Bad Faith; Waking Dream; Living Nightmare: Narratological Ambiguity and the Puritan Imagination in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"

Peter Christoph Winzeler
Wimbledon, London

Bachelor of Arts, Trinity College Dublin, 2013

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Not only is Hawthorne an intense writer, he is also an intensely stylistic writer. He initially seems formal and rigid in his use of language, appears unremarkable by means of conventionalities such as formal diction (Millington 26). Yet it is precisely this "seeming" that makes him so fascinating, blurring the line between appearance and reality. The author achieves this in "Young Goodman Brown" by means of narratological devices that lead to ambivalence; he does so to unambiguously illustrate the power of the haunted Puritan imagination in its conception of sin, "functioning with the full force of history" (Martin 83). Hawthorne's tale is concerned with the recognition of sin and the innate depravity of mankind, the dark thoughts and acts that seem to brand a character a sinner. Most importantly of all, it is this sense — the realization — that humanity can, or is, corrupt that charges the work with a terrifying force. It is what Melville calls "the power of blackness" (Melville 1). Reality is unmoored by the ambiguity that constantly questions whether Brown "really" experiences his nightmarish journey through the forest. Matthiessen's now critically famous formulation of the "device of multiple choice" (Matthiessen 264) has traditionally left readers feeling obliged to choose one particular interpretation of events over another. But reading Hawthorne is not simply about making " either/or" choices. It is about allowing different interpretations to exist side by side, in what Bercovitch calls a relationship of "both/and" (Bercovitch 194). Brown experiences *both* a dream *and* a reality. By slowly and deliberately reading "Young Goodman Brown," we see how the author frequently employs suggestion and ambiguity, deliberately sustaining phenomenological uncertainty to dramatize the psychological consequences of Puritanism. The story hinges on not-knowing as Brown is left in a spiritual darkness for the rest of his life. He is so profoundly affected, we must agree that "he was himself the chief horror of the scene" (142).

A popular conception of Hawthorne views him as a writer of allegory, a term liberally applied by contemporaneous reviewers. Any suggestion of the nonliteral or symbolic was termed "allegory," and thus Hawthorne was frequently "allegorical" (Bell 23). On the surface, "Young Goodman Brown" conforms with such a simplistic view. Herman Melville, in his ecstatic essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," writes that he was deceived by the triviality of the title, and the explicit naming of the characters "Goodman" and "Faith" makes the allegorical appear the most obvious and only mode of interpretation. Indeed, the opening of the tale is too inviting with its self-conscious writing: "Faith, as the wife was aptly named" (133). Another quality of Hawthorne's writing that is often remarked upon is his linguistic style. Waggoner writes that, "His style … was a little old-fashioned even when he wrote it. It is slow-moving, with its pace slowed down still further by his heavy punctuation" (Coale, "Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*" 103). Diction such as "pr'y thee" and "afeard" (133), coupled with Brown and Faith's repetition of each other's phrases, only serve to affirm Matheson's belief that Brown and Faith speak in a ritualistic and artificial tone, their conversation rehearsed and recited as if from a prepared text (Matheson 136). Yet, precisely because of these stylistic attributes, Hawthorne's opening does not simply belie the piece but actually imbues it with a prophetic power. On first inspection, the protagonist is a naïve and credulous member of the church in Salem, who goes walking in the woods one night away from him wife Faith. There does not appear to be any specific trigger for Brown's expedition to the forest. But there are a number of details that establish "[his] prior attitude toward the moral nature of the universe" (Martin 83), which in turn directly contribute to the author's masterful and openhanded ambiguity of effect.

One of the phrases that echoes ominously between both characters is “of all nights in the year” (133). Colacurcio proposes that the date is October 31, when “evil influences” (Colacurcio, “Certain Circumstances” 52) were thought, nay known, to be abroad. The author gestures towards the Puritan’s belief in the supernatural, towards “the hermeneutics of Puritanism” (Bercovitch 41) — that everything has to be seen within a spiritual framework. This influences how Brown, and we as readers, might interpret what the protagonist experiences after departing from home. The ambiguity of the story is prefaced early on “in the subtle emphasizing of the dream motif” (Fogle 23). Faith is concerned that she may “be troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she’s afeard of herself, sometimes” (133). Her husband nervously notes, “She talks of dreams, too. Methought, as she spoke, there was trouble in her face, as if a dream head warned her what work is to be done tonight” (134). The ultimate uncertainty of whether the events in “Young Goodman Brown” are dream or reality has its origins in the connection between vulnerability and altered states of mind. Reality is counterpoised with dream, as the lone individual, unguarded, may become susceptible to fear and doubt. And so Brown’s decision to journey alone to the forest (of all places), a cursed land where Puritans believed the Devil resided, appears doubly portentous. Yet he denies the possibility of corruption in himself, and instead returns his wife’s concern: “dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married!” (133). He has already begun to doubt others, transferring his own “moral obliquity” (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 288) onto his wife. Thus, Hawthorne begins to build a climate of moral uneasiness, where both naïveté and guilt cohabit. His simple-mindedness, having already found form in his condescending advice to “say thy prayers … and no harm will come to thee” (133), returns with renewed assurance.

That is not to say that guilt is eradicated, yet Brown feels assured enough to genuinely believe his journey will have no consequences: “Well; she’s a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I’ll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven” (134). Not only does he maintain an idealistic version of his wife to settle his conscience, but crucially he also presumes that after this one night he can return as if nothing happened, unaffected. “Guiding and heightening our psychological expectations” (Crews 99), the fact that he is temporarily — but nonetheless consciously — forsaking Faith “destroys,” as Hurley asserts, “any belief in Goodman Brown’s ‘simple and pious nature’” (Hurley 118). Hawthorne juxtaposes the goodness of the wife with the now revealed “present evil purpose” (134) of the husband, a powerful indictment of the latter who goes to the dark wood “fully awake and aware of his intention” (Doubleday 209). “Intention” is the key word here, for Brown does not accidentally stumble across the Devil. His resolve operates within the context of moral assumptions specific to the cultural setting of seventeenth-century New England. To stray from the normal pursuit of salvation is “unpardonable” (Stibitz 157), let alone to keep covenant with evil. As it turns out, what “must needs be done” (133) is nothing less than keeping an appointment with the Devil, which seems to have been arranged some time previously. Already in a state of “bad faith” (Thompson 64), Young Goodman Brown’s is a compelling case of conscience that plays out in his forest experience with devastating force.

