

Young goodman brown

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In this extract from “ Young Goodman Brown”, Nathaniel Hawthorne uses symbolism, imagery and point of view to depict Goodman Brown’s eventual journey from naivety in man’s purity of faith to recognition of man’s disposition to evil. It reveals Brown’s misplaced faith in man, who is deficient, instead of God. In the dialogue that ensues between the minister and Deacon Gookin, we learn of an impending meeting expecting participants hailing from “ Falmouth and beyond... Indian powows” (Hawthorne 26). The geographical listing hints at the far-reaching influence of the devil.

By including the Indians, Hawthorne subtly contrasts the inclusiveness of this heathen community versus the exclusivity of the Puritan community. This perhaps also alludes to the dogmatic view of the Puritan doctrine of predestination which regards all outside their community as doomed therefore limiting the influence of the Christian faith. In addition, the sacrosanct act of ordination is undermined suggesting the meaninglessness of such appointments and celebrations when true faith is missing.

Brown clearly holds the two men in high esteem as he was concerned about facing the minister and Deacon with “ a clear conscience” (25) if he consorts with the devil. This chance encounter destabilises Brown’s fundamental belief system. He realises that he has been deceived by the appearance of piousness and purity of faith by those regarded as the elect of God but are in effect devil worshippers. He goes through a sort of an awakening and his faith is shaken as he begins to see the corruptibility and hypocrisy of a society that values public display of morality over genuine private faith.

Hawthorne uses the visual imagery of the overwhelming darkness in the forest to hint at the Brown's delusion since "the depth of gloom" (25) could have impaired his ability to make out the true forms of the two men. He assumes it is the deacon from his perceived familiarity of the voice. This could indicate that Brown's vision is veiled by the darkness in his community thus impairing his judgment of the people around him and his spiritual blindness as his personal faith is based on what he hears them say instead of a true knowing of his faith.

The imagery of "stars brightening" above when doubts and confusion begins to overcome Brown symbolises hope (Khoo 16) in the midst of doom and gloom. This hope leads Brown to make a penultimate declaration of resistance, clinging on to Faith, his wife, who represents a tangible symbol of his faith as his strength of this resolve. Once again, we see his misplaced faith in a being instead of the Divine. This perhaps is a foretelling of the imminent lose of Brown's faith since Faith, being human is deficient. This symbolic spark of hope is overshadowed almost immediately by a "black mass of cloud" (26).

The alliteration in "hurried across..... hid the brightening star" and "sweeping swiftly" both emphasise the quick movements of the cloud to cast a shadow over the clear sky. Apart from signifying the omnipresence of evil and its great influence over mankind, it also foreshadows another episode of looming devastation to Brown's weakened faith. Later on in the extract, Brown hears again, sound of voices of familiar townsfolk blending in with the "murmur of the forest" as if attesting to the embodiment of both the devil and his followers.

Hawthorne skilfully weaves in the aural imagery of a cacophony of sounds juxtaposed against a single utterance of a young woman to create a sense of the internal spiritual chaos welling up within Brown and drawing attention to the emergence the catalyst of his final conflict – possibly Faith. Up to this point, Brown has not seen but only hears what he perceived as the truth. Did he really hear the minister and Deacon or is this a figment of his imagination? This uncertainty suggests the ambiguity and relativity of good and evil, truth and deception.

All that Brown has previously regarded as good and truth appears otherwise now. The narrator's point of view in this extract moves into the foreground while Brown recedes into the background. According to Wargo, this switch “ showcases the increased detachment of Brown from his moral faith” (Vicky Wargo). At one point, the narrator addresses Brown as the “ listener” (Hawthorne 26), Levy contends that such tones of detachment “ are measures of the distance he places between himself and the protagonist he regards with a mixture of condescension and pity” (Leo B.

Levy, 375). This detachment evokes disdain for his misplaced faith and sympathy to Brown's struggles. The conflict in the point of view is also evident. When the narrator declares that Brown is wavering in his faith, “ doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him” (Hawthorne 26), he contradicts the narrator by pronouncing “ With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil! ” This according to Wargo “ alludes to Brown's moral confusion”. There are moments when the narrator's voice and Brown's thought seems to merge.

When a question “ Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying ... ” is asked, we are unsure who is asking it. This uncertainty leads us question if this is perhaps Brown’s display of his self-righteousness. Whilst he dismisses his own venture into the forest, he questions the men’s presence. It is as if to allude to the words of Jesus in the Bible, Matthew 7: 3, Brown “ looks at the speck of sawdust in his brother’s eye and pays no attention to the plank in his own eye” (1544).

Is he not then, as much a hypocrite as he judged the men to be? The elements of symbolism, imagery and point of view in the extract reveal the internal tension and turmoil building up in Brown. This encounter serves as a rising action in the plot. Brown started the journey confident of his faith but the encounters along the way caused him to vacillate and he realises, with “ heavy sickness of his heart” (Hawthorne 26) that evil is resident in everyman.