

Analysis of the theme of escape as illustrated by nathaniel hawthorne in young go...

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



In the both of the two stories, Young Goodman Brown and Rip Van Winkle, the main characters are normal and innocent people who wander off into the woods, then fall asleep or enter a trance. Once the characters return from the woods, the world seems to have changed and they feel lost within their own community. These stories portray the wilderness as a place of mystery and escape, that is somewhat distant from society and reality.

In Young Goodman Brown by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Goodman Brown leaves town to go into the forest. The woods he walks into is very eerie, described as being “darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind” (Hawthorne 606). Goodman Brown was also fearful that there may have been “a devilish Indian behind every tree” (Hawthorne 606). Along the way, Goodman Brown encounters a man who seems to be expecting him, because he tells Brown “‘You are late’” (Hawthorne 606). Goodman Brown replies saying that “‘Faith kept me back awhile,’” (Hawthorne 606), and this suggests that Goodman Brown may have been trying to escape or get away from his wife by going into the forest. A lot of the language used to describe the wilderness in the story makes it seem like a mystified and concealed place, that Goodman Brown uses as an escape from his wife and society. He later woke up the next morning, not knowing whether what he saw in the forest was real or not. “Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dream a wild dream of a witch-meeting?” (Hawthorne 614), and this further widens the gap between the forest and reality.

In *Rip Van Winkle* by Washington Irving, Rip is an easy going guy who “unconsciously scrambles to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains” (Irving 459), in order to avoid his nagging wife. Rip was constantly bothered by “the terrors of Dame Van Winkle” (Irving 459), so he decided to escape into the forest along with his dog. Along the way, Rip, similarly to Goodman Brown, encounters someone who seems to be expecting him, when he hears his name being called. Rip travels with his new acquaintance through the mountains, and Rip heard “distant thunder, that seemed to issue out of a deep ravine, or rather cleft between lofty rocks, toward which their path conducted” (Irving 460). When Rip and his partner arrive at an amphitheatre, “new objects of wonder presented themselves” (Irving 460). This language makes the wilderness seem like a mysterious place with new things to be discovered in every place. Rip gets drunk on too much liquor and doesn’t wake until twenty years later. Once he returns to society, he is lost and feels alienated. “ ‘ I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my gun, and every thing’s changed, and I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!’ ” (Irving 464). After Rip leaves the mountains, he comes back to his home, but it is not the same anymore, because Rip was isolated away from his society long during a time of rapid change, and he wasn’t there to see the changes.

In both stories, drastic changes occur to the main character’s perception of society upon their return from the wilderness. The wilderness is almost like a separated world from society; things happen in one place but the other place

seems completely unaffected. Both authors use language that portrays the wild as a conceded and mysterious place, and is almost distant from reality.