistrates of Salem, and his own wife, destroys Brown's faith in the Puritan elect It also sets the tone for the rest of his life. Critics often view this outcome as an attack by Hawthorne on the unredemptive nature of the Puritan belief system, which holds that people are evil by nature because of original sin.

Alienation vs. Community

Though Brown successfully rejects the Devil in his physical form, he allows sin to reside within him when he rejects his belief in humanity. "Often, awakening suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed at his wife, and turned away." By turning away, Brown becomes the symbolic representation of Hawthorne's belief in the isolation of the human spirit. In Hawthorne's own words, every human being is alone "in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart."

Good vs. Evil

In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne presents sin as an inescapable part of human nature. The fact that Goodman Brown only has to make his journey into the evil forest once suggests that the spiritual quest is a ritual all humans must undergo at some point in their lives. Brown, however, proves himself incapable of accepting this part of the human condition and cannot move forward with his life as a result.

Faith, on the other hand, makes a leap of love and faith to welcome her husband back with open arms from his inexplicable night away from home. Brown, however, "looks sadly and sternly into her face and passes without greeting." Whereas Faith is able to accept the inevitable fallen nature of humanity and live prosperously with this realization, Brown the absolutist cannot accept this truth, and remains stuck in a state of suspicion and ill feelings. By portraying these two reactions, Hawthorne makes a statement not only about the black-and-white, Puritan view of good and evil, but how evil can take other forms as well.

Style

Allegory

"Young Goodman Brown" takes the form of an allegory. An allegory uses symbolic elements to represent various human characteristics and situations. Brown represents Everyman ("Goodman" was a title for those under the social rank of "gentleman") while Faith represents his faith in humanity and society. In leaving his wife, Brown forsakes his belief in the godliness of humanity. He immediately enters a wood "lonely as could be" that is enshrouded in a "deep dusk." These woods are the physical location in which Brown explores his doubts and opposing desires, and as such represent his personal hell. When he tells his companion "Faith kept me back awhile," it is clear that he feels ambivalent about forging a pact with the Devil. Yet, while Brown pledges to return to Faith several times, he continues his dark journey. Although Brown eventually leaves the physical location of the woods, mentally he stays there for the rest of his life.

Symbolism

Examples of symbolism in "Young Goodman Brown" include the pink hair ribbons, which represent Faith's innocence, and the snake-like staff, which is symbolic of the form the Devil takes to corrupt Adam and Eve in the Bible. Another symbol emphasizes a reaction instead of an object. The example unfolds part way through Brown's journey into the woods, immediately after he recognizes the voices of the deacon and the minister. The narrator relates that "Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart," This action symbolizes Brown's wavering faith and his growing realization that he is losing his basis of moral support.

Point of View

Throughout "Young Goodman Brown" point-of-view swings subtly between the narrator and the title character. As a result, readers are privy to Goodman Brown's deepest, darkest thoughts, while also receiving an objective view of his behavior. Early in the story readers learn from Brown himself that he expects his journey to be a one-time event: "Well, [Faith is] a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night F11 cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven." In contrast, readers get an intriguing perspective on Brown's mad dash to the Devil's altar from the objective narrator: "The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds .... But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors." By the end of the story, the narrator supplies the only point of view; Brown's voice is conspicuously absent. This shift symbolizes the loss of Brown's faith.

Foreshadowing

Hawthorne uses foreshadowing to build suspense and offer clues as to the story's direction. As Brown leaves for his mysterious journey, Faith voices her doubts: "Prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with dreams and such thoughts that she's afeared of herself sometimes." This statement predicts Faith's betrayal and her appearance at the Black Mass. Brown offers a second example of foreshadowing during a brief monologue: "What a wretch I am to leave her on such an errand .... Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no;' t would kill her to think it." Here Hawthorne hints both at Brown's later confusion over whether he had dreamed his experience and the symbolic death of Faith's innocence at the Black Mass.

Romanticism

Romanticism was a literary movement originating in the eighteenth century that emphasized imagination and emotion, yet it was also marked by sensibility and autobiographical elements. According to Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, Romanticists held that absolute principles lead to personal failure. Based on the destiny of the title character, it is clear Hawthorne subscribes to this theory as well. Unable to accept the duality of human nature—that good and evil can and often do exist side by side—Goodman Brown lives out the rest of his days as "a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man."

Other examples of the Romanticist at work include an underlying message in "Young Goodman Brown" that urges readers to examine the effect their behavior has on others and to change accordingly. This message illustrates the Romanticist conviction that human nature can change for the better.

Historical Context

Although the Salem Witch Trials had unfolded more than one hundred years prior, nineteenth-century New England was still reeling from inherited guilt, even as it rebelled against the constrictive morals of its forebears, the Puritans, It was into this Salem, Massachusetts, society that Hawthorne was born in 1804. Despite the fact he listed Unitarian as his official religion, his roots and sensibilities were unmistakably Puritan.

Hawthorne's great, great grandfather William Hathorne (Nathaniel added the "W" to the family name when he began signing his published works) was the first family member to emigrate from England. He once ordered the public whipping of a Quaker woman who refused to renounce her religious beliefs. Following in the footsteps of his father, William's son, John, presided over the Salem Witch Trials. Hawthorne claims he was frequently haunted by these unholy ghosts from his past. Hawthorne's heritage was not the sole influence on his development, however; the social tenets of his contemporary society also played a key role.

