Young Goodman Brown

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

The descendent of infamously harsh Puritans, and the only child of a sea captain who died when Hawthorne was four, Nathaniel Hawthorne grew up in Salem, Massachusetts. As a child, Hawthorne injured his leg and was forced to spend a year in bed; he developed a love for reading during this time. He attended Bowdoin College, then worked as an editor and wrote short stories, many of which, including "Young Goodman Brown," were published in his 1837 collection *Twice-Told Tales*. In 1841 he joined the transcendentalist Utopian community at Brook Farm, which, in 1842, he left to marry Sophia Peabody. They moved back to Salem. In a remarkable streak that lasted from 1850 to 1860, he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, one of the first true best-selling novels in the United States, *The House of the Seven Gables*, often regarded as his greatest book, *The Blithedale Romance*, his only work written in the first person, and *The Marble Faun*, a romance set in a fantastical version of Italy. Hawthorne died in 1864, only a few months before the end of the Civil War. His reputation in America was so great that the most important writers of the era, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Louisa May Alcott, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, were pallbearers at his funeral.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Puritans began in the 16th century as a group of English Protestants who sought to purify the Church of England of the remnants of Roman Catholicism. In 1628, John Winthrop led a group of Puritans (who were persecuted in England) from England to Massachusetts, where they hoped to create a "city upon a hill." In the 1670s, the Puritans of Massachusetts fought one of the deadliest wars in American history against the Native Americans of southern New England. In August, 1676, the Puritans captured and beheaded the Native American leader, Metacom, also called King Philip; they interpreted their victory as a sign of God's favor and the deadly toll as a spiritual purge of their community. In 1692 and 1693, the Puritans of Salem held the Salem witch trials, a series of hearings, prosecutions, and executions that resulted in the deaths of twenty people, mostly women, on the grounds that they practiced witchcraft. Later it was generally understood that the proceedings were the result of hysteria rather than justice or evidence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* deals with similar themes of sin and hypocrisy in a Puritan small town. Arthur Miller's 1952 play *The Crucible* dramatizes the Salem witch trials (again dealing with similar themes of sin and hypocrisy) while also allegorize the 1950s black lists and Communist-outing hysteria led by Senator Eugene McCarthy. William Bradford's journal, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, describes conditions in Plymouth Colony from 1620 to 1657. The Puritan pastor Cotton Mather's 1710 essay *Theopholis Americana: An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City* describes the Puritan's dreams for a holy land in America. Jill Lepore's nonfiction book *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* recounts the brutal 1670s war between the Puritans and the Native Americans, in which Goodman Brown's father fought.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "Young Goodman Brown"
- **When Written:** 1835
- **Where Written:** Salem, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1835 and 1846
- **Literary Period:** American Romanticism
- **Genre:** Short story, allegory
- **Setting:** 17th century Salem, Massachusetts
- **Climax:** When Goodman Brown calls on Faith to resist the devil
- **Antagonist:** The devil, the hypocrisy of the Puritans
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Descendant of a witch trial judge. Hawthorne was a descendent of John Hathorne, a Puritan judge who ordered the execution of the Salem Witch Trials. Hawthorne added the "w" to his name to hide his shameful ancestry.

The white whale. Herman Melville dedicated *Moby-Dick* to Hawthorne.

PLOT SUMMARY

At sunset in Salem, Massachusetts, recently married Goodman Brown steps from his house and kisses his wife, Faith, goodbye. Faith, wearing a cap adorned with **pink ribbons**, begs Goodman Brown not to leave her alone all night. She's afraid of the bad dreams she'll have if he makes her spend the night alone. Goodman Brown replies that his journey must happen that night, and Faith gives Goodman Brown her blessing as he

heads out in the street.

As he departs, he looks back one last time and sees Faith watching him, and has the feeling as if, through some dream, she might have figured out his plans for the night. But he dismisses the thought, certain that Faith could never tolerate even thinking about such a thing. Goodman Brown also resolves, after this night, to stand by his saintly Faith and "follow her to heaven."

Fear overwhelms him as he walks into the forest. He imagines "devilish" Indians or even the devil himself hiding behind every tree. Even so, he walks on until he encounters a mysterious man at a bend in the road. When the man asks why Goodman Brown arrived late, Goodman Brown replies, his voice trembling, that "Faith kept me back awhile."

The man is ordinary and simply dressed, and might be mistaken for Goodman Brown's father, though the man seems as if he could sit comfortably at the dinner table of a governor or in the court of a King. The man also carries a large snake-shaped **staff**, which in the shadows of the forest seems to be alive.

The man offers the staff to Goodman Brown, who refuses and begins to make his case for turning back toward home. Goodman Brown points out that nobody in his family had ever met with a mysterious man in the woods at night. But the man replies that he was good friends with Goodman Brown's father, grandfather, and other Puritan leaders, and helped them all in acts of cruelty and sacrilege. When Goodman Brown argues that he wouldn't be able to face his minister at church if he continues on, the man laughs aloud. Finally, Goodman Brown argues that he can't go with the man because it would break Faith's heart.

Someone appears on the path ahead: Goody Cloyse, a pious old woman who taught Goodman Brown his catechism. Goodman Brown is shocked to see her in the woods and hides in the woods to make sure she doesn't see him. To Goodman Brown's horror, Goody Cloyse greets the man as the devil and calls him "my worship." The devil gives her his staff, and she disappears.

Goodman Brown and the devil walk on together, but soon Goodman Brown refuses to continue, saying that Goody Cloyse's hypocritical example can't make him abandon his Faith. Unworried, the devil continues on, leaving Goodman Brown behind. Just then, Goodman Brown hears horsemen approaching and once again hides. He recognizes the riders as the minister and Deacon Gookin. The two men discuss the night's meeting, excitedly noting that there will be some Indians who know a lot about devilry and a young woman who will be inducted.

Goodman Brown lifts his hands to pray, but hears voices murmuring from above, including a voice he thinks is Faith's. Goodman Brown calls out to Faith, but hears only laughter. Faith's **pink ribbon** drifts down from the sky and catches on a tree branch.

Losing all hope that there is good on earth, Goodman Brown exclaims, "My Faith is gone!" He calls for the devil and runs through the forest, laughing and swearing and shouting. Soon he finds himself near a clearing, with a rock for a pulpit. It is filled with a vast congregation of townspeople, criminals, and Indian priests. But he doesn't see Faith and so feels hope.

A figure appears at the pulpit and a voice calls for the converts to come forward. Goodman Brown steps out of the forest and is led forward to the rock alongside a veiled woman. The figure promises to tell them all the dark secrets of their town, of seductions and murders, and describes the whole world as "one stain of guilt," full of sinners. Goodman Brown looks at the woman and realizes that it is Faith. As the figure prepares to baptize them in a pool of something red in a hollow at the top of the stone, Goodman Brown cries out, warning Faith to resist.

Goodman Brown is suddenly alone in the forest, with no sign of the events of the night. He staggers into Salem that morning, but shies away from the minister's blessing and snatches a child away from Goody Cloyse as she teaches the girl the catechism. Faith, wearing her **pink ribbons**, runs up to him joyfully and almost kisses him on the street, but he only stares at her sternly and walks past without saying anything.

The narrator wonders whether Goodman Brown's night in the forest could have all been a dream, but relates that, regardless, Goodman Brown became distrustful of everyone around him. When he went to church he feared that the sinful minister and his listening parish would all be destroyed. He often woke in the night and shrank from Faith beside him in bed, and when his family prayed he scowled and muttered to himself. Though he lived a long life and died a grandfather, he died unhappy and desperate, with no inscription on his tombstone.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Goodman Brown – A young man from Salem, Massachusetts and the descendent of a long line of Puritans, Goodman Brown was raised to be a pious Christian and is terrified of being thought a sinner. When the story begins, Goodman has been married to Faith, whom he believes to be a paragon of goodness and purity, for just three months. His curiosity leads him to go into the woods in the middle of the night to meet with the devil. The devil shows him that all the respected Puritans who Goodman has looked up to are in fact hypocrites and devil-worshippers, and that Faith, too, is tempted by the devil. Though Goodman's adventure may be just a dream, it ruins his life, making him mistrust his community, his family, and his faith. He lives to old age as a desperately unhappy man.

