

Essay on choice in young goodman brown and the road not taken

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



Choices are things that have been discussed in literature for many years, as it carries a universal resonance for all people who wish to reach a destination or accomplish a goal. Frost's protagonist in the poem "The Road Not Taken" is seemingly obsessed with the time where he came across a fork in the path in a forest, took one path, and didn't go back and take the other one. He hems and haws about what might have been on the inside, even as outwardly he exclaims that he did take the road less traveled (and therefore preferable). He is 'sorry he could not travel both and be one traveler'; apparently, he is the type of person who wants to have his cake and eat it too. Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" gives us a person who is not very satisfied with the need to make choices; meanwhile, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" depicts a similar situation in which the title character has to make choices that could determine his innocence or grace.

In Frost's poem, while both paths are said to be about as worn as the other, he goes on to state to himself (and to others, though admittedly with a sigh) that he did take the 'one less traveled by.' His sigh is made to express the regret that he could not possibly choose both of those paths. Therefore, even as he attempts to convince himself that he did the right thing and should be satisfied with it, he knows that he will never fully be convinced. He even entertains the notion for awhile that he can go back and head down both paths, keeping "the first for another day" (Frost). However, as with the journey of life, he cannot make that choice again, and that gnaws at him. One of the clearest symbols for the consequences of choice in Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Brown" is the name of the wife - Faith. In the short

story, Goodman is leaving his wife Faith to embark on a journey that is necessary, but risky. " My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise" (Hawthorne, 1835). He actively chooses to abandon his faith, or at least puts it aside for the night; he feels that, come morning, he will return to it. She is symbolic of Goodman's faith in himself, in humanity and in God, which he believes is good and ineffable. He adores his faith - " Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven" (Hawthorne, 1835). However, by leaving Faith, he puts himself in danger of corruption. The use of the literal name 'Faith' is part of Hawthorne's plan to make this a clear, allegorical parable to the reader - he wishes to make it clear exactly what he is walking away from.

The road down the forest, which Goodman Brown travels on, is, like Frost's road, a symbol for the choices he makes through life, and the path he takes towards darkness. At the beginning of the path is Faith; the goodness and virtue that all men learn at the beginning of their lives. However, as the road is travelled, temptation begins to rear its ugly head, in the form of the devil and his promises of practical shortcuts at the expense of ethics and innocence. The further one walks down the road, the closer one gets to darkness - " 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" (Hawthorne, 1835). By making the road such an overt symbol of choices and their effect on life experience, Hawthorne and Frost show the way our paths are determined by our choices.

The symbolism present in "Young Goodman Brown" showcases a metaphorical fall from grace and innocence. Goodman starts the story with Faith and goodness, falls into temptation, grows paranoid and frightened at the evil he sees, and loses faith in himself and others in the process. The physical paths Frost and Hawthorne show in their stories are very symbolic of choices in every journey – should you turn left, or should you turn right? The fact that both choices are, in truth, equally as trodden upon hints at the uncertain nature of the human journey; each path presents a possible future, and you can see clearly that they are separate from each other. You do not know where each road will lead, but you must make a choice. You make a choice and you must commit to it – there is no going back and changing course in the middle. That commitment to linear choices is what makes Frost's and Hawthorne's poems so indicative of the symbolic journey.

Works Cited

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