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ABSTRACT

In their anthology, Guth and Rico cite as preface to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," a student paper saying: "The mere doubt of the existence of good and the thought that other human beings are evil can become such a corrosive force that it can eat out the life of the heart." This is what happens to Brown. In the story, he has help from the promptings of the Devil, or, he succumbs to his imagination and projects his own guilt upon his neighbors and family. A choice of these two interpretations may be left up to the individual reader. Teachers' manuals and the questions posed in texts about this story make clear that it is subject to varied interpretations. However, it is helpful in interpretation to consider the devil himself. The worldly-wise, sophisticated older man, as he is portrayed in the story, assists Brown to reach the conclusion or excuse that "everybody does it." The Devil does this by using tactics in current use by advertisers and politicians: poisoning the well and encouraging hopping on the bandwagon. He relies chiefly on his oldest tactic, the business that gave him his name: slander. By suggestion, or Brown's own suggestible imagination, Brown comes to project his own distrust on all of his community. If instructors can help students to understand exactly what happened to Brown, maybe some of them can avoid some of the devilish temptations to which everyone is susceptible. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/NKA)

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Abstract

In their anthology, Guth and Rico cite as preface to Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," a student paper saying : "The mere doubt of the existence of good and the thought that other human beings are evil can become such a corrosive force that it can eat out the life of the heart." This is what happens to Brown. He has help in the story from the promptings of the Devil. Or, he succumbs to his own imagination and projects his own guilt upon his neighbours and family. A choice of these two interpretations may be left up to the individual reader. However, it is helpful in either interpretation to consider the Devil himself. This worldly-wise sophisticated older man, as he is portrayed in the story, assists Brown to reach the conclusion or excuse that "everybody does it." The Devil does this by using tactics in current use by advertisers and politicians: poisoning the well and encouraging hopping on the bandwagon. He relies chiefly on his oldest tactic, the business that gave him his name: slander. By suggestion, or Brown's own suggestible imagination, Brown comes to project his own distrust on all of his community. If we can help students to understand exactly what happened to Brown, maybe some of them can avoid some of the devilish temptations we are all susceptible to.

Giving the Devil His Due:

yet another reading of "Young Goodman Brown",

from Address to the Inco Guid, or The Rigidly Righteous

by Robbie Burns

. . . .
A ye wha are sae guid yoursel,
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
Your Neebours' fauts and folly!
. . . .
Ye see your state wi' their compar'd,
And shudder at the niffer,
But cast a moment's fair regard
What maks the mighty differ;
Discount what scant occasion gave,
That purity ye pride in,
And (what's aft mair than a' the lave)
Your better art o' hiding.

Then gently scan your brother Man,
Still gentler sister Woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving Why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark,
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart,'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us,
He knows each chord its various tuone,
Each spring its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.

Teacher's manuals and the questions posed in texts about this story make clear it is subject to varying interpretations. More than 500 critical articles, notes R.V. Cassill, have been written about this story. The critics, note Barnet, Berman and Burto, "fall into two camps: those who believe that Goodman Brown falls into delusion. . . and those who believe that he is initiated into reality." In support of the

interpretation of Brown falling into delusion,Barnet, Berman and Burto note the critics rely on Faith's wearing her pink ribbons the next morning and on the narrator's objective perceptions, and, in support of the latter interpretation, they go on to cite Frederick Crews : "The richness of Hawthorne's irony is such that , when Brown turns to a Gulliver-like misanthropy and spends the rest of his days shrinking from wife and neighbours, we cannot quite dismiss his attitude as unfounded." However, most of the critical studies and guidebooks overlook a significant, maybe a crucial, point. Brown's night was a delusion, but for a reason that seems not to have been credited. One of the main characters in this story is sometimes not fully given his due. This is an interpretation of "Young Goodman Brown" based on a definition of "devil" and consideration of the temptations the Devil employs. "Devil" means, in its roots, "a slanderer." "Satan" in its roots means "an accuser." What the Devil suggests to Brown and the effect of his suggestions depend on these terms. The Devil's purpose is to sow discord. To Hawthorne, as to Nietzsche, "Sin is that which separates." (One suspects Nietzsche read Hawthorne to draw this conclusion.) If this story is interpreted as an indoctrination into reality, it is a harsh reality, one of "Evil is the nature of mankind." Since that is the Devil's opinion, I'd opt for the interpretation that the story is, rather, the story of a delusion. Brown has been led astray, but by whom and how?

Hawthorne's story has elements of both allegory and Everyman stories, and it is deliberately ambiguous about whether the literal events occurred. One of my colleagues, Carol Hart, suggests this placing of the material reality at issue demonstrates "that Hawthorne is not primarily concerned about making a statement about human nature: [that] evil may or may not be the dominant principle in humanity and the universe." The effect of his experience on Brown, however, is certain. The experience was a nightmare for Brown, literal or otherwise. And it created a nightmarish life for him. If we assume the material presence of the Devil in the story, Brown is offered various prompts by the Devil who, by suggestion and evil omens, arouses Brown's fears, guilt, and suspicion. If we assume the Devil offers Brown the evidence of his senses, then Brown "sees" for himself, his neighbours at play with the Devil. However, if we consider that devilish thoughts occur to each of us and arouse visions in our imagination of the devil at work, we know that no material presence is necessary for the Devil to do his mischief. In fact, we frequently open the door and step out to meet the Devil when we fall victim to our own inner promptings. Whether the Devil is a material presence in the story or a figment of Brown's imagination, the effect is the same. The example of Goody Cloyse having lost her broom and immediately assuming it had been stolen and therefore blaming someone else for its disappearance is an example of how quickly we

retreat from seeing any fault of our own and how eagerly we find others at fault. "Sure of himself," Brown failed to discount the purity he prided in, and made an appointment to meet with the Devil. The doubts that put dents in his armour as he set off on his errand and his pride in himself led him down the path to his own destruction. The poor young man is doomed from the outset and the question of how self-aware this "Rigidly Righteous" chap is, becomes the significant question.