Faith – Faith, Goodman Brown's young wife, initially seems like the embodiment of innocence, as symbolized by the pink ribbons in her cap. Goodman thinks that she is angelic and

worthy of the name "Faith." She complains of bad dreams and begs Goodman to stay at home. Goodman insists on leaving her, but in the forest, Goodman discovers that she, too, has been tempted by the devil to attend the satanic conversion ceremony. When Goodman returns to Salem the next morning, Faith greets him joyously, her pink ribbons untouched, and it is never made clear if Goodman dreamed the whole thing and Faith is still the pure woman he believed her to be, or if she really had been corrupted by the devil. Regardless, Goodman can't respond to her affectionate welcome. She and Goodman live to old age and raise children and grandchildren, but he never regains his faith in her or in the community.

The Devil – The devil first appears in the guise of Goodman's grandfather, carrying a staff that resembles a serpent. He later appears as a dark figure. He meets Goodman Brown in the woods, reveals the hypocrisy of all the Puritan leaders Goodman respects, and lures Goodman and Faith to a satanic conversion ceremony.

Goodman Brown's Father – Goodman Brown's father, who died before the story's start. The devil tells Goodman that he and Goodman's father were close friends, and describes helping his father set fire to an Indian village during King Philip's war. Goodman Brown thinks he sees his father's form in the smoke at the devil's conversion ceremony urging him to worship the devil.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Goody Cloyse – Goody Cloyse is a respected Salem Puritan who taught Goodman Brown his catechism, serves as his spiritual advisor, and was a good friend of Goodman's grandfather. Goodman is shocked to see her at the devil's conversion ceremony.

The minister – Salem's minister is one of the Puritans who Goodman Brown deeply respects and who he is troubled to see at the devil's conversion ceremony.

Deacon Gookin – Salem's deacon is one of the Puritans who Goodman Brown deeply respects and who he is troubled to see at the devil's conversion ceremony.

Goodman Brown's Mother – Goodman Brown's mother, who died before the story's start. Goodman Brown thinks he sees her form in the smoke at the devil's conversion ceremony warning him to resist the devil.

Goodman's Grandfather – Goodman Brown's grandfather, who died before the story's start. The devil tells Goodman that he and Goodman's grandfather were close friends, and describes helping his grandfather to whip a Quaker woman (Quakers were a different Christian religious sect from the Puritans) through the streets of Salem.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE HYPOCRISY OF PURITANISM

Hawthorne sets "Young Goodman Brown" in the New England town of Salem, where the Puritans tried to create a religious society with strict morals and pious norms, but also where the infamous Witch Trials took place. The Puritans believed that some people are predestined by God to go to heaven, and that those people are identifiable by their morality and piousness; people cannot earn their way to heaven by performing good works, but if they are part of the elect, they will instinctively and naturally do good. As a result, Puritan communities were profoundly focused on the value and necessity of the appearance of goodness, believing that it was a reflection of inner goodness and therefore a sign of one's chance of heavenly redemption, and engaged in social policing to determine what counts as "good." Hawthorne uses the setting to explore the dark side to the Puritan emphasis on the appearance of good.

At the beginning of the story, Goodman Brown believes wholeheartedly in these Puritan tenets, despite the fact that he himself is at that moment lying to his wife, Faith, saying that he is on an overnight business trip when in fact he is heading off into the forest out of curiosity to attend a witch's meeting. He believes in the perfect goodness of his wife who seems to radiate pureness, and generally believes in the goodness of everyone else, too. In fact, he believes that after his dalliance in the woods with the devil, he will be able to return home and live as a good man with his perfect wife and go along with her to heaven. However, when he gets to the forest, in what may or may not be a dream, he discovers that essentially the entire town, including Faith, whom he had thought to be incapable of sin, are at this convocation, are "friends of the devil." In horror, Goodman Brown concludes that "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name." He concludes that everyone is evil, that the word "sin" means nothing because everyone is sinful. When Goodman Brown returns to the town, he is no longer the happy young newlywed he was when he left. He is bitter, stern, and gloomy and mistrusts the "good" appearances of everyone around him, instead seeing sin everywhere, hiding below that surface.

When looked at from a modern perspective, Goodman Brown's revelation that everyone is sinful in some way seems obvious: of course no one is perfectly good, as Brown imagined Faith and many others to be. That's just human nature. But it is here

that Hawthorne levels his most profound criticism of Puritanism. Goodman Brown believes that his experience or dream has forced him to see through the lies of perfect goodness told by his religion. And so he abandons it. Yet the story presents his actions not as a triumph but a tragedy, and Brown lives a life of suspicion, sadness, anxiety, and gloom. The story, then, suggests that the true issue is Puritanism and its internal logic, the way that it demands all goodness or none, perfect purity or eternally damned sin. Such a world, the story suggests, is one at odds with the realities of being human, one in which no one who takes it seriously can live a good life because it is impossible to live a perfect one.

LOSING FAITH AND INNOCENCE

"Young Goodman Brown" is the story of how a young "good" man named Goodman Brown loses his innocent belief in religious faith. Goodman Brown's loss of innocence happens during a vivid nightmare in which he ventures into a dark forest and sees all of the people he had considered faithful in his life gathered around a fire at a witches' conversion ceremony with the devil presiding from on high. By the end of his journey into the woods, Goodman Brown learns that even the purest outward display of faith can mask underlying sin.

Goodman Brown's wife, Faith, is the embodiment of faith and purity, even in her actual name. Goodman Brown's internal conflict is based on whether to "keep the faith." At first the struggle is literal: his wife begs him to remain at home and not head off into the woods; Goodman Brown's decision to leave behind Faith becomes a metaphor for his epiphany about religion, which he similarly abandons at the end of the story. When Faith begs him not to leave her for the night, Goodman Brown wonders if Faith has lost faith in *him*; he asks, wondering if she's questioning his fidelity, "dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?" Faith remains a symbol of Goodman Brown's religious faith throughout the story: when Goodman Brown first meets up with the devil, the devil accuses him of being late, which Goodman Brown explains by saying "Faith kept me back a while," a play on words meant to refer literally to his wife Faith begging him not to leave, and figuratively to his religious faith, which could have stopped him from meeting up with the devil, but didn't.

The **pink ribbons** that flow from Faith's cap represent faith and purity; Hawthorne refers to them five times throughout the story, each time at a pivotal moment when Goodman Brown is feeling lost or troubled; the ribbons remind him of the purity of faith, but also of its shallowness. When Goodman Brown sees Faith at the witches' meeting, he realizes that the ribbons were merely a superficial outward symbol, not proof of actual piety. When he screams out for Faith after hearing her voice among the throng of heathens at the witches' ceremony, a pink ribbon falls from the sky. When Goodman Brown sees his wife participating in the witches' meeting in the woods, he simultaneously loses his Faith (his wife) and his faith (his religion). Whereas Faith once represented perfection and the path to salvation, now Goodman Brown looks toward her, with the witches' fire reflecting in her eyes, and sees only a "polluted wretch." He looks up into the black sky and cries, "My Faith is gone!" The blissful newlywed bounding out from his happy home in the first scene has become an "unhappy husband," tragically stripped of Faith and his faith.

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Hawthorne uses the forest to represent the wild fearful world of nature, which contrasts starkly with the pious orderly town of Salem. The threshold Goodman Brown finds himself perched upon in the opening lines of the story is not just between himself and his wife, Faith, but between the safety of the town and the haunted realm of the forest into which he ventures. Home is a safe harbor of faith, but the forest represents the home of evil and the devil himself, a place where "no church had ever been gathered or solitary Christian prayed."

When the devil tries to lure Goodman Brown deeper into the forest, Goodman Brown equates the forest with a break from his faithful legacy. Going into the woods means descending into the arms of the devil. He cries out "Too far! Too far!...My father never went into the woods on such an errand." Trees are symbols of sin, hiding spots for the devil and Indian "savages": "[t]here may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," he worries aloud. The devil might leap out "from behind a tree" at any moment, he fears. When Goodman Brown meets the man, who we later learn is the devil, the devil himself is seated on an "old tree."

