

Young goodman brown- nathaniel hawthorne research paper

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



The works of Nathaniel Hawthorne were a reflection of the history of his Puritan relations and the New England during his days. Some of his well-known works include *The Scarlet Letter*, *Young Goodman Brown*, and *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804. Two aspects of his early life especially influenced his writing career: the Hawthornes had been persecuted due to their religious affiliations and the Salem witchcraft trials.

Nathaniel's father passed on in 1808, leaving his wife and three kids-two girls and a boy - reliant on relatives. Nathaniel spent his early life in Salem and Maine. A leg injury limited his movements for a significant duration, during which he developed a passion for reading and thinking.

With assistance from his rich uncles, Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College in Maine (1821 - 24). Hawthorne had no interest of taking up any occupation, instead choosing to read and write short stories, many of which were published in newspapers. Among the novels were *Fanshawe* (1828), *Young Goodman Brown* (1835), and a collection, *Twice Told Tales* (1837).

In 1842, Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody and together they had three children. The family settled at Concorde, Massachusetts. Unable to support his family from writing alone, Hawthorne took up a position at the Salem County House as a surveyor in 1846, but was dismissed two years later because his political connections.

The dismissal turned to be a blessing in disguise as he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, his most successful work. The duration from 1850 to 1853 was the most fruitful since he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*.

Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne's former schoolmate at Bowdoin, became president in 1852 and Hawthorne was selected as the American consul at England from 1853 - 57. He wrote *Our Old Home* (1863) during the stay at England. In 1857, the Hawthornes moved to Italy and settled mainly in Rome and Florence.

They later returned to England and Nathaniel completed his final and lengthiest work, *The Marble Faun* (1860). The family returned to America and stayed in their permanent home at Concord. He died on May 19, 1864 while visiting the New Hampshire Hills with Franklin Pierce (Meltzer, pp. 54).

The story begins at night in Salem when Goodman Brown leaves his wife, Faith, to meet a strange person in the forest. As they meet, Brown and the individual advance further into the forest, at this juncture, it becomes evident that his companion is the devil, and the reason for that journey is to participate in an unknown ceremony, but clearly an evil one.

As they progress with the journey, Brown realizes that others are heading for the ceremony, most of whom are from Salem town and whom he had believed to be Christians and pure in heart. He is surprised and discouraged and once again opts to turn back, however, before he does this, he hears Faith's voice and recognizes that she is the one who is to be initiated at the

ceremony. Knowing that he has lost faith and Faith, he decides to join the ceremony.

At the ceremony, new converts are called to the altar for anointing, just when Faith is about to be anointed in blood, he shouts out her to look to heaven and refuse. He finds himself alone in the forest.

Arriving in Salem the following morning, Brown is unsure whether the occurrence was real or a dream, however, his outlook of those around him, including his wife, drastically changes.

Goodman Brown exhibits purity and corruptibility as he wavers between believing in the innate kindness of the individuals around him and believing that the devil has conquered the minds of those he loves. When the story begins, Brown is convinced of the righteousness of his father and grandfather until the old man, possibly the devil, tells him otherwise.

Brown has faith in Goody Cloyse, the priest, and Deacon Gookin until the devil tells to him that Cloyse is a witch and Gookin is his assistant.

Eventually, he is convinced that Faith, his wife, is upright and honest, until the devil shows him at the ceremony that she too is unclean. The revelations show Brown's lack of a firm stand as he easily swayed. He shows us the good and evil sides of humankind.

Through his exposure of the good and evil sides of humankind, Hawthorne mentions what he believes as the concealed corruption of the Puritan society. Goodman Brown believes in the public portrayal of purity made by

his father and the church leaders and in the communal formations that are built upon that purity.

Hawthorne uses Brown to show his audience that behind the public display of purity, the Puritans' acts were adulterated. Satan tells Brown that he was there when his father, grandfather and other church members burned native Indians' villages, suggesting that the founding of English country has a dim side that religion falls short of explaining.

Faith Brown is Goodman Brown's wife and serves a symbolical purpose in the novel. Brown leaves her at night to have a meeting with the devil, when asked why he was late, Brown answers " Faith kept me back a while" (Hawthorne, pp. 10). She stands for positive force in the society.

Consequently, when Brown realizes that she too is evil, he cries " My Faith is gone" and runs frantically toward the witches' assembly (Hawthorne, pp. 23).

Faith represents the solidity of the family and the domestic realm in the Puritan outlook. As her name hints, she seems to be most pure-hearted among the Puritans and functions as a substitute of sorts for religious emotions.

Her husband clings to her as he inquires about the righteousness of those he knew, drawing comfort from the fact that if Faith remains pure, then his own faith is worth defending. However, when he discovers that Faith too is corruptible, he believes that everyone around him is evil. Brown's

estrangement from Faith at the conclusion of the story is the worst result of his change of mind.

In this novel, the devil seems to be a normal man, showing that everyone, including Brown, can be evil. The devil appears from the forest decently dressed just as any man in Salem would, but Goodman Brown discovers that the devil can emerge in any situation and fail to appear inapt.

By accentuating the chameleon nature of the devil, Hawthorne illustrates that the devil basically personifies the worst side of man. By mentioning that the devil could be Brown's father, the writer builds a link between them, leaving the readers to speculate whether the two are related or the devil is Brown's evil side. Brown's contact with the devil affects him forever.

Nancy Bunge in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993) critiques the book based on the conduct of Goodman Brown (Bunge, 14). She mentions that everybody is corrupt and can move along honestly and openly with others after admitting this grim truth. Yet Brown rejects this reality and destroys his life by trying to maintain his righteousness.

The novel reveals this fact so painfully that, despite the huge amount of critical commentary on the story, many recognize it as the novel's theme. Bunge is right; the climax of the novel takes place at the ceremony, especially when Brown finds out that Faith was also evil. This changes him forever.

Nina Baym in *Thwarted Nature: Hawthorne as Feminist*, argues from the outlook of the female characters. She mentions that the protagonists, regularly male, decline any sexual bond with a female figure, normally a spouse or fiancée (136).

In most cases, this action has a grave effect on the scorned woman. Stories written prior to 1842 have a female character demolished only by accident, not purposely. In *Young Goodman Brown*, Brown's separation with his wife was not intentional, as he had intended to return to her after the appointment with the devil.

Baym asserts that the act of a man leaving his wife demonstrates the male's disinterest to the affairs of their female counterparts. She defines women as sexual beings and the men as "sexually frozen" (138). Baym suggests that Hawthorne's male characters are engrossed with their female counterparts but the only way of making contact with them is through desire.

Joan Easterly asserts that Brown is a changed man after his encounter in the forest. Hawthorne shows how Brown fails the trial of his moral and divine being. For instance, Brown does not cry after seeing Faith and those who were close to him at the ceremony.

This indicates that he has no compassion for these people and therefore cannot a Christian himself (340). I disagree with this point, Brown was filled with so much grief after seeing that his father, grandfather and church leaders were all corruptible. Finding out that his wife was also evil was just

too painful for him and we see him shouting to her to look to heaven and refuse the initiation.

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