Four points need to be addressed in teaching this story. First, the etymology of the word "Devil" helps explain the social criticism in this story. A consideration of the roots of "Devil" shows what kind of evil Brown is actually yielding to. Secondly, it is important to take note of how the Devil manages to persuade Brown. He uses the logical fallacies frequently used today by advertisers and politicians. Thirdly, the story is less an ambiguous puzzle if we take very careful note of the setting. All of the above make this a great story to encourage students to read for detail, consider words carefully--and maybe consult their dictionaries to establish helpful definitions--, and to introduce students to fallacies in logic used by and against them. Fourthly, despite its surface appearance as an allegory, the story contains convincing psychological realism as Brown meets with the various tactics the Devil uses in presenting his temptations. When these things are taken note of, the story assumes relevance for students. Finally I will take a quick look at some of Hawthorne's other work in support of this interpretation. All things considered, it is a story worth a lot of consideration.

Most readers note that Hawthorne never refers to Brown's "acquaintance" as the Devil and goes to some pains to avoid being specific. Goody Cloyse uses the name only in the lower case, when, on being startled, she screams, "The devil." Brown, too, uses the term only with the lower case. I'm opting for the term "Devil", as many critics do, particularly because the concept of slander is central to the story. The devil was first "Diablo." Originally and foremost Diablo or devil meant "a slanderer." **Diablo means "to slander; to set at variance." The Devil is a scandal monger who sets neighbours against each other. Satan means "accuser" and has its roots in the Hebrew word for adversary. The synonym for Satan was "devil," as it was for "fiend." The Devil's other alias is "false accuser." In Paradise Lost,Milton calls him "the great deceiver"and "the artificer of fraud" and the "father of lies."**

The Devil tempts Brown using a logical fallacy that has been effective as a persuasive tactic

through the ages. He **poisons the well**. (The usual example of this is Stuart Chases' "You can't believe anything my opponent is about to say; he's a notorious liar.") He **casts aspersions**. The devil uses **slander.** He **maligns**. And Brown proves to have no faith in anyone he knows. He can no longer see the good in them, no longer trust anyone. He goes the full seven leagues in step with the devil, and can no longer believe in his neighbours' goodness.

We spend much of our lives deciding who is trustworthy. We usually decide to put our faith in our friends and family, to take them on faith. Our lives would be hellish if we did not. If we know one thing of the Devil, it is that he is not trustworthy, reliable, so when the Devil says, " Now ye are undeceived." we know we must invert this. Brown, however, is completely deceived, from the start. Who would take the devil's word for anything? Young Goodman Brown takes it as gospel. He fails to question authority; to consider the source.

The second logical fallacy the devil employs is much in use today. People cheat on their taxes by it. They even vote by it. "Don't lose your vote," we're advised when the polls are published showing little support for our choice,"voting for someone who hasn't a chance. Vote for one of the candidates everyone is voting for." We buy our clothes, beer, etc. by this one. It makes the world go around. **"Everybody's doing it; everybody does it**." Gullible Goodman Brown was quick to hop on the **bandwagon**. As Hawthorne writes in"My Kinsman Major Molineux,""The contagion was spreading among the multitude." Brown ends his life a bitter man. Some of the men who burnt witches must have lived out their lives like Brown. They too had joined the parade without due consideration, without thinking for themselves or without keeping faith with themselves. Innocent Brown has been **"bedazzled," beguiled** by the devil, or **"Beguiled by the serpent"** as Eve said. "Beguiled" means deluded by trickery, **deceit,** sorcery**, treacheries,** cunning, craftiness, **dissimulation**. (The root of "guile" is wigle--Old English for sorcery.) Brown has been lied to and believed it. The Devil was the first person (creature) in the Bible to tell a lie, remember. (Hawthorne doesn't let Brown off easily; he calls him "Young" only twice, once in the first sentence, because Brown's suspicions at the outset indicate he's not entirely trusting. Brown is quick to distrust Faith but trusts the word of the Devil without a doubt.) Enchanted by the Devil, Brown is **disenchanted with his fellows**. He didn't keep faith with his god

himself. God didn't let him down; Brown deserted. We should also consider whether Brown is, from his first steps into the forest, excusing his own behavior, appeasing his conscience, by telling himself "everybody does it."

Hawthorne's Devil uses techniques of persuasion we are all too familiar with from politics and advertising. By using slander, the Devil tempts Brown to lose his faith in his fellow man and Brown falls for it. And by encouraging Brown to leap on the Bandwagon (everybody does it), the Devil clinches the sale, making it seem a bargain. The story is also about projection and the power of suggestion,and about our gullibility and susceptibility to hearsay.

Of course, we needn't think beyond the ever present rumours in our newspapers. Or we might think of the damage a rumour or suspicion has done in our own circle of friends.

The Devil's **final temptation** offers fulfilment of **our desire to know the dirt**--the tactic used today to sell the tabloids. In an effort to win over Christ, the devil tempted him with material things -- survival and security: food, safety (protection from injury) and power. The devil was asking Christ to prove his divinity, but the Devil only needs to use a minor test to have Brown break faith. The Devil doesn't even promise Brown the usual bonuses: fame, riches, happiness or power or even the knowledge he had promised Adam and Eve. He promises Brown only a special sort of knowledge: Brown will be privy to others' secrets. This temptation is related to the "everyone is doing it" fallacy. Wouldn't we all like to know if our friends and neighbours also think the nasty thoughts that can pop into our minds? Isn't it sometimes reassuring sometimes to find that someone else has erred? Brown returns from the wilds "bewildered." ("Bewildered" in its roots means "to stray", "to cause to become lost.") Brown is now **"more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than [he] could now be of [his] own."** He failed the devil's tests. He yielded to all the temptations.

