

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Young Goodman Brown



Young Goodman Brown: Setting

- Time: Sunset
- Place: Salem village
- Weather conditions: Windy
- Social conditions: See notes on historical context
- Mood: Darkness and gloom



Character: Faith Brown



1. Characteristics: Sweet, cheerful, religious
2. Developing character: She goes from good to corrupted.

Character: Young Goodman Brown



1. Characteristics: Confident, religious
2. Developing character: He goes from being confident in his ability to choose good rather than evil, but once he stands before the Devil's altar, he can no longer believe that good always prevails. He becomes a profoundly disillusioned man who sees wickedness everywhere, including in those closest to him.

Character: The Devil



1. Characteristics: Older man physically resembling Young Goodman Brown in some ways
2. Developing character: The reader comes to see him as the darker side of Young Goodman Brown's character.

Character: Goody Cloyse, the Minister, Deacon Gookin



1. Characteristics: Pious, virtuous at story's beginning; hypocritical at story's end
2. Developing characters: All three of these characters serve as dramatic examples of the wickedness and hypocrisy that may hide in the souls of those who appear most virtuous. These three are distinguished from among the crowd of townsfolk at the gathering because they represent a standard of piety and godliness that is destroyed for Brown by his experience. Both Goody Cloyse and Deacon Gookin were real people who were involved in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

Young Goodman Brown: Plot



"Young Goodman Brown" opens with Young Goodman Brown about to embark on an evening's journey. His young wife, Faith, fearful for some unknown reason, beseeches him to delay his journey. Goodman Brown, however, stresses that he has a task that must be accomplished before sunrise, and so the newlyweds reluctantly part. As he walks down the street, Goodman Brown chides himself for leaving Faith while he goes on his journey and resolves that, after this night, he will stay by the side of his good and pious wife. Pleased with himself, Goodman Brown then hurries through the forest to accomplish some unknown task.

Plot (cont.)



Deeper in the forest Goodman Brown spies an old man, who is actually the Devil in disguise, waiting for him. Goodman Brown blames Faith for making him late. The older man, who has a curious resemblance to Goodman Brown, carries a staff which resembles a black snake. When the older man urges Goodman Brown to take the staff to ease his walk, Goodman Brown expresses second thoughts and his intention to go home. The older man convinces Goodman Brown to walk with him, however, and listen to the reasons why he should continue. Goodman Brown agrees and murmurs that his forefathers, good honest Christians, would never go on such a walk.

Plot (cont.)



To his surprise, Brown finds this is not true. His companion tells him that he is well acquainted with the Brown family and that he helped Brown's father and grandfather commit acts such as the punishment of religious dissenters and the massacre of Indians. While Goodman Brown expresses surprise, his companion continues to speak of the good Christians of New England with whom he is acquainted: deacons, town leaders, even the governor. Goodman Brown is amazed but tells his companion that were he to continue on this journey, he still would not be able to meet the eye of his minister. Hearing this, the older man breaks into a fit of laughter.

Plot (cont.)



The two men then see Goody Cloyse, the old woman who serves as Goodman Brown's moral adviser. Not wanting to explain who he is with and where he is going, Goodman Brown hides in the woods. Again, Goodman Brown is surprised; the woman knows his companion, who has now taken on the appearance of Goodman Brown's grandfather. The two older people talk of a witch's recipe and the meeting that will take place this evening. Goodman Brown realizes that Goody Cloyse is a witch.

The two men continue walking through the forest. At a hollow in the road, Goodman Brown refuses to go any further, declaring he would rather be on the side of Faith than Goody Cloyse. His companion leaves him to think over the matter. Goodman Brown realizes that his decision to stop will enable him to meet his minister and deacon with a clear conscience. As he continues these comforting meditations, a carriage passes by on the road. Two men, who reveal themselves to be the minister and the deacon, speak of the evening's meeting and the young woman who will be joining. After the carriage has passed, Goodman Brown feels faint as he realizes that these men, too, are in communion with the Devil. Now he questions whether or not heaven really exists. Yet his love for Faith gives him the willpower to resist going to the meeting.

Plot (cont.)