Nineteenth-century English traveler Thomas Hamilton once described the descendants of New England's first colonists as "cold, shrewd, calculating and ingenious," and asserted that "a New Englander is far more a being of reason than of impulse." Hawthorne applied these traits and values—which he struggled to accept within himself—to his characters, including the title character in "Young Goodman Brown." According to Hyatt H. Waggoner in his book, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Hawthorne "continued to note in himself, and to disapprove, feelings and attitudes he projected in ... Young Goodman Brown. He noted his tendency not only to study others with cool objectivity, but to study himself with almost obsessive interest." The same Puritan values that inspired Hawthorne's objective observation of people and events contributed to his growth and genius as a writer.

At least one other classically Puritan trait emerges in Hawthorne's writings: a keen interest in the welfare of the community. With its emphasis on brotherhood and the perils of alienation, "Young Goodman Brown" is a good example of a Puritan society. "Salem was a part of him," Waggoner concluded, "for good and ill."

Critical Overview

From the publication of his first collection of stories, *Twice Told Tales*, Hawthorne's books were reviewed often and enthusiastically. Although lavishly praised by critics, the collection itself sold poorly; an enlarged edition issued in 1842 fared no better. This pattern of critical appreciation and public neglect continued throughout Hawthorne's literary career, and he was forced to occupy a series of minor governmental posts in order to supplement his income. Hawthorne's work, which consists of over fifty stories and sketches as well as such classic novels as *The Scarlet Letter*, has continuously drawn critical and popular attention since his death. His work draws readers not only for its strong storytelling qualities but also for the moral and theological questions raised within.

"Young Goodman Brown" ranks foremost among Hawthorne's short stories in both popular appeal and critical respect. It remains a favorite because it holds something of interest for almost everyone, be it plot line, the title character's moral dilemma, or the tale's ambiguity. Yet this universal appeal comes not at any sacrifice of artistic or structural integrity.

Some notable American authors of the nineteenth century, however, dismissed "Young Goodman Brown" for its strong allegorical structure. Edgar Allan Poe thought Hawthorne's use of allegory distracted from the natural elements of his work, while Henry James believed it constituted Hawthorne's propsenity for taking the easy way out. Of Hawthorne's contemporaries, only Herman Melville saw merit in "Young Goodman Brown." "Who in the name of thunder," Melville wrote in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, "would anticipate any marvel in a piece entitled 'Young Goodman Brown?' You would of course suppose that it was a simple little tale, intended as a supplement to 'Goody Two-Shoes.' Whereas it is deep as Dante."

Over the years, critics came to agree with Melville rather than Poe and James. In 1945, Richard H. Fogle offered these words of tribute in *New England Quarterly:* "In 'Young Goodman Brown,' then, Hawthorne has achieved that reconciliation of opposites which [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge deemed the highest art. The combination of clarity of technique, embodied in simplicity and balance of structure, in firm pictorial composition, in contrast and climactic arrangement, in irony and detachment, with ambiguity of meaning as signalized by the device of multiple choice, in its interrelationships produces the story's characteristic effect." Nearly twenty years later, critic David Levin was still finding genius in Hawthorne's outwardly simple tale. "By recognizing that Hawthorne built 'Young Goodman Brown' firmly on his historical knowledge," Levin wrote in *American Literature*, "we perceive that the tale has a social as well as an allegorical and psychological dimension."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Rena Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses various themes in "Young Goodman Brown," including Puritanism, good and evil, and ambiguity, as well as the tale's allegorical structure.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of those rare writers who drew great critical acclaim during his own lifetime. To his contemporaries—Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Herman Melville—as well as to the next generation of writers, Hawthorne was a genius. Poe said in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales* that Hawthorne has "the purest style, the finest taste, the most available scholarship, the most delicate humor, the most touching pathos, the most radiant imagination." Hawthorne's work, consisting of over 50 stories and sketches as well as such classic novels as *The Scarlet Letter*, continued to draw attention after his death and experienced a particular resurgence of interest after World War I. His writings attract readers not only for their storytelling qualities, but also for the moral and theological ambiguities Hawthorne presents so well.

The Latin American writer Jorge Luis Borges and the eminent American scholar Harold Bloom both agree that Hawthorne's shorter works are his best. Foremost among his stories in popular appeal and critical respect is "Young Goodman Brown," which tells the story of a young Puritan drawn into a covenant with the Devil, despite his attempts to resist. In the course of one evening, Brown's illusions of the godliness of his society are shattered as he discovers that his fellow townspeople, including religious leaders and his wife, are attending a Black Mass. At the end of the story, Brown is left to wonder whether his vision was, in fact, a dream. Yet the delineation between the imaginary and the real does not matter, because the mere ability to see such evil in his loved ones destines Brown thereafter to a life of desperate gloominess. The prose is powerful, prompting Melville, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales* to delight in this "strong positive illustration of that blackness in Hawthorne."

