

Short stories essay



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Nathaniel Hawthorne, “ Young Goodman Brown”

Goodman Brown was not asleep in this short story. As I read, I believed that Goodman did indeed meet the devil in the forest. If he had indeed dreamt about the trip he was sent on and meeting the devil, I think his nervousness would have been described in more detail than it was. Concentrating more on the anxiety he was feeling would have led the reader to believe that the events were not real. I also saw this story as an allegory. I saw the allegory after reading the story two times. I think it is centered on Goodman Brown having a bumpy past and that he wants to go beyond his past and reach heaven. The characters names also show the religious allegory in the story. The names Goodman and Faith are used and the characters are then soon faced with terrifying evil. I think that Goodman Brown and his wife, Faith's names symbolize that they are good, religious people and that Goodman is making up everyone being evil in his head.

I found an essay by Alexa Carlson that described the symbolism in light vs. dark, forest vs. town, nature vs. human, and fantasy vs. reality. In her paper, Essay #1: Young Goodman Brown, she states that “...fantasy vs. reality are employed to reinforce the idea that good and evil have been set up as strict categories into which no one, not even the religious figures of the community, fit neatly.” As she later writes, if Hawthorne was apprehensive about “ what he considers right and wrong in terms of human behavior, I think he would have spend more time building up his tragic end.”

“ Young Goodman Brown” was a pretty sad story because he was happy with all the locals and his faith until the trip came into Goodman Brown's life.

Goodman is pure going into the forest, but in a sense comes out of the forest somewhat evil. He comes back thinking he is better than everyone else and ends up isolating himself to lead a very lonely life.

Source: Carlson, Alexa. Essay #1: Young Goodman Brown. www.crwl.utexas.edu

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “ My Kinsman, Major Molineaux”

I read some information about Nathaniel Hawthorne’s life and then thinking back to this story, I see his life somewhat reflected in the main character. I saw him relating himself to Robin and parallel the emotions and similarities to that of his own life. I remember reading that Hawthorne locked himself up in a room for twelve years and completely isolated himself from the people around him. In “ My Kinsman, Major Molineaux”, Robin is given a lesson and isolated from the group of the new colony. He leads himself to his own misery and disrespect because he recognized himself as a kinsman and wanted something back. Both Hawthorne and Robin face the problem of being accepted by society. They both had their shares of complications and complexity fitting in with their surroundings.

The first paragraph of the story is there to let you know something. There is a hint hidden in the paragraph about the fate of Major Molineaux. He states that uprisings are beginning to occur in the colonies.

Robin is an 18 year old who travels across the ocean to see Major Molineaux. He seems confident that all will work out even though he does not know where his uncle lives. He goes with little money and asks where Major

Molineaux lives. His first attempt to find his uncle is a disappointment. All the people he asks are mean to him but he still keeps looking. From the story, I get that Robin does not really want to find Major Molineaux. Once he sees his uncle tarred and feathered, he starts laughing and realizing how much he has grown from his trip. The older people in the story seem to be really mean. I think they have a greater hatred toward Major Molineaux. The man Robin sees with the black and red face scares him. I think the red and black represent danger and anger and possibly evil. The danger could represent either that the mob is supposed to be something evil or that the mob represents the violent changes that place as the Revolutionary War approaches. Robin seems to be very ignorant also because he is a country boy and has just seen the harsh city life.

Edgar Allan Poe, “ The Cask of Amontillado”

In “ The Cask of Amontillado”, Montressor wants to seek revenge on Fortunado. Montressor lures him into the vaults by telling him about the rare cask of Amontillado he has found down there. Montressor tells Fortunado that he would have had him check out the wine but he had a previous engagement, so he would be asking Luchesi for the favor. In an article I found on the Internet, the writer told about Montressor’s ability to get Fortunado to fall for his trick. ([www. poedecoder. com/essays/cask/](http://www.poedecoder.com/essays/cask/)) He wrote, “ Montressor was careful not to arouse Fortunado’s suspicions”. This was Montressor’s “ perfect plan of retribution”. He was planning the death of Fortunado and Fortunado fell for the trap that Montressor had planned. Montressor is the narrator of Poe’s great story.