What follows is a very significant shift in the story, from the factual mode that typifies the quotidian to the extraordinary. Young Goodman Brown enters another world at twilight; he is described as “crossing a threshold” (Johnson 30), away from “home and the community, from conscious, everyday social life” (Milder 45). Entering into an enchanted space, where Puritans

believed supernatural forces had great influence, the lone traveller becomes particularly prone to "[the] peculiarity in such a solitude" (134). So much so that Brown places himself in an immediate state of not-knowing, "[he] knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead" (134). The relationship between the individual and other persons is broken down — for all Brown knows, there could be an as yet "unseen" and therefore undetected "multitude" (134). Here begins what West terms Hawthorne's "cultivation of ambiguity" (West 17). The narrator's observation that the protagonist leaves home with "excellent resolve" is especially ironic, as he quickly becomes fearful of the forest and the potential proximity of the Devil: "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!" (134). In "Young Goodman Brown," the forest is "a space liberated from custom" (Person 42). His fear that the Devil could be right beside him is the basis for his own uniquely specific type of experience, formed out of Puritan materials. That fear represents "an inward journey" (Walsh 64) into the doubting soul, one that proceeds from the thought that he can temporarily subject himself to evil.

The tale is thus primed as "a sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning" (Lawrence 81). It is not surprising, and entirely appropriate, that as soon as Brown expresses his anxiety over the influence of evil, he experiences his first encounter. And with no one other than the Prince of Darkness himself. Indeed, it is as if the protagonist summoned him himself, so "sudden" is the appearance of his "companion," and "not wholly unexpected" (134). Upon entering the woods, Brown is presented with a host of ambiguous incidents that make him question the reality of what he sees. Hawthorne uses qualifying expressions to create phenomenological uncertainty, destabilizing allegorical meanings and "suspending judgment on

apparent meanings, which are nonetheless offered as possibilities" (Mosher 17). "Young Goodman Brown" may begin as an allegory, but the "goodman" Brown embodies does not simply represent a particular point of view or condition that eventually clashes with its opposite. Not only is he portrayed as encountering evil at this early stage of the tale, it would appear that he helps to summon it from the depths of his Puritan imagination. As Coale writes, "the allegorical 'separation,' the dualistic structure of his [Hawthorne's] vision, becomes more intertwined, interpenetrating and 'intimately connected'" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 2). Good and evil do not exist independently, but each helps to create the other. Brown's first experience in the forest is the first of many encounters catalyzed by his initial naïveté and his initial bad faith. Having already had his prolepsis (about following his wife to heaven) undercut by the narrator's judgment of his "present evil purpose" (134), the appearance in the forest of a suspicious dark figure is timely in its "suggestion that the action is produced in Goodman Brown's own mind" (Johnson 31).

The Devil attempts to convince a hesitant Brown to proceed further into the woods. However, Hawthorne does not name him as such, maintaining a deliberate vagueness by calling him "the second traveller" (135). Here we find numerous examples of narratological devices that "put the reader in the same ambiguous situation as the characters" (Toker 17), those qualifying phrases which are neither subjective expression nor objective description. The traveller is the focus of a new field of vision. "As nearly as could be discerned," he is "about," "apparently," and "perhaps" (135) similar to Brown's own appearance. What the protagonist sees is allied to his own selfhood, which becomes even more apparent when the narrator states that "they might have been taken for father and son" (135). There is a personal tailoring of images, and the

"consistent discrepancy between appearance and reality" (Fogle 26) sows the initial seeds of doubt in both character and reader's mind. If Brown and the Devil look like father and son, then what does that say about Brown's father? Or, more importantly, about Brown himself? His relationship to evil is thus brought to the fore, suggestive that it is far more complicated and complicit than may at first appear (Bromwich 151). Individual instances of ambiguity merge to produce an atmosphere of doubt, accentuating the fact that he has only seen the "figure" (134) of a man by the roadside. Thus, Hawthorne's "literary strategy is every bit as deep as [the] historical plot" (Dunne, *Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies* 16), confirmed with a close narratological examination of what follows.

Paying attention to narrative enunciation is particularly important because it helps to demonstrate how the author creates interpretive uncertainty by destabilizing the text. Various interpretations collide as dream and reality vie for prominence. The remarkable example of the serpentine staff vibrates between the credible and the incredible:

> But the only thing about him, that could be fixed upon as remarkable, was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself, like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light (135).

The Devil's staff possesses the "likeness" of a great black snake, an illustration made all the more fantastical by the way it "might almost" move like a living serpent. The sentence itself is "so curiously wrought" that events are presented as if they were natural, when in fact Hawthorne has managed to transform a mere staff into "a thrilling Gothic apparition" (Dunne, *Calvinist*

Humor in American Literature 20). More to the point, Brown's imagination seems to have generated this animation. Liebman argues that "although events are presented as spontaneous, in fact they are connected almost causally, each originating in the mind of the character" (Liebman 158). The snake's writhing motion is made possible by his fear of the Devil's presence, an internal fear that acts upon external objects. But no sooner does the author offer the portrayal, he retracts this particular — particularly disturbing — description by stating that "of course" it "must have been" an "ocular deception" caused by "uncertain light" (135). The uncertain light of the forest becomes an uncertain light for narrative interpretation; persons and objects are referred to as "figure[s]" (134) and "likeness[es]" (135), "transforming the transparency of an objective world into the ambiguous opacity of an interior space" (Coale, "Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*" 134).

Ambiguities dominate the scene. In Winters's critical opinion, Hawthorne presents the reader with a "formula of alternative possibilities" (Stubbs 50), and like Matthiessen, he insists on the basic "either/or" perspective that renders interpretations as binary alternatives. Instead, we should view the author's method as one encompassing multiple possibilities. He leaves both possibilities intact: the Devil's staff could have moved, but also might not have moved. Wanting in tangible materialization, Brown's surroundings cannot help taking shape from his mindset. A guilty Puritan on a mission to meet the embodiment of evil, afraid of the supernatural influence the forest might exert, whatever he sees is real for him. Hence, ocular deception or no ocular deception, he finds himself in "a wilderness that becomes [his] mirror" (Levin 50). One might argue that the narrator is too quick to explain away the disturbing implication that Brown essentially hallucinates the moving staff. The overly assertive phrasing of "This, of course, must

have been" (135) overcompensates for what can be construed as a tame explanation, originating in the natural world. Yet as we shall see, "the 'logic of compulsion' replaces the logic of nature"; unaware, the protagonist's thoughts come to have "the potency not only of events but of causes of events" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 158). As Bercovitch correctly advances, the author's meanings are multiple but not open-ended, "they are designed to create a specific set of anticipations, to shape our understanding of what follows in some definite way" (Bercovitch 194). Brown's hallucinogenic encounter with the Devil sets the tone for the action that ensues: we can expect that the deeper he journeys into the woods, the more frequent and persuasive these visions become.

