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"Young Goodman Brown": Humans are Devils Incarnate

Throughout history, we have developed many varied notions regarding sin and its relation to the self. One such theory, as exemplified in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short allegorical story "Young Goodman Brown," emerged during the late 17th century colonial Salem. He uses the following quote to express the theme of the story, "The fiend is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man" (7). The quote suggests that all human beings are inherently evil, sinful, tormented by guilt, brought down by pride, and intolerant to the extreme, yet remain undisclosed within a person or their psyche. After Young Goodman Brown, the protagonist, interacted with the devil and spent a night in the forest, his approach towards everyone and everything is permanently altered, maniacally, and evilly. The story portrays humans as beings who hold onto a persona to hide the darker side of the human heart. However, no one can conceal the evil that lies within each individual.

Goodman Brown exudes ignorance in the introduction of the short story as his hubris blinds him to the dangers of going on a journey into the unknown. Hawthorne spotlights Goodman Brown and Faith's naivete to emphasize how wrong it is for the reader to think Goodman Brown will come back on his journey unscathed. As Goodman Brown begins to leave, thinking he will return to Faith as if only setting out on a short errand, Hawthorne uses the extended metaphor, "She is a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven" (1). Goodman Brown is ignorant to believe that Faith will rest safely at home and that when he returns, he will metaphorically cling to his Christian religion

and reunite with Faith once again happily. As naive as he is, his journey to enlightenment is a long way ahead. Before this, when the traveler, a human incarnation of the evil, requests Goodman Brown to travel further, Goodman Brown replies, "We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs" (3). He anticipates that his race of puritans are saved from sinning by god when in reality, he has much to discover within his race. Therefore, his innocent mindset he starts the trip off with, contributes to the contamination of his mind.

Goodman Brown's overnight errand grants him the eye-opening experience of the darker side of the human soul, often willfully ignored. When the devil leads Goodman Brown deep enough into the forest, he witnesses a gathering of wicked people he thought to be saints. He says, "But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, ... there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches gave over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes" (7). Goodman Brown has a sudden epiphany to the unthinkable. Never did Goodman Brown think that people of such piety could be instilled with even a whit of evil. Later, a congregant in the gathering deliberately tells Goodman Brown, "Now are ye undeceived! Evil is the nature of humankind. Evil must be your only happiness" (9). After the events around the fire unfold, Goodman Brown discovers that the people he used to view as unflawed, are sinful each in their way. Cognizant of reality, he starts to rethink all aspects of humanity, as the new information of everyone else's sinful lives settles in deep within his own pure, dark heart.

Stunned and enlightened, Goodman Brown returns from the forest with a transformed impression of humanity. After his excursion, he feels immorality is everywhere and only sees the worst in those around him. Having witnessed the presence of sinful behavior, regardless of their

class or persona, he realizes that the fiend is less hideous when emerges from a corpse; Hawthorne writes, "Maddened with despair so that he laughed loud and long ... he seemed to fly along the forest path, rather than to walk or run" (6). Goodman Brown laughed in amazement and, at the same time, frustrated by the overwhelming awareness of humanity's false persona. Finally, buying into unholy facts, he lets go of his piousness to Puritanism and gives into the world that is full of evil, embedded in all of us since our birth. When he returns to his home with a remodeled perspective on humans, he hears the minister speak and challenges him, "dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers" (10). While others buy into the superficial aspect of the minister, Goodman Brown sees the minister as a man that is dark and nefarious. He recognizes the flawed theory of Puritanism, and that it doesn't exist. As a result of his newfound cynicism, he lives a life of gloom and solitude until the day he dies.

One of the most challenging things to accept in life is to realize that things are not as they seem superficial. Gradually, Goodman Brown's expedition allows him to reach the same realization. Many times authors use the literary devices of metaphor, epiphany, and allegory to convey an essential concept such as Nathaniel Hawthorne used literary devices to expose the critical idea of the malintent that exists within or that all humans are devils incarnate. Regardless of whether or not his journey with supernatural events is a dream, his time in the forest allowed for greater introspection and a revelation about identifying his neighbors, friends, and confidants genuinely.

