

Young Goodman Brown's Apocalypse

Most criticism and reflection of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* centers on a good versus evil theme. Critics also debate interpretations of the main character's consciousness; is Brown awake or dreaming. What is certain is that he lives and dies in pain because his belief in his righteousness isolates him from his community. It is also certain that Hawthorne's interpretation of Brown's "mid-life crisis" has ambiguity and leaves a reader with many different feelings about what and why certain things have happened. Hawthorne's use of symbolism in his allegorical tale *Young Goodman Brown* causes the main character's revelations about the sin within his community, his family and himself.

Young Goodman Brown's journey into the forest is best defined as a kind of "general, indeterminate allegory, representing man's irrational drive to leave faith, home, and security temporarily behind, for whatever reason, and take a chance with one (more) errand onto the wilder shores of experience" (Martin). Brown has a curiosity that "kills" his naive outlook on life and changes him until his death. He has a mission to go into the forest and meet the devil. A mission that he begins out of curiosity and a "deep need to see if the teachings of his childhood, his religion, and his culture, have armed him sufficiently to look the devil in the face and return unscathed" (Hodara 1). The symbol of the forest, late at night, can be interpreted as the untamed regions of Brown's heart where the devil roams freely as he roams in the forest. The forest is the devil's domain. Brown finds, in the dark of the night, many of his daytime friends share this domain with the devil. What he considers moral and "good" in his life he finds in the forest. This torments his perception of practically everything.

A good man in Hawthorne's day was a person of proper lineage. This very lineage Hawthorne capitalizes on as he begins the goodman's conference with the devil. The Goodman claims that he is from a family of upright and moral men that have never and would never go into the forest on a trip such as the one he is participating. "Hawthorne depends upon this defense to criticize the patriarchal lineage upon which a person places his worth" (Segura). The devil disproves Brown's theory by stating that all of Brown's ancestors accompanied him and tortured women in Salem or burned to the ground Indian villages. Afterwards the devil and his ancestors would go for a friendly walk. With this, Hawthorne has mocked the institution of *Young Goodman Brown's* lineage and his society's view of honor by stating his family's past. The question remains whom or what is the devil. If the devil points to the painful truth of the past and the reality of people in the present, is this the allegorical face of evil (Segura)? Perhaps Hawthorne playing upon the reader's disposition to see the devil as evil and stand next to the "good man" and his fate? Distraught, disappointed and confused, Brown leaves the company of the devil. He calls for faith and hope from the heavens. Faith is another important symbol that Hawthorne uses in the tale. Faith is Goodman Brown's wife. "Faith, and Goodman Brown's relation to it - or to 'her' - is the key to the story's meaning" (Jones). Critic Madison Jones also makes the statement that the you believe in order to understand. Without belief or faith it is difficult to understand the nature of sin. Jones says that it is as though faith is a kind of spectacle empowering the natural eye to understand what was invisible to him before; the bad in the community that Brown did not see before because he had faith. When he went into the forest he left his speculates in the village and was therefore able to "see" the things his naiveté and faith blinded him from before the trip. The trip is a departure from Faith- the wife and faith -- the belief. When Brown meets the devil he apologizes for being late. He states, "Faith kept me back a while." His faith tries to keep him from the evil he will see, but literally it is wife Faith. When Brown calls to heaven for his faith he sees Faith's pink ribbons from her hair. He also hears screaming and possibly her voice. He screams in despair that he has lost his Faith. This is also the point where he gives up, begins to realize what

life is like, and losses his faith in humanity.

Brown never recovers from the scenes of that dark night. He continues life with his loss of faith in himself, his wife (who was also seen in the forest), and his community. It is was the fall in perception from a unifies sense of reality to the awareness of separation and the realization of the necessity of healing that separation. Instead of making the effort of sympathy and love to unite himself with others, however, Brown turns from them forever; having lost the absolute, he can not live with ambiguity (MaGill). His second hand faith, given to him from his Puritan teachings, has not prepared him for the sin in the world (Hodara). He becomes a stern, judging, distrustful, dark man who never recovers his faith.

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