

Nathaniel Hawthorne
Young Goodman
Brown and the
Minister's Black Veil



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Discuss symbolism in the following two short stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Young Goodman Brown and The Minister's Black Veil Literature is like a laboratory where life and all that happens or can happen in it are examined. However, the author has a prerogative over which symbol he uses. This is because literature is often subjected to the whims and caprices of not only reality and imagination, but also to the dictates of the intentions of the author. Symbolism refers to the way of expressing something in a work of art such that the characteristics of a person or group of people or age are represented as lucidly as possible. Symbolism is the most important in the story because it is the one through which the author is able to impress the essence of his story upon the reader. Nathaniel Hawthorne used several symbols in Young Goodman Brown and The Minister's Black Veil to describe acts, subjects and persons in the two plays and the most prominent symbols used shall be discussed in this paper. In Young Goodman Brown, the devil's staff that was surrounded by a sculpted serpent was symbolic of the serpent in the book of Genesis. The serpent was used to symbolize an evil demon. The devil told Goodman Brown that the staff would help him to travel faster and this is quite symbolic to the serpent in the bible that told Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would make her wiser. This further corroborates the argument that the devil's staff is symbolic to the serpent in the book of Genesis. However, Goodman Brown followed the instruction of the devil and was punished for being a weakling and losing his innocence and this is also synonymous to the punishment that was meted on Adam and Eve for following the counsel of the serpent. It should also be noted that just like Eve's curiosity made her eat the forbidden fruit, it was Goodman Brown's curiosity that influenced his decision to go into the forest. Another symbol

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that was used in Young Goodman Brown is the pink ribbon that was used by Faith. Faith's pink ribbon is symbolic of her purity and this can be seen if one considers the fact the color, 'pink' embodies purity and gaiety. Ribbons are decorations that are used to show modesty and innocence and this show that the fact that Faith wore a pink ribbon means that Hawthorne was trying to explain to readers that she was a virtuous girl that had a pure nature. The symbolism of the pink ribbon would be seen when Goodman Brown sees the flapping of a pink ribbon from the sky as a sign that Faith had compromised her innocence and purity. After the pink ribbon fluttered from the sky, Goodman Brown shouted that, "My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied moment. 'There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is the world given.'" (Hawthorne 23). However, when Goodman Brown sees Faith wearing her pink ribbon, it was a sign that she had returned to her state of innocence and purity. The Minister's Black Veil is another book that Nathaniel Hawthorne used different symbols to represent the acts and characters of the play. The Black Veil that was worn by the minister was used to symbolize the evil and secret sin of human nature. The Veil could have represented the minister as a wolf in sheep's clothing, but it was actually worn by Rev. Hooper to separate himself from the sin that he saw every day. The minister probably perceived the evil nature of the world and was probably hiding some sins and this was the reason that he wore the black veil. The sight of Rev. Hooper wearing a black veil also reminds his congregation of their secret sins. Black is symbolic of evil and the covering of the face by a veil shows how Rev. Hooper tried to protect himself from the sins of the member of his congregation. The Black Veil is also symbolic of the minister's ineffectiveness in catering for the spiritual needs of his

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congregation (Hawthorne). As revealed in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown and The Minister's Black Veil, there are many symbols that can be used to represent different acts and characters. These symbols help the intuition of the readers and make them have a feel of the message that the author is trying to pass across. Works Cited Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Minister's Black Veil. Rockville, MD: Bompacrazy. com, 1979. Web. Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Young Goodman Brown. Rockville, MD: Wildside Press LLC, 2005. Print.