"Young Goodman Brown" explores the eponymous character's decision to venture into the forest and its profound consequences. Toker suggests that the story "can be read [so] that it is Goodman Brown's suppressed doubt about his own identity as one of the elect" (Toker 32) that propels him on his errand into the wilderness. Whether because of an unsettled sense of guilt, the inability to grasp indeterminacy, or merely a simply curiosity, he enters into a world influenced by this impulse. And that "outer physical world is so much the projection of the inward imagination" (Coale, "Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*" 259) that the two are inseparable. Brown's uneasy state of mind is plainly conveyed when he admits to the Devil that "I have scruples, touching the matter thou wot'st of" (135), the matter no less than the innate depravity of mankind. Stemming from hesitation and doubt, the number and intensity of personal crises will gradually increase, their ambivalence appearing to spring more from the mind of the protagonist than from any supernatural force: "[the Devil's] arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of the auditor, than to be suggested by himself" (138). Hawthorne's ambiguity strengthens

a psychological exposition of these events, illustrating the unambiguous power of the haunted Puritan imagination. Brown initially holds fast against the Devil, having kept covenant with "a gentleman who has lured him on this errand with a vague promise of a spectacle of unsanctified doings" (Bromwich 208). The Devil pushes for them to "walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go, and if I convince thee not, thou shalt turn back" (135).

The terms of this proposition are proposed as rational argument, a seemingly fair request that is in no way forceful. While it is tempting to blame our protagonist's ordeal on demonic powers, his "visions" are the product of his suspicion and distrust. Hawthorne leads us to the convincing estimation that in his narrative scheme Brown's uncertainty and the Devil's guile are not different. Another desired effect of Hawthorne's narrative strategy is to offset "the morbidity of his themes" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 22) with formal and archaic language. The dark implications of the tale find renewed potency, simmering beneath a calm and, consequently, emotionally distant surface. D. H. Lawrence viewed Hawthorne as a deceptive writer, masquerading as the innocent author of romance novels in order to hide a diabolic undertone:

> That blue-eyed darling Nathaniel knew disagreeable things in his inner soul. He was careful to send them out in disguise. Always the same. The deliberate consciousness of Americans so fair and smooth-spoken, and the under-consciousness so devilish (Lawrence 81).

The "under-consciousness" of the tale as a whole exists in microcosmic form inside the eponymous character himself — the Devil's personalized, "scandalous rumor and innuendo" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 294) targets those members of the community

closest to him. Bizarrely, what disturbs Brown is plainly that if he were to attend the Prince of Darkness he would diverge from the "virtuous" behavior that he presumes his patriarchal elders upheld.

The unconventionality of his journey elicits Brown's hesitation, instead of a more appropriate awareness that "consorting with the Devil is intrinsically sinful" (Matheson 47). The latter undertakes his own mission to persuade the goodman of evil's influence by first claiming to have known his family as well as any other: "I have been well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans" (136). In actual fact, it would appear that Satan knows them better when he reports the sins of the grandfather constable and Brown's own father. Despite this, Brown off-handedly dismisses these claims and does not seem even slightly perturbed. First, he reasons why he would not have heard of his ancestor's reputedly sordid past: "Or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New-England" (136). Then, in the same breath, he confidently says about his community, "We are a people of prayer, and good works, to boot, and abide no such wickedness" (136). The Puritans were committing themselves to a lie by denying a part of reality from themselves, chiefly the multifaceted characteristics of the self (Bercovitch 205). Dunne writes that judging from New England history and from "the book of life," we can conclude either that the Puritans were truly unique or that Goodman Brown is "comically mistaken." (Dunne, *Calvinist Humor in American Literature* 43). To hear the Devil claim such an impressive general acquaintance among the most revered members of the town begs the latter assumption. The protagonist's amazement is amazing in itself, but ultimately short-lived, and his reaction does not so much question the Devil's claim to universal influence as it does shrug off its relevance to his own moral condition:

"Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman, like me" (136). Interestingly, there does not appear to be any significant change of mood or conviction (Dryden 134). "The Puritan mindset is on trial" (Waggoner 47), and thus far, devilish evidence — both visual and otherwise — has encountered the same response. It does not apparently apply to a "simple husbandman" who can always cling to Faith: "Is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith [?]" (139).

In line with Satan's assertion that he is in league with the elders of Salem village, the second "figure" of the evening comes into view:

> As he spoke, he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism, in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin (137).

Hawthorne makes sure to clearly communicate both Goody Cloyse's virtuous character and her longstanding relationship to Brown. She is someone whom he has reverenced from youth, and who has had a profound influence on his moral life. If ever there were an unsettling image for the young goodman, it would be seeing her in the forest, too. What is even more unsettling is her appearance following hard upon the Devil's earlier "claims of sovereignty" (Davis 74), especially in light of her intensely personal connection with the protagonist. Person links the customized figures he sees to the Puritans' belief in specter evidence, the belief that the Prince of Darkness had the power to impersonate individuals (Person 18). It would make sense for the latter to conjure authority figures in his best attempt to argue for the universality of evil. But this assumes his existence, an uncertainty that permeates through "Young Goodman Brown." Goody

Cloyse appears in very much the same manner as Satan: both outlines are encountered along the forest path, fueling the prevailing view that this "specter" is actually a product of the protagonist's mind, and a reality because of his moral assumptions. Thus, "the line between appearance and reality is blurred" (Mosher 158) when subjective events are presented as if they were objective. The old woman reminds both Brown and the reader of the Devil's physical resemblance to Brown's grandfather: "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is" (138). Why is our protagonist silly? Not to be interpreted lightly, this pronouncement underpins his seemingly misguided decision to depart Faith for the spiritual wilderness and that decision's chilling aftermath.