Once he relents and journeys far in the "deep dusk" of the forest, Goodman Brown finds that nature and the supernatural begin to blend. The woods take on a life of their own: when he first sees the devil's snake-shaped staff, it's not just a piece of carved wood, but a terrifying serpent that "might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself." A bit later, when the devil explodes in laughter mocking Goodman Brown, the "snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy."

In the encounter with Goody Cloyse, a catechism teacher turned witch, Goodman Brown watches in horror as the devil throws her his serpent-shaped staff, causing it to "assume life" and vanish with her instantly into the darkness of the forest. When Goodman Brown cries out in desperation for Faith after hearing her voice in the witches' congregation, her pink ribbon magically falls from the sky. At this point, the woods are no longer just a gathering of scary trees, but a haunted sanctuary of sin. When Goodman Brown sees his church leaders in the forest en route to the witches' meeting, he asks in horror, "Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying so deep into the heathen wilderness?" Like the sinners within it, the

wilderness itself has become a heathen.

After the witches' ceremony, as Goodman Brown reels in terror at his loss of faith, the personification of the forest and nature deepens. Now entirety of nature mocks Goodman Brown: "The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds--the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians...as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn." Natural phenomena also bookend the story: it starts with the sun setting, and ends with the sun rising. Goodman Brown's experience is one of darkness literally--nearly the entire story takes place at night--and darkness figuratively, with Goodman Brown moving from the angelic light of his blissful newlywed life with Faith and her **pink ribbons**, to the dark hell of the forest and a rendezvous with the "prince of darkness" himself.

SAINTS VS. SINNERS

The Puritan religion dictated that everyone on earth was either an evil sinner doomed to burn in hell or a pure earthly saint destined for heaven. To avoid being perceived as anything but wholly good, Goodman Brown (who, like his wife, Faith, is also "aptly named") is obsessed with the idea of veiling his own sinfulness. Goodman Brown's paranoia as he navigates the forest, dodging behind trees in terror of being outed as a sinner, is a reflection of the police state-like environment of Puritan New England, in which merely being perceived as a sinner could mean banishment or death.

After the devil meets up with Goodman Brown in the forest and shares his tale of having befriended Goodman Brown's pious family members in the past, Goodman Brown responds that "the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England." When Goodman Brown and the devil come upon Goody Cloyse, the woman who taught Goodman Brown his catechism, he worries that "she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going." Goodman Brown soon learns that Goody Cloyse herself is a witch, making a sinner out of someone he had considered a perfectly pious saint. Goodman Brown's insight into the hollowness of religion happens when we realizes that people are not either purely good or purely evil. He sees in the witches' conversion ceremony a mix of the "pious and ungodly...saints and sinners" standing side-by-side with the devil.

The devil himself delivers the clearest condemnation of the fallacy that everyone is either a saint or a sinner. He shows Goodman Brown that everyone has something to hide, and that sin is just a common consequence of being human: "Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshipping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds…"

The trees and the snake-like **staff** evoke the story of Adam and Eve and the universality of sin. Goodman Brown initially believes the Puritans to be the elect, an exception in the world of sinners, but he becomes suspicious of even the most respected members of his community. Though his name is literally good man, and his wife's is faith, he eventually admits to his own moral imperfection and his wife's wavering faith. When he exclaims that "sin is but a name," he accepts that the world can't be divided into sinners vs. the good and faithful; sin is human and universal.

Goodman Brown loses his faith, but he still can't escape the idea that everyone is either a sinner or a saint; either he dreamed everything, and he is a sinner, or his experience was real, and everyone else he knows is a sinner. Because of this, after returning to Salem, Goodman Brown can't confront Faith about the night in the woods. To do so would be to admit that he went to the devil's conversion ceremony, or that he dreamed about it. Instead, he just "looks sternly and sadly into her face" when he reunites with her, and when he sees her praying each night, he "scowls and mutters to himself, and gazes sternly at his wife, and turns away." He stays in Salem, remains married to Faith, and goes to church every Sabbath day, even though he has lost his faith, because he can't risk the possibility that he is the sinner.

FAMILY AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

Young Goodman Brown makes reference to many generations of the Brown family, both Goodman Brown's ancestors and his descendants. Goodman Brown must choose whether to follow his ancestors' example, for better or for worse, or whether to make his own decisions and break away from family tradition. The tragedy of the story is that he is unable to choose: he loses faith in following family tradition, but he can't reject his family and start new traditions, either. The story begins very soon after Goodman Brown has begun a family of his own by marrying Faith. She tries to dissuade him from going into the woods by calling him "dear husband" and "dearest heart" and referring to his duty as a husband to stay at home. At first, his curiosity draws him to the devil, but the thought of his Puritan ancestors makes him want to turn back: "We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and I shall be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path."

Because his family legacy (as he understands it) and his individual desire are opposed, he stops and starts on the path, unable to move forward or to turn back. The devil takes on the guise of Goodman Brown's grandfather in order to influence Goodman Brown to become one of his followers. He tries to resist family tradition by thinking of his new family. He thinks of Faith and sits on the path, refusing to go on, but when he hears her voice among those of the devil-worshippers in the sky and sees her **pink ribbon** fall, he can no longer resist the devil.

Without family to guide him, he can't choose for himself. He "loses faith" in his family, and so he loses all sense of himself. At the devil's ceremony, Goodman looks at Faith and again remembers their family bond: "The *husband* cast one look at his pale *wife*, and she at him." He opposes the devil by telling her to resist: "'Faith!' cried the *husband*, 'look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one."

Part of the story's tragedy comes from the family's failure to communicate their legacy. When the devil tells Goodman that his family members were friends with the devil, Goodman says, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England"; though knowledge of his family history would have helped Goodman make his individual choices, he realizes that such honesty, even between family members, would have been dangerous. When Goodman arrives at the devil's conversion ceremony, he thinks he sees his mother telling him to resist and his father telling him to advance in the smoke, but because their messages are contradictory and unclear, he can't make a choice of his own: "Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought." When Goodman returns to Salem, he can't tell his wife, his children, or his grandchildren what he experienced, and so he dooms his descendants to the same trapped existence. He can't break away from his family, even though he no longer believes in following his family's legacy.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FAITH'S PINK RIBBONS

Hawthorne draws attention to Faith's pink ribbons in the story's first few paragraphs, when she tries to convince Goodman Brown to stay at home. Delicate (Faith lets "the wind play with the pink ribbons) and naively or childishly cheerful (Faith has a "melancholy air…in spite of her pink ribbons"), the pink ribbons symbolize faith and innocence. In the forest, Goodman Brown loses his innocent faith and becomes certain that Faith has been tempted by the devil when he sees her pink ribbon fluttering down from the cloudy sky and snagging in a tree. As Goodman Brown begins to fear that everyone he knows is a hypocritical sinner, the pink ribbons take on a new meaning: they now symbolize the mere superficial *appearance* of innocent faith. When Goodman Brown returns to Salem in the morning, he sees that Faith is still wearing her pink ribbons, but their meaning, which was so clear and favorable when he set out for the forest, is now muddied: do her untouched ribbons mean that Faith never left Salem, and Goodman Brown's experience in the forest was all a dream? or did Faith simply replace her lost ribbon, and are the ribbons further proof of her hypocritical ability to seem moral despite sinful actions?

THE DEVIL'S SERPENT STAFF

When Goodman Brown meets the man whom Hawthorne later reveals to be the devil, Hawthorne draws attention to the man's staff, which resembles a black serpent and almost seems to twist like a live snake. The staff strongly suggests the man's supernatural and sinful nature, and it connects "Young Goodman Brown" to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve's temptation by a serpent to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Goodman Brown and Faith, like Adam and Eve, are tempted to do what is forbidden in their community and lose their innocence for the sake of knowledge.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Hawthorne's Short Stories* published in 2011.

Young Goodman Brown Quotes

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "pr'y thee, put off your journey until sunrise, and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she's afeard of herself, sometimes. Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!"

Related Characters: Faith (speaker), Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Faith's plea for Goodman Brown to stay with her instead of leaving on his journey introduces the moral conflict of the story. Goodman Brown can listen to his wife Faith (who also stands in for his religious faith) and remain in Salem, or he can journey into the woods. It's significant that the story begins with Goodman Brown in a conflict with Faith about his journey; this lets readers know that there are moral stakes to his journey, in that he seems to be leaving his wife (and, metaphorically, his religious faith) in peril by going.

