

# [Hawthorne and poe take us to hell](https://assignbuster.com/hawthorne-and-poe-take-us-to-hell/)

In both “ Young Goodman Brown” and “ The Cask of Amontillado”, evil is something that the characters carry with them throughout the stories. The revelation of their personal evil is a journey that begins with the ostensible picture of faith and good will and as the stories progress; the characters strip their masks in the journey into darkness and chaos. At the end of the stories, the characters return to a place of structure but something is broken.

The first thing to note about the structure of the stories is that they are both purposefully modeled from Dante’s Inferno, which was based in the “ journey to hell” genre so popular in the Middle Ages. What distinguishes Dante from the countless other poets and writers is that Dante has a psychological component to his journey into hell. The journey into hell is both a literal journey and a psychological journey into the darkest and grimmest parts of Dante’s soul. The major difference between Dante and the works of Poe and Hawthorne is that Dante moves through Purgatory and Heaven in order to rebuild his fractured soul. In both Poe and Hawthorne, the return to normalcy is only superficial. Upon confrontation with their evil natures, the characters never get to rebuild themselves. They just look like they are normal.

The stories begin with the character in a state of innocence or what seems to be a state of innocence. In Cask, the narrator states that he was pretending to be a friend to the doomed Fortunato. “ He did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.” (Poe) In the Poe story, the mask is one that the protagonist perceives and accepts as his wont. By contrast, Young Goodman Brown does not perceive that his happy home life is a delusion that he must constantly maintain. At the beginning of the story, Goodman Brown prides himself in his piety. Beyond the highly symbolic name of Faith for his wife, Brown begins his journey into the dark woods declaring “ My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path” (Hawthorne)

In both stories the journey into darkness becomes the journey into truths, truths that the protagonist will only admit in the darkest places. Even in these journeys, there is a degree of conspiracy theory in order to assist the protagonist. The protagonist of Cask convinces his victim that he’s a mason and even produces the trough to prove it. By contrast, Young Goodman Brown believes that he sees a witch’s coven and every member of the town is gathering to celebrate the wickedness that flows through everything.

Yet, these far-reaching conspiracies turn out to be mere window dressing for the actual revelation. In the case of Cask, the narrator is using the trough to build a wall so that Fortunato will be trapped behind brick indefinitely. In the case of Goodman, the hooves and the townspeople coming to the dark woods are merely speaking the words that Goodman has in heart. When the dark figure states: “ This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds: how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows’ weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers’ wealth; and how fair damsels–blush not, sweet ones–have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest to an infant’s funeral” (Hawthorne) he is admitting to himself things that he already knows.

No community is completely innocent of sin and there are always going to be scandals and problems. Goodman Brown is a zealot whose faith is based on everyone in his community being just as sanctimonious as himself. When he goes into the dark woods and sees visions of the townsfolk gathering to worship at a witch’s Sabbath, he is admitting that he lives among people who are sinful and capable of evil deeds. Instead of integrating that revelation in his daily life, he becomes hardened. When one grows up in a certain community with high standards and thinks that the community is perfect, only to learn that it’s not, one has two choices. The healthy individual will stop being so hard on himself and have compassion both for himself and for those around him. The unhealthy individual – as Goodman Brown turns out to be – will become more judgmental and rigid, not only in his own behavior but in his judgment of others. At the end of the story, Goodman Brown has shut himself off from the rest of the community through emotional and psychological issues.

By contrast, in Cask, the narrator is literally building a wall against Fortunato. As he reveals himself to be planning the murder of Fortunato, a murder and a revelation that can only take place in the darkness of the cellars. The scene where the narrator is bricking up Fortunato serve as a return to structure, that bricks up both his victim and his own sense of guilt. One of the funniest lines is “ My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so. I hastened to make an end of my labour.”(Poe) Whether or not that sick heart has anything to do with the guilt, it’s covered up in the process of killing Fortunato.

Both stories depict evil as a secret life that the characters will not show to the world and the very secrecy makes the evil powerful.