

# Goodman brown political views and religious beliefs essay

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



In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story Young Goodman Brown, there exists sufficient evidence to prove that death and birth can be symbolized through events, characters and objects. These symbols do not only highlight the main themes in the short story, but also represent Hawthorne's political views and religious beliefs. The main characters who symbolize death and birth are Faith (Young Goodman Brown's wife) and a grave man whom Brown meets in the forest.

The forest is depicted being gloomy dreary and evil. Additionally, Faith symbolizes political conservativeness as she clings to conservative Christianity throughout. Such conservativeness ensures that she does not suffer eternal condemnation like her husband Young Goodman Brown who is meant to represent the political hypocrites like Governor Howard Dean who changed views to suit their political whims.

Furthermore, the serpent like features that the grave man has is also a symbol of death. In addition, the departure of Young Goodman Brown from his wife's comfortable house into the darkness of the forest symbolizes the birth of Brown's new life. It also represents the departure from popular conservativeness to the unpopular liberal mindedness, which provokes a conflict of a person against the entire mainstream of society.

Therefore, characters, objects and events in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown do not only symbolize death and birth, but also reveal prevailing political views and religious beliefs. Hawthorne's religious beliefs are evident in the short story and feature death and birth.

This concept of death and birth is seen from the beginning of the story due to the characters, such as Faith, Young Goodman Brown's wife. Faith is symbol of the puritan Christian life. Faith like President Bush "relied too much on faith to make decisions" (Facts on File News Services para 7) when she pleads Brown to "put off his journey and sleep in his own bed until sunrise" (Hawthorne 7). however, her requests are unsuccessful.

This is a sign of Faith's relevance as a life sustaining figure in Brown's life; Faith's religious beliefs seem to convince her that the journey will mark Brown's death. It also signifies Hawthorne's belief that Christianity is the foundation of successful life. Once in the forest, Brown meets a grave man adorned in "grave and decent attire... and had a staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake" (Hawthorne 10).

The black snake is a token of the evil in the society and also signifies departure from mainstream conservative views. Like abortion which many of the conservative Christians oppose (Facts on File News Services para 26-28), the black snake is a mark of liberal mindedness.

Additionally, Brown confesses to the grave man that his "father... and his father before him... were a race of honest men and good Christians" (Hawthorne 12). This signifies that Hawthorne believes Christianity to be the only way to live an honest and fruitful life. This encounter further implies that Brown's ancestors had been devoted Christians and significantly marks the death of Christian beliefs.

Throughout the night, Brown is experiencing disturbing visions. That's why in the morning when he goes back home to his wife Faith, Brown's Christian spirit had died. In church, Brown realizes the extent of his spiritual death when the preaching makes no meaning to him, and he labels the preacher as a blasphemer. Brown's spiritual death also symbolizes his physical death. His spiritual death is a precursor to his physical one.

When Brown was "borne to his grave a hoary corpse", the mourners "carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom" (Hawthorne 26). Therefore Hawthorne asserts that the loss of one's religious identity is the beginning of one's spiritual and the ultimate physical death. Brown chooses to forsake his Christian faith and live a faithless life when he decides to visit the forest for an "evil purpose" (Hawthorne 7).

Unlike Senator Kerry who chose to be "on God's side" despite of being criticized for being too liberal (Facts on File News Services para 24), Brown chooses to be on the devil's side when he decides to go to the forest with an evil aim. This is the birth of Brown's faithless life through which his eventual death is symbolized. Brown takes "a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest... with narrow path creeping through, and closed immediately behind..." (Hawthorne 9).

Furthermore, Brown knows that he is in the midst of "unseen multitudes" (Hawthorne 7) implying that there are unseen evil forces in the forest. Like Senator Kerry who forsakes some of the Catholic beliefs and is against

campaigns for abortion (Facts on File News Services para 10), Brown decides to renounce his Christian leads to his spiritual and physical death..

It is imperative to state that Hawthorne alludes to the fact that evil and death exist in the real world. Human beings are carriers, and regardless people believing in God and serving Him, this evil lives even among those who confess to Christianity. The only way of escaping such a situation is through chaste followership of Christian belief. Hawthorne attains this by comparing the appearance of the grave man to Brown.