The time and place of the story's **setting** work with the Devil to convince Brown. For readers, certainly Salem,(not Hawthorne's birthplace Salem town, but Salem village,today called Danvers), the site of the witchcraft hysteria, is recognized by readers as a place of historical importance.

The role of rumour and suspicion in the creation of the hysteria is obvious. (A significant question for class discussion is why did Hawthorne chose to write a tale about an era distant from 1835? This is like Twain writing a novel about slavery,14 years after its abolition.) Several explanations have been offered for why Hawthorne set "Young Goodman Brown" and The Scarlet Letter and other stories in the past. It has been said Hawthorne was haunted by the actions of his Puritan ancestors and that may be. It has also been noted that Hawthorne may have been disturbed by the Puritan deprecation of storytelling. The question of whether particular events were occurring in his era which prompted him to write these stories has also been addressed by scholars.[1] The events of Salem of 1692 are indelible in our imaginations, and, we hope, eternally remind us of what the human race is capable, of the results fear and rumour can produce. Hawthorne returns us to the era of the witch hunts because all witch hunts are sparked by rumour and gossip and suspicion and slander. **The Puritans, that "grave and dark-clad company," went about seeking sin and nosing out secret guilt. It is important to note that Brown's pre-dates the witchhunt of 1692 because Goody Close mentions that "unhanged witch Goody Cory" who, as Harding notes, was hanged for witchcraft in September 1692. We, unfortunately, needn't think beyond Senator McCarthy's communist witch hunt in the 1950s to see such thinking in action.** (See the movie *Guilty by Suspicion* about blacklisted Americans.) Consider, too, stereotyping generalizations indicating "more [consciousness] of the guilt of others than of our own" that " the whites (or blacks, or Indians, or Asians) always rip us off" or "cheat" or "defraud the insurance companies."

For Brown, Salem is the fortress-like village, surrounded by a wilds full of dangers. The threats in the forest of savage Indians, who did do battle with his father's generation, and the fears of the Puritans of threats to their religion created insecurities. For helpful brief background to the attitudes of the Puritans of Salem during the era around the witch trials, see Stephen Vincent Benet's essay "Witchcraft Days in Salem", 1937 (also published under the title "We Aren't Superstitious") and Arthur Miller's preface to "The Crucible.") The community in "Young Goodman Brown" sees itself as the elect, as having the answers. Brown fears the Indians partly out of his belief that his people are the only Godly people in the country. There is a parallel to modern fundamentalist religion and cults in "Young Goodman Brown." The more one sees him or herself as "saved," the more he or she sees the unsaved, the unconverted, as contaminated.

In case we might overlook this point, Hawthorne reminds us that in the forest it seems to Brown as if "every other voice of the *unconverted* wilderness, were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man." (E. E. Cummings' prayer is good to keep in mind, "and even when it's sunday may i be wrong/ for whenever men are right they are not wrong.")

"This night of all nights in the year" suggests October 31, All Hallow's Eve, Halloween, preceding All Saints Day, Nov 1 whose old name is Hallowmas. The evening before the Holy Day a vigil is to be kept for the spirits of the dead. (Nov 2 is All Soul's Day for the Roman Catholic Church--a day of services and prayer for the souls in purgatory--for the souls not at rest.) (It might also be helpful to note that the Gospel for All Saints Day is the Beatitudes, Matthew 5, 1 ff. : "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you , and persecute you, and shall **say all manner of evil against you falsely** for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they thy prophets which were before you." Restless spirits walking abroad--the spirits of Brown's ancestors-- should be on his mind.

It's late autumn. Withered leaves lie crisping on the ground. The descriptive details of the story direct our attention; the Devil "plucked a branch of maple." In late autumn, note the few rusty cranberry and rosy and brassy maple leaves still clinging on the ends of branches, or the last pink maple seeds twirling in the last light of evening. Pink ribbons? Our imaginations easily frighten us, especially when we are where we aren't supposed to be. Guilty consciences provoke imagination.

A good way to begin study of this story is to ask students to note, as they read, all the references to the "uncertain light" of various kinds in "the deepening gloom"and the story's last word and to find examples of Brown's susceptibility to suggestion (e.g. paragraphs 42, 47, 53,54,58, and 49). Before they read the story, ask students to remember how dark autumn nights can be before the snow cover brightens things up, and to watch for a few days to see how long there is any light after the sun has dropped below the horizon. To note, looking east, how the tops of buildings stay illuminated while on the ground the shadows deepen. And to recall how, while they are reading a horror novel in the night, the sounds of a branch scraping the eaves and the fridge motor activating become ominous. Brown very quickly, thanks to his guilty conscience, becomes paranoid; he's sure someone is out to get him. Brown needs only enter a shadowy woods to have his "fearful dream." His imagination quickly goes into

overdrive. Note Brown's assumption of the pathetic fallacy (as in Disney's enchanted forest in Snow White) in seeing the wind and forest mirroring and mocking his state of mind-- in case we are slow to catch on, Hawthorne points his finger at these: ". . . the wind laughed at him." (This is also an example of Hawthorne's tricky use of the narrative point of view. It is not always clear which statements are the narrator's and which are Brown's thoughts.) Because he is off limits in the forest, a place where he has "no legitimate business," an out- of -bounds place for the Puritans, and "on his present evil purpose," an errand he has "no business" going on and especially at night, at sundown, a time when an understood curfew comes into effect in his village, he can't think to question whether appearances belie reality in the wilderness and in the Devil's words. Knowing also the defiance in his own heart, how could he not come to assume the hearts of those he loves are similarly inclined?