"Young Goodman Brown" has been analyzed through many lenses, including the psychological, historical, sociological, theological, and semantic. Critics still disagree over fundamental questions such as whether Brown is a victim or has only himself to blame for what befalls him. One feature that does stand out in the work is the accurate portrayal of Puritan society. Hawthorne clearly understands the demands of the Puritan faith, and it is no surprise to find that he has a legitimate claim to this heritage—among his ancestors number a constable who "lashed [a] Quaker woman so smartly" and a military officer who engaged in the destruction of an Indian village. Hawthorne also includes in his story the characters of Goody Cloyse, who taught Brown catechism, Martha Carrier, who had been promised to be "the queen of hell," and Goody Cory, all of whom were real people accused of sorcery during the Salem Witch Trials. Deacon Gookin also figures in Puritan history, as does, of course, Salem village. Such details challenge the reader to analyze Hawthorne's intentions: is he trying to influence us through his use of histdry to believe that Brown was not dreaming? Is he trying to cast

doubt on historical figures and thus show that no one is beyond suspicion? Whatever the answers may be, Hawthorne effectively places us in the story, illustrating the social milieu which produced the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

Though "Young Goodman Brown" is sharply steeped in Puritan history and culture, like all great works of literature it can be viewed on a more universal level as well. "Young Goodman Brown" takes the form of an allegory, which uses certain elements of a story (characters, plot, etc.), or the entire story itself to symbolize something else. Brown represents Everyman ("Goodman" was a title for those who were beneath the social rank of "gentleman"), while Faith, his wife, represents his religious devotion. In leaving Faith, Brown forsakes his belief in the godliness of humanity. He immediately enters into a wood "lonely as could be," which is enshrouded in "deep dusk ... deepest in the part" through which Brown walks. These woods are the physical location in which he will explore his doubts and conflicting desires. That he feels ambivalent about forging an alliance with the Devil is clear from his first entry into the forest, when he tells his companion that "Faith kept me back awhile." Yet though he pledges to return to Faith—or to his belief in humankind—several times, he continues his journey toward the Black Mass, which symbolizes his descent into Hell. Whereas many times a predominantly allegorical story fails in other areas—characterization, plot, or simply engaging the reader—Hawthorne succeeds at this double task remarkably.

Not all critics and readers approve of use of the allegorical. Poe, for instance, avows in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales* that "In defense of allegory ... there is scarcely any respectable word to be said." Other critics see a purely allegorical reading of the story as far too narrow, and so have used it as a foundation upon which to construct other interpretations. Some psychological allegorists see the story as an example of Sigmund Freud's theory of the struggle between the ego, superego, and id. The id, which acts on one's instinctive desires, is represented by Brown's desire to submit to the evil of the Black Mass. His conflicts arise from his superego, or conscience, which wants no part of the night's events. The superego, created by the strict Puritan society, is represented by the town and its people. Brown's indecision characterizes the attempts of the superego to keep the ego, or Brown himself, from going along with the desires of the id. In a Freudian psychological reading such as this, Brown's journey through the forest is seen as a sexual adventure that ends with the revealing of sexual knowledge when the Devil shares the "mystery of sin" with his congregation.

Still other critics read the story as Hawthorne's attack on the unredemptive nature of Calvinism, a system of beliefs which emphasizes the power of the Devil, the innate depravity of humans, and predestination—being chosen before birth to enter heaven after death. Such a reading can be supported by Brown's words, early in the story, that "after this one night I'll cling to [Faith's] skirts and follow her to heaven." Brown believes Faith is an "angel"— one of those selected for heaven. Though Brown rejects final acceptance of the Devil's proclamation that "Evil is the nature of mankind," after the Black Mass he only sees the capability of evil in those who surround him, and thus he endures his life under the hand of the Devil anyway. Critics who offer such readings, however, may be equating Hawthorne, the author, with Hawthorne, the descendant of Puritans who assumed the guilt of his witch-hunting ancestors. Author Henry James

wrote that "Young Goodman Brown," "means nothing as regards Hawthorne's own state of mind, his conviction of human depravity and his consequent melancholy; for the simple reason that if it meant anything, it would mean too much."

Though it may be tempting to look upon the story as a simple "tale," it is without a doubt a difficult one from which to draw conclusions. The ambiguous nature of the story is apparent throughout. For example, in the seeming appearance of Brown's dead father beckoning him to attend the Black Mass "while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother?" One of the more alarming uncertainties, however, lies in the character of Faith. From the very beginning, Faith's "faith" is called into question—she wears pink hair ribbons, perhaps a sign of frivolity. More important, though, is the suggestion that Faith herself has also agreed to a covenant with the Devil. She asks Brown not to leave that evening, for she is filled with "such thoughts that she's afeared of herself sometimes," Yet her voice is sad, as if she has resigned herself to accepting the evil to come. In the end, Brown never knows if Faith also rejects the Devil.

Brown, himself, is an inconstant character. He begins as a naive young man believing in his own free will to turn back on his sinful promise. His increasing struggles to resist evil show his development as a man. For example, at one point Brown challenges his companion, the Devil, for "any reason that I should quit my dear Faith." But when he has reaffirmed his decision to "stand firm against the Devil!" he discovers that Faith is on her way to the Black Mass. Suddenly, finding "There is no good on earth," Brown turns into a personification of the Devil. Brandishing the Devil's own staff, he rushes through the forest, blaspheming; and against the fearful backdrop of wild beasts and Indians (the antithesis of civilized Puritan society), he becomes "himself the chief horror of the scene."