Faith's insistence that she cannot be home alone with her thoughts and dreams is also significant, as it is a statement

that reverberates throughout the story. For the Puritans, thoughts and dreams present real danger, and sin is not limited to a person's literal actions. Her statement might mean thatFaith, whom Goodman Brown assumes is innocent and pure, is capable of imagining or dreaming the same experience of sin that Goodman Brown finds in the forest. This interpretation is strengthened by Faith's presence in the woods later that night, and bythe narrator's speculation at the end of the story that Goodman Brown's experience in the woods might have been a nightmare or simply imagined. While this quotation seems rather innocuous at the beginning of the story, as Goodman Brown moves through the nightmarish woods it begins to take on a darkness that it did not originally possess, hinting that even Faith, the emblem of Puritan goodness, might herself be capable of sin.

"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. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), Faith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the story Goodman Brown becomes more and more suspicious of his Puritan community, and this quotation is the first inkling of the full-blown paranoia to come. Goodman Brown entertains for a moment the possibility that Faith could have learned from a sinful dream the purpose of his journey into the woods, but he then dismisses the thought. He states that it is impossible because it "would kill her to think it," implying that she is too pure and good to suspect such a thing.

In the context of the story as a whole, this quote points to both Goodman Brown's black-and-white worldview that one must be either wholly a saint or wholly a sinner, and also to his own delusions about himself. While he seems to believe that Faith can only be good and that even an inkling of sin would kill her, he simultaneously believes that he himself can dabble in sin on this journey without fundamentally changing himself. He believes that after one night of sin he can return to Salem and be good for the rest of his life, ultimately following Faith to heaven. This conflict between Goodman Brown's worldview and who he perceives himself to be is one that the story will disastrously resolve.

It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

As Goodman Brown passes further into the forest, the descriptions of his surroundings become frightening. He seems to think there is a significant shift between the safety of Salem and the danger of the woods, which points, once again, to his black-and-white Puritan worldview. While in the following paragraph he expresses his concern that there are "devilish Indians" or maybe the devil himself lurking in the trees, the "unseen multitudes" he fears turn out to be not outsiders, but rather people from his own community. In this sense, his sense of peculiar solitude in the woods (of perceiving himself to be the only sinner in a place where, in fact, sin is lurking but unseen) mirrors exactly his experience of living in Salem.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking, as I came through Boston; and that is full fifteen minutes agone."
"Faith kept me back awhile," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

Related Characters: The Devil, Goodman Brown (speaker), Faith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation serves to make clear, if it wasn't already, the double meaning of Faith's name. When Goodman Brown

tells the man that Faith kept him back awhile, he means not simply his wife but also his religious faith, which has caused him to doubt whether he should continue into the woods. Any instance in which Faith's name or person appears in "Young Goodman Brown" can be read with this double meaning.

The woods have been presented so far as frightening and dangerous, and the devil's appearance in the woods cements Goodman Brown's inkling that the woods are full of sin. As the story progresses, though, it becomes clear that evil is not limited to the woods. This is foreshadowed in this quotation when the devil indicates that he has just been in Boston, an orderly and pious city that is, like Salem, full of good Puritans. Just as the devil is not only found in the woods, Goodman Brown is destined to learn that evil and sin are not limited to the woods; wickedness pervades even the town of Salem, a place which Goodman Brown believed to be pure.

"But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent.

Related Characters: The Devil

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Though the man is plainly dressed, the presence of the snakelike staff reveals that the man is likely the devil. The fact that the devil is dressed in a way that would make him seem at home (and even respectable) in Goodman Brown's Puritan community serves to erode the plausibility of Goodman Brown's Puritan worldview in which those who appear to be upstanding must truly be good. This is another step towards Goodman Brown's realization that the possibility of sin is everywhere, and not just in places and people outside of Goodman Brown's community.

Additionally, the quote is foreboding in that it recalls the serpent in the Biblical Garden of Eden, which is what introduces sin into the world when it tempts Adam and Eve with knowledge. The devil can be seen, too, as tempting Goodman Brown with knowledge in an effort to introduce him to sin. Because the staff is made of wood, a natural material, that appears to be wriggling (a supernatural act associated with evil), this quotation begins the story's conflation of evil with nature, which points to the complexity Hawthorne wants us to see in both the "forest" and in human nature, which is capable of both goodness and sin.

"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."

Related Characters: The Devil (speaker), Goodman Brown's Father, Goodman's Grandfather

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the devil is successfully eroding all of Goodman Brown's scruples about continuing down the path to sin. A major obstacle to him accepting sin is his family lineage, which he believes to be made entirely of good Salem Puritans. The devil, by informing Goodman Brown of his own relationship with Goodman Brown's family and ancestors, manipulates Goodman Brown's weak sense of morality, which rests on considering how he would be seen by his family and community. Note that this tactic would never work if Goodman Brown's sense of morality involved personally evaluating individual situations for himself.

The devil's examples of his actions also show how Hawthorne depicts evil as something very human and pervasive—not necessarily something supernatural or black-and-white, as the Puritans want to believe. Religious persecution, war, and murder are often justified by religion, but that doesn't make them any less evil or "devilish."

"I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil,

Goodman Brown's Mother, Goodman Brown's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

Goodman Brown here reveals a key problem with the repressive nature of Puritanism. Because someone's morality is understood in Puritan society as being tied to their outward appearance of goodness and purity, discussion of a person's failings or moral ambiguity is strictly taboo. Perhaps Goodman Brown would have been better able to understand his own sinful impulses if his family had discussed their experiences with him, but he has never heard these matters spoken of, and it distresses him. It only distresses him for a moment, though, since he immediately recognizes that the smallest rumor of the family's wickedness could have led to ostracism from their community, so it wouldn't have been worth the risk of bringing up the subject at all. This silencing of discussion in Puritan society directly leads to Goodman Brown's ineptitude at handling the situation in the woods, and at the end of the quotation we see Goodman Brown return to his self-delusion about the purity of his family ("[we] abide no such wickedness"), the kind of black-and-white logic that prevents him from coming to a nuanced understanding of sin.

"I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil, Goody Cloyse

Related Themes:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation, again, shows the Puritan obsession with outward appearances. Goodman Brown is walking through the woods with the devil, but when he sees a woman from his community whom he believes to be a good Christian, he says he will take a different path so she does not see him consorting with a stranger. In other words, what scares him most about this encounter is not his actual conversation with the devil, but the possibility of a woman from his community noticing that he has sinned. He seems less concerned that being with the devil could compromise his soul or his ability to go to heaven; instead, he sees his goodness as mostly the *appearance* of goodness in the eyes of his community. Further complicating this deception is that the woman, too, is revealed to be a sinner who lives in the community with a respectable appearance.

"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?"

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil, Faith, Goody Cloyse

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the story, Faith's presumed purity and morality are the only things keeping Goodman Brown from giving himself over to the devil. Despite all the hypocrisy that the devil has revealed (Goodman Brown's family's association with the devil, the community's secret sins, and even his own ability to resist sin), Goodman Brown is still clinging to the last scraps of his faith. It is notable here that Goodman Brown is speaking of "quitting" Faith his wife, rather than faith his religion. In this moment of trying to resist the devil, Goodman Brown is appealing to another person, rather than to his God or his own internal moral convictions. The Puritan tendency to locate faith in the seeming goodness of other people rather than in knowing the self to be virtuous is in evidence here.

Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown, Deacon Gookin, The minister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

Here Goodman Brown is hypocritically delighting in his belated and uncertain commitment to resist sin in the name of Faith. Again, he conceals himself from the travelers in the woods because Puritanism's focus on the outward appearance of goodness has led him to believe that as long as nobody from his community *sees* him in the woods, he will be able to return home unchanged and still be respected and bound for heaven. Any nuanced sense of morality would leave him much more troubled by the fact that, though unseen by others, he has already sinned by walking through the forest with the devil. It is also interesting to note here that he is hiding behind a *tree* in the forest to be unseen by others. At the beginning of the story, Goodman Brown worried about the evils lurking in the trees, which seems to foreshadow this moment in which he himself has become the unseen evil in the forest, despite his delusional self-satisfaction in this moment.

