

How was Young Goodman Brown taken into the world of evil?

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Or, How is Young Goodman Brown tempted to sin by curiosity? [NU: 2016]

Or, Why must Young Goodman Brown make his journey into the forest?

Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804-1864) "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) is a dark symbolic tale. It shows how a man falls from innocence into doubt and despair. Goodman Brown begins his journey with faith in God and love for his wife, Faith. But the forest, the devil, and shocking visions tempt him. Finally, his curiosity pulls him into the world of evil.

Leaving Salem and Faith's Warning: Goodman Brown leaves Salem village at night. His wife is Faith. She wears pink ribbons. She begs him not to go. She says,

"Prithee put off your journey until sunrise."

But Goodman Brown answers,

"This one night must I tarry away from thee."

This shows his first temptation. He chooses curiosity over love. Faith's sad face and her fearful dreams are warnings. Yet he leaves her behind. This step away from Faith is also a step away from true faith.

Meeting the Mysterious Traveller: In the dark forest, Goodman Brown meets the mysterious traveler. The man looks like him but is older. It seems this man looks like his father. He carries a staff shaped like a snake. The staff moves like a living snake. This traveller is the Devil. He tempts Brown to walk deeper into the woods. Goodman Brown at first says he will go back. But the Devil replies,

“E’en go thy ways, Goodman Brown.”

The calm words and the serpent staff create doubt. Brown’s curiosity makes him continue the journey.

Goody Cloyse, the Minister, and Deacon Gookin: Brown hides when he sees Goody Cloyse, his old teacher. She recognizes the traveler and cries, “The devil!” Then she laughs and talks of witchcraft. Brown whispers in despair,

“That old woman taught me my catechism!”

Later, Goodman Brown hears the voices of his village leaders. He hears the Minister and Deacon Gookin. Brown hides in fear. He feels betrayed. These men were symbols of Puritan faith. Yet they are going to the Devil’s meeting. He says,

“With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!”

His heart begins to lose trust in all religion. Curiosity again tempts him. He wants to know more about the hidden sins of these holy men. This drives him deeper into the forest of evil.

Faith’s Ribbon and the Cry of Despair: Suddenly, Brown hears voices from the clouds. He hears his wife’s voice. Then a pink ribbon falls down. He cries in horror,

“My Faith is gone!”

This has a double meaning. He feels he has lost his wife, Faith. He also feels he has lost his spiritual faith. In anger and madness, he shouts,

“Come, devil! For to thee is this world given.”

Now he rushes to the evil meeting.

The Devil’s Sermon and Final Temptation: At the fiery altar, the dark leader welcomes them, saying,

“Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness.”

Goodman Brown sees Faith beside him, trembling. The evil force almost wins. His mind becomes weak. He feels lost and broken. He almost accepts the baptism of sin. But he resists for a moment and cries,

“Faith! Faith! Look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one.”

At once, everything disappears. He is left alone in the silent forest.

Goodman Brown’s journey shows how curiosity led him into evil. He wanted to test sin and see the truth. He found only despair. After that night, he could never trust anyone. Even in prayer, he heard only “an anthem of sin.” The story teaches that curiosity without faith destroys hope. Goodman Brown was led into evil by his own weakness.