Hawthorne toys with his readers throughout "Young Goodman Brown," suggesting that Brown is only dreaming. Once again, the Devil's staff becomes the focal point of narrative ambivalence. He touches Goody Cloyse's neck "with what seemed the serpent's tail" and leans "on his writhing stick" (137) when he speaks to her. The story exemplifies the author's "frustrating tendency to give evidence with one hand and take it back with the other — to create ambiguity of human perception and conclusion, leaving us suspended in a subjective, indeterminate realm with no stable ground" (Person 42). A mumbling old lady, there is nothing especially remarkable about Cloyse's physical description. And so the intrusion of the shapeshifting staff with its supernatural attributes disrupts one of many moments that might have assured us that "life in the story is or can be normal, 'real,' or good" (Mosher 14). Her pious nature vanishes when she recognizes and explicitly names the Devil for the first time in the text; she "knows her old friend" (137), her familiarity with evil exposed through her casual conversation with "your worship" (138). Brown is forced to choose between his lifelong belief in

the community's show of social appearance and the powerful suggestion of the universality of evil. "Accordingly, Goodman Brown's mental organization (and, by implication, the Puritan ecclesiology) dissolves into moral chaos" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 299). His "ethical situation" (Thompson 42) requires him to grapple with his ability to know other people's motives and, ultimately, his own. Goody Cloyse attributes her haste through the forest to the onset of a witches' meeting where, "For they tell me, there is a nice young man to be taken into communion tonight" (138). It is less about her moral condition and more about Brown's; hers lies beyond "the proper limits of the story" (Budick 231), while his is riddled with doubt and warped by his discovery of the possibility of universal evil.

Hawthorne is sure to include enough phenomenological uncertainty so that there is no relying on "sense evidence" (Budick 231) for Brown's knowledge of the world, or, therefore, on the evidence by which he should conduct his moral life. Millington writes that he inhabits "an epistemological marketplace" (Millington 26), where interpretations of experience vie with one another for control. No critical term is more firmly associated with Hawthorne than "ambiguity," the author's narratological technique recurring with a "persistent, almost pedantic pointedness" (Bercovitch 207) and his grammatically heavy qualifications operating as a nearly fully effective Gothic procedure (Dunne, *Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies* 6):

> So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian Magi. Of this fact, however Goodman Brown could not take cognizance (138).

"Young Goodman Brown" is emblematic of what Todorov calls the "genuine fantastic" (Toker 31): it causes the reader to equivocate between assuming the supernatural — the Devil causing

the staff to assume life — and reading the story as the account of a dream — Brown's imagination causing the staff to assume life. Liebman argues that Hawthorne repeatedly reintroduces the hallucinogenic performance of the staff as snake to distract from the real issue in question, that of whether Goody Cloyse actually appears (Liebman 159). Incidental ambiguity emphasizes the volatility of the external world and posits the ever-disturbing prospect that Brown projects his own fears and desires. The tale's intense surrealism of dreams represents essentially mental actions transposed to a historical world (Milder 45).

Thus, the word "reality" should "be set in quotation marks as part of the mind's figuration" (West 17). The author unsettles the search for stable meanings by repeatedly using "expressions of paralipsis" (Mosher 13), the most common of which is "as if." The Devil, after Goody Cloyse's disappearance, waits "calmly as if nothing had happened" (138). He in turn disappears just as quickly, "as if he had vanished" (139). The doubt can be ascribed to the ambiguity of Brown's point of view; no character he encounters in the forest seems to possess a shadow, and they appear and disappear in the most remarkably convenient manner" (Colacurcio, "Certain Circumstances" 114). This purportedly magical condition, as if conjured by the satanic "serpentine staff" (138), is undermined by the narrator's observation that the exemplary apparitions the protagonist sees are just that: apparitions that are referred to as "figures" as if to reserve judgment on their ontological status. Winters was repelled by Hawthorne's formal dexterity, belittling such instances of ambivalence as slight performances. For him, the author's tales did not embody anything concrete, and lacked meaning despite their "concentration of design" (Bell 24). Henry James also characterized "Young Goodman Brown" and Hawthorne's other Puritan short stories as whimsical or fanciful. James thought that he had managed to take

"the grim precinct of the Puritan morality for [his] playground" and "exquisitely … contrived" that everything would eventually "evaporate in the light and charming fumes of artistic production" (James 111).

But Hawthorne's artistic techniques are not self-indulgent or performative for their own sake. James is absolutely correct when he identifies Puritan morality as the tale's subject matter, the fabric out of which it is woven, but he has confused the terms of "Young Goodman Brown." Hawthorne does not simply use Puritan morality as a backdrop for the exhibition of his creative talents, a framework that dissolves in the process of serving its incentivizing purpose. Rather, he uses rhetorical devices, strategies of ambivalence, to place Puritan morality at the center of his narrative inquiry. "A quality of mind" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 99) is dramatized so that we are made to see the world through Brown's eyes. Artistry and history are complementary, as winding uses of "perhaps," "or," and "might" (138) sustain and indeed reinforce the author's main concern, "the theme that mere doubt of the existence of good … can become such a corrosive force" (Matthiessen 283) on the haunted mind of the Puritan imagination. It is unclear whether Goody Cloyse is ever present in the forest. The "politics of both/and" (Bercovitch 203) forgo having to side with one particular interpretation of events, so that meanings in "Young Goodman Brown" are not mutually contradictory. Instead, the phenomenological uncertainty of what Brown sees fortifies the evaluation that his encounters emanate from his troubled conscience: "Conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither" (139). His dream-like vision is also a reality; both the illusory quality of his "visions," as well as their personalized and seemingly substantial form, makes their appearance real *for him*.

Hawthorne uses ambiguity structurally (Fogle 12) to raise expectations in his readers. The consequences of Brown's personal experiences produce an increasing doubt, a sort of "negative faith" (Stibitz 303) that ensues from a discrediting of appearances previously trusted. Left to his own initiative and immersing himself into an increasingly overwhelming solitude, we encounter the cumulative emergence of "the resources of the haunted mind" (Hurley 112). Concealed in the verge of the forest, he has arrived at a place "where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (Johnson 33). He plumbs the undiscovered depths of his own imagination, and is subject — and subjected — to another shadowy and disembodied episode:

> On came the hoof-tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but owing, doubtless, to the depth of the gloom, at that particular spot, neither the traveller nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the way-side, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky, athwart which they must have passed (139).