There is also irony in this short story. Montresor realizes what he is about to do to Fortunado the further along they go into the vaults. The character's name, Fortunado, also plays with irony by the fact that he is less than fortunate in this occasion. I also saw irony when Montresor and Fortunado were drinking some wine before they got to the Amontillado. Montresor toasted to Fortunado's long life, when he knew that his life would be over very soon. I did not see the symbolism in the motto or the coat of arms but in the website mentioned above, they did however show me. The symbolism in the coat of arms and the motto was "of Montresor's evil character, who like the serpent intends to get revenge."

The foreshadowing laid in the first sentence of the story. "The thousands of injuries of Fortunado I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge." From this sentence, you can clearly see that someone in the story is going to be hurt in some way. Nevertheless, Montresor felt guilty in the end. When Fortunado went into the deep end of the crypt, Montresor heard him screaming and he began to tremble. I think he realized what he did and felt he had done a terrible thing. Also, at the very end of the story, Montresor narrated, "In peace may he rest". If he wished him peace in his death, why would he have killed him? Seems to me like he was a little guilty.

Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"

"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" takes place during the American Civil War that was fought in the 1860's. The United States was divided over the issue of slavery. The Northern States wanted an end to come from slavery

and the South wanted to keep slavery alive to ensure low labor and production costs.

In the short story there was a bit of symbolism played out. The line “ Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands”, symbolizes her hands for the white Southern wealthy plantation owners and politicians who were stubbornly willing to divide the country. The Southern people would have rather allowed Americans to kill one another in a war, rather than choosing to resolve differences between North and South by ending slavery and giving freedom back to black Americans.

Ambrose Bierce wrote with a lot of fantastic imagery. The imagery he used seemed to build the suspense near the end of the story. The images he portrayed were strange, yet peaceful and hopeful. Then suddenly he hits readers with gunfire and pain. For example, to heighten the suspense he used bizarre passages such as “ black bodies of the trees” and “ no fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere”. The reader gets to ride along with Peyton during this dramatic imagery. You go from the threat of death, to beautiful images of life, to images of a wonderful afterlife, to pain, and finally to the arms of his wife.

Peyton Farquhar died in the end. I saw that as a symbol of being killed because of the deceitful and weak Southern upper classes. Peyton was a “ well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family”. They wouldn’t give up their wealth but others could be killed, even if they were respected Southerners.

Guy de Maupassant, “ The Necklace”

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A short summary of “ The Necklace” is that Mme. Loisel was ashamed to go to a party without proper jewels around her neck. She did not want to look poor, like her husband and her were. She borrowed a friend’s necklace and proceeded to lose the necklace at the end of the night. She bought a new necklace for thirty six thousand francs and returned it to Mme. Forestier. Mme. Loisel and her husband spent the next ten years working extremely hard to pay off the necklace only to find that the necklace Mme. Loisel borrowed was a fake and was not worth near the amount she spent on the new necklace.

I saw the irony in the story in Mme. Forestier and the plaster necklace. When Mme. Loisel returned the necklace to Mme. Forestier, she didn’t hesitate to look at the lovely necklace and make sure there was nothing wrong with it. If it had been a prize possession, she would probably have opened the case and made sure there were no scratches or jewels missing. Obviously, Mme. Forestier wasn’t concerned about the shape of the so-called plaster necklace. Another part I saw irony in was when Mme. Loisel was looking through Mme. Forestier’s jewels. Mme. Forestier took her large jewelry box out of her wardrobe while the other necklace was sitting out in a black box. Mme. Loisel also went through thousands of bracelets and necklaces of fine quality. Those pieces of jewelry weren’t good enough for her and then she settles on the plaster necklace.

Guy de Maupassant was connected with the Ministry of Public Instruction. Interesting enough, Monsieur Loisel was employed at the Ministry of Public Instruction. Maupassant wrote very classically and simply. He avoided social commentary at all risks. While he was writing, he liked to write about the real

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world and show everyone that he was well informed about it. (www.members.tripod.com/KisnerD/guyde.htm) I think this story fit his description very well. It was very realistic and sounds like something that could happen to anyone.

Kate Chopin, “ Desiree’s Baby”

Kate Chopin wrote great short stories. Many say her works imitated Guy de Maupassant’s. Her style in “ Desiree’s Baby” imitates his by escaping from traditional short stories and writing something new and free. Chopin wrote what she saw. The plots in her stories were well organized and ended with critical acts, somewhat like Maupassant’s.