"My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied moment. "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil, Faith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

Once Goodman Brown believes that Faith has gone to the devil, he no longer has the strength to resist wickedness, and he literally (though this is a play on words) loses his faith. This points to the fact that Goodman Brown's faith is something that depends on the behavior of others, rather than something that comes from within himself. This also points to the extremism of his ideology: that after seeing that several members of his community have sinned, he believes that "there is no good on earth." Outside of Puritanism, this logic would be absurd, but the black-and-white, good vs. evil logic of Puritanism drives him to a despairing conclusion about the nature of the world. Indeed, he is driven to so much despair that he declares that "sin is but a name." By this he implies that to call something sinful is meaningless, since sin is the natural condition of the world.

The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the story, Hawthorne has used imagery of the forest, trees, darkness, and wilderness to symbolize the presence (and danger) of sin. Here, in saying that "the road grew wilder" and then describing the road vanishing altogether, Hawthorne is using imagery to allude to Goodman Brown's despairing abandonment of the morality that he followed in Salem. The presence of the path represented a clear road back to Salem, and also a civilizing influence on the dark and evil woods. In this passage, the reader is led to understand that Goodman Brown has sinned irreversibly. The path is gone, and he can not now trace it back to the town and the morality he once espoused.

This passage can also be read as a dark comment on human nature. For the first time Goodman Brown is in the literal wilderness, with no path and no hint of the goodness of Salem. In this moment, he is described as being guided by an instinct towards evil. Since Goodman Brown is now fully in nature and suddenly finds his own nature taken over by an instinct towards evil, this can be seen as Hawthorne implying that humans are at least all prone to evil, if not naturally evil altogether.

"Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your deviltry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

Goodman Brown has not only accepted now that he is a sinner, but he seems to have embraced it, too. In this quotation, he is speaking to the wind, which Hawthorne described as having laughed at him. As Hawthorne uses

natural elements to imply moral dangers, Goodman Brown's taunting of the wind indicates that he is no longer threatened by the presence of sin. In fact, he summons sin ("Come witch, come wizard..."), and includes himself in the list of sinful entities. Thus, even though Goodman Brown has relinquished his commitment to Puritan morality, he is still operating within the Puritan worldview in which, now that he has sinned, he must be just as bad as "the devil himself." The Puritan worldview allows for no middle ground here, which is why Goodman Brown's taunt that the devil should fear Goodman Brown as Goodman Brown fears the devil seems somewhat extreme.

> The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man.

Related Characters: The Devil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

In this somewhat opaque sentence, Hawthorne describes Goodman Brown's transformation while also commenting on the nature of evil itself.Goodman Brown feels that he has become one of the wicked things that he once feared and despised. Hawthorne's wording, though, implies that Goodman Brown is, in some sense, also possessed by something outside of himself. It seems from this sentence that he is enacting a wickedness that he knows from Puritanism, but that is not "in its own shape," or is not natural to him. This, Hawthorne tells us, is much more terrible than something wicked acting in its own nature.

At the same time, Hawthorne also seems to be making a point about the humanity of evil. In Goodman Brown's Puritan worldview, he has been trained to see evil as something external and supernatural, existing as wicked magic or acts of the devil himself. Here Goodman Brown seems possessed and entirely given over to his stereotype of evil, but Hawthorne also suggests that the most terrible kinds of evil appear "in the breast of man"—through natural human wickedness. This connects to the devil's earlier claim that he had helped Goodman Brown's ancestors to beat an innocent woman or to burn an Indian village. These are acts that have nothing supernatural or religious about them, but they are still indisputably evil.

> As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment Goodman Brown is consumed with the vision of his religious community as evil. He has heard a hymn he knows from church sung in the forest until it dissolves into sounds of wilderness, he sees a rock that resembles a pulpit, and he sees the townspeople gathered around the devil as though they were a congregation. This is the mirror image of Puritanism, the same elements but with a different purpose, and it serves to further degrade the possibility of the purity of Puritanism.

Hawthorne's assertion that the "heart of the solitary woods" is made of devil worshippers also makes a statement about the inherent evil of nature, which cannot, for Hawthorne, be separated from human nature and the nature of communities. As the distinction between Salem and the woods erodes, the presence of sinners at the heart of the woods begins to reflect on the world at large, rather than only on the strange and frightening wilderness.

> But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

This passage reminds readers that all hope is not yet lost for Goodman Brown—he has not yet physically glimpsed Faith in the clearing, and thus he is still able, against all odds, to be surprised that the "good" people in his community are consorting with those of ill repute. Clearly, by this point in the story, Hawthorne has let us know that reputation and outward appearance have little to do with a person's

capacity for sin, but Goodman Brown, in this moment maintaining hope that Faith is still pure, makes a naive observation that those of strong faith are not revolted by the "true" sinners. This shows that he is still beholden to the Puritan view that someone is either wholly good or wholly bad, and that those qualities align with a person's appearance or reputation.

He could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother?

Related Characters: Goodman Brown's Mother, Goodman Brown's Father, Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

A consistent issue with Goodman Brown's faith (and, by proxy, Puritan faith in general) has been that his morals are given to him by those in his family and community, and thus morality seems to mean little more to him than preserving his reputation or family tradition. When Goodman Brown is at a pivotal moment in the ritual in the woods, figures that appear to be his parents give him conflicting instructions about what to do. Because of this, he is unable to make a choice at all. Goodman Brown no longer believes his family to be good and pure, but he is not able to repudiate them and make his own choice either, which means he is condemned to repeat their same mistakes and carry on the legacy of hypocritical Puritanism in his own family.

"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have reverenced from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshipping assembly."

Related Characters: The Devil (speaker), Faith, Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

This is a quite literal statement of the hypocrisy of Puritanism. The devil tells the congregated townspeople that those in the community who were considered most pure, those who were considered to be the moral examples of the town, have, in fact, been living lives of sin. This is intended to upend Goodman Brown's faith and worldview, as the devil understands that Goodman Brown's faith has not given him strong personal moral convictions. Instead, his faith is based on comparing himself to the upright appearances of people in his community and maintaining the appearance of being good himself. Because this faith exists only relative to others, the devil can easily challenge it by revealing to Goodman Brown (or by appearing to reveal to him) that his community is full of hypocrites and sinners.

By the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

Related Characters: Faith, Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

This ushers in the climax of the story in which Goodman Brown's worst fear, that Faith is impure, is realized. Until this moment he has not physically glimpsed her, and could thus hold out hope that Puritan ideals were still pure in at least one person he respects. Because his faith is so tied to his illusions about his pure community (rather than self-knowledge of goodness and a personal conviction to be good) this revelation about Faith marks the foreclosing of the last possibility for Goodman Brown to maintain idealism about Puritanism. This cements for him the notion that family and community are not to be trusted.

It is also significant that the red light in which he glimpses Faith and the other members of his community is described as a "blaze of hell-kindled torches." This is another instance of Hawthorne's blending the natural with the supernatural and with evil. The fact that Goodman Brown has seen Faith literally in the light of hell raises questions about what he has actually seen. Is his Puritanism causing him to see her sin in "the worst light" rather than having a nuanced

understanding of the complexity of her character and morality? Or has he been tricked by the supernatural into seeing something that doesn't exist? This statement is ambiguous, but it certainly gives readers reason to be suspicious of what Goodman Brown believes he is seeing.

> "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race."

Related Characters: The Devil (speaker), Faith, Goodman Brown

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the devil plays to the black-and-white distinctions made between good and evil people in Puritanism. While it might be possible to attend such a gathering and understand that the people there have sinned but are not necessarily wholly evil, Goodman Brown and the devil subscribe to a much more extreme division of people, as is evident here. Since Goodman Brown has glimpsed his young wife consorting with the devil, he is susceptible to the devil's pronouncement that "evil is the nature of mankind," an extreme statement by any logic except that of Puritanism.

This passage also speaks to the way that Puritanism externalizes faith, as believers derive their own faith from the appearance of virtue in those around them. The devil refers to the community having depended on "one another's hearts" in order to "hope that virtue were not all a dream." In this way, the devil's words suggest that if the Puritans had a more internalized sense of morality and virtue they would be able to look inside themselves and understand goodness, which would make them able to resist the cynicism inspired by seeing their community sin. Of course, this kind of internalized faith is unlikely by Puritan logic, since everyone is tempted by sin, and the strict Puritan division between wholly good and wholly bad means that if virtue came from within then everyone would know that they were not wholly virtuous. This whole story functions as a critique of the logical end of such a pattern of belief.