Brown's experience is more ambiguous than ever, and the language of ambiguity is the only appropriate medium to convey such an eerie presence. During his time in the forest, he "beholds, discerns, recognizes, fancies, and discovers, as well as sees and hears" (Liebman 161). In this twilight atmosphere things seem and appear not only as themselves but as semblances of other things. Hawthorne unleashes a flurry of incredibly contradictory expressions; events even play

out on an imaginative, narrative level so volatile that sounds only "appeared" to pass, figures only "brushed" by. Despite the sound of the hooves and voices of the riders, the "depth of the gloom, at that particular spot" casts doubt on their actuality. The protagonist's perspective is qualified even further by the narrator's excessively self-assured and decisive claims that "doubtless" Brown's vision was limited by the darkness, and that the riders "must" have passed by despite their not having intercepted a characteristically "faint gleam" from a strip of skylight.

What is conjured out of the depths of the forest gloom is startling, all the more so for its apparently unprompted arrival. Brown's mind has become "a seemingly passive spectator" (Coale, "Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*" 262), a mirror to reflect apparitions without the ability to control them. Their undirected indeterminacy becomes directly related to his own person. The disembodied voices frustrate him because he could have sworn that they belonged to the minister and Deacon Gookin, the most highly esteemed members of his diocese. Sowing doubts and resolving nothing, Hawthorne continues to accumulate damning evidence against these paragons of virtue (Matheson 141). It is only appropriate that in the night of the forest, both symbols of wandering and doubt, the protagonist second-guesses himself. The nature of his journey is twofold: he both encounters an exterior reality in the forest and its environs, and he wanders into interior realms. Hawthorne's narrative devices, because they purposefully engender uncertainty, afford the reader a whole host of opportunities to actually ignore "the dominance of Brown's point of view" (Thompson 162). The author does not wholly discount the possibility that our protagonist really hears what he thinks he hears. "The voice like the deacon's" and "the solemn old tones of the minister" (140), however, discourse on details that he has been concerned about since first arriving at the forest. The renewal of these old yet ever-

present concerns strongly suggests that he hallucinates the conversation he reportedly overhears. The clergymen talk of "Indian[s]" (140), echoing his prior concern that "There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree" (134). They also speak of "a goodly young woman to be taken into communion" (140). This directly mirrors Goody Cloyse's earlier comment that there is "a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night" (138). The horror of what Brown allegedly hears is how specific the content is to his own life; fears and concerns about his faith and what lies in the forest greatly influence what he sees and hears. It is no surprise that the nice young man is himself, and that the goodly young woman his beloved Faith, whose name has reverberated in his mind from the outset of his errand.

It is at this point that Brown shows signs of weakening his resolve, while his doubt begins to overpower him. All of Hawthorne's qualifying expressions have flashed visions of elders before him who, "know[ing] as much deviltry as the best of us" (140), induce in him a loss of moral certainty. With all of its dualities and contradictions, "Young Goodman Brown" gradually exposes an "entanglement of self and world" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 139) as the author, revealing evidence by degrees, presents Brown's mounting and simultaneously intensifying crises in a dilatory manner. Those characters who were initially introduced "honorifically" (Martin 158) are now unveiled in their corrupt purpose: "Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying, so deep into the heathen wilderness?" (140). In the same dilatory manner, the protagonist's journey assumes all the uncertainty of a dream (Johnson 30) and becomes localized around a witches' meeting. Bloom writes that he is "not at all self-reliant" (Bloom 2), a rather troubling instance of societal over-conditioning. And so the repeated news of this meeting which accompanies his visions chips away at his "naive acceptance of the

appearance of sanctity" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 292) in his moral guides. This sanctity was based on an approved, social manifestation of goodness (Hurley 122), but is now perverted by sensational, private, and haunting intimations of evil. The self's cost of confirmation comes at too high a price. Brown's solitary journey into darkness, originating with defiance, caves in, as he loses his relationship to the Puritan community. The ultimate irony is that he actually rediscovers his relationship to his Salem brethren, only now they seem to move inevitably towards the witches' meeting, bound together by their "present evil purpose" (134). Fit to burst with "the heavy sickness of his heart" (140), Brown struggles to escape from his overriding loss of moral certainty.

The text gathers atmosphere as its ambiguities disclose the implication that not just a few individuals, but everyone he once thought virtuous, is in reality part of an alliance with the Devil. This atmosphere represents that entanglement of self and world, the former actually drawn towards the ambivalence it creates in the latter. Brown's doubt adopts an externalized configuration, dark and tempestuous in its charged significance: as he "lifted his hands to pray … this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward" (140). The interplay between "his perplexity and its purport" (Bercovitch 208), while indefinite, is not arbitrary. The onset of this "black mass" while he prays is, indeed, a foreshadowing of an antithetical and unholy communion. A cumulative potential of the protagonist's comprehensive doubt is released in a proliferation of different voices from his whole community, all of which are implicitly linked to his realization that others are engaged in sin:

> Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once, the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents

> of town's-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion-table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine, at Salem village, but never, until now, from a cloud of night (141).

Lacking in stable embodiment, these supposed verbalizations swirl "aloft in the air" to create a hypothetical space peopled with "confused and doubtful sound." It is unclear whether the sound itself is lacking in order or whether the townspeople are themselves in doubt. What is clear is the author's employment of bewitching narratological ambiguity that creates a "low-mimetic illusion of reality" (Colacurcio, "Certain Circumstances" 119).

Voices are only sounds, at once indistinct accents of civilization and the murmuring of the natural world. Hawthorne's artistry lies in his uncanny ability to hold both dream and reality as viable interpretations, complementary mediums that oscillate between summoning the familiar and making the familiar go away. He achieves this by clothing "those familiar tones" in a "cloud of night," so that we are faced with an authentic and creative encounter with the Puritan mind (Stubbs 55). Dunne approaches the passage from a variety of angles:

> Depending on one's critical disposition, it can be understood to establish the sounds as real, or it can be interpreted as attributing the sounds to Goodman Brown's delusion, or to his guilty conscience, or to the manipulations of Satan (Dunne, *Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies* 5).