Hawthorne adds ambiguity to the story with his suggestion "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting? " It is tempting to answer yes since Hawthorne suggests throughout the story that dreams can foreshadow events. Brown realizes that Faith spoke "as if a dream warned her what work is to be done tonight." Her speech at his leave-taking— "A lone woman is troubled with dreams"—implies, instead, that they may have been having a shared dream as both prepare to embark on the same journey. Certainly, Brown's understanding of his experiences can be filtered through the lens of a dream/nightmare—in the dark, gloomy forest, in voices so indistinct "he doubted he heard aught but the murmur of the old forest," and in the Devil's congregation that "alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow."

Yet for Brown whether or not his experiences belong to a dream does not matter, because "a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become," Although Brown did "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one," he has lost his faith as completely as if he had indeed given himself to the Devil. In church, he cannot listen to the psalms "because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear"; while listening to a sermon he fears "the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers"; he even "shrank from the bosom of Faith"—yet he never knows if evil actually exists in these places. Though

Brown succeeds in his rejection of the Devil in physical form—that of the dark figure leading the Black Mass—he allows sin to reside within him when he rejects his belief in humanity. Therefore, Brown comes to represent Hawthorne's belief in the isolation of the human spirit; Hawthorne acknowledged that every human being is alone "in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart."

Source: Rena Korb, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

Morsberger is an educator, editor, andnonfic-tion writer. In the following essay, he contends that Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is "our most effective literary work in recreating the atmosphere in which the witchcraft hysteria" of the Salem Puritans occurred.

Hawthorne, if any one, was equipped to write the definitive novel on the Salem witchcraft delusion; but he never confronted it head on. "Alice Doane's Appeal" conjures up the victims from the graveyard, *Grandfather's Chair* and "Main Street" give the barest bones of a synopsis, "Sir William Phips" merely hints at it, and *The House of the Seven Gables* fictionalizes its heritage of guilt. But nowhere does Hawthorne give the dramatic account in depth of the trial and tragedy of Rebecca Nurse, George Burroughs, John Proctor, Giles Corey, George Jacobs and the other courageous victims, nor the damnable game of the "afflicted" girls, the admission of spectral evidence by autocratic judges, nor the sinister attempt by paranoid theocrats to maintain their power through terror. It remained for lesser writers to deal with such matters, for Hawthorne was not so much chronicling our history as he was molding the legend of our past. Thus the wholly fictitious "Young Goodman Brown" is our most effective literary work in recreating the atmosphere in which the witchcraft hysteria occurred.

"Young Goodman Brown" is Hawthorne's most successful story. Here he is free from the authorial editorializing that makes some other tales excessively didactic. Nowhere does the author intrude; such moral generalizations as the story contains are spoken by the devil, who is, of course, unreliable. The reader is spared such obvious guidelines as, "and this shall be a moral unto you," that mar other tales. Hawthorne's allegories, profound though they usually are, often seem too contrived and their plots are sometimes inadequate for their meaning. But in "Young Goodman Brown," there are no poisoned Gothic gardens, no bosom serpents, Faustian laboratories, or other unnatural devices; the supernatural terror is not of Germany but comes from authentic American history; its folk-lore quality is not from flights of fancy but from an actual episode that has become a part of our heritage. As Hawthorne says elsewhere of the Salem burial ground, for every Bunker Hill monument in our history, there should be a Gallows Hill. As he says of democracy that it "comes from the nature of things," so does the situation in "Young Goodman Brown"; it is not superimposed from without but corresponds to the psychology of Puritan belief and of the Salem witchcraft delusion.

Yet the very absense of editorializing has caused considerable ambiguity. In their introductory notes to the story, Sculley Bradley, Richmond Groom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long explain its meaning as Brown's "corruption through his loss of simple faith in the goodness of mankind...." This is comment has stood in the widely used *The American Tradition in Literature* since 1956; but in the context both of Hawthorne's fiction and of 17th-century Puritanism, it is misleading. For Brown, as a Puritan, would have been indoctrinated with the Calvinistic concept of total depravity, according to which mankind is utterly corrupt and deserves no better than damnation. In the orthodox

Calvinism of Michael Wiggles worth's doggerel "The Day of Doom," men of good works are damned to hell, and so are they

Who dy'd in infancy, And never had or good or bad effected pers'nally, But from the womb unto the tomb were straightway carried,.,.

They are damned not for sins of commission but simply for their humanity in being born with "Nature / depraved and forlorn."

Accordingly, Perry Miller maintained that "It is impossible to conceive of a disillusioned Puritan; no matter what misfortune befell him, no matter how often or how tragically his fellowmen failed him, he would have been prepared for the worst, and would have expected no better."

In Goodman Brown, Hawthorne did conceive of a disillusioned Puritan, but Brown's tragedy is not the loss of his simple faith; rather it is that his faith is too simple to begin with. He is, of course, aware of evil from the start, for he is concerned lest a dream have warned his wife "what work is to be done tonight" as he sets forth on "his present evil purpose." But at this stage in his development, evil is still a notion; he may believe in it intellectually as dogma, but he has not yet experienced it. So his leaving his wife for an evening of diabolical revelry at the witches' sabbath is merely an untested young man's first (and he expects final) Sing. One might compare him to the youth who thinks he will just once try drugs, prostitution, or some sort of perversity—just once, to see what it's like, and never again—and who gets hooked into addiction or shocked into fanatical reaction. Goodman Brown is like die person who from perverse curiosity experiments once with LSD and has a bad tap.