In Hawthorne's words, the grave man " bore a considerable resemblance to Brown more in expression than in feature" (Hawthorne 10). Symbolically, the grave man portrays gloom and evil as a real personification of Death. It can be argued from this assertion that Brown's resemblance to the grave man reflects evil and death which exist in a real world and which human beings unknowingly possess.

In addition, the grave man tries to appeal to Brown not to be afraid since Brown's relatives as well as other Christians " were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight" (Hawthorne 13). The grave man can be likened to Senator Kerry.

Like Senator Kerry who forsook his Christian beliefs propagating atrocious acts such as abortion (Facts on File News Services para 10), the grave man helped members of Brown's family, such as Brown's father and grandfather, as well as other Christians who had lived in chastity to commit acts of

atrocities. Senator Kerry's as well as the grave man's actions are symbols of the death of Christianity that also illustrate Hawthorne's belief that evil and religion exist side by side, and that the most chaste people can avoid evil.

The use of symbols also illustrates Hawthorne's political views in the United States and the relationship between politics and religion. Various symbols within *Young Goodman Brown* reveal the dominant political ideologies and what a significant role religion, especially Christianity, plays in American politics.

In the recent years, " U. S. politicians have become increasingly vocal about their religious beliefs" (Facts on File News Services para 10). However, such a vocalization of their religious inclination has led to much criticism or the decline of some of politicians' political life. Like Senator Kerry who vocalized antireligious views which led to " denial of communion" (Facts on File News Services para 34) with the church and the society, Brown's anti Christian stance results to him in being considered an outcast.

As it is explained above, this is the beginning of Brown's death. Similarly, Senator Kerry's support of pro-choice views, which are in opposition to mainstream catholicism views on life, led to his eventual political death. While Hawthorne's views on the relationship between religion and politics are not explicit in *Young Goodman Brown*, the implications are evident when analyzing the latest occurrences of *Vis a Vis* in America.

Events, objects and characters of *Young Goodman Brown* express, albeit implicitly, that Hawthorne sees conservative and liberal political views in a

conflict. In Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, there are characters that explicitly support conservative views, but are inwardly democratic.

Hawthorne achieves this through the numerous outwardly chaste characters such as Brown's father and grandfather with whom the grave man had been "good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk had they had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight" (Hawthorne 13).

Unlike Senator Kerry who explicitly expressed liberal views on religion, these characters chose to remain overtly conservative (staunch Christians), but secretly held liberal anti Christian views by being friends with the grave man. Furthermore, Brown explicitly asserts, "With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!". Before this statement, he was in the forest and pledged the devil his allegiance to him.

These characters lived in spiritual conflict. This expresses Hawthorne's political assertions that the society is overtly conservative, and that those who try to pursue the liberal politics risk to be condemned by the society. Furthermore, this fact also exposes the political hypocrisy within the society where politicians like Governor Howard Dean who embraced Christianity to win governorship (Facts on File News Services para 23) both accept and deny religion to suit their political agenda.

The use of symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story Young Goodman Brown is not only used to depict brown's spiritual and physical death, but how dangerous it is for a person to depart from the Christian faith. Moreover, these symbols expose prevailing religious beliefs and political views. Young

Goodman Brown ignores his wife's appeals not to go to the forest at night. This marks Brown's beginning encountering the death.

Death and birth are not explicitly stated but alluded to through events, objects as well as characters such as Faith and the grave man. Hawthorn's symbols have also been illuminated through real life figures such as President Bush, Senator Kerry and others. Like most of the conservative Republicans, Faith and other chaste Christians, such as Brown's father and grandfather, choose to abide by conservative Christianity.

However, liberal mindedness is revealed through Brown, and like other real life figures such as Senator Kerry who suffers eternal condemnation as a result of adopting liberal views. Therefore, through these symbols, Hawthorne makes overt references on the perils of living a faithless life as well. He also highlights the conflict between liberalism and conservativeness as well as how religion influences modern politics.

Facts on File News Services. Religion in Politics: Issues & Controversies. Facts on File News Services, 2010. Web.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Young Goodman Brown. New Jersey: Wildside Press LLC, 2005. Print.