



Young Goodman Brown

Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Hawthorne's classic tale of a young Puritan's meeting with the Devil.

Young Goodman Brown Details

Date : Published September 9th 2005 by Wildside Press (first published 1835)

ISBN : 9781557423627

Author : Nathaniel Hawthorne

Format : Paperback 48 pages

Genre : Classics, Short Stories, Fiction, Academic, School, Horror

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From Reader Review Young Goodman Brown for online ebook

Inkspill says

a haunting tale of what happens to a man, Goodman Brown, who battles with his conscience to keep his faith and the consequences of it.

I also liked this one in how Hawthorne plays with the idea of faith by giving Goodman Brown's wife the same name. The story is packed with dark imagery. How Hawthorne tells this tale helps me appreciate the good Vs bad in a religious context.

Latasha says

I LOVE NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE!! this story is absolutely brilliant and wonderful. Just read it!

Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says

Young Goodman Brown, surrounded by good, goes into the forest one night and, in the darkness which illuminated the good that he knew all his life, suddenly saw that virtue is but a dream and that even Faith, his wife with pink ribbons in her hair, has wickedness dwelling in her heart.

Disillusioned, young Goodman Brown dies old, scowling.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Young Goodman Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne

"Young Goodman Brown" is a short story published in 1835 by American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. The story takes place in 17th century Puritan New England, a common setting for Hawthorne's works, and addresses the Calvinist/Puritan belief that all of humanity exists in a state of depravity, but that God has destined some to unconditional election through unmerited grace. Hawthorne frequently focuses on the tensions within Puritan culture, yet steeps his stories in the Puritan sense of sin. In a symbolic fashion, the story follows Young Goodman Brown's journey into self-scrutiny, which results in his loss of virtue and belief.

The story begins at dusk in Salem Village, Massachusetts as young Goodman Brown leaves Faith, his wife of three months, for some unknown errand in the forest. Faith pleads with her husband to stay with her, but he insists that the journey must be completed that night. In the forest he meets an older man, dressed in a similar manner and bearing a physical resemblance to himself. The man carries a black serpent-shaped staff. The two encounter Goody Cloyse, an older woman, whom Young Goodman had known as a boy and who had taught him his catechism, in the woods. She complains about the need to walk and, the man rudely throws his staff on the ground for the woman and quickly leaves with Goodman. ...

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[illegible]

unacceptable. Native Americans are seen as denizens of this region. Goodman soon meets a figure, familiar, with a snaked staff, rather Mephistophelean, who resembles his grandfather. Goodman proceeds even as he objects and hesitates, knowing that his intent is not right. His companion implies that there is much hypocrisy in the village of Salem, and that people are not who they superficially seem to be, harboring minds and souls of darkness instead. Is Goodman being forced to confront his own naiveté and his own id?

His guide continually offers Goodman the use of his staff, which Goodman at last takes. The guide's words seem to come from inside Goodman's own head. Finally, convinced that all those whom he most admires, including his beloved wife Faith, are congregated for a Black Mass in the heart of the forest, Goodman seems to capitulate to the forces of darkness, although the episode ends ambiguously, suggesting that it may all have been a dream.

Is this, indeed, a dream? Is it the confrontation of a man with his own darker urges, urges that he projects upon others, judging them to be hypocrites? Or is this a fable to suggest that all people project outward "acceptable" selves that hide what is evil inside them? Or does it suggest that the repressive Puritan society, or any such society, deforms its members by denying and forcing them to deny aspects of themselves that would be best recognized? Or all of the above?

Piyangie says

A good short read. Enjoyed Hawthorn's symbolism in weaving a story of the contradicting ideas of public morality and religious faith.

Paul Williams says

This is, in my opinion, one of the single greatest short stories ever written. The narrative is so tightly woven, the dialogue genius and subtle, and the prose are extremely sharp. While much criticism tries to explain the allegory as a man's venture into the realm of the sexual, I think that the story is much more universal. For one thing, there's very little to indicate that Goodman Brown's journey is specifically sexual (Freudians will disagree, but I remain unconvinced), and I feel that Hawthorn's concerns were much more akin to hypocrisy and false expectations we have, and how we thus betray ourselves.

The most fascinating character is, of course, the Devil, and this is one of the best I've read. He's not opening malicious, and his subtlety is what makes him so frightening. His ability to ensnare Brown tighter and tighter intrigues me. The way Goodman Brown falls from grace is so cleverly planned, and yet it's so obvious to us as readers, and to the victim himself, though he doesn't realize it. How often do we find ourselves digging our own graves, doing things that we know are foolish, yet pushing farther against our greater knowledge. Of course, we can never anticipate the actual consequences, and that's why we are so easily tempted, and that is one of the things Hawthorne does such an amazing job of exploring here.