His trip into the forest is indeed a bad one, so traumatic that he concludes by disbelieving in any goodness. Though he cries out to Faith to "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one," and is whisked away from the black mass, he still believes Satan's claim that "Evil is the nature of mankind" and blights the rest of his life by acknowledging, "Come, devil; for to thee is this world given." His discovery of the hypocrisy of the catechist, clergy, ministers and magistrates of Salem has destroyed his faith in the Calvinist elect, who if they persevered anywhere should have done so in the new Zion of Massachusetts. With die participation of his wife Faith in the devil worship, there are not brands spared from the burning; the depravity is indeed total.

It is too simple to consider the story an unqualified attack on Calvinism. Though Hawthorne deplored the Puritans' grim bigotry, he respected their strength and commitment and wrote in the "The Old Manse" that he preferred the warmth that their writings once had to the anemic frigidity of 19th-century liberal theology. It is true that one element of "Young Goodman Brown" is a criticism of Puritan self-righteousness; the devil points out to Brown that he has "a very general acquaintance here in New England" and proceeds to cite numerous instances of bigotry, persecution, and hypocrisy.

On the question of evil, the issue is more complex. Hawthorne rejected Emerson's bland dismissal of evil as mere illusion that will vanish when one rises transcendently into the world of spirit: "So fast will disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons, enemies, vanish ...." But how far did Hawthorne go in the opposite direction? Melville asked of Hawthorne "whether there really lurks in him, perhaps unknown to himself, a touch of Puritanic gloom" and concluded (later citing "Young Goodman Brown" as an example) "that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to the 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" and that "this black conceit pervades him [Hawthorne] through and through."

Though the lack of editorial explanation makes the story ambiguous, Goodman Brown's morbid misanthropy is not Hawthorne's. Henry James commented, "The magnificent little romance of "Young Goodman Brown" ... evidently means nothing as regards Hawthorne's own state of mind, his conviction of human depravity and his consequent melancholy; for the simple reason that if it meant anything, it would mean too much." James further observed that the gloomy subjects of Hawthorne's tales "were not the expression of a hopeless, or even of a predominantly melancholy, feeling about the human soul."

To find Hawthorne's own position, we must turn to other works, for he is one author whose writings can profitably be cross-referenced. What Goodman Brown experiences is an inversion of Jonathan Edwards' statement that it is one thing to have an opinion that God is holy and ought to be worshiped and quite another thing to have a sense of that holiness in one's heart. Thus in *The Marble Faun*, explaining the pure Hilda's reaction to discovering the crime of Miriam and Donatello, Hawthorne comments on "those tears (among the most chill and forlorn that gush from human sorrow) which the innocent heart pours forth at its first actual discovery that sin is in the world.... They may have heard much of the evil of the world, and seem to know it, but only as an impalpable theory. In due time, some mortal, whom they reverence too highly, is commissioned by Providence to teach them this direful lesson; he perpetrates a sin; and Adam falls anew, and Paradise, heretofore in un-faded bloom is lost again, and closed forever, with the fiery swords gleaming at its gates." As a Puritan, Brown would have a knowledge of evil but a notional knowledge only until his ordeal in the forest. Then he falls into what William James calls "really insane melancholia ... desperation absolute and complete, the whole universe coagulating about the sufferer into a material of overwhelming horror, surrounding him without opening or end. Not the conception of intellectual perception of evil, but the grisly blood-freezing heart-palsying sensation of it close upon one ...." Apropos of Hilda, Hawthorne explains further "that dismal certainty of the existence of evil in the world, which, though we may fancy ourselves fully assured of the sad mystery long before, never becomes a portion of our practical belief until it takes substance and reality from the sin of some guide, whom we have deeply trusted and revered, or some friend whom we have deeply loved. When that knowledge comes, it is as if a cloud had suddenly gathered over the morning light; so dark a cloud, that there seems to be no longer any sunshine behind it or above it... as if the catastrophe involved the whole moral world."

Clearly Hawthorne had a perspective that Brown lacks. His own position is perhaps best seen when he describes young Phoebe Pyncheon's distress upon discovering the evil in her respectable kinsman, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon:

A doubt of this nature has a most disturbing influence, and ... comes with fearful and startling effect on minds of the trim, orderly, and limit-loving class

Dispositions more boldly speculative may derive a stern enjoyment from the discovery, since there must be evil in the world, that a high man is as likely to grasp his share of it as a low one. A wider scope of view, and a deeper insight, may see rank, dignity, and station, all proved illusory, so far as regards their claim to human reverence, and yet not feel as if the universe were thereby tumbled headlong into chaos

This final view was Hawthorne's own It is matched by Melville's statement in *Moby Dick*: "Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly, this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye."

But Goodman Brown resembles Ishmael in "The Try-Works" chapter, Melville's equivalent of a witches' sabbath, during which as helmsman Ishmael is terrified by the thought that like Brown in the dark forest, he "was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern." Recovering his senses after almost capsizing the ship, he makes a statement that can serve with uncanny accuracy as a comment on "Young Goodman Brown."