A cause and effect plot summary shows the logic of the Devil's tactics and psychological realism in the portrayal of Brown. The Devil uses several temptations to try Brown's faith but doesn't need to lie to get Brown to nibble on his hook. Brown falls victim to pride and fails the first temptation. That was to make an appointment in the woods to meet the Devil. Goodman Brown, who "thinks he can do no wrong," heads out to meet his "acquaintance" in the wilderness (where no self-respecting, God-fearing Puritan would step foot, especially alone). Brown believes he will stand fast. He has confidence in himself. He leaves his Faith at the threshold, and never asks for God's assistance. He can go it alone. Farmer, Koertge, and Sierra note that Brown "arrogantly separates himself from the community of faith to battle evil alone." They go on to say, "If this story is read as a purely psychological story, Brown can be seen as a typical Hawthorne protagonist whose intellectual hubris forces him to pull into himself, separate himself from others, and think he can work out the issues of faith and good and evil by intellectualizing them." Against his conscience, his better judgement, from the outset, Brown keeps his appointment, but he forgets who he is dealing with. Students understand this bit of daring on Brown's part if they recall the first time they went to a party where there would be smoking (or drinking) and what they told themselves when they tried their first cigarette. "I can try just one cigarette. What harm can it do? I won't become a smoker."

In response to the Devil's first temptation, Brown had made his appointment with the powers of darkness, sure, with "the purity ye pride in" (Burns) he'd resist any temptation and win the contest. (Of course, ironically, pure pride leads him to believe this.) This young man is sure he has a handle on things,

everything under control. And why not? He is a good fellow, one of the elect. One can imagine him humming Julie Andrew's "I have confidence in me" from the Sound of Music to arouse his own confidence and quell his nervousness about his "guilty purpose" as he dons his coat to go on his appointment.

In his nervousness to get to his flirtation with the Devil, Brown almost forgets to kiss his bride goodbye. After he has leaned back into the house to kiss her, Faith puts her head out the door to call to Brown. In sticking her neck out to tell Brown she is frightened, Faith shakes Brown's confidence. She also allows the wind to toy with her frivolous pink ribbons. They should be white ribbons on a good Puritan wife, a proper plain married woman's cap (see those of the modern day Amish), the sign, like a wedding ring, of a married woman, so it is possible they are a sign that Faith breaks rules. She must be vain and frivolous and rebellious, or why the pink ribbons? (Pink is also a little girl's colour and could merely suggest she is childlike or innocent.) The image disturbs Brown, and her words arouse his guilt and his own doubts.

She said she couldn't trust her thoughts on that night. She said "a lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afear'd of herself, sometimes." She didn't say she was afraid of what Brown might do, or of the devil, just of her own imagination. Since Brown is leaving his sheltered life and going on a dangerous journey into the wild world, it is only natural for Faith to worry with "dreams" of what might befall. Ask students what goes through their minds when it is miserable weather and someone is 15 minutes, then 1/2 hour,then 1 and 1/2 hour late for a date? What are the thoughts of a parent when the newly licensed driver is out with the car on icy roads? The thoughts of a fisherman's wife when her husband is at sea in a storm? Faith is so relieved to see Brown safely returned at the end of the story she almost dares to kiss him in public. Of course Faith was right to worry about his welfare, as it turns out. Had Brown feared his own thoughts and imagination could carry him away, he might have fared better.

All Faith asks of him is that he wait until morning. But Brown's reaction to her concern is to worry, "Dost thou doubt me already?" (Honeymoons are soon over.) Brown wonders if his wife suspects his secret errand. Hawthorne here has a little fun with words. Faith looked, thinks Brown, "as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done to- night." We might say "Little does Brown dream how much trouble he's about to run into." (As if to point to the experience being a dream, the introductory paragraphs of the

story contain several references to sleep and to dreams of all sorts.) She hopes Brown will "find all well" on his return, and he later concludes she might herself be flirting with the devil. A guilty conscience often accuses others in excusing itself. People who suspect others are often guilty people, people with a thorough acquaintance with the sin they project onto others. It won't take much effort for Brown to come to suspect Faith.

Brown makes "haste on his present evil purpose." He knows his purpose is evil. This is his first breach of faith or trust. Because he was so bent on his appointment, he almost forgot to kiss his wife goodbye (God be with you). But he does leave his faith at the door, and we see his second breach of trust when he uses her as an excuse when the Devil says "You're late." Goodman Brown was never pure, was he? He readily passed the buck and blamed Faith for his being late!

It is Brown who first spooks himself in the woods wondering "who maybe concealed by the innumerable trunks" and fearing "a devilish Indian behind every tree" and "the devil himself" at his elbow. But while Brown puts himself in harm's way, he has a little assistance. His companion says he will "convince" Brown. The convincing is prompted by Brown's own thoughts, for he has opened the door for devilish ones. Hawthorne underscores his point by having Brown suggest the means of temptation to the Devil. In turn, Brown tells the Devil how disappointed his ancestors and his spiritual advisors and his wife would be if Brown were to go down the path with the Devil, and the Devil has found, as the vernacular has found which "buttons to push." As surely as Hamlet's father was destroyed by poison poured into his ears, Brown will be sickened by suggestion, and by his own projection. So we don't miss the point that Brown's devilish imagination is hastening away with him, Hawthorne notes the Devil is "discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself." (If we are ashamed of ourselves and in need of excuses, most of us easily succumb to thinking the worst of all the people we know.)

Proud of himself for "having kept covenant by meeting thee here," Brown thinks he'll turn around and go home now. He's gone far enough, and says "I have scruples touching the matter thou wot'st of." "My father," he adds, attempting to resist the Devil with authority and asking for trouble, "never went into the woods on such an errand." He hands the Devil his can opener. Brown asks, and we enjoy the irony,

"Shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept. . . " He intends to say kept company with the devil. Of course Brown is not the first to commune with the Devil. All of us have. Try living one day without yielding to one of the seven deadly sins. When we are up to no good, one of the first things we ask ourselves is, would anyone I know do this? If we can answer yes, we cheerfully dive into trouble head first. We want to live up to the family reputation, but if we know of a blot on it, we take advantage of it.