The sheer amount of "diverting ambiguities" (Mosher 6) inextricably ties Brown's guilty conscience to his crescendo of moral doubt. The "stronger swell" (141) of hallucinatory voices is directly proportional to this crescendo, the manipulations of Satan synonymous with Brown as the victim of his own thoughts. Melville's judgment of "the power of blackness" (Melville 1), the realization that mankind is innately sinful, arises from the causal link between the voices and the cloud — the cloud that is intent on haunting the protagonist is his psychological interiority projected outward. Both the "pious and ungodly" (141) inhabit his dark pool of doubt, and his supposedly simple constitution is ruined as a consequence of the "disappearance of the fixed poles of belief" (Fogle 21).

The temptation of Young Goodman Brown may be viewed as "a kind of interior monologue" (Hurley 119), a debate which he holds with himself. His wracking doubt surrounds "the three institutions to which man is morally obliged: family, society, and the church" (Stibitz 131). Earlier, the Devil told him of his ancestor's involvement in horrific acts committed against others; more recently, the protagonist "saw" Goody Cloyse and "heard" the minister and Deacon Gookin. The pattern that Hawthorne has followed centers on phenomenological uncertainty: his favorite participles, such as "glimmering and flitting" (Liebman 145), highlight the subjective essence of Brown's disposition. The more he loses his Faith — literally, the further he walks from home — "the thicker the spectral terrors crowd upon his consciousness" (Bromwich 153). His remorseless battle with the voices he hears in the depths of the forest reaches a "pinnacle of grief, rage, and terror" (141) when he hears the voice of his wife. It is appropriate that Hawthorne's description of her motivations is so vague, for it is suggestive of the protagonist's hazy but not insignificant doubt. The narrator does not name her, but teases protagonist and

reader with the unconfirmed proposal that she seeks demonic service: “and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain” (141). The mood has plunged even further into darkness, systematically deepening and intensifying with the shocking conception that Faith, the bedrock of Puritan life, is impure. Brown is a far cry from his initial aspirations to “cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven” (134), those aspirations ironically laying the foundation for his present state of mind. Subject to an almighty torrent of “blackness,” nature mocks his “anguished doubt” (Walsh 68).

The forest mocks Brown as if to ridicule his naïveté; that is to say, his Puritan imagination haunts him. Throughout his journey there have been myriad instances of objective “facts” being subjectively perceived, and potentially only by our protagonist (Liebman 17). He “beheld the figure of a man” (134); “recognized a very pious and exemplary dame” (137); “heard the tramp of horses” (139); “recognized the voices” (140); “sees” a black cloud overhead (141). And once these insecurities have accrued, Hawthorne delivers to him the final blow, the proverbial nail in the coffin that clinches his moral collapse: “But something fluttered lightly down through the air, and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon” (141). It is worth noting that Hawthorne actually alludes to Faith’s pink ribbons “three times in the opening paragraphs of ‘Young Goodman Brown’” (Fogle 24). These once apparently trivial material objects return to the narrative, but the ribbon that the protagonist now “sees” is far less material and far less trivial, now catalyzed as an emblem of heavenly faith (or lack thereof). There is no relying on sensory evidence — “something” lands on a branch, and Brown touches “it.” The crucial transition that is made occurs via our protagonist’s perception: subject “beheld” object, and saw that object as a ribbon. Hawthorne’s “grammatical

constructions" (Doubleday 43) do not allow for positive identification, but because the image of the ribbon is so personalized for Brown, it is acutely compelling. He cannot ignore it. He assumes what he sees to be real, which for Budick is the quintessential evidence for "what to think of Goodman Brown's (not to mention the Puritan's) mental and emotional disposition" (Budick 231).

We have witnessed an ordering of the various persons nearest and dearest to Brown, each incriminated in turn by their "presence" in the forest, and the reader's "sense of a single shape and direction" (Colacurcio, "Certain Circumstances" 55) to the narrative asserts itself at this devastating consciousness of evil. It is as if the line between conviction and perception has all but disappeared. Hawthorne leads us from one fantastical projection to another, undermining the "external supports, the crutches" (Johnson 32) upon which the protagonist had formerly leaned. The crushing "evidence" of his wife's ribbon is the tipping point. Levin believes that it "is not in line with the sense of ambiguity that characterizes preceding incidents, for it appears tangible" (Levin 8), but what is truly, indubitably unambiguous is how the author's individual instances of narratological ambivalence all coalesce in this one moment to precipitate an all-pervading, anguished doubt. Brown's increasing realization and attraction to evil erupts with a violent force, his hesitation evaporating entirely: "'My Faith is gone!' cried he, after one stupefied moment. 'There is no good on earth, and sin is but a name. Come, devil! for to thee is this world given'" (141). He becomes guilty of "cosmic blasphemy"; his abandonment of the possibility of redemption is one of "traditional Christianity's two unpardonable sins" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 302), the other being his first presupposition that after this one night he can return to Faith. Thinking man all good, or thinking himself all bad,

Hawthorne reinforces the power of the haunted Puritan mind by conveying the psychological consequences of Brown "living a theology" (Waggoner 43). Inspired with a vision of Melville's formulation of "blackness," an uncompromising awareness of general guilt, Young Goodman Brown becomes a man possessed.

Crews sees "a vengeance of the denied element against an impossible ideal of purity or spirituality" (Crews 9). However, his pride does not fade with the onset of his despair — if anything, the two sins combine to produce a terrifying mixture. As before, he continues to assert his identity, only this time it is "turned upside down" (Toker 31): "Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powow, come devil himself! and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fears you!" (142). Brown's despair applies to himself preeminently, provoking him to challenge the Devil; he feels the depravity of others, but not the full extent of his own. In his rage at the forces of evil he exhibits a reckless abandon that is at once helpless in its pride to outdo the devil, and itself demonic: "But he was himself the chief horror of the scene" (142). Throughout "Young Goodman Brown" Hawthorne has unsettled narrative stability with expressions of "seeming," and it is no different when, in this ultimate crisis of faith, "he seemed to fly along the forest-path, rather than to walk or run" (142). One might attribute this supernatural display to the influence of the staff he is holding, an object that is never dissociated in this tale from Satan himself. But here we witness an ungodly unleashing of emotion that is all too real. The story's deliberate haziness and multiple inferences, all stemming from Hawthorne's ambiguity, clearly emphasize Brown's troubled mindset; moreover, his visions of a corrupted community are born out of his sense, or his suspicion, of sin. It is important we remember that

instead of being corrupted by some outside force, he makes a personal choice to go into the forest: the choice was the true danger.

