

# Literary analysis essays example

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



## **Introduction**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*, like all good stories, has all the ingredients that keep the reader interested. The Story starts off when an innocent young man goes on a journey across the forest. He is a married man from the village of Salem who takes pride in the community and its leaders. His illusions regarding his society are refuted when he realizes that many of the people in his town, including his wife and the religious leaders are going to attend a Black Mass. Although one is not able to tell whether the story is a nightmare or a true story, it places Goodman Brown in a position where he has to examine himself and those around him through a moral perspective. He is unable to forgive his loved ones for being evil and consequently has to spend the remaining part of his life in desperation and loneliness. The story lends itself to different forms of analysis due to its rich narrative and conflicting views and morals. This paper presents an analysis of *Young Goodman Brown* in terms of the symbols used by the author.

There are different symbols used by Nathaniel Hawthorne in this story. First, sunset and night are used symbolically to indicate the opposing powers of good and evil in the story. Goodman Brown is able to view his wife, Faith, with love in the light of day, while at night; he has great suspicions and fear about her. He also tells his wife to pray before dusk and no harm would befall her. This shows that he fears the dark and associates it with evil. In addition, the staff carried by the traveler (Satan) is black in color to signify evil. The dark and gloominess of the forest is also associated with the evil lurking there: It soon became " deep dusk in the forest" (Hawthorne 541). His faith urges Goodman Brown not to continue his journey in the dark but to wait till

sunrise to avoid the evil of the devil and keep in God's light which represents safety.

Secondly, the walking stick is used a symbol in the story to show the trickery and shape-shifting nature of the devil. At one moment in the story, the stick is twisted and withered, while at another moment it changes into a snake.

The snake on the staff is reminiscent of the biblical serpent that tempted Adam and Eve to taste the fruit at the Garden of Eden. The trickery employed by this stick is similar to that of the snake in Genesis because it may lead to sin and loss of innocence through curiosity. This is evidenced by Brown, when he ventures into the forest without heeding the warning by his wife. Just like the Biblical Eve was driven by curiosity and ignored the command of God, Brown falls prey to temptation. His knowledge that mankind is evil in his nature taints how he relates with everyone including his wife, Faith.

Thirdly, the name of Goodman Brown's wife: " Faith," is used symbolically in the story. When the two are in good terms with each other, it signifies that Brown has faith in God. In addition, when Brown goes into the forest despite having been warned, he is further and further away from having faith in God. His wife personalizes this faith when she encourages him to put off his journey until sunrise (Hawthorne 540). When he journeys into the forest, he encounters the darkness of evil, which is what happens to those who discard their faith. When he travels with the devil as his companion, his Christian faith is fading. The evil is highest around him when he travels with the devil. Fourth, the journey is a symbol of Goodman Brown's test of faith. He meets the dreary darkness of the forest and encounters the devil, who is

represented by the strange traveler. This journey is representative of the Christian's journey through life, where many temptations come and have to be overcome along the way. He is victorious in his test when he starts to regain strength to pull away from the devil (Hawthorne 544). As Goodman looks into the sky and prays, the message is clear: the goodness and strength to overcome temptation are not too far even when temptations seem the hardest.

## **Conclusion**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* has several ingredients that make it a good story. The author places rich literary tools which lend themselves for critical analysis. One such tool is symbolism. There are several instances where this is used in the story. First, sunset and night are used symbolically to represent good and evil. This is apparent in the use of a dark walking stick and the darkness in the forest to signify evil. The light of day signifies good and safety. Secondly, the walking stick is a symbol of the devil's trickery. The name "Faith," as used by Goodman's wife is also symbolic of Christian faith. Fourth, the journey is used symbolically to represent Goodman's Christian walk and test of faith. Overall, the story makes an interesting read.

## **Work Cited**

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Young Goodman Brown." *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. Ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell. 7th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2011. 540-49.  
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