

Literary criticism technique in "young goodman brown"

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is a short story in which the author attempts to convey several different messages or themes throughout the literary piece. Themes in literary works can sometimes be better understood by analyzing the piece with a specific literary criticism technique. A few of these literary criticism techniques include Marxist, Formalism, and Reader Response just to name a few. Given Hawthorne's style of writing and this short story in particular, a reader or critic can benefit from analyzing his work with the Reader Response literary criticism approach.

The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms define reader response criticism as, "a type of literary criticism that focuses on reading as an active process and on the diversity of readers' responses to literary works," (Murfin & Ray 425). By analyzing "Young Goodman Brown" using the Reader Response method the reader adequately comprehends the themes of loss of innocence, fear and public image that Hawthorne depicts in his short story. Goodman Brown, much like the title alludes, is the main character in this story that is faced with a series of decisions that illustrates his morals and society as a whole.

Using the Reader Response literary criticism technique the reader relates to Goodman Brown in his first major decision. This decision comes as Goodman Brown is leaving one evening and his wife is pleading with him not to go. Mr. Brown sets the tone for the short story and gives the audience some insight into his personality as he responds to his wife by stating, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee," (Hawthorne 3). Brown then

turns the focus from himself back towards his wife's trust in him by questioning, " my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married? (Hawthorne 3). The obvious reader response in this part of the story is one of misunderstanding or perhaps anger towards Goodman Brown for leaving his new wife (Faith) and flipping his decision to leave onto Faith's insecurities. Themes and symbols become more prevalent in the story using this literary critique as the main character wanders into the woods and interacts with who appears to be the devil. The theme of loss of innocence is understood by the audience due to the fact that it was Mr. Brown's own decision to leave his wife on a journey to interact with the devil.

Another theme that is highlighted in " Young Goodman Brown" by Nathaniel Hawthorne proves to be the theme of fear. Fear is illustrated in the plot from the moment the main character makes his journey into the woods or forest. By using the Reader Response critique the audience picks up on the author attempting to portray the forest as a place of darkness, isolation or evilness. Hawthorne conveys this image as he states, " It was now deep dusk in the forest and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying," (Hawthorne 4).

In this portion of the story the main character has met up with the devil and continues to walk with the devil deeper into the forest. Without using the literary critic known as reader response, the audience might overlook the fact that Hawthorne is attempting to set a tone of evil and how Mr. Brown weighs out this evil with the innocence and purity that his wife Faith resembles. Finally, the theme of public image or how one is perceived in

society is certainly something that Hawthorne attempts to focus on in this literary piece.

Throughout the story Goodman Brown sees several individuals in the forest that he never thought he would see or would associate with evilness. These individuals include Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin and even his own wife Faith. Using the literary critique discussed above, the reader can relate to Goodman Brown and almost feel what he feels as he observes these people in the forest with him. At the beginning of the story Hawthorne somewhat projected Mr. Brown as almost an outcast in his innocent community by taking this journey into the woods.

However as his journey continues and he sees other individuals in the dark forest with him Goodman Brown realizes he is not alone. The reader can interpret this a few different ways. First, it could be interpreted that Hawthorne is trying to illustrate that one's public image may not be exactly what you think it is. This also could be interpreted as the loss of innocence is inevitable at some point in one's life. Nathaniel Hawthorne's style of writing provides a solid balance of obvious and subtle symbols, motifs and themes to portray the messages he sends to his audience.

The readers of his literary pieces can learn more by going through his short stories applying the Reader Response Critique. This will allow one to relate to the different characters on a personal level and not allow information such as time, location and economic issues to be factored into a reader's analysis. The reader response criticism certainly is beneficial to readers struggling

with interpretation of a literary work; however this is not the only method that can aid a reader. In fact, there is numerous critique methods not mentioned and can even be used in conjunction with one another to allow for greater insight.