> "Faith! Faith!" cried the husband, "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one."

Related Characters: Goodman Brown (speaker), The Devil, Faith

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

While Goodman Brown has been unable to resist the devil up to this point, seeing his cherished Faith by the side of the devil gives him the strength to attempt to resist in the form of begging her not to give herself to the devil. In the context of the story, this is a tragic moment in which he has stood up to sin too late. Even though he ultimately resists the devil, which leaves him alone in the forest and subsequently lonely for the rest of his life, he has already been infected by the cynicism and misery of evil. He has, even though he seems to be standing up for it, already lost his faith. It is important to note that Hawthorne writes "cried the husband" rather than "said Goodman Brown." This seems to imply that Goodman Brown may not be standing up for his own moral beliefs, which are, by this point, dashed, but rather he seems to be standing up for the sanctity of family. He is speaking not as an individual, but as an embodiment of the role of the husband protecting his wife.

Goodman Brown continues to make similar hollow gestures throughout the remainder of the story. He is described as living out his days following Puritan tradition without his heart in it; he still goes to church and raises a Puritan family, but he himself does not believe, and being around the Puritans whom he knows (or believes) to be hypocritical means that the religious gestures torment him.

> Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown, Faith

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

Goodman Brown has now fled the forest and returned to the orderly and pious town of Salem, but he cannot forget what he saw, and he can no longer separate in his mind the goodness of Salem from the evil of the woods. While he seems to be returning to Faith (and to his religious faith), he cannot embrace either after what he has seen.

That Faith is at home unperturbed with her pink ribbons intact (Goodman Brown saw them fall in the woods) makes us question whether or not Goodman Brown truly saw what he believed he saw. He and Faith met each other's eyes in the woods, but Faith seems either undisturbed by or unaware of this meeting. As Goodman Brown cannot speak with her about his experience (as his family did not speak with him about theirs), he is left wordlessly suspecting her. Her innocence and joy could mean either that she is truly a sinner who is unbothered by having witnessed her husband in the woods, or Goodman Brown has dreamed/imagined the whole encounter, and Faith is not such a wicked sinner. Goodman Brown decides to occupy the space in between, remaining with Faith in name, but feeling his family and his faith to be ultimately empty.

> Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting? Be it so if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

This is the logic of puritanism brought to its terrible conclusion. Because of Puritanism's obsession with outward appearances, Goodman Brown has been disillusioned with himself and with his community. While he does not know whether he dreamed or literally experienced the events in the woods, he can never confirm or repudiate the memory because that would be akin to an admission that he is not as good as he appears. Ironically, though he never brings up his experience in order to avoid ostracism by his community, his secret memory of his experience makes him distant from his family and community. He is consumed by cynicism since, regardless of whether or not the encounter was real, he knows himself to be living as a hypocrite. Because of the extremism of Puritanism, it does not matter whether Goodman Brown literally sinned or only dreamed that he sinned—each scenario has the same meaning and the same effect on him. As readers, we are to understand that this is an unnecessary tragedy.

> 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.

Related Characters: Goodman Brown, Faith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

This is an ominous end to a dark story in that Goodman Brown has never recovered from his experience, and, furthermore, he has not broken with the hypocritical and damaging Puritan tradition that led him to his doom. This implies that his children and grandchildren will have similar experiences and struggles. The ending, in which we see a preview of generations of struggle, cements Hawthorne's dark view of the endless and damaging logic of Puritanism, in which people are not able to be honest with themselves or with each other about their temptations and sins, and they are thus not able to find joy and morality within their own hearts.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN

At sunset in the town of Salem, Massachusetts, a man named Goodman Brown has just stepped over the threshold of the front door of his house. On his way out, he leans his head back inside to kiss his wife goodbye as she, "aptly" named Faith, leans out toward the street to embrace him. Faith is wearing a cap adorned with **pink ribbons** that flutter in the wind.

Hawthorne creates a stark contrast between the seemingly perfect young newlyweds and their sinister setting, Salem at nightfall. Their names, "Faith" and "Goodman," promise the characters' piety and morality, and Faith's ribbons seem child-like and innocent. But the setting of the story is important—Salem is the Puritan town famous for its murderous and hypocritical "Witch Trials"—suggesting that either sin or a problematic terror of sin lie beneath the beautiful exterior.

Faith pleads with Goodman Brown not to leave her alone all night and instead to set out on his journey at sunrise. She's afraid of the bad dreams she'll have if he makes her spend the night alone. Goodman Brown replies, somewhat mysteriously, that his journey must take place between sunrise and sunset, and begs Faith not to doubt his intentions. Faith relents and gives Goodman Brown her blessing, and he heads out in the street. He looks back one last time and sees Faith watching him sadly despite the **pink ribbons** on her cap.

The threshold of the house symbolizes a turning point, a moment in which Goodman Brown can choose to listen to Faith and stay at home as a good husband, or follow his curiosity and go off alone into the night. Faith's fear of bad dreams suggest a few possibilities: that there may be something evil and supernatural about Brown's mysterious nighttime journey; that she may simply fear being lonely without her husband at home; or that she worries about what she *might do without her husband around.*

Now walking along on his way, Goodman Brown feels a crushing sense of guilt over leaving Faith, not just because she begged him to stay and comfort her, but because it looked as though, through some dream, she might have figured out what he was intending to do on that night. He dismisses the thought, though, convinced that no one as pure and innocent as Faith could ever tolerate even thinking about such a thing.

Guilt and paranoia are key emotions in the story. Goodman Brown feels crushing guilt not only because he is abandoning Faith but also because he fears that Faith knows about the sinful purpose of his journey. He fears being discovered to be a sinner and he is certain that Faith is saint-like, and so it doesn't occur to him that Faith might be begging him to stay at home to keep them both from going into the forest that night and sinning.

Goodman Brown resolves, after this one night, to stand by Faith after tonight and someday "follow her to heaven." This promise to himself comforts him, and so he feels justified in picking up his pace toward his "evil purpose."

Even though Goodman Brown just lied to his wife and admits to himself that his journey is evil, he continues to think of himself as one of the Elect, the people who the Puritans believe are predestined by God to go to heaven. He believes that his wife's saintliness will make him saintly, too. He seems to think he can just dip a toe into sin and then draw back, no harm done.

Goodman Brown's confidence doesn't last long, however. A wave of dread and fear soon overwhelms him as he sets out alone down a dark path through a forest that he imagines might be haunted by "devilish" Indians or other frightening beings—including even the devil himself—hiding behind every tree. Even so, he walks on until he encounters a mysterious man at a bend in the road. The man casually makes reference to having been in Boston fifteen minutes before. When the man asks why Goodman Brown arrived late, Goodman Brown replies, his voice now trembling slightly with fear at the sudden appearance of the man (even though such a meeting wasn't entirely unexpected), that "Faith kept me back awhile."

The forest for Puritans marked both a place of fear and a place of possibility. It contained threat ("heathen" Indians and a world out of the control of Puritan society, but also an escape from the pressures of that society and its members all watching each other for sin. For Brown, who is walking into the forest expressly out of a sinful curiosity, the forest seems to hide sin everywhere. The forest might also then be seen as reflecting his own mind, full of its own confusions and terrors.The mysterious man hints at supernatural powers by mentioning that he was in Boston just a few minutes before, an impossible feat. Hawthorne's use of the double meaning of Faith's name makes the story into a parable.

As the two of them walk through the deep forest in the darkening dusk, the narrator describes the man as ordinary and simply dressed, and considerably older than Goodman Brown. He looks enough like Goodman Brown that the two could be mistaken for father and son. Despite their similar appearance, the older man seems more worldly and at ease than Goodman Brown, as if he could sit comfortably at the dinner table of a governor or in the court of a King. The man's one unforgettable feature is the large snake-shaped **staff** he carries, which in the shadowy light of the forest seems to be alive and slithering.