In “ Desiree’s Baby”, light and dark symbolism were used. The first light/dark symbol I read was the description of L’Abri, Desiree and Armand’s house. Madame Valmonde shuddered at the sight of it. The house was “...a sad looking place,” and that starts to make you realize there is not a lot of happiness inside, though they perceive to be happy. As Madame Valmonde gets closer to the house, she describes it in more detail. “ Big, solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall.” This is a dark symbol for what is about to happen in the house between Desiree and Armand. He will find out not just too much about his wife but also about himself and the house will go under. I see a light symbol on Desiree when Madame Valmonde comes to visit her and the baby. Desiree is wearing all white and lace. She is so happy with her life and is so pure. She will only find out later that her life isn’t as pure as she thought it would be.

In the second paragraph of the story, the narrator tells a crucial part of the story. “ Why, it seemed but yesterday that Desiree was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmonde had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar.” I see this sentence foreshadowing the ending by letting you know that she was not the Valmonde’s child. Desiree was lying in the shadow of the pillar. I think that foreshadows that she was a child with a secret and the Valmonde’s tried to keep it hid until the day the child’s skin started turning brown. Also, Chopin describes Armand as having a “ dark, handsome face”. This also foreshadows the end as Armand finds the letter his mother wrote that she was part black.

William Sydney Porter, “ The Gift of the Magi”

“ The Gift of the Magi” is very similar to “ The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant. The characters in both stories think money is more important than their loved ones. They do not see the sentimental value of things. All they see is the cash value. They were also different in the fact that they gave up completely different things. Mme. Loisel gave up ten years of her life to pay for the necklace. Della gave up her lovely hair and Jim gave up his prized watch. Della and Jim can eventually get back what they gave up, but Mme. Loisel can never gain ten years back on her life. What she gave up was much more expensive.

In the beginning of the story, Della was crying and sobbing because she did not have enough money to buy Jim a present for Christmas, which was the next day. “ Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs,

sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.” I see this as foreshadowing exactly what would happen throughout the story. Della started off in tears and then mopped around a little bit. She thought of her crazy idea to cut off her hair for money. Once she got her haircut off and had the money, she was so happy to buy Jim a present. They exchanged presents only to find that Jim bought her a brush set and she bought him a chain for the watch he sold for her brushes. Once again, she cried because they gave up their lovely possessions for each other and had nothing to do with their new presents.

Stephen Crane, “ The Open Boat”

“ The Open Boat” is a dramatic short story based on Stephen Crane’s own real-life experience. In this short story, Crane provided biographical facts and also added a lot of description. In the story there are a lot of psychological meanings of the experience and its effects on those people involved.

I found an article dedicated to the concept of naturalism being applied to “ The Open Boat”. The article is by Jason Voegele and I found it on the Internet. As the story begins there are four main characters we meet. Crane goes into great detail to describe not only these four men, but also what lies around them. Voegele wrote that the “ opening scenes show right away the antagonism of the men and the sea and nature’s lack of concern for their tragedy”. Even though the four men are in a terrible situation, nothing else in the nature world changes to help them. Things do not work like that. The men think nature is taking its toll on them as they keep getting into worse situations. It is just the way the world turns and things will always happen that you don’t want to happen. The men begin to lose hope in their survival

due to the pounding they are getting from the earth. “ If this wind holds and the boat don’t swap, we can’t do much else”, is a statement from the captain. He has given up also. They feel they are up against a wall and can’t climb over. They all feel the lack of concern from the world around them. Voegele also writes that Crane “ now understands what it is to be human; that constant striving in the face of futility, and that need for others that ultimately none of us can deny”. The reality in the story seems a bit harsh in the beginning, but it becomes evidence of the characters human spirit in the end. The main conflict is human vs. nature. A single human life is insignificant in respect to the rest of the world.

