

# Thomas his own free will to turn

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Thomas F. Walsh Jr. argues that in order to obtain a better understanding of what happens to Goodman Brown, we should be aware of three major symbols within the text: first, we have Faith, who is Brown's wife who represents religious faith and faith in mankind. Second, we have the forest which shows Brown's journey which represents his inward escape into the black and despairing depths of his soul. Third, the Devil represents Brown's darker side which is filled with doubt, which he eventually believes that evil is the nature of mankind (F. Walsh Jr.

1). The symbolic movement of the forest scenes is from the bosom of Faith to the loss of Faith which includes despair, from the village of belief to the depths of the forest of despair, and from a doubting balance of Brown's personality to the complete submergence of the brighter side into the darker side which objectifies despair. He says that these three symbols "tell the story of a young and naïve man in the ways of the world" (F. Walsh Jr. 1). He eventually finds out that men are all not good and he became so convinced they are all bad that he could remove the doubt of the universal evil from his mind.

Korb discusses how Brown is an inconstant character in the story. Hawthorne presents Brown as a "naive young man who believes his own free will to turn back on his sinful promise and we also see his increasing struggles to resist evil which then show his development as a man" (Korb 1). For example, Brown decides to challenge his fellow partner who happens to be the Devil for "any reason that I should quit my dear Faith" (28). But when he has affirmed his decision to stand up to the Devil, he discovers that his dear love Faith is on her way to the Black Mass (Korb 1).

Brown then turns into a personification of Devil and soon finds out that there is no real good on earth. Brandishing the Devil's own staff, he rushes through the dark forest and against the fearful backdrop of beasts and Indians, he becomes "himself the chief horror of the scene" (30). Kelly King Howes touches upon the role the Devil plays and how the figure of the Devil in Young Goodman Brown is shown as an older man who wields a twisted, snake-like stick.

He seems to vaguely resemble Brown and he could be looked at as a "reflection of the darker side of Brown's nature" (Howes 1). The Devil claims he has had relations with Brown's grandfather who was involved in the persecution of the Quakers, and his father who was involved in an attack on the Indian village. Deacon Gookin, Goody Cloyse, and the minister serve as great examples of the wickedness that may hide in the souls of those who appear most virtuous (E. May 1). The three are "distinguished from among the crowd of townsfolk at the gathering due to the fact that they represent a standard of piety and godliness that is destroyed, and for Brown, by his experience" (Howes 1). It may be tempting to look upon this story as a tale because it is difficult to draw conclusions from. Korb says the ambiguous nature of the story is apparent throughout.

For example, in the seeming appearance of Brown's dead father beckoning him to attend the Black Mass "while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother?" (Hawthorne 32).

One of the more alarming uncertainties lies in the character of Faith because from the very beginning of the story, her Faith is called into question when she wears "pink hair ribbons which could symbol a sign of frivolity" (Korb 1).

<https://assignbuster.com/thomas-his-own-free-will-to-turn/>

It could also be said that Faith herself has also agreed to a covenant with the Devil. She asks Brown not to leave the night of his departure because she is filled with "such thoughts that she's feared of herself sometimes" (24). But her voice is sad and it is as if she had resigned herself to accepting that the evil is approaching.

We find out at the end of the story that Brown never knows if Faith also rejects the Devil. Howes argues that at the start of the story, Brown appears confident in his ability to choose between good and evil. This then alters once he stands before the Devil's altar with the other damned communicants; he no longer believes that good always prevails (Liebman 1).

He soon becomes a "profoundly disillusioned man who sees wickedness everywhere he turns and in even in those who are closest to him (Howes 1). It could be said that Brown's final distrustful, alienated state is due to the result of a guilty conscience. He cannot forgive himself or others for hidden sinfulness. Brown is unwilling to accept the duality of human nature, which is the simultaneous ability to be both innocent and evil. Young Goodman Brown could also be seen as an illuminating allegory of Calvinist belief in the Devil's power and humanity's basic depravity. Brown is seen as a victim of Puritanism unlike those who were persecuted as witches in Salem.