

# The transformation of goodman brown in young goodman brown

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



In Young Goodman Brown, Hawthorne creates the characters of Goodman Brown's wife, Faith, and the elderly man whom he meets in the woods to represent his faith, and the Devil respectively. Goodman Brown's evolving relationship with these characters demonstrates his transformation over the course of the narrative: from faithful Puritan to unfaithful and paranoid.

While many details suggest that some events that take place in the woods are just a dream, Hawthorne leaves it ambiguous to the reader whether these events were real or not to create a sense of paranoia in the reader similar to the one Goodman Brown experiences when returning from the woods..

Goodman Brown's wife, Faith, represents his faith throughout the story. As she is first introduced, Hawthorne makes this clear to the reader through the line Faith, as the wife was aptly named (52). This brings attention to the meaning behind her name so that in future uses, the reader can gain further insight into what Hawthorne is really trying to say. Lines where Faith and faith are interchangeable further this connection such as is there any reason why I should quit my dear Faith (56), My Faith is gone! (59), and But where is Faith? (60). Through Faith, Hawthorne is able to communicate how Goodman Brown's relationship with his faith transforms throughout the story.

Goodman Brown sets out to meet a man in the woods for some evil purpose (53) which is left unexplained. He exclaims What if the devil himself should be at my very elbows! (53) right before encountering the man. Hawthorne uses this line to foreshadow who this man really is. Hawthorne implements many other techniques, both implicit and explicit, to expose the elderly

man's true nature as the Devil. While the traveler was about fifty years old (53), he later states he helped [his] grandfather, the constable (54) which suggests an ageless quality about him. The staff of the man which bore the likeness of a great black snake (54) is a reference to the Devil's portrayal as a snake in biblical contexts. Later, when the two encounter Goody Cloyse in the woods, she exclaims The devil! (55). With the elderly man's true nature as the Devil exposed, his coercion of Goodman Brown in the woods serves to represent the temptation of sin for Goodman Brown.

Hawthorne also uses the elderly man to make statements about certain groups in society via their relationship with him. The elderly man claims to have worked with individuals such as deacons of churches, town selectmen, the Great and General Court (54), and the Governor. Their work with the devil suggests that these individuals and the groups they represent have an evil nature about them. A group that Hawthorne examines closely throughout the story are the Puritans. The story takes place in the village of Salem, the location of the Salem Witch Trials where the Puritans accused many (women especially) of witchcraft and executed them. The elderly man who represents/is the devil says to Goodman Brown I have been well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans (54). Hawthorne is making a statement by implying their close connection with the Devil. Most specifically, Hawthorne makes reference to their questionable actions during the Salem Witch Trials: lashed that Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem (54) and during King Philip's war: set fire to an Indian village (54).

The narrative follows the transformation of Goodman Brown as he becomes further and further from his faith until he loses it entirely becoming destined to a life of paranoia and disbelief. Hawthorne is able to describe this inner conflict through his relationship to the characters of Faith and the elderly man. The story begins with Goodman Brown choosing to leave Faith to meet the man in the woods. Symbolically, he has let into a temptation to sin although he reasons that after this one night, [he'll] cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven (53). Hawthorne's use of words changes quite noticeably as Goodman Brown ventures into the woods with phrases such as gloomiest trees, narrow path creep, peculiarity in such a solitude and lonely footsteps (53). These words create a sense of isolation and unease in the reader that contrasts quite sharply with the phrasing used with Faith: parting kiss, pretty head, and letting the wind play (52). This contrast in wording signifies the differences between the warm comfort and community associated with his faith and the cold isolating nature of sin.

Goodman Brown soon overwhelmed with this unknown, begins to have hesitation and attempts to turn back to his faith, however, the elderly man continues to coerce him: Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go (54). The coercive strategies of the elderly man indicate that Hawthorne is commenting on the natural tendency of humans to be persuaded by the decision of the group and well as their tendency for generalization both of which played a role in the development of the Salem Witch Trials. As Goodman Brown is having hesitations and deciding to conclude his journey into the woods and his business with the elderly man, he discovers the true

nature of Goody Cloyse, who had taught him his catechism in youth (55). Afterward, Goodman Brown states aloud That old woman taught me my catechism (56). Through the repetition of this statement Hawthorne highlights its different meanings contextually before and after. While before, the statement represents the significance of Goody Cloyse to the development of his faith, afterward it represents the betrayal and confusion that Goodman Brown feels after discovering the true evil nature of one of his spiritual advisors.

Goodman Brown's dream of the witch meeting and the true evil nature of all whom [he had] revered from youth (61) and deemed holier than [himself] (61) serves to expose the generalization that Goodman Brown makes after being betrayed by just one of the individuals with whom he regarded with the highest respect. After revering these people and contrasting his sins with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward (61), he is unable to continue his faith on his own. Hawthorne represents this final loss of faith figuratively through the capturing of Faith in his dream. Hawthorne's use of language instills Goodman Brown's feeling of betrayal in the reader: faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart (58), agony and desperation (58), and maddened with despair (59). The dream tortures Goodman Brown with a sense of paranoia.

Hawthorne implements paradoxical events to demonstrate that Goodman Brown is dreaming. These events also serve to define the borders of the dream allowing the reader to discern true events from the events that Goodman Brown imagined. The first contradictory event that takes place is

when Goodman Brown hears the voice of Deacon Gookin in the forest. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding place (57) however, neither the travelers nor their steed were visible (57). Lastly, signifying the end of the dream, at the end of the witch meeting, a hanging twig, that had all been on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew (63). Hawthorne highlights the contradiction between the fire and the cold dew to bring attention to the contradiction and thus, the end of the dream.

In addition to the paradoxical events that take place within the dream, the pink ribbon also serves to discern the real from the imagined. Hawthorne brings attention to Faith's pink ribbons through repetition exposing its importance. As Goodman Brown leaves his wife, Hawthorne repeats that she is wearing her pink ribbons so the reader begins to expect the presence of the ribbons. When Goodman Brown hears the sounds of villagers walking through the woods to the meeting, he makes out the voice of his wife, Faith, and, after hearing her screams, something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it and beheld a pink ribbon (59). Hawthorne's repeated correlation of Faith and her pink ribbons make it clear to the reader of Faith's presence in the woods.

However, when returning from the woods the next morning, Goodman Brown spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons (63). This contradiction with the pink ribbons signifies that the past events were, in fact, dreamt by Goodman Brown.

While there is much evidence that points to the witch meeting being a dream, Hawthorne includes the question to the reader, Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting? (63). This brings an ambiguity regarding the dream which gives the reader the same sense of confusion and paranoia that inflicts Goodman Brown. His paranoia causes him to greet Faith sternly and sadly and [passing] on without a greeting (63) representing the final separation of Goodman Brown and his faith.