It's unfortunate that such an awesome story cost the protagonist his Faith and happiness, but it probably wouldn't be nearly as amazing if that weren't the case.

Tom Mathews says

The events that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692 have echoed down the years like few others in our history. Its impact can be seen even four generations later in Nathaniel Hawthorne's scathing indictment of society in a village ironically named after the Hebrew word for peace. Hawthorne, a great, great grandson of a judge from the witch trials, uses this spooky tale of a midnight gathering to condemn those who used a facade of piety and righteousness to condemn others for the most venial reasons. His story brings to mind a verse from the Bible.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27)

Tracy Reilly says

Okay, I've read this enough times that I think I can do an actual review. I know people are always arguing over the GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL--or at least they used to. So, I would like to submit this story as THE Great American Short Story.

To me, it's plainly, simply, iconic. It doesn't just represent American culture: the ideas go even deeper to the unconscious soul of the human race. It just happens to be set in America, and in its embryonic state---that's what makes it such a great choice as a representation of the uniquely American mindset, capturing all our contradictions at their ancient roots.

I used to hate this story, and all Hawthorne, mostly because it was about the Puritans. Doesn't everyone hate the Puritans? They're so boring and strict in their monotonous black and uniform starched white collar and cuffs. Their sour outlook about life, their busybody interventions into others'. But this story is about the underbelly.

It's almost like a psychedelic Grimm's Fairytale .. it takes place in the dark woods! What's out there? Witches? The Devil? Nudity? Children being corrupted? Dark vows? Yes!!!

What's so amazing about this story is its end. I'll try to do this without a spoiler. It so rightly captures the source of all that is wrong with the world--if you want to call it evil, or sin, fine. But it mostly has to do with perception. That old "Judge not--" axiom from the Bible, which I always thought as parallel words for the Golden Rule.

He never looked at his wife the same way. That's a shame. Koo Koo Ka Choo.

Sandy says

This little story packs a very big punch! I approached it as a "taster" of Hawthorne's work, prior to undertaking one of his longer pieces, and I am completely flabbergasted! While I can appreciate his immense

talent as a writer (his images are VIVID!), I am not willing at this point in time to immerse myself in such dark stories.

I skimmed the Wikipedia page devoted to Hawthorne and his life and I believe that it will be necessary for me to understand Hawthorne's life and the history of his time in order to fully appreciate his writing. That is a project for another month. This is July and I am in the mood for lighter fare!

Bill Kerwin says

Young Goodman Brown, first published in *New-England Magazine*, VIII (April, 1835), is one of Hawthorne's enduring classic. This simple story of a young Puritan who undergoes certain life-altering experiences when he accompanies the "traveller with the twisted staff" to a ceremony deep in the nighttime woods is both memorable in itself and representative of the great themes that darken and enrich Hawthorne's fiction: the Puritan connection with evil, the deceptive nature of everyday life, the precariousness of individual human faith.

Although the story is obvious in its symbolism (for example, young Brown has a wife named "Faith" whom he loses track of in the course of the story), it is sure and subtle in its development, as we, along with young Goodman Brown, come to doubt the reliability of the social world and what good we are willing to claim for it, and for ourselves.

On the Sabbath-day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen, because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear, and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence, and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, awaking 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 sternly at his wife, and turned away.

Maryam Rajee says

The allegory represents a man losing his faith and beliefs emphasizing the depravity of human nature.

Charles Boogaard says

Great short story : A walk with the devil which will forever change a mans life. "They carved no hopeful verse on his tomb, as his dying hour was gloom."

zeynab kaveh says

this is one of the masterpieces in short story! the symbolism used in the work is so amazing that by rereading it, you can always find some hidden dimensions of the text. protagonist is named "Goodman" and he seems the only good man in his village. his wife is named "Faith" which represents the protagonist's faith. the forest which all the devilry in the story is happening there, has been described with conventional elements such as darkness and every time which there is a hope for getting out of this evil environment there is a light which finds its way through the trees. the event is happening at night. night, darkness,... all these elements prepare us to enter to a evil communion.