While he is lifting his hands to pray, however, he hears Faith's voice. He calls out for her, and she answers with a scream. He realizes that Faith is going to the meeting, and he decides to attend the meeting too because all good is now gone. Soon he reaches a clearing with a crude altar surrounded by the "saints" and "sinners" of Salem. While the Devil's congregation sings an evil hymn rejoicing in sin, Brown waits, hoping that he can find Faith. At a call for the new members he steps forward, and Faith is led forward by two women. A dark figure speaks of sin. He commands the newlyweds to look at each other and then declares that they now know virtue is but a dream and evil is the nature of mankind. Goodman Brown cries out to Faith to resist this evil.

Plot (cont.)



He never finds out, however, if Faith does resist. As soon as the words are out of his mouth, Goodman Brown finds himself alone in the forest. The next morning he returns to Salem. Everywhere he goes he sees people who attended the meeting, but he turns away from them. He even turns from Faith.

Though Goodman Brown never finds out whether or not he dreamed the meeting in the forest, the experience still has a profound effect on him. After that night, he becomes a stern, sad, and distrustful man. He rejects the faith he once had in his religion and even rejects his own wife. At his death, no hopeful words are carved upon his tombstone. He has lived a life of gloom, seeing sinners and blasphemers everywhere he looked.

Young Goodman Brown: Point of view



Omniscient limited – The author tells the story in third person. We know only what Young Goodman Brown knows and what Hawthorne allows him to tell us.

Young Goodman Brown: Conflict



Man vs. himself - The conflict that Brown suffers during his journey in the woods is shown to be internal through the number of details that are projections of his unconscious. The devil's arguments "seemed rather to spring from up in the bosom of his auditor" – that is, Brown himself. When "the echoes of the forest mocked him," Brown is projecting his emotional state onto the forest.

The further Brown sinks into despair, the clearer it becomes that what he sees and hears is to a large extent the product of his fancy. "Once [Brown] fancied that he could distinguish the accents of townspeople of his own," but "the next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught" until "then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones." Ultimately Brown himself is the "chief horror of the scene" created by his own mind in conflict

Foreshadowing



When Young Goodman Brown leaves Faith in the beginning, she says to him, “Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year.” It is obvious later that Faith knows that something is going on and she does not want her husband out in it.

Young Goodman Brown: Theme



1. **Guilt vs. innocence** - the inexperienced young man ever has. Early in the story, Brown says: "after this one night I'll cling to [Faith's] skirts and follow her to heaven." He believes Faith is an "angel" and one of the Puritan elect who is destined for heaven.

Unfortunately, Brown's experience in the forest makes him reject his previous conviction of the prevailing power of good. He instead embraces the Devil's claim—"Evil is the nature of mankind"—by crying out "Come, devil: for to thee is this world given." This acknowledgment, fueled by the discovery of hypocrisy in the catechist, clergy, the magistrates of Salem, and his own wife, destroys Brown's faith in the Puritan elect. It also sets the tone for the rest of his life. Critics often view this outcome as an attack by Hawthorne on the "unredemptive" nature of the Puritan belief system, which holds that people are evil by nature because of original sin.

Theme (cont.)



- 2. Alienation vs. community** - Though Brown successfully rejects the Devil in his physical form, he allows sin to reside within him when he rejects his belief in humanity. "Often, awakening suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed at his wife, and turned away." By turning away, Brown becomes the symbolic representation of Hawthorne's belief in the isolation of the human spirit. In Hawthorne's own words, every human being is alone "in that saddest of prisons, his own heart."

Theme (cont.)



3. **Good vs. evil** - In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne presents sin as an inescapable part of human nature. The fact that Goodman Brown only has to make his journey into the evil forest once suggests that the spiritual quest is a ritual all humans must undergo at some point in their lives. Brown, however, proves himself incapable of accepting this part of the human condition and cannot move forward with his life as a result.

Faith, on the other hand, makes a leap of love and faith to welcome her husband back with open arms from his inexplicable night away from home. Brown, however, "looks sadly and sternly into her face and passes without greeting." Whereas Faith is able to accept the inevitable fallen nature of humanity and live prosperously with this realization, Brown the absolutist cannot accept this truth, and remains stuck in a state of suspicion and ill feelings. By portraying these two reactions, Hawthorne makes a statement not only about the black-and-white, Puritan view of good and evil, but how evil can take other forms as well.

Young Goodman Brown: Symbolism



1. Forest: A place of temptation or evil
2. Faith Brown: Purity and religious faith
3. Young Goodman Brown: Naiveté, piety, righteousness
4. Pink ribbon: Child-like innocence