The Devil makes full use of Brown's can opener. He uses the advertiser's equivalent of testimonials, of authority. **The Devil's tactic is to tell Brown his respected ancestors did evil.** This is not a lie on the Devil's part. Harding notes he's a crafty devil-- telling a truth or two "to make his lies acceptable." (350)

Brown says his ancestors "never spoke of these matters." We can believe this, but since Goody Cloyse mentions them later, we can assume she has told Brown about them in his education, since Brown's grandfather was her godfather. We rarely speak of the things we've done that we are ashamed of, but others don't resist telling them. Brown tells the Devil, "**the least rumour** of the sort would have driven them from New England." Rumour seems to be the first deadly sin in Hawthorne's classification. (Note throughout the story the references to hearsay, such as, **"They tell me that. . ."** In the company of saints (remember the particular E'en) and sinners, Brown finds those "**suspected even** of horrid crimes.")

Brown does not grant his ancestors that, "To err is human." Certainly Brown does not say of them "If they did these things, 'Forgive them Father. They knew not what they did.'" This Puritan was so worried about being pure, he forgot to be loving and forgiving. But at least Brown does doubt the Devil's word, briefly. If anyone had got wind of this (note the wind is sighing through the trees throughout), his ancestors would had been run out of town, he says. Like Elizabeth in "The Minister's Black Veil," **Brown knows the power of hearsay.** A little later, the Devil twists his knife in the wound this suggestion made in Brown. His ancestors' hid their guilty secrets. In case we readers too readily believe the Devil, the narrator makes his opinion clear. As noted by critics, the narrator of this allegory gives only positive appelations and adjectives to Brown's family and neighbours.

Next the Devil lets Brown see a few of his spiritual advisors. As Brown sees his "moral and spiritual advisor" approaching, he hides himself (he has a guilty conscience), and says, "she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going." His reputation is a concern for Brown. What will the neighbours think? Harshbarger, citing Demos, notes that "Like the inhabitants of small, pre-modern communities almost everywhere, the New Englanders were vitally concerned with matters of reputation." (p11) Isn't this why he went on his errand at night?

Cloyse calls Brown a "silly fellow"--something that might have served well had Brown taken note, but what is more important about Goody's speech is the suspicion (". . . my broomstick hath strangely disappeared , **stolen, as I suspect**, by that unhanged witch. . . .") and hearsay: "**for they tell me** there is a nice young man. . . " When added to competition and envy, suspicion is a powerful force. Harding notes that "the historical Goody Cloyse was accused of witchcraft in 1692 on evidence no different in kind from Brown's vision of her." (Harding,p.xi) Harding goes on to note " The devil points to her "figure. In assuming that she then *is* in the forest, Brown is acting as witnesses at the trial did"(p.351). (Cloyse also gives us the best description of the Devil by saying he is "in the very image" of Brown's grandfather whom she calls a gossip. "Gossip" had shifted from its archaic meanings of a godparent or a close friend or companion to today's meaning of "trivial talk, often based on groundless rumour" and Hawthorne took advantage of its multiple meanings.)

Brown suggests the next two tactics for the temptation. First he considers what if my minister should see me here? He concludes "his voice would make me tremble" at church--and this is what happens. Then, nervously, but in a valiant effort to fend off the Fiend, Brown says he must go home now, because ". . . there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart. . . ." Would he sin happily, if it weren't for her? (See Kohlberg's classification of the Stages of Moral Reasoning. Brown hasn't any strong principles of his own, but obeys for fear of punishment.) Brown swears, after doubting its existence, that "With Heaven above," though he doesn't remember to call on Heaven's help again, "I will yet stand firm against the devil!" But it takes little more than the noises in the forest to push his imagination to top speed. While "the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of town's-people of his own," and "the next moment. . . doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest," he hears

the voice of a woman. He hears Faith calling him-- as a child sometimes hears his mother calling , when he/she is rapt in some activity. He thinks he hears Faith "entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain. . . " Pure projection?

The climatic impetus for Brown's fears is his wife: " They tell me that . . . there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion." The devil's last tactic is "something fluttering lightly down through the air." Brown "seized" on it, of course. He seizes it like one seizing on an idea, and he "flies" through the forest. On the basis of scant evidence, Brown has decided his wife has become one of the Devil's party. Now that he is haunted with doubts about Faith , "the whole forest was *peopled* with frightful sounds." Brown knows "himself the chief horror of the scene." and "maddened with despair . . . " he runs every witch way. Despair, according to the Bible, is a major sin. People with faith have hope. To add to his sins, Brown gives "vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy." At this point Hawthorne makes sure we can't mistake his point,"The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man." Blasphemy (speaking evil) is "the unpardonable sin." In Matthew 12:31, Christ warns the Pharisees that irreverence to the Holy Ghost is the one unforgivable sin. Later, Brown urges Faith to ". . . resist the Wicked One" but "Whether Faith obeyed he knew not." (No wonder the word "obeyed" was inscribed into the marriage service, since men had such doubts about their wives!)

Finally Hawthorne rubs it in, with the reminder of Brown's sneaking out by saying that the "young girls trembled, lest their mothers should espy them." and with the ultimate question of our consciences, "What would your mother say?" In paragraph 60: ". . . a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought. . . . " What would Brown's mother say? Hawthorne may be a stern moralist, but he has a little fun while he is rebuking us.

Brown did make an effort to quell his fears (and his doubts about Faith) in his efforts to shrink the wolves to mouse size when "the wind laughed at him": "Let us hear which will laugh loudest! Think not to frighten me with your deviltry! Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powow [Norton spelling], come devil himself! and come goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you." But the wind got the last laugh. And he has only himself to blame--"the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart." In case we

readers are in danger of forgetting the whispers, their noise has swelled: "the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the **unconverted wilderness** were mingling and according **with the voice of guilty man** in homage to the prince of all."