Goodman Brown feared that he would see a "devilish Indian," but instead the devil (as the man's snake-shaped staff suggests him to be) takes the form of a man who closely resembles Goodman Brown, and who wouldn't look out of place in "civilized" Salem or Boston. The point is clear: the devil is just at home among the Puritans as he is among the "heathen" Indians. The snake staff recalls the Biblical story of Adam and Eve's loss of innocence, in which a devilish snake tempts Eve into sin. And one might argue here that the story of Goodman Brown is one of gaining knowledge of good and evil, of learning that good and evil are not always visible simply by their appearance and so can lurk anywhere. At the end of the story, Goodman Brown must try to live in the world with this new knowledge.

Sensing that Goodman Brown is tiring, the man offers him his **staff** to help pick up the pace. Goodman Brown refuses and begins to make his case for turning back toward home: he had agreed to meet up with the man in the forest tonight, nothing more, and he kept his word. Saying he has "scruples" concerning the business that the man wants to discuss, he declines to carry the man's serpent staff. The man suggests that they start walking, and that he will try to convince Goodman Brown while they walk. Goodman Brown points out that nobody in his family, all good Christians, had ever agreed to meet up with a mysterious man in the woods at night, and he has no intentions of being the first.

Goodman Brown must choose whether to continue onward or turn back, the same choice he had to make at the threshold of his house. Once again, his family connections seem to urge him to turn back and stay in town; this time, instead of Faith asking him to stay in town, he thinks of the many generations of upright Puritans that came before him who would have wanted him to turn back. He believes that all his relatives have been saintly, and the idea of being the first sinner horrifies him. This is important, because it means that he measures his own goodness against the goodness of his community, not against an absolute sense of right and wrong; he wants to do good in order to fit into his community, not in order to be moral or devout. Put another way, Goodman Brown's morals are hollow, held up from without rather than within. Further, this problematic framework for moral behavior emerges from the logic of Puritanism: the Puritans believed that the Elect were predestined by God to instinctively be moral and go to heaven, and so doing good became a tool for proving that a person was part of the Elect and a rightful member of the Puritan community rather than a legitimate expression of one's internal moral compass.

The man shocks Goodman Brown by replying that he was good friends with Goodman Brown's father, grandfather, and other Puritans and Puritan leaders, and has enjoyed acts of cruelty and sacrilege with them all. He mentions helping Goodman Brown's grandfather, a constable, whip a Quaker woman through the streets of Salem, and he recalls helping Goodman Brown's father burn down an Indian village during King Phillip's War. Goodman Brown wonders why his father and grandfather never told him about their relationship with the man, but he immediately changes his mind and realizes that if there had been any bad rumors about them, they would have been kicked out of New England, since the community is so holy.

The man continues to reveal the hypocrisy of Puritanism, claiming that Goodman Brown's ancestors hid their evil behavior behind their semblance of piety. Goodman Brown seems most shocked not that his father and grandfather were sinners, but that they didn't trust him enough to tell him the truth, and that the family bond between them was therefore less strong than Goodman Brown believed. However, he understands that in Salem, it is even more important to seem *saintly than it is to* be *saintly, and that the community would have responded to rumors of sin with ostracism, not mercy. Put another way, Goodman Brown is recognizing how Puritanism's total refusal to accept any sin makes it essential to hide one's own sins. At this point, though, Goodman Brown still believes that the community at large is so anti-sin because it is holy.*

The man suggests that New England isn't as holy as it claims, and describes drinking communion wine with deacons, scheming with the courts, and helping the governor. Goodman Brown is amazed, but argues that he has nothing to do with such high-up people, and that he wouldn't be able to face his minister at church if he continued onward. The man bursts into violent laughter, and his **staff** seems to wiggle along. Finally, Goodman Brown argues that he can't go with the man because it would break Faith's heart. The man agrees that he wouldn't want Faith to come to any harm, and tells Goodman Brown to go ahead and leave the forest.

After revealing all of Goodman Brown's family as sinners, the man now reveals all Puritan leaders as sinners as well, meaning those men were only pretending to be saintly. Yet Goodman continues to believe that even if his own family and the unapproachable Puritan leaders might be sinners, at least the people and immediate leaders of his own community are good. When the man laughs at this, too, Goodman continues to believe that Faith, at least, is saintly and honest. Even though he is losing faith in his broader community, and even though he is realizing that he is a human, not a saint, he thinks it's possible for someone like Faith to be perfectly good.

As the man speaks, someone comes into sight on the path ahead: Goody Cloyse, a pious old woman who taught Goodman Brown his catechism. She is moving very quickly for such an old woman, and mumbling something as she walks, perhaps a prayer. Goodman Brown is surprised to see her in the woods so late at night. To avoid being seen and questioned about his journey with the man, he hides in the woods. The man continues on the path alone.

Goodman Brown is as hypocritical as his father and grandfather; he wants to be thought *of as good, and so he steps into the forest to avoid being seen by Goody Cloyse. His fear of the forest, and of whatever supernatural beings it might hide, is not as strong as his fear of being thought a sinner. Of course, one can also recognize that Good Cloyse also only lets down her appearance of goodness when she is in the forest; after all, Goodman Brown thought her unimpeachably good for all these years.*

To Goodman Brown's surprise and horror, Goody Cloyse greets the man as the devil and then addresses him as "my worship." She observes that the devil taken on the appearance of Goodman Brown's grandfather, and calls young Goodman Brown a "silly fellow." She then complains that her broomstick was stolen by "that unhanged witch, Goody Cory" while Goody Cloyse had on a flying ointment made from the fat of a baby. She asks for the devil's arm, but instead he gives her his snake **staff**. When Goodman Brown looks again, Goody Cloyse and the staff are gone

Once again, Goodman Brown learns that someone who he looked up to is actually a hypocritical sinner: like Goodman's father and grandfather, Goody Cloyse is far less saintly than she pretends to be. As his teacher and his old family friend, Goody Cloyse's closeness to the devil increases the pressure for Goodman to "follow the herd" and worship the devil. As a witch, she has a strong relationship with nature and the supernatural; like Goodman Brown, she goes into the forest to find the devil, but unlike Goodman Brown, she walks through the forest unafraid, uses plants in her flying ointment, and uses the devil's serpent staff to make herself disappear.

Goodman Brown and the devil walk on together. The narrator says that the devil argues very persuasively for continuing onward, and urges Goodman Brown to hurry. The devil plucks a maple branch and strips its twigs and buds to make it into a walking stick, though the stick withers and dries out in the devil's hands. They reach a gloomy hollow, where Goodman Brown sits on a stump of a tree and refuses to continue, saying that Goody Cloyse's hypocritical example can't make him abandon his Faith. Unworried, the devil leaves Goodman Brown the maple staff to use if he decides to continue on his own. Goodman Brown sits for a moment, happy not to have to return to town and face the minister and Deacon Gookin with a guilty conscience, and happy to be able to sleep well when he gets home.

Even though the devil is exposing the Puritans' hypocrisy, Goodman Brown continues to believe that his wife is saintlike. Again, the symbolic name Faith lets Hawthorne simultaneously describe Goodman Brown's sense of responsibility to his religion and to his wife. Goodman Brown's stop-and-start journey illustrates his ambivalence toward sin and the devil: he resists the devil's glib arguments, and he rejects Goody Cloyse's example. Yet note once again that even as he resists the devil the relief he feels is a relief of having avoided the guilt of facing his saintly community, as opposed to a relief of having actually been saintly himself.

Just then, Goodman Brown hears horsemen approaching. He feels guilty for being in the forest and so hides behind the trees again. Even though it's too dark to see the riders, he recognizes them by their voices as the minister and Deacon Gookin, riding along as if they were going to a church meeting. The deacon expresses excitement for a meeting that night, and says that there will be people there from all over New England, as well as some Indians who know a lot about deviltry and a young woman who will be inducted. Goodman Brown's horror makes him feel weak and ill, and he leans on a tree for support. He begins to doubt if there is a heaven, but he looks up at the starry sky and vows that he will still resist the devil. He lifts his hands to pray.