Source: www.jvoegele.com/essays/openboat.html

Willa Cather, “ Paul’s Case”

Paul seemed to me to be a boy who really needed good attention. His father emotionally abused him and he was looked down upon at school. All he really needed was someone who would just listen to him and talk to him like he was normal. Even though he was a problem child, I ended up liking Paul in the end of the story. I don’t know if it was a pity liking or what. You can’t help but feel sorry for someone who has lost their mother, who’s father abuses them, and who wants to make their life better but is stuck where they are. I also don’t think he had any learning disability either. I just think that he didn’t get the right chance because everyone looked down upon him like he was the devils spawn.

People were not willing to give Paul a chance. On a website I found, the article could not agree more. They also had written that his teachers

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misunderstood Paul because he didn't fully understand some of the harder lessons. In the article, they wrote about how Paul's teachers "made Paul feel as if he were inferior to the other students, and that he was not worthy of their extra time for tutoring sessions, which only further discouraged Paul from wanting to learn." ([www. geocities. com](http://www.geocities.com)) I could not agree more. The teachers did not want to spend to time to help the poor child learn and that only pushed him further away and made him a more disgruntled child.

Paul's death was very sad to me. He led such a terrible and lonely life only to end his life at his own will. I don't know how you could kill yourself but then I kind of feel for the poor kid. I guess if I put myself in the situation of having my mother dead, my father abusing me, and having nobody want me to succeed, I wouldn't want to live either. His life was very bleak. In the same article mentioned above they made a very good statement about Paul's death; "One must wonder if Paul ever had a chance of not committing suicide with the life he led. Perhaps it was the only way out for him." Perhaps that is true. His life was so bleak and miserable that the only way of ending the day-to-day pain was to end his life. Sad but true.

Source: [www. geocities. com/Athens/Oracle/4925/main. html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/4925/main.html)

D. H. Lawrence, "Odour of Chrysanthemums"

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" is about a coal miner and his wife. Elizabeth is awaiting her husband, the coal miner, to come home. They seem to already have some problems but she still is very concerned were he is at. He is late and she is expecting him to come home drunk. As she awaits his arrival home, she sits and thinks deeply about their relationship. She keeps a good

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attitude about it for the sake of their children. She doesn't want them to see that anything is wrong. Later his mother brings her the bad news. She tells Elizabeth that there had been an accident and her husband had suffocated. They bring his dead body to the house for the ladies to clean up. I think that is terrible to have the family of the dead man, clean him. That is pure suffrage. The story brings out that in the remainder of the story. Elizabeth goes through many different emotions while washing him. She becomes very inquisitive, and then angry, and then she fills with sympathy, forgiveness, and cool consideration. She sees that her and her husband had long ago rejected something deep within the other, and that they had lived utterly separate lives. At the end of the story, Elizabeth is "grateful to death, which restored the truth." Elizabeth's emotional turmoil is very convincing. I would have never seen the turmoil coming from her because of her actions in the beginning of the story.

The chrysanthemums in the story symbolize Elizabeth's emotions. I see the chrysanthemum as a terrible sign to Elizabeth. I think that it means that the flower reminds her of the misery in her life. It reminds her of her terrible marriage and her drunken husband. I also see it as the chrysanthemums odor smothering her somewhat like her husband was smothered by the coal fall. The odor of the chrysanthemums was so strong and overwhelming that it reminded her of her husband and his overwhelming power.

Elizabeth's final thoughts in the story are pretty deep. She hides his dead body in the parlor so the children would not see. Elizabeth also seems to have a realization that she is powerless to control her life at all. She thought that now that life "was her immediate master." She seems almost afraid to

know that death has captivated her household and had a hold of her. She seems very afraid because of “ death, her ultimate master.”

This story carries a great deal of character in it. I had to read it twice to get the full effect of what the story really was bringing to my attention. First of all, I gathered from the information that this was a religious story by the names used in the beginning of the story. James Joyce uses names like Christian Brothers School in the first paragraph and gives the reader an insight of what the community the boy lives in is like. The boy in the story also gives great detail to the late priest. Another way to realize that this was a religious story was to pay attention to the way the boy treated his family. He had a lot of respect for his family and he partly showed it by waiting patiently for his uncle to arrive home. He had to ask for permission and some money.