Brown had lived in a community divided into the "pious and the ungodly," those who met at the communion table and those who met in the tavern, but, with surprise, he sees "the wicked" "irreverently consorting" with "the good." The Devil might have been doing Brown a favor telling him none of the Puritans are pure. There is a little forgiveness on Hawthorne's part for all of our sins in this acknowledgement that "everybody does it," that "to step aside is human." But Brown misses the chance to doubt the devil and the Devil reels Brown in by saying no need to compare yourself to the good and find yourself wanting: "There. . . are all whom you have reverenced from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward." Search for evil and you shall surely find it: " . . . . By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places-- whether in church, bed-chamber, street, field, or forest-- where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot." Then the Devil promises more: "Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power. . .can make manifest in deeds." Hawthorne has pointed with the phrase "all wicked arts" to witchcraft --which Goody Cloyse's broomstick had earlier also pointed to, and to the coming witch hunts. Like women with their broomsticks (or vacuums) cleansing the world of dirt, the Puritans had set out to rid the world of all evil. This is the work of busybodies, poking their noses into sómeone else's conscience to scent out mischief. Brown has just been told in strong terms, to stop looking out his glass house for evil in others. He ignores the warning.

In case we are in danger of missing the point, Hawthorne's Devil tells us straight out: "**Depending on one another's hearts** [what Christ commanded of us], **ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream!**" Note the Devil is careful with his words, sounding much like Biblical scripture, and he uses "dream" not "ideal" its more appropriate synonym here. "**Now ye are undeceived!**" For Goodness' Sake, this is the Devil talking! Do we not expect twisted, ironic, blasphemous things from him? But now, alas, Brown is totally deceived. "Evil is the nature of mankind."

[Even if the Bible implies this, surely for Puritans, Christ offers redemption.] If we are tempted to believe this, is it not because we are only too aware of our own all too human dark desires and readiness to yield to temptation? Each of us submits to the urges to lie, gossip, deny, rebel. The Bible's two central demands are love God and love one another. Love includes trust. People who endure a breach of good faith in a severe way suffer. How can we survive if we can take no one on faith?

The gathering were told they would be more conscious of the secret guilt of others than they would be of their own. Brown does just what the devil promised and distrusts the Deacon now he is more conscious of the secret guilt of the man, than of his own. When Brown asks "What God doth the wizard [the Deacon] pray to?" he is asking the wrong question. The question should be, what does he pray for? The answer should be for faith. It might be the Deacon prays for mercy. Brown doesn't consider this. (It's amusing that Hawthorne has Brown call the Deacon "Wizard" because the word evolved to mean a sorcerer or magician and the male counterpart of witch, but originally meant "wise man" or "sage". Its root, which it shares with "wicked," merely means "smart." Hawthorne lets us decide which use Brown intends.)

Goodman Brown didn't measure up. He broke faith before he went on his suspect errand and he became the devil's property, selling his soul pretty cheaply. Now he's a doubting Thomas. He has the doubts he should have had about himself in the first place, but now they are about others. He would have been better off had he sold himself short, had he seen himself less as a hero (a tendency of the young and good and idealistic) and more as merely human and capable of error. He fell for the Devil's first (ancestors), second (neighbours and teachers), and third temptation (your wife too.) He remarked that goody Close might "choose to go to the devil" but failed to notice how readily he chose to do the same.

Various scholars have differing interpretations of the story's conclusion. Wilfred L. Guerin believes Brown resisted "the diabolical urge to join the fraternity of evil" but notes that Brown was "never at peace with himself again." Barnet, Berman and Burto cite Connolly, "[Brown's] faith is purified, for he comes to see that he is not different from the rest of the congregation." Michael Meyer says "Young Goodman Brown remains unfallen" and is "not self-loathing" and "believes himself to be without guilt." If this is so, why are his dying days filled with gloom? If he alone is Heaven bound, why is he not exulting to be escaping his hypocritical neighbours and happily headed to his reward? Meyer suggests that Brown

has a limited awareness. This is so, since the Devil promised at the baptism that "they might be partakers of the mystery of sin," "more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own." The Devil left Brown "distrustful" certainly, and that was his intent. He promised Brown, "This night it shall be granted to you to know their secret deeds...." Brown is so full of doubt of his neighbours that he can not give anyone the benefit of a doubt. He can't take anyone on faith. He has taken the devil's word--and for more than it was worth.

Young Goodman Brown has gone to the devil and doesn't fully know it. He has gone to the woods to see the can of worms the Devil invites him to have a look at. He's handed the Devil the can opener. He's taken the bait, been reeled in, and clubbed over the head. And he doesn't know what hit him. He now doubts everyone. He knows he's been wicked in walking with the Devil. In another bit of irony, Brown calls to Faith to resist as the Devil "prepares" to baptize the pair of converts into being partakers of the "mystery" of sin so that they will know each others' secrets. What has been on his mind throughout his journey? That Faith will find out what he's been up to. Brown's guilty conscience has been bothering him a great deal. He calls on Faith to resist so she won't learn the truth about him, but he cannot resist suspecting her. (Brown, as a recently married man, is no doubt discovering things about his wife like any newlywed.)

It is as the moment when he calls on her that the noises cease. This is like awaking oneself from a nightmare when it becomes too threatening. Brown has "no power to defang the lion or to change him into a more benign kind of creature', and is given no "new powers," so "he is unable to mobilize resources to overcome a threat."(Garner) Hawthorne's point has been taken to be that Young Brown was too naive to know what to do, too untried, too inexperienced. Surely Hawthorne hopes to vicariously educate us-- lest we fall victim to the same line. But Brown knew better; he knew it was his duty to "keep the faith." Afraid that his secret will out, he now fears what "polluted wretches. . . the next glance" might "show them to each other." The last paragraphs give us no sign of Faith's doubting Brown. All we see is that his dread of his being found out has worked with his excuse that "everybody does it" to darken the rest of his days. Brown has not resisted. He now doubts everyone. The fiend that raged in his own breast has convinced him that "evil is the nature of mankind." That's a pretty damning thing to believe since it implies that was God's intent in our creation.