Once again, Goodman Brown's eagerness not to be caught in the woods reveals his hypocritical desire to appear *saintly, though he knows his journey is sinful. The revelation that the minister and Deacon Gookin are also hypocrites horrifies him: even more than Goody Cloyse and the past generations of Browns, the minister and deacon are supposed to exemplify piousness and lead the Puritan community (and not feeling guilt when he saw them was a motivating factor in his motivation to resist the devil). It doesn't occur to Goodman Brown that they might have his same human flaws. Though the surrounding nature has gotten darker and more ominous as Goodman Brown walked deeper into the woods, his desperation makes him turn to nature: he leans against a tree, and looks to the stars for a reminder of heaven, as if the stars could guide him now that the minister and deacon no longer can.*

A mysterious dark cloud races across the sky above him, hiding the stars, and from it he hears a murmur of voices. He recognizes the voices of many of the people of Salem, both the holy and the unholy ones, and he recognizes his wife Faith's sorrowful, pleading voice. The voices go away, then come back. The other voices seem to be encouraging Faith onward. Goodman Brown cries out her name three times and hears a scream in reply, followed by distant laughter, before her **pink ribbon** drifts down from the sky and catches on a tree branch. Goodman Brown snatches the ribbon.

The supernatural obscures nature as doubt and despair eclipse Goodman Brown's faith in his wife. Again, Hawthorne plays with the double meaning of Faith's name: Goodman Brown's three outcries can be read as pleas to his wife or as appeals to both his and her religious belief. The falling ribbon, which initially symbolized Faith's innocence, now also signify Goodman Brown's lost faith and innocence.

Crazed with despair, losing all hope that there is good on earth, Goodman Brown exclaims, "My Faith is gone!" He calls for the devil and then grasps the devil's maple staff and charges onward into the dark and the wilderness. The narrator describes Goodman Brown as a terrifying, crazed figure, and though the forest is full of terrifying sounds, Goodman Brown is the scariest thing in the forest, laughing and swearing and shouting as he runs. Suddenly he sees a red light and hears a familiar hymn sung with sinful lyrics by wild voices. He finds himself near a clearing in which a rock serves as a pulpit and four blazing pine trees illuminate a vast congregation of supposedly pious townspeople, dissolute criminals, and Indian priests. He sees Deacon Gookin and the minister, but he doesn't see Faith; he begins to feel hope.

Stripped of his innocent "faith" in his wife, Goodman Brown becomes almost inhuman, more terrifying than his worst fears of nature and the supernatural. The Puritans believed that humanity could be divided into the saints and the sinners, and so, having lost his "Faith" and his last reason to strive for saintliness, he lets himself fully become a sinner, blaspheming and calling for the devil. The devil's congregation is a travesty of a church, as if mocking the hypocrisy of the Puritans—who have been revealed to look saintly on the outside but be sinners within—but the hypocrisy of his community no longer shocks Brown or makes him feel ill: he has lost his faith and accepts that all humans are sinners. But he does not yet enter the clearing and join the throng, and the possibility that Faith might not be there keeps him from declaring himself a sinner.

The blasphemous hymn ends with a sound like roaring wind and howling beasts, the pine trees burn brighter, and a figure appears at the pulpit. The narrator notes that the figure resembles some of the most respected ministers of New England's churches. A voice calls for the converts to come forward. Goodman Brown steps out of the forest. In the smoke he sees the shape of his dead father beckoning him forward and the shape of his dead mother warning him back, but he doesn't have control over himself and he can't stop. Deacon Gookin leads him and Goody Cloyse leads a veiled woman to the rock, where the figure welcomes them.

As the devil's congregation begins, the usual order of things falls apart: nature melds with the supernatural, people considered to be saints in Puritan society stand with sinners, and humans harmonize with beasts. The devil's resemblance to a minister and the ritual's similarity to a church ceremony draw attention to the hypocrisy of self-righteous Puritan piousness. The appearance of Goodman Brown's parents' ghosts emphasizes his need for familial guidance, but their contradictory advice leaves him as helpless as before they appeared.

The figure tells them to look at the congregation, and describes the hypocritical piety of all the people assembled there, whom Goodman Brown and the veiled woman have looked up to. The figure promises to tell them all the dark secrets of their town: how church elders have seduced young girls, how young wives have poisoned their husbands, how young men have killed their fathers to inherit their wealth, and how young women have killed their babies. The figure describes the whole world as "one stain of guilt," and promises that they will be able to make other people give in to the strong impulse to sin.

The devil's speech and the sight of the congregation seem to further prove the hypocrisy of the Puritans and the folly of innocence and faith. The devil encourages Goodman Brown to doubt the most profound and sacred relationships, and especially family relationships: husband and wife, father and son, mother and child. The devil denies that humanity is divided into sinners and saints; instead, he claims that all humans are naturally sinners, and that the choice to sin is just a matter of giving in to nature.

The figure then tells them to look at each other. Goodman Brown recognizes the woman beside him as Faith. The narrator describes them as husband and wife trembling before the altar. All the assembled worshippers repeat the figure's cry of welcome. The figure prepares to baptize Goodman Brown and Faith with a pool of something red in the hollow at the top of the stone altar—blood, or flame, or water reddened by the light—but before he can touch either of them, Goodman Brown cries out and warns Faith to resist. Goodman Brown finds himself suddenly alone in the forest, not knowing what happened to Faith. The trees are damp with dew instead of on fire.

After all his indecision on the halting journey, Goodman Brown must make a final decision whether to lose his faith and innocence, give into his community and family's hypocritical example, and become a sinner. Though Goodman Brown can't resist the devil on his own, the presence of his young wife gives him the moral strength to resist through her. His last-minute rebellion against the devil and his community leaves him suddenly alone, foreshadowing the distance he will feel between himself and his community and family for the rest of his life.

Goodman Brown staggers back to Salem the next morning, staring all around him like a crazy person. He sees the minister taking a walk by the graveyard before breakfast. But when the minister tries to bless him, Goodman Brown shrinks away. Through an open window, he sees Deacon Gookin in his home, praying, and Goodman Brown wonders what god he's praying to. He sees Goody Cloyse in her doorway, teaching a girl the catechism, and Goodman Brown snatches the girl away. Finally, he sees Faith, still wearing her **pink ribbons**. She runs up to him joyfully and almost kisses him on the street, but he can't respond to her loving greeting. Instead he stares at her sternly, then walks pass without saying anything.

Though Goodman Brown resisted the devil and avoided being baptized as a sinner, he lost his faith and his innocent trust in his Puritan community. Ironically, he cannot relieve his new mistrust of Faith and the other Puritans by questioning or accusing them, because to do so would be to admit to having seen them in the forest and to his own temptation by the devil: instead, he shrinks away from the deacon and stares wordlessly at Faith. Even though he has lost all faith in Puritanism, the hypocrisy of Puritanism continues to dictate his actions. Hawthorne draws attention to Faith's pristine pink ribbons to begin to cast slight doubt on Goodman Brown's supernatural experience in the forest.

The narrator wonders whether Goodman Brown's night in the forest could have all been a dream, but says that even if it wasn't real, it ruined Goodman Brown's life. He became afraid and distrustful of everyone around him. Though Goodman Brown continued to go to church and listen to the minister, he would turn pale and feared that the church, the sinful minister, and his listening parish would all be destroyed. He often woke up at midnight and shrank from Faith beside him in bed, and when his family prayed together at morning or at night, he scowled and muttered to himself. Though he lived a long life and died a father and grandfather, he died unhappy and desperate, with no inscription on his tombstone.

The narrator's question haunts Goodman Brown, and his doubt creates a permanent emotional barrier between him and all other people. Neither the narrator nor Goodman Brown can ever know whether the other Puritans are all actually devil worshippers, whether something sinful in his own psyche made him imagine his experience in the forest, or whether his adventure in the forest was nothing more than a dream, because in order to question Faith and the other members of the community about it, Goodman Brown would have to admit to being tempted by the devil, even if only in his mind. He cannot even speak honestly to his wife and future children, and he fails to truthfully guide his children just as his father and grandfather (might have) failed him. His fear of seeming a sinner makes him a hypocrite for the rest of his life. At the beginning of the story Goodman Brown thought that he could go into the forest and sin a little out of curiosity, and then come back home and continue on with his life. But whether or not what happened in the forest was real or a dream, what it revealed to Brown was that sin could be everywhere and that the logic of Puritanism—in which the appearance of even the slightest sin is dreadfully punished—ensures that all sin gets hidden and makes it impossible to every figure out whether anyone else is a sinner. And so he lives and dies faithless and isolated by his doubts.

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