

Young Goodman Brown Key Info

Writer: Nathaniel Hawthorne | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Key Facts

- **Full Title:** Young Goodman Brown
- **Author:** Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)
- **Title of the Author:** American Novelist, Short Story Writer; Master of Dark Romanticism
- **Source:** Inspired by Puritan history of Salem, Massachusetts. It includes witch trials, Calvinist morality, and the themes of sin, guilt, and hypocrisy.
- **Written Time:** 1835
- **First Published:** 1835, in The New-England Magazine
- **Publisher:** The New-England Magazine (later collected in Mosses from an Old Manse, 1846)
- **Genre:** Short Story / Dark Romanticism / Allegory / Psychological Tale
- **Form:** Prose short story; allegorical narrative with symbolic characters and events.
- **Structure:** Linear plot with exposition, journey into the forest (rising conflict), meeting the Devil (climax), and return home with permanent loss of faith (resolution).
- **Tone:** Dark, mysterious, allegorical, ironic, and critical of Puritan hypocrisy.
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited (focused on Goodman Brown's perceptions and psychology).
- **Significance:** A classic of American literature; explores Puritan morality, loss of innocence, the duality of human nature, and the dangers of blind faith. It remains a central text in studies of symbolism and allegory.
- **Language:** Originally written in English.
- **Famous Line:** "Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness."
- **Setting:**
- **Time Setting:** Seventeenth century (Puritan New England, around the time of Salem witch trials).
- **Place Setting:** Salem village and a dark forest nearby (symbolic of sin, temptation, and the unknown)

Key Notes – Young Goodman Brown

Puritanism (Puritan Influence): The story is set against the backdrop of 17th-century Puritan society. The Puritans lived strict lives in the name of religion and morality. In the story, Hawthorne shows how excessive religious hypocrisy turns people into hypocrites and breeds mistrust.

Young Goodman Brown – Significance of the Name: The title of the story carries deep symbolism in its three words. “Young” represents youth, innocence, and naivety. “Goodman” was a colonial-era term for ordinary men, often carrying connotations of social and religious respectability. “Brown” symbolizes the common man, human weakness, and inner conflict. Taken together, the name refers to a young man facing a moral and spiritual crisis.

Salem Village: The story both begins and ends in Salem Village. It symbolizes Puritan society, where people outwardly appear pious and holy. However, Hawthorne reveals that beneath this surface lies hypocrisy, hidden sin, and corruption. When Goodman Brown returns from the forest, he realizes that the villagers are actually allied with the devil. This discovery shatters his faith. Salem Village thus becomes a symbol of duplicity and Puritan hypocrisy.

Salem Witch Trials (1692) and Hawthorne’s Ancestors: On August 19, 1692, a dreadful event took place in Salem, Massachusetts, during the infamous Salem Witch Trials. At that time, Puritan society was deeply religious and steeped in superstition. They believed that witches or sorcerers made pacts with the devil to commit evil acts. This led to a wave of trials in which many women (and some men) were accused of witchcraft. Nineteen people were executed by hanging—sixteen women and three men—while others died in prison. Most of these trials were the product of blind faith, fear, and hypocrisy. One of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ancestors, John Hathorne, was a chief judge in the trials. John Hathorne never repented for his role. Nathaniel felt a deep sense of guilt and shame over this family connection. To distance himself from this infamous legacy, he added a “w” to his surname, changing Hathorne → Hawthorne.

Background: Young Goodman Brown

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the short story Young Goodman Brown in 1835. The story was set in Salem, Massachusetts, the town where Hawthorne was born. His ancestors had been strict followers of the Puritan faith and were also involved in the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692. This dark past deeply influenced Hawthorne. He wanted to write stories exploring human hypocrisy, guilt, and crises of faith.

Hawthorne observed that although Puritan society appeared outwardly religious, it was inwardly filled with hypocrisy and secret sins. From these experiences, and from the shadow of his family's guilt, the story emerged. Through the character of Goodman Brown, an ordinary young man, Hawthorne shows how losing faith can leave a person permanently hopeless and disillusioned.

When first published, readers were astonished by its symbolic and mysterious atmosphere. The story is not merely a short tale, but a reflection of the darkness within the human soul and the hypocrisy of society. Hawthorne combined his own family history with Salem's past to create the work. For this reason, Young Goodman Brown is both a semi-historical and a symbolic narrative.

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