Michael Meyer says that "this story is a criticism of the village's hypocrisy." It is, in part. However, Brown, not the townspeople, is the primary hypocrite here. He flirts with the devil and is seduced, but he believes his townspeople should be immune to such temptations. By the conclusion, is he disheartened by his own guilt or by his belief that he lives with hypocrites?

What does it take for most of us to lose faith in our fellows? Most of us become doubters when we learn we have been lied to, or robbed or cheated, when we have put our faith in someone and been disappointed. We begin to suspect everyone of ulterior or self-serving motives. Does experience teach all of us to distrust each other? The Norton Anthology referring to the story as an initiation story (379) says "Young goodman Brown discovers the universality of evil in human beings." Brown believes this is what he has learned. He thinks his ideals have been shattered and lives and dies a "disillusioned" cynic. There is no question that we all have impulses for good or evil, but Brown never questions the evidence and never considers he can only "partly compute" (Burns). From his own efforts to excuse his mischief, sneaking out into the woods to chat with the Devil, he concludes that everybody does it, and then leaps to the assumption that everyone is rotten at the core. What Brown does not see is that he has been deceived or self-deluded, thrown completely off balance.

Did he dream or see a vision or see something real? Robert Cassill says, if this were all a dream, the ending is "without a resolution." In that case, says Cassill, "nothing happened." However, he adds an "And yet. . . " noting that Brown had indeed lost his faith in Faith. As quoted by Guth and Rico in their anthology's preface to the story, Hawthorne wrote : "A dreamer may dwell so long among fantasies that the things without him will seem as real as those within." Does it matter to us which is the case when we hear negative **gossip**? If someone tells us a negative, shocking thing about someone we know, most of us don't doubt it. Unimaginable, we say at first, and then persuade our imaginations to envisage the shocking thing. Innocent until proven guilty? Once doubt has unlatched the door, when hearsay creeps in, it's game over, no contest. Suggest to a friend that a mutual acquaintance was once accused of rape, and observe the friend's reaction. Brown has yielded to the power of suggestion, yielded to a delusion. Harding, discussing Sheldon Liebman's study of Hawthorne's trickery with the point of view in "Young Goodman Brown" points out that "the story forces the reader to undergo the very temptations (of

believing the 'evidence' so dubiously presented) that Brown himself has to endure.. . . [and} since the reader has constantly to bear in mind that it is only a fiction he is engrossed in, he may not lose sight of the fact that the mode of the story is 'supposing' not 'believing.' He notes that " if the reader does decide that Brown *really* saw the people of Salem Village at the ceremony in the forest, then the reader has listened to the devil's voice, and has been welcomed to the communion of lost souls." (xiii)

Brown is punished. "Milton, who argues that even the pagans understood that sin's natural punishment was the sinner's depravity, wrote: 'to banish forever in a local hell, whether in the air of in the centre, or in that uttermost and bottomless gulf of chaos, deeper from the holy bliss than the worlds' diameter multiplied; they thought not a punishing so proper and proportionate for God to inflict as to punish sin with sin.'" (John Milton, p. 279) Brown's punishment is to live in a local hell as deep from holy bliss as can be and to lose his chance for Heaven. He tried to stand alone and his punishment is his isolation for the rest of his life. If Brown only doubted his wife and only doubted his neighbours,but believed he had kept faith with God (which, even in quantities as small as a mustard seed, is supposed to be enough to save us), would his dying hours be gloom? Why did he have no faith that he at least was going to Heaven ? He doubted it. He felt himself a part of "a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart." This is not what a community of "believers" is supposed to feel. A little guilt and fear created doubt and suspicion in the "haunted forest", the "heathen wilderness." A little **calumny** went (and goes) a long, long way. Brown believed his neighbours and his wife to be hypocrites, and he knew himself to be. The last paragraphs tell us that he lived out his life and died "distrustful" of everyone around him. Brown sees himself as "guilty by association"--another logical fallacy at work here. Whether or not Brown thinks he disavowed the Devil, he put his trust in the Devil and the Devil got his due.

Several of Hawthorne works treat repeated concerns: rumour, secrets, suspicion, the power of suggestion, brotherhood, and standing fast. Hawthorne was concerned with human temptations, with the secrets that keep us from "heart to heart" contact, and with what constitutes sin. Examining The Scarlet Letter, "The Birthmark", "Ethan Brand" (about The Unpardonable Sin) and other works by Hawthorne, one begins to suspect that Hawthorne was writing an addenda to Dante's catalogue of the sins that earn one the fires of Purgatory or the ice of Hell. Hawthorne is not concerned with hell of an afterlife however; he is concerned with the sins that make a hell of life on earth. Hawthorne seems to define sin as a breach of

faith.

It is significant that in a July 1836 article, Hawthorne commented "witchcraft differs little from nightmare." Certainly other Hawthorne characters, such as Ethan Brand and Aylmer and Father Hooper, bewitched themselves and created their own nightmares. Apparently Hawthorne also worried about the similarities between nightmares and writing fiction. Brian Harding notes that " Numerous scholars have discussed Hawthorne's concern with the relationship between witchcraft and the imagination." In Hawthorne's story "The Devil in Manuscript" written the same year as "Young Goodman Brown," Oberon, the main character, notes Harding, "sees an analogy between the way in which the devil of tradition sucked away the happiness of those who subjected themselves to his power and the way in which his own ambitions as a writer have destroyed his pleasure in life." In his words: 'I am surrounding myself with shadows, which bewilder me, by aping the realities of life. They have drawn me aside from the beaten path of the world, and led me into a strange sort of solitude-- a solitude in the midst of men.' Thus the writer's subjection to the devil takes the form of entrapment in the world of his own imagination and his exclusion from the real world." (viii) Harding goes on, "Witchcraft, dreaming, the enchantment that separates from life, diabolic possession and potentially dangerous (inflammatory) writing: this concatenation of ideas is at the heart of Hawthorne's thought about the meaning of fiction and its creation." Like Brown, Hawthorne's imagination seems to have haunted him.

