

The change in young goodman brown

Literature



The Change in Young Goodman Brown . In his short story “ Young Goodman Brown”, Hawthorne presents the idea that the Puritan religion, because of its specific beliefs, has lost all sense of meaning to the younger generations. In his journey through the dark woods and the events he witnesses there, Goodman Brown’s steps symbolize Hawthorne’s own doubts and observations about his religion based on his knowledge of what has gone before and the inevitable result of the Puritanical teachings he’s been part of.

As Young Goodman Brown sets off on his dark journey, his young wife Faith implores him not to go, sensing some kind of immediate peril. The journey represents a necessary testing of his faith, but the fear expressed by his wife Faith indicates there is a hidden peril in undertaking such a journey. Her warning, “ may you find all well when you come back” (293), seems to indicate the peril does not apply strictly to Goodman Brown as he sets off on his journey, but for Faith as well as she is left behind in the darkness. In this solitary journey, Hawthorne indicates that the doctrine of purposefully seeking challenges to a faith already weakened by church dictates is a highly dangerous proposition with the capability of leading many men and women to their dooms rather than their salvation.

This concept that the experience is leading to doom rather than salvation is defined more as the story progresses and Goodman Brown goes deeper into the darkness of the forest. The people that Young Goodman Brown sees and hears as he makes his way to the heart of the forest proves to him that the human soul is beyond redemption, regardless of their good works performed in the light of day, such as “ a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his

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catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin” (295). It is witnessing of the meeting between the woman and his companion who is presented as the devil, that first opens Young Goodman Brown’s eyes to the idea that the people he has considered so good in his lifetime are as full of sin and corruption as anyone. Throughout his journey, he loses some heart, but determines to hold fast to his Faith and return home. However, when he hears the voices of the villagers in a passing cloud, along with the sound of his own Faith being carried along with them, he gives in altogether and determines to find out what lies at the end of the path. Crying “ my Faith is gone!”, Goodman Brown suddenly realizes the teachings of his religion allow for no greater redemption following a good life than that afforded to the wicked. “ There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given” (298). Understanding the teaching of the Puritans that no man may ever escape the evil to which they’re born, regardless of their intentions or daily activities, Goodman Brown loses his faith in a good and forgiving God, giving in entirely to the despair that must follow such revelations.

Although his Faith has been tested, Goodman Brown is no longer able to believe in her or it. His experience has taught him that all people contain evil in their souls and that no one can be trusted. Even his own thoughts are subject to questioning and at no point in time does he ever return to the easy lifestyle with his neighbors he once knew. Regardless of appearances, his life is now one full of evil at every turn where the slightest evil counteracts even the greatest good and no hope remains that a Godly life might eventually lead one to heaven.

References

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Hawthorne, Nathaniel. (Date of publication). "The Young Goodman Brown."
Name of Anthology. Name of Editor (Ed.). Place of publication: Name of
Publisher, Date of anthology publication.