Look not too long in the face of the fire, 0 man!. . Tomorrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler relief . Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon

This is what happens to Brown on his return to Salem. Ishmael therefore concludes, matching the judgment of both Melville and Hawthorne, "Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee... .There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness." This is the woe that afflicts Brown. He has departed from Ishmael's "insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy," into "all the horrors of the half known life"; and as Ishmael says, "Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!"

Brown's physical return to Salem poses a number of problems. If his experience is taken literally, then everyone else who had participated in the black mass would know that he too had been there. Yet no one else appears unchanged. Is it because the others did not renounce Satan, as Brown did? Faith would know that he knows she was there, and he would know that she knows he knows. At the beginning she has a knowledge or at least a premonition of "what work is to be done tonight" and urges him to stay as much for her sake as for his own on "this night... of all nights in the year." Yet Faith greets him as if nothing amiss had occurred. She has not been overwhelmed with

gloom; and if the rest of her days are blighted, it is because Brown's never-lifted depression turns their marriage into suttee on the psychological level.

On the other hand, if the experience is a dream, it is not clear where the dream begins, unless it does so before the story starts. The tale opens factually with Brown setting out on his journey; and while it very effectively shifts into the supernatural, there is no transition from actuality to dream. Yet the dreamlike quality of the night-journey is essential for the mystery of iniquity. Like Dante at the opening of *The Inferno*, Brown "came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost___I cannot rightly tell how I entered it, so full of sleep was I about the moment that I left the true way." The forest is that of the soul, and there Brown learns like Melville, that "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright."

If one assumes that Brown literally drifts into a dream, other technical problems arise. Did he simply walk into the forest and fall asleep like Rip Van Winkle? Did he spend the night uncomfortably under a tree? If so, would he not realize upon waking that he had been asleep? On the level of motivation, why should he go into the forest to spend a night sleeping out, if he was not on his way to a rendezvous? The only way in which the dream version can be seen logically is for the entire story to be a dream, and such a reading still does not provide for a transition out of the dream at the end.

Yet the dream alternative is necessary for modern readers who do not believe in witches. Despite the loose ends, the final ambiguity allows for a psychological or spiritual rather than a literal experience. There was no actual witchcraft at Salem, but twenty people died there as witches, and Hawthorne's story provides the atmosphere in which such hysterical delusion could take place. As Alan Simpson states, "The Puritan was always obsessed by his sense of sin. Taught to expect it everywhere, and to magnify it where he found it, he easily fell into the habit of inventing it." Though the story makes no mention of witchcraft trials, it is not difficult to imagine Goodman Brown as an accuser and prosecutor of his neighbors. In his profound suspicion of evil on the part of everyone save himself, we see here, as Salem showed in actual history, a parable of the beginnings of American paranoia in society and politics.

Source: Robert E Morsberger, "The Woe That Is Madness: Goodman Brown and the Face of the Fire," in *The Nathaniel Hawthorne Journal*, edited by C E Frazer Clark, Jr, 1973, pp. 177-82.

Critical Essay #3

Connolly is an educator, editor, and critic. In the following essay, he calls "Young Goodman Brown" "an individual tragedy," because while Goodman Brown retains his faith in God, he is still condemned by the imperfections of Calvinism.

It is surprising, in a way, to discover how few of the many critics who have discussed "Young Goodman Brown" agree on any aspect of the work except that it is an excellent short story. D. M. McKeithan says that its theme is "sin and its blighting effects." Richard H. Fogle observes, "Hawthorne the artist refuses to limit himself to a single and doctrinaire conclusion, proceeding instead by indirection," implying, presumably, that it is inartistic to say something which can be clearly understood by the readers. Gordon and Tate assert, "Hawthorne is dealing with his favorite theme: the unhappiness which the human heart suffers as a result of its innate depravity. " Austin Warren says, "His point is the devastating effect of moral scepticism." Almost all critics agree, however, that Young Goodman Brown lost his faith. Their conclusions are based, perhaps, upon the statement, "My Faith is gone!" made by Brown when he recognizes his wife's voice and nbbon. I should like to examine the story once more to show that Young Goodman Brown did not lose his faith at all. In fact, not only did he retain his faith, but during his horrible experience he actually discovered the full and frightening significance of his faith.

Mrs. Leavis comes closest to the truth in her discussion of this story in the *Sewanee Review* in which she says: "Hawthorne has imaginatively recreated for the reader that Calvinist sense of sin, that theory which did in actuality shape the early social and spiritual history of New England." But Mrs. Leavis seems to miss the critical implications of the story, for she goes on to say: "But in Hawthorne, by a wonderful feat of transmutation, it has no religious significance, it is a psychological state that is explored. Young Goodman Brown's Faith is not faith in Christ but faith in human beings, and losing it he is doomed to isolation forever." Those who persist in reading this story as a study of the effects of sin on Brown come roughly to this conclusion: "Goodman Brown became evil as a result of sin and thought he saw evil *where none existed*." Hawthorne's message is far more depressing and horrifying than this. The story is obviously an individual tragedy, and those who treat it as such are right, of course; but, far beyond the personal plane, it has universal implications.

