

First & Last Name

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Walking the Path of Life

Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of "Young Goodman Brown" explores a man's internal conflicts of his interpretation of good versus evil. During his journey with the Devil, the man's search for the goodness within himself changes the way he views the people in his Colonial world. This walk with evil represents the temptation of Brown's logos, rules for life, and can be related to man's in general.

Hawthorne's story strives to make the reader see the deeper meaning in his work through his characters' names. The story is centered on Goodman Brown, a Puritan recently married. By referring to him as "Young Goodman," Hawthorne attempts to convey that all people are good when they are young. Faith, the wife of Brown, represents what religious faith should be: beautiful, pure, and unwavering in conviction. These character names give the reader an idea of what was morally expected of the people in a Puritan New England colony.

Brown's desire to test his own virtues leads him out into the forest. The nighttime walk through the forest illustrates the trials of man as faces the unknowns of life. The journey starts at the village, which represents a world that is right and pure. He leaves his sheltered life of the village for the darkness and dangers of the forest path; there he is to meet the devil. Brown meets

the stranger and holds fast to his conviction, denying him, saying, “ My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of martyrs” (Hawthorne). The Devil corrects Brown, giving details of his forefathers’ lives and how he has come to know them. The Devil is crafty in the way he states his dealings with all men. His standpoint is all evil acts are from his inspiration, and those committing these acts have named themselves friend to the Devil.

Brown holds onto what he knows as fact, but the Devil has sparked his curiosity and the walk begins. The Devil continually chips away at the foundation of Brown’s beliefs through examples of his influence. The Devil shows Brown all the “good” people in his life and reveals they are the Devil’s own people. This symbolizes the breaking of the beliefs most hold as children. The views he holds as a youth will change with time, as life experiences will broaden his understanding of them.

The trial that finally breaks Brown is the testing of his Faith. Once he sees that his embodiment of goodness turns to the dark path he has been traveling, he succumbs to the devil’s will and races down the path. This frenzied flight brings Brown to the Sabbath, a gathering of all people in Brown’s village. By showing all the people Brown knows in his life to be at this gathering shows the entire world is in league with the Devil. This is the Devil’s final trick, to convince Brown everyone he knows is evil, that evil is the nature of all men, and he should accept it. After all, if his Faith can be turned, so can anyone.

We are left at the end of the story to make determine the truth of the tale. At the Sabbath, Brown gives his final resistance “Faith! Faith! Look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one.” This defiance breaks the Devil’s illusion and leaves Brown to wondering if this night’s

experiences are real or was it a dream. This uncertainty leads to Goodman's mistrust of others. In one-way or another the Devil has achieved his goal of sowing the seeds of doubt. If Brown had accepted the Devil, evil wins outright. Through his denial of the Devil, it has left him with the question of what is real. Hawthorne presents the reader with a double-edged sword, what is real or dream in the story, just like what is real or not in their own life.

Real or not, the walk in the woods has changed Goodman Brown. This story shows the dark path through the woods is the same as humanity's walk through life. Both are full of dangers and uncertainty, trial and tests, and the devil whispering in our ear through out the journey. The Devil shows his influence in the actions of all men. The concrete beliefs we have when we are young can always be turned to sand when treaded upon. When the morning comes, we are left with the question of what is dream and what is reality. How we use these life experiences and relate with others is what truly defines the goodness or evil in us.