Epiphany is a sudden surprise that the true nature of the character comes out during an exact moment. I saw the epiphany come out at the very end of the story when the boy went to the bazaar. He had planned to buy his obsession something while he was there. He arrived at the bazaar only to have a change of heart. The boy realized that he had been overcome with this girl and in the meantime became obsessed with vanity. In an article I found, Diana Mak, wrote, “ The boy had come up to the point of enlightenment and disillusionment.” ([www. members. nbci. com](http://www.members.nbci.com)) He went to the fair in search for a prize but instead he saw what this girl had done to him and he felt nothing but “ anguish and anger.” The boy thought that he could buy the love of this girl by buying her something. He didn’t realize that he was overcome with arrogance just for this girl.

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Source: www.members.nbci.com/_XMCM/dianamak/essay.htm

Washington Irving, “ Rip Van Winkle”

This story has a lot of twists and turns. I was a little confused by the story at first until I found some articles to help me understand what the meaning of the story really was. These articles talked about how the story was an allegory for the changes in our country. I also found information about how Washington Irving took German folklore and added American scenes and events to add great depth into the story.

There are many types of unique symbolism throughout the story. These symbols let you know of the changes that are occurring in American society. Rip Van Winkle seemed to have gotten to take a break from the harsh changes that most Americans were feeling at the time. They went through the strife of a rapidly changing country, while Rip Van Winkle got to take a long, relaxing nap. In an article I found, it stated that “ Irving’s sociopolitical opinions do not become readily apparent until Rip wakes up from his sleep. Rip is confused and asks questions seeking his identity in the same way that the young country was seeking its identity. Rip seeks the truth much as the new country was.” (www.cwrl.utexas.edu) This is where I saw the allegory play into the short story. When Rip returned to the town, the sign that hung by the tavern had been changed. When he left the small town, the sign had a man with a crown and a scepter in his hand. After his return from the long nap, the sign was changed. The man in the earlier sign now had a large sword and cap instead of a crown.

Source: www.cwrl.utexas.edu/daniel/amlit/rvw/tv.html

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The first thing I researched was why Henry James wrote his book in installments. According to the web page, www.gradesaver.com, James had the book published at Collier and they decided to divide the story into five parts and publish them in twelve installments. Collier was a magazine and to boost his circulation and revenue, he published *The Turn of the Screw*. Doing it in installments kept people buying his magazine. Collier and James did, however, agree to publish the story as a whole when Collier was done publishing James' work.

James wrote this piece at a time in history when people were beginning to lose faith in their traditional religion. People were looking everywhere for spiritual understanding and James found it perfect to write this and have people find spirituality in the world beyond. In the same article as mentioned above, he wrote how “ people searched for a new way of understanding and accepting death.” This seemed like the perfect way for James.

The governess is the primary narrator in this *The Turn of the Screw*. She is a young lady who finds herself being the caretaker for two little children. The governess finds herself encountering the ghosts and struggles to fight for the souls of the children. She cares for the two children, Flora and Miles. Miles was sent home from school for unknown reasons. It is hard to tell if the boy is just a terrible child or very smart and deviant. Flora is the sweet little girl whom is thought to be the one communicating with the ghost of Miss Jessel.

In the prologue of the book, the opening reveals the origin of the book's title. They are telling a ghost story where a child is visited by a ghost. Griffin then

says that he will give the frightening tale one “turn of the screw.” This makes the story into a ghost story.

One part of the book that I found hard to interpret was the end of the book. Miles' death came as a great shock. I think that the governess simply frightened Miles to death or could have smothered him to death. Sure that may be hard to believe but that was the only reasonable explanation I could come up with. I saw foreshadowing in the story that brought me to believe that she smothered him. Miles was banished from school because of things he said. I assumed it was dirty language and he passed those words onto other children, including his own sister. Flora probably did not learn the appalling language from the ghost of Miss Jessel but most likely from her own brother. In the article from www.gradesaver.com, they talk about the governess' reaction to Miles and his confession. The governess was given adequate information about why Miles was expelled from school. They also talk about how “the governess's behavior is having a dangerous effect on the boy. The sweating, hard breathing, and weakness she describes begin even before she tells the boy that Quint is present.” The governess seems to get even more upset and then begins shaking the boy.

I liked this book more than I thought that I would. I was not expecting it to be a ghost story at all and was really quite surprised by the ending.

Source: www.gradesaver.com/ClassicNote/screw/about.html

Bibliography:

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