Young Goodman Brown, as a staunch Calvinist, is seen at the beginning of this allegory to be quite confident that he is going to heaven. The errand on which he is going is presented mysteriously and is usually interpreted to be a deliberate quest of sin. This may or may not be true; what is important is that he is going out to meet the devil by prearrangement. We are told by the narrator that his purpose in going is evil. When the devil meets him, he refers to the "beginning of a journey." Brown admits that he "kept covenant" by meeting the devil and hints at the evil purpose of the meeting.

Though his family has been Christian for generations, the point is made early in the story that Young Goodman Brown has been married to his Faith for only three months.

Either the allegory breaks down at this point or the marriage to Faith must be looked upon as the moment of conversion to grace in which he became fairly sure of his election to heaven. That Goodman Brown is convinced he is of the elect is made clear at the beginning: ".,. and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven." In other words, at the start of his adventure, Young Goodman Brown is certain that his faith will help man get to heaven. It is in this concept that his disillusionment will come. The irony of this illusion is brought out when he explains to the devil the reason for his tardiness: "Faith kept me back awhile." That is what he thinks! By the time he gets to the meeting place he finds that his Faith is already there. Goodman Brown's disillusionment in his belief begins quickly after meeting the devil. He has asserted proudly that his ancestors "have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs," and the devil turns his own words on him smartly:

Well said, Goodman Brown I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both, and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight I would fain be friends with you for their sake.

Goodman Brown manages to shrug off this identification of his parental and grandparental Puritanism with the devil, but the reader should not overlook the sharp tone of criticism in Hawthorne's presentation of this speech.

When the devil presents his next argument, Brown is a little more shaken. The devil has shown him that Goody Cloyse is of his company and Brown responds: "What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven: is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?" He still believes at this point that his faith will lead him to heaven. The devil's reply, "You will think better of this by and by," is enigmatic when taken by itself, but a little earlier the narrator had made a comment which throws a great deal of light on this remark by the devil. When he recognized Goody Cloyse, Brown said, "That old woman taught me my catechism," and the narrator added, "and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment." The reader at this point should be fairly well aware of Hawthorne's criticism of Calvinism. The only way there canbea "world of meaning" in Brown's statement is that her catechism teaches the way to the devil and not the way to heaven.

From this point on Brown is rapidly convinced that his original conception about his faith is wrong. Deacon Gookin and the "good old minister," in league with Satan, finally lead the way to his recognition that this faith is diabolic rather than divine. Hawthorne points up this fact by a bit of allegorical symbolism. Immediately after he recognizes the voices of the deacon and the minister, we are told by the narrator that "Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was a blue arch, and the stars brightened in it." Here the doubt has begun to gnaw, but the stars are symbols of the

faint hope which he is still able to cherish, and he is able to say: "With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil." But immediately a symbolic cloud hides the symbolic stars: "While he still gazed upward into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars." And it is out of this black cloud of doubt that the voice of his faith reaches him and the pink ribbon of his Faith falls. It might be worthwhile to discuss Faith's pink ribbons here, for Hawthorne certainly took great pains to call them to our attention. The ribbons seem to be symbolic of his initial illusion about the true significance of his faith, his belief that his faith will lead him to heaven. The pink ribbons on a Puritan lady's cap, signs of youth, joy, and happiness, are actually entirely out of keeping with the severity of the rest of her dress which, if not somber black, is at least gray. When the ribbon falls from his cloud of doubt, Goodman Brown cries in agony, "My Faith is gone!" and it is gone in the sense that it now means not what it once meant. He is quick to apply the logical, ultimate conclusion of Goody Cloyse's catechizing: "Come, devil; for to thee is this world given."

Lest the reader miss the ultimate implication of the doctrine of predestination, Hawthorne has the devil preach a sermon at his communion service: "Welcome, my children ... to the communion of your race. Ye have found thus young your nature and your destiny." Calvinism teaches that man is innately depraved and that he can do nothing to merit salvation. He is saved only by the whim of God who selects some, through no deserts of their own, for heaven which the great mass of mankind is destined for hell. The devil concludes his sermon: "Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race." It is not at all insignificant that the word race is used several times in this passage, for it was used earlier by Goodman Brown when he said, "We have been a race of honest men and good Christians...." After this sermon by the devil, Young Goodman Brown makes one last effort to retain the illusion that faith will lead him to heaven; he calls out: "Faith! Faith!... look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one." But we are fairly sure that he is unsuccessful, for we are immediately told:"Whether Faith obeyed he knew not."

Young Goodman Brown did not lose his faith (we are even told that his Faith survived him); he learned its full and terrible significance. This story is Hawthorne's criticism of the teachings of Puritanic-Calvinism. His implication is that the doctrine of the elect and damned is not a faith which carries man heavenward on its skirts, as Brown once believed, but, instead, condemns him to hell—bad and good alike indiscriminately—and for all intents and purposes so few escape as to make one man's chance of salvation almost disappear. It is this awakening to the full meaning of his faith which causes Young Goodman Brown to look upon his minister as a blasphemer when he teaches "the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable," for he has learned that according to the truths of his faith there is probably nothing but "misery unutterable" in store for him and all his congregation; it is this awakening which causes him to turn away from prayer; it is this awakening which makes appropriate the fact that "they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone."