Inundated with the “revealed depravity” (Greven 30) of all the people he has reverenced throughout his life, Brown believes he can remain unchanged by his haunting experiences. His rush to the heart of the forest presents his fiendish confidence as totally misguided (Matheson 138), for he somehow still thinks that he can triumph over a universal fountain of wickedness. His “rush” (142) is just that, a desperate display that instead of heroically representing the good ironically “guides mortal man to evil” (142). Hawthorne's sustained employment of ambiguous techniques masterfully probes the “sinister recesses” (Matthiessen 192) of the protagonist’s mind; it reveals the remarkable transformation that has been wrought in him, from a self-described “simple husbandman” (136) to a far from unassuming figure:

> In truth, all through the haunted forest, there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew, among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter, as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous, than when he rages in the breast of man (142).

The author unequivocally depicts that “blackness” is at its most extreme when it comes from within oneself, and not from outside. Three times in as many paragraphs does the narrator assert the protagonist’s evil nature and his mistaken opinion about the character of sin. One delusion leads to another in a procession whose dreamlike intimations have devastating real life

consequences. The truth of the fiction lies in Brown's "psychomoral response" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 295), which cannot be anything but certain and terrible.

With his belief in Faith severely compromised, he hurtles to the witches' meeting to confront the procession, "terrifying in its confusion of the orders Brown had previously held separate" (Stubbs 72). A façade of goodness and familiarity is presented in the context of a hellish initiation, "the swell of what seemed a hymn … He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house" (142). The author deliberately presents the counterpart to a Puritan meeting-house to emphasize the tailor-made horrors that have troubled the protagonist throughout the forest, and what he encounters will make known the full extent to which he has been deceived. His perception of the congregation is problematized by Hawthorne's equivocation: "Either the sudden gleams of light, flashing over the obscure field, bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church-members of Salem village, famous for their especial sanctity" (143). He uses the quality of artifice to simultaneously reveal and obscure the dark intimations of the night. Nothing is clear to Brown because his heart is "a battleground for conflicting forces" (Liebman 165), the haunted reflections of doubt and terror: "either" the light "bedazzled" Brown, "or" he "recognized" his townspeople. Following the appearance of Faith's pink ribbon on the branch of a tree, the surreal intensity of his projected fear increases, "As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in a shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once" (143). Brown is engaged in a dialogue with his conflicted self, his tormented conscience flashing forth "out of the darkness" to "people" it with highly volatile visions.

The phantasmagorical light and shadow of the rising and falling fire, which alternately reveals and obscures the witch-meeting, is an image that is representative of "Young Goodman Brown" itself. The validity of Brown's vision is questioned by the fitful illumination of red light just as it flickers and fades. Thompson makes an admittedly surface comparison of Nathaniel Hawthorne with Joseph Conrad's protagonist Marlow in *Heart of* Darkness, when he writes writes that "the meaning of an episode [to Marlow] was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze" (Thompson 67). While the image appropriately captures the haze-like indeterminacy of Hawthorne's style, it does not address the "heart of darkness" that pulses with such terrific force. Brown finds himself caught between the "infernal emotions of desire and loathing" (Doubleday 165) as he arrives at this summation of imaginative guilt: "there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of unconverted wilderness, were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man" (144). His psyche is so turbulent that the natural world of the forest becomes conscripted against him, howling projections of his reflected guilt back at himself "as if" all of these nightmarish apparitions really existed. And they do for Goodman Brown. Truly, they are not "slight performances" that "lack meaning" (Bell 24); they are, in fact, "words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at more" (144).

The roaring wind that supposedly encircles Brown is the culmination of his paranoia. When a "physical," externalized cloud of doubt first appears in the text, the narrator says that "no wind was stirring" (140) and that, later, the sky was "clear and silent" (141). But when he accepts the universal influence of evil and hurries deeper into the woods to seek it out, we are told that the trees creaked and the "wind tolled" (142); that wind then becomes a "tempest" (142)

that spurs him onwards even more. Hawthorne would have us interpret the wind as "an objective correlative of Brown's excited delusion" (Mosher 14), the "projective fantasy" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 295) of Brown's twilight experiences. Nowhere has he been able to control his visions, least of all here at the "negative epiphany" (Matheson 14) whose prophetic revelation seems to constitute a narrative climax:

> At the word, Goodman Brown stept forth from the shadow of the trees, and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood, by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well nigh sworn, that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke-wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? (144).

Just as before "he could have sworn … that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin" (140), so now he "could have well-nigh sworn" that the "shape" of his deceased father beckons him from "a smoke-wreath." These phrases continue to suggest that the protagonist sees things as he thinks they are; if his experiences are indeed imagined, then when he thinks he sees his dead father and mother he is in a sense his own devil and his own conjurer (a terrifying thought indeed). Still more terrifying is the "loathful brotherhood" he feels with the congregation "by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart." He is "loathful" because of his reluctance to be involved in a confraternity of sin, and is unwilling to accept his own participation in the nature of mankind. But he is the chief horror of the scene, a perpetrator, as well as the victim, of his sins.

"Young Goodman Brown" requires the narrative technique of "both/and" in order to create a mutual reciprocity between external and internal domains (Bercovitch 4). Visions constitute reality, as the seemingly unknowable ontological ambiguity of the congregation's appearance becomes a function of Brown's mind. His inner doubt about the goodness of the world, coupled with his guilt about leaving Faith, affect the way in which he views "reality," so much so that what he sees *is* reality. He is trapped by his moral definitions, his cultural perspective shaping his point of view. Coale writes that Puritans engaged in a self-analysis that must perpetually re-examine itself to see where it stands. This process provides the possibility of salvation but can also produce "a self-absorption so intense that the world at large can only reflect it" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 151). It would appear that Goodman Brown possesses the worst of both qualities: his self-analysis is dishonest and presumptuous, if not nonexistent, and the phenomenological severity and fluctuation of his visions reflect the self-absorption of his haunted Puritan mind. The subordinate characters in the tale are "purely adjunctive" (Milder 45), shadowy figures charged with his psychic instability, which all emanate from his very conceptualization of the Devil and doubt of faith. "The initial confusion in his heart and mind" (Hurley 122) at the outset of the tale — or even before it begins — helps to fabricate the events of his night journey, and self-reflexively confirm his thoughts and feelings. In fact, "thought precedes feeling (seeing, hearing, and touching) and imposes upon it" (Liebman 166), so by reversing the process of converting an impression into an idea, Hawthorne plumbs depths "shrouded in a blackness, ten times black … [probing] at the very axis of reality" (Melville 2).