In "The Minister's Black Veil," the presumed sequel to "Young Goodman Brown," rumour is again an issue: "A fable went the rounds . . . . It was said, that . . . . It was believed . . . ." In that story, a minister becomes a rather sinister figure by donning a black veil he refuses to remove until the final veil is rent. The turning point occurs when his affianced, Elizabeth, is "infected" with the same suspicion the community has already fallen victim to. She says, alas, "rumour" might wreck havoc with the minister's life if he is suspected of having "secrets." Father Hooper, like Brown, also attempts to stand alone. The problems of both involve secrets and involve other people. It is Father Hooper's problem that through "whispers" Father Hooper was "enveloped" in "an ambiguity of sin or sorrow. . . so that love or sympathy could never reach him." Father Hooper, like Brown, through the whispers Brown attends to, removes himself from his community, from brotherhood.

It is noteworthy that none of Hawthorne's protagonists get into difficulties because of what someone else has done to him. Each of them is the creator of his or her own problems. Brown, for instance, is not a victim of others' rumours and slander, but the author of his own undoing. Father Hooper allows the rumour mill to grind by responding only with smiles, gently, softly, repeatedly, and maybe smugly, when faced with reactions to his veil or when asked about it directly. In these stories, as in several others including "Ethan Brand", Hawthorne offers the double irony of the protagonist himself being lost in the mission he pursues. Father Hooper's use of a veil, implying imperfect sight as, suggests the protagonist is not aware of his own limited sight. Brown thinks he has resisted the Devil, but has fallen victim and been lost.

Pride gets raked over the coals by Hawthorne, literally, in "Ethan Brand." Brand, and Aylmer in "The Birthmark," Robin in "My Kinsman Major Molineux," and Young Goodman Brown are all exemplars of the sin of pride. Young Goodman Brown's name suggests a fair bit of pride. The Puritans did try to live pure lives, but they were proud enough of their mission to call themselves Puritans.

Blasphemy and defying God are the subjects of Ethan Brand's search for the unpardonable sin. In "Ethan Brand," Brand, like Brown, goes about "looking into every heart, save his own, for what was hidden in no other breast." The story has a similar conclusion. His heart "had withered--had contracted--had hardened-- had perished. . . He had lost hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother man." (p305) Against this sort of character, Hawthorne creates the protagonist of "The Great Stone Face," Ernest, whose name sums him up. He is mild, sweet, thoughtful, sincere, and has "faith" in the "grandeur, the beauty, and the goodness in nature and in human life." The poet in the story says the latter are qualities "which my own works are said to have made more evident." And we suspect, Hawthorne wishes he were that poet, and not one cataloguing our sins and follies. The Great Stone Face has all the desirable qualities, " for all the features were noble, and the expression was at once grand and sweet, as if it were the glow of a vast, warm heart, that embraced all mankind in its affections, and has room for more. It was an education only to look at it. According to the belief of many people, the valley owed much of its fertility to this benign aspect that was continually beaming over it, illuminating the clouds, and infusing tenderness into the sunshine." Ernest, like other Hawthorne protagonists, does not see himself as he is, that he is "a man of peace, uttering wisdom, and doing good, and making people happy" and that

he therefore resembles the Great Stone Face.

In Hawthorne's essay "The Haunted Mind" written in the same year as "Young Goodman Brown", 1835, he seems to be clarifying this story. The essay is about the wandering of the wakeful mind in the course of a night, aroused from sleep and unable to return to sleep immediately. Consider the following passage:

> In the depths of every heart , there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at midnight, those dark receptacles are flung wide open. In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them; then pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain. It is too late! A funeral train comes gliding by your bed, in which Passion and Feeling assume bodily shape, and things of the mind become dim spectres to the eye. [Hawthorne lists early Sorrow and Hope and Disappointment and then continues.] A sterner form succeeds, with a brow of wrinkles, a look and gesture of iron authority; there is no name for him unless it be Fatality, an emblem of the evil influence that rules your fortunes; a demon to whom you subjected yourself by some error at the outset of life, and were bound his slave forever, by once obeying him. . . . Do you remember any act of enormous folly, at which you would blush, even in the remotest cavern of the earth? Then recognize your Shame.

In the second last paragraph of the essay is a reference to the pleasant things of life, including a reference to "the dancing radiance round the hearth of a young man and his recent bride." It is certainly suggestive of Brown and his recent bride and of what Brown enjoyed before his "act of enormous folly."

Hawthorne's works urge us to fulfil the commandment, to love one another, to maintain brotherhood. His work revolves around those things that divide us: rumour, hearsay, secrets, distrust. But what is faith? It means trusting in the good. If we do not trust in each other, we must live in isolation and complete despair. There is a sad irony if we teach the story from our sophisticated, cynical perspectives as being about a fall from innocence, because we are suggesting that all education is a

loathsome thing, a plunge into a sad reality. And there is a sweet irony in offering this story to a class in an effort to teach critical thinking, since it is a fine example of a man who chose not to think for himself, not to examine the evidence, and not to consider the source.

Endnotes:

1. In a biographical article on Hawthorne, Cassill notes that Hawthorne himself fell victim to slander in 1849, fourteen years after he wrote "Young Goodman Brown": "He had just lost the job in the customhouse that had been arranged for him by friends in politics. In the politically motivated hearings that terminated his appointment he had been slandered and deceived by pious hypocrites among the Whip opposition."

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