Though much is made of the influence of Puritanism on the writings of Hawthorne, he must also be seen to be a critic of the teachings of Puritanism. Between the position of Vernon L. Parrington, who saw Hawthorne as retaining "much of the older Calvinistic view of life and human destiny," and that of Regis Michaud, who saw him as "an anti-puritan and prophet heralding the Freudian gospel," lies the truth about Hawthorne.

Source: Thomas E Connolly, "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': An Attack on Puritanic Calvinism," in *American Literature*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, November, 1956, pp 370-75.

Adaptations

In 1968, Edward J. Megroth adapted *Young Goodman Brown* as an opera, with music by Harold Fink.

Young Goodman Brown was adapted as a motion picture by Pyramid Films in 1972. This thirty-minute film won a special jury award at the Atlanta International Film Festival.

Topics for Further Study

What does Goodman Brown mean when he says, "Faith kept me back a while," after the Devil comments on his lack of punctuality?

Was Goodman Brown's brush with evil real or imagined?

Read other works of literature in which the line between reality and imagination is blurred, such as "The Swimmer" by John Cheever and "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe. What are some of the reasons why authors might use this technique?

Investigate the dictates of Puritan culture. How is contemporary American culture different? How is it the same?

What effects did the Salem Witch Trials have on the nation as a whole? Cite specific historic examples.

Compare and Contrast

1692: The Salem Witch Trials result in the hanging deaths of nineteen people accused of being witches.

1835: Hawthorne, a descendant of one of the judges who presided over the Witch Trials, publishes "Young Goodman Brown." The allegorical tale explores the society and the mindset that spawned the trials.

1996: Arthur Miller's play, The Crucible, is adapted for film. In 1953 Miller's play used the Salem Witch Trials as an allegory to condemn the actions of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee.

1690: The first newspaper in British North America, Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick, is established. The Governor of Massachusetts scuttles the paper before the end of the year.

1835: James Gordon Bennett opens the New York Herald. Six years later, the New York Tribune is founded. These papers, which cost one penny, are meant to reach the multitudes and be non-partisan.

1997: USA Today is the nation's leading newspaper, based on circulation figures. Founded in 1982, it is the first paper to be published at several printing plants throughout the nation simultaneously.

1600s: The Native American population numbers an estimated six to nine million.

1800s: The Native American population numbers less than three million.

1997: The Native American population (now including Eskimo and Aleut ethnicities) has recently risen to just over two million.

The Industrial Revolution and the Publishing Business

Printed communication increased by leaps and bounds in the first half of the nineteenth century as a result of new technology. Publishers enlarged their size and scope under the pressure of competition, and new agencies of delivery—including the ocean steamship and the railroad—increased the speed and efficiency of publishing. Improved presses sped up the rate of printing twenty-fold between 1830 and 1850. This trend contributed to Hawthorne's public reputation and income as many of his earlier short stories and essays found their way into print via a newsman's press.

The literary output of New England writers between 1830 and 1850 was not only noteworthy for its volume but also because it reflected the qualities of the region, new contacts with European culture, and the spirit of Jacksonian Democracy. The works of many writers of this period—including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Herman Melville, and

Edgar Allan Poe—are still widely read today. According to Frederick Jackson Turner in his book *The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and Its Sections*, however, Hawthorne was "the greatest of the New England novelists" and exhibited "a power of psychological analysis and literary skill that have not since been equaled by any American writer."

What Do I Read Next?

Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), centers on Hester Prynne, a young woman who incurs the wrath of her rigidly Puritan community when she becomes pregnant and refuses to name the father.

Reverend Hooper, the main character in the "The Minister's Black Veil" an 1835 short story by Hawthorne, bears much in common with other Hawthorne characters, he is obsessed with sin and guilt and chooses to advertise his knowledge of the human potential for evil. The action unfolds in a seventeenth-century New England parish, when the minister reports to a Sunday morning service wearing a black veil.

"The Tell-Tale Heart," Edgar Allan Poe (1843). Considered one of Poe's greatest tales of psychological horror, this story involves a murderer who buries his victim under the floor of his apartment and is then tortured by the sound of a beating heart.

"The Devil and Daniel Webster" (1937) by Stephen Vincent Benet. An O. Henry Memorial Award-winning story about the trial of Jabez Stone, who sells his soul to the Devil, who has tricked the farmer by masquerading as a lawyer. At the trial, Stone is defended by famous New England lawyer Daniel Webster, and the judge presiding over the case is Nathaniel Hawthorne.

"The Devil and his Grandmother," Jacob Lud-wig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1812). This tale appears in the timeless collection of literary masterpieces known in English as Grimm's Fairy Tales, The German brothers translated the stories as told to them by common villagers. In this particular tale, three deserting soldiers serve the Devil for seven years and then must solve a riddle to avoid becoming his property. The soldiers are ultimately aided by the Devil's grandmother.

Further Study

Levy, Leo B "The Problem of Faith in 'Young Goodman Brown'," in *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1986, pp. 115-26.

Levy discusses some of the critical interpretations of "Young Goodman Brown" and provides his own reading of the story, focusing on the character of Faith

Newman, Lea Bertam Vozar *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, G. K Hall & Co., 1979 Newman covers all of Hawthorne's stones, presenting publication history, circumstances of composition, sources, influences, relationships with other, Hawthorne works, and interpretations and criticisms

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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