in the first encounter with the devil, Goodman Brown says "Faith kept me back awhile." he means his wife but figuratively and most importantly he means his own faith was keeping him from coming to this evil forest. or in some other place he asks the devil "why I should quit my dear Faith?" all these statements in the novel show the woman as a symbol of faith. as he proceeds in the forest he sees all the people of his village which he thought were good people but in truth are servants of the devil. in one point of the story he looks up and sees the blue sky which provokes a hope in us but in a second dark clouds come and block this hopeful scene. Hawthorne does not believe that there is goodness in world. It is evident in the story and some may say it is the main theme of the story. when Goodman Brown loses his wife(faith) he says" come devil,for to thee is this world given." the representation of a man without faith is amazing, the author says" there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown."

the apex of the story is the devil's speech. he says evil is the nature of mankind. even the protagonist who has been shown as the good one has this evil in his nature too. in some place the author says he joins the devil's communion because "he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that wicked in his heart." in the first pages when he does not want to come with the devil but UNCONSCIOUSLY resumes walking. these are all saying that nature of mankind is evil.

but enough of this I wanna talk about representation of woman in the story. as i said earlier his wife is not important as a person but is functioning as man's faith. Why a woman should represent man's faith? there are some stereotyping of women in the story.(in the case of Indians there is some ethnic stereotypes too. there are represented as Others and dangerous.)

all this said, the story has an indeterminate finale. we don't know if the whole novel was just a dream or really happened but nevertheless it affected Goodman's whole life and he couldn't tolerate people's duplicity in character.

Michael says

Such a wonderfully (and eerily) subversive story of a man who sees what lies behind the virtuous facade. A classic "dark romance," it's got all the hallmarks of another kind of classic: that of the "hero cycle" (to use Joseph Campbell's famous phrase), where the hero has to leave society to gain wisdom, which he then brings back with him. Here, though, the "hero cycle" is completely inverted. The wisdom that Young Goodman Brown gains, when he's off in the woods, is the belief that the townsfolk he thought were virtuous are in fact hypocrites and deceivers in league with the devil. He can't even look at his wife in the same way afterwards. Was what he saw in the woods real or just a dream? It's never resolved, but it doesn't matter, because dreams and reality are one in this tale. The grim final sentence makes clear the depths to which he's shaken and the extent to which he was never the same again: "And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom."

Duane says

Young Puritan, Goodman Brown, enters the forest one night and imagines/dreams that he and his fellow 17th century neighbors, villagers, all good Puritans, are in cahoots with the Devil himself. And unless God is tolerant of ignorant fools, I suspect Hell itself is populated with these religious fanatics, these witch burning despots.

Chitra Divakaruni says

A beautifully structured short story with deep mythic undertones and a mystery at its heart. Amazing use of symbols, and an unexpected lesson at the end. I love what Hawthorne does here with setting--the world of daylight and the village, pitted against the world of the night forest. I love teaching this story, and I've learned a lot from it myself.

Eryn☼ says

Read for Gothic Fiction

I really enjoyed the whole battle between good and evil. The writing wasn't my favorite, but it's an enjoyable short story.

Bri Zabriskie says

I love this story (though only after many readings and discussions on it, at first I was totally creeped out by it). Here's some analysis of the setting I did for a class recently:

Where does the story take place? What time period?

The story starts out in Salem village, Massachusetts during the time when the Puritans populated the small colony. From there our protagonist takes a “dreary road” into the nearby forest, landing him in the deep in heart of the “haunted forest;” to him, a dark and dangerous “wilderness ... peopled with frightful sounds” (420, 425). Eventually he comes to an “open space” surrounded by the “dark wall of the forest” and housing a “rock” that looks something like an “altar or a pulpit” surrounded by flaming trees and foliage (426). The setting finally moves back to the sunny, morning streets of Salem village. Each of these different settings is integral to the meaning of the story.

What does the setting suggest about the characters' lives?

The setting of the story, Salem, Massachusetts, is rich with history, most significantly the Salem Witch Trials. The Puritans who lived there all grew so suspicious of each other that they accused several of their own number of witchcraft. Over 150 of the accused were imprisoned with 26 being prosecuted in Salem and

nineteen of these hanged for the crime of witchcraft. The Puritans of Salem at this time have been portrayed as suspicious and uneasy. The setting further adds to this notion by being set in a dark and “gloomy” forest at dusk and night where the light is described as “uncertain” and the sounds within it, “frightful” (423, 421, 425).

What is the significance of the time of day for this story?

The story begins at dusk and continues on throughout the night till the climax at midnight. This time of day is a dangerous one for the characters in the story, evidenced by Brown comforting his young wife by telling her “no harm will come to [her]” if she “[goes] to bed at dusk” (420). The nighttime setting is also significant in that it provides for lonely and foreboding forest and gives our protagonist an uptight feeling. This is manifest when Brown enters the forest and considers that a “traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead” (420). The “uncertain light” provided by the dying day and tree cover create an overall tone of suspicion and insecurity (421). The climax takes place “at the hour of midnight,” an hour known to be a witching hour, the demonic hour, or the devils hour (some variations place this between midnight and three a.m.). The denouement is set in Salem the next morning, after our protagonist has undergone his major transformation. This is stark in its contrast to the dark setting of the rest of the story and suggests to the reader that Goodman Brown has been enlightened in a way. No longer is he unsure of his fellow Puritans, but their evil natures are made plain to him.

What is the protagonist’s relationship to the setting?

Young Goodman Brown may be a psychological story in that setting may be interpreted as a reflection of Goodman Brown’s internal state. The uncertain light cast by the time of day as mentioned previously may be reflective of his desire to hide his own sins. His journey down “a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through and closed immediately behind” may be a symbolic representation of Brown’s descent into his own unconscious mind (420). This is furthered instances such as the forest echoing him back mocking him in paragraph 48 and the description of the forest as haunted in paragraph 53 as soon as he has made the decision to commit to his wicked path (425).

Does the setting of the story in some way compel the protagonist into action? How?

The coming of dusk in the beginning of the story seems to compel Brown along his “evil purpose” (420). Even more significantly, as the end of the rising action, Brown looks to the “sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him. Yet, there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it” (424). This acknowledgement of the setting compels him to witness that “With Heaven above, and with Faith below, [he] will... stand firm against the devil,” but the very next moment a change in the scene, “a black mass of cloud” darkens both the sky and his perspective and propels him fully into a demonic state (424). It is then that he cries, “My Faith is gone! ... There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil! For to thee is the world given” (425). The “tempest” of the forest at this time “drives him onward” in his madness until he reaches the hell-like clearing of the climax (425).

Does the story’s time or place suggest something about the character of the protagonist? What?

As mentioned previously, the setting of Salem seems reminds the reader of its historical background, the Salem Witch Trials, a time of suspicion and fear. The setting further adds to this notion by being set in a dark and “gloomy” forest at dusk and night where the light is described as “uncertain” and the sounds within it, “frightful” (423, 421, 425). If this is indeed a psychological symbol of Brown’s inner journey, then Brown may be an everyman representation of Puritan New England. Perhaps Hawthorne, through the inward journey of Goodman Brown, aimed to describe the descent of the Puritan man and woman into the cynicism

and distrust that bred the Salem Witch Trials.

How does the setting of the climax of the story contribute to a change in the character's personal perspective?

The climax of the story is set in a hellish vision in the deepest, darkest part of the forest. Here Goodman Brown believes he recognizes "a score of the church-members of Salem village, famous for their especial sanctity" among the devil-worshipers. However, his certainty questioned by the description of the "congregation" alternately showing and disappearing "out of the darkness" of the scene because of the "sudden gleams of light" from the red fire of the blazing pines surrounding them (426). This scene and the fiendish baptism that arguably takes place in it, contribute to Brown's realization that all around him are sinful.

Does a change in setting during the story suggest some internal change in the protagonist? How?

The change from deepest night in the forest to bright morning in Salem village could suggest that Brown has been enlightened by his inward or nighttime journey. Perhaps he has discovered in himself and thus in all humanity a capacity for evil that he did not know was there and so remains "distrustful" and "desperate" all his days.

Vahid says

Before making any efforts to write a review, I admit that in my previous experience of reading this story, I had definitely failed to establish any dominance on the structure and meaning of what I read, perhaps because of excitement and fascination.

Looked at from a biographical respect, it can be argued that Hawthorne wrote this piece as a way of expressing disappointment at the fallacious and hypocritical beliefs of his ancestors, who believed that they are destined to land in heaven regardless of the sinful acts they perpetuated.

Hawthorne finds himself the young man who harbored misconceptions about his ancestors and he rebukes puritanism whose adherents were wrapped in guilt and hypocrisy.

There are major symbols such as faith, GMB's wife, who also represents GMB's faith which is lost when going to meet the devil.

Another pivotal ideology in this story is the dualism that perfectly dovetails with Descartes' explanation of dualism and how existence and concepts are based on the dual nature of existence.

Overall, however, I have to mention my nonchalance towards finding this piece an intriguing story, due to the very fact that faith and darkness have long become the stereotypical topics that we no longer care to spare a thought for.