Brown's encounter with the Devil incited Melville to his formulation of the power of "blackness," and no wonder. For we finally meet with an uncompromising vision of evil that "would shake anyone's faith in the integrity of others" (Person 43). The protagonist is first presented with a miscellany of depraved and morbid "secret deeds" committed by those whom he has "reverenced from youth" (145), including licentious desires, murderous impulses, and a charge of infanticide. Maintaining a difference between *what* is said and *how* it is said heightens dramatic tension, with Satan's ceremonious diction standing in stark contrast to the insinuation of its significance; the "grisly archness" (Fogle 10) of "blush not, sweet ones" (145), for example, is particularly suggestive in its incongruity. Brodhead echoes D. H. Lawrence's view when he declaims that "Hawthorne is *not* a gentle author but the terrifying wielder of that 'terrific thought'" (Brodhead 26). In "Young Goodman Brown," that thought finds expression in the Devil's unwavering and relentless monologue:

> '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. Far more than this! It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin.' (145).

This perverse gift, what Lawrence calls "mind knowledge" (Lawrence 82), is incredibly disturbing because the "true" sight of Brown's own "interior darkness, his tormented nature" (Greven 111), is so far removed from his sometime conception of himself as all good. The key word the author uses is "undeceived," not only in reference to the protagonist but also to the reader, who is less deceived about Hawthorne's narrative art.

The intensity of Brown's situation when he discovers Faith at the witches' meeting is sustained by all the devices of ambiguity (Hurley 284) when the narrator questions whether the christening bowl at which the Devil as priest stands, "Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame?" (146). But at this point in the tale the protagonist is so deeply entrenched in his all-encompassing hallucination of evil that the answer to these questions are somewhat trivial. For he is convinced that "the Shape of Evil" (146) stands ready to baptize him and his wife. Colacurcio reminds us that he has tried to make his errand to the forest all depend on his "Faith." "And so in the end it does, though in a way his presumptuous confidence had little prepared him to expect" (Colacurcio, "Certain Circumstances" 57). The only question, the only equivocation, that now concerns him is whether Faith does indeed "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One" (146). He will never know whether Faith obeys his command: "Hardly had he spoken, when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind, which died heavily away through the forest" (146). However, the real question that needs to be asked is whether she was in fact even there. The abrupt ending of the sequence at the "crucial moment of communion" (Johnson 31) is a further suggestion that the Brown's experience springs from his own mind. Resurfacing from his diabolical trials into an unruffled nighttime air, he staggers against a tree whose "hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew" (147). His haunted mind, fired by his guilty conscience, sets the forest alight, ensuring that Hawthorne's created illusion remains compelling (for in the end it leaves us under no illusions at all).

"Young Goodman Brown" provides an intense portrayal of a defining moment in the eponymous Puritan's life, and the consequences of his state of mind. The separate instances of

the author's device of equivocation come together at the end of the story to enforce the central ambiguity of theme: the nature of Brown's doubt. The most striking and momentously deceptive example of the device comes when the narrator says, "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting? Be it so, if you will" (147). Consistent in a narrative "hedged with uncertainties" (Fogle 47), this final masterstroke seems to leave it up to the reader to determine the reality of the night journey. Hawthorne writes that Brown's was "a dream of evil omen" (147), yet qualifies this assertion with the preceding clause — "Be it so, if you will" (Mosher 14). The dispassionate allowance of the second is misleading. Here the narrator focuses not on the terrifying phenomenological uncertainty of the narrative but instead on the consequences of the protagonist's experience. But as it has already been amply demonstrated that the resolute significance of the latter gains its stunning power from the former, his seemingly ambiguous vision of evil actually self-generated and thus unambiguously sinister. Davis is incorrect that "To actually wonder, was it a dream or wasn't it? would be to miss the point of the story" (Davis 97). The point is that because Brown's haunted mind functions with the full force of Puritanism, the journey was real for him. The "anthem of sin" (147) that he hears does not appear to reach the ears of any but him, a projection that for him is loud, fearful, "the horror of an evil almost tangible" (Doubleday 210).

His vision of evil is so convincing that "he accepts the Devil's word about the constitution of the invisible world" (Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety* 284), and it is precisely the visibility of his doubts — which in turn develop from his shadowy reasons for being in the forest — that cements his bad faith. His night's experience has such a profound effect that he sets himself apart from others, shrinking from his wife and neighbor; irrevocably assured that said

exceptional experience is more definitive than a lifetime of ordinary social appearances of goodness. One of the most striking qualities of the final paragraph is its tone; gone are the suggestions of the fantastical and the visionary, the dreamlike quality of the protagonist's adventure eventually replaced by assertive and unequivocal narration: "A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative , a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream" (147). He sees evil everywhere he looks because the corruption of his mind is complete, and he concludes that he endures as the exclusively "good" man in a troop of transgressors . He has no awareness of his own "helplessness and meanness" (Johnson 34) when he snatches away children from their teachers: "Goodman Brown snatched away the child, as from the grasp of the fiend" (147). Ultimately, his inability to believe in the virtue of his peers for the rest of his life is an extension of his one night in the forest: he hears an anthem of sin instead of a holy psalm, and views Goody Cloyse as a fiend instead of the pious teacher of catechisms. Only Brown is no longer in the forest. Now removed from the context of that dreamlike world, and surrounded by village life proceeding as it presumably always has, his moral indictments appear all the more distressing. For such is Hawthorne's irony that even though the protagonist turns into a misanthrope, "we cannot quite dismiss his attitude as unfounded" (Crews 11) because his vision of evil haunts him to the grave.

By studying the pattern and manipulation of narratological ambiguity in "Young Goodman Brown," we learn about "the sources and effects of that ambiguity" (Mosher 15). Hawthorne's fascinating exploration of a "both/and" mode of thinking enables him to dramatize moral history by using ingenious aesthetic devices; the tale is both historical and aesthetic, "exemplary of the twice-told and dialogical quality" (Thompson 64) of his best writing. An

unsuspecting man who strays into the forest, territory that the Puritans believed was haunted by the Devil, Brown experiences a waking dream, a living nightmare that impacts a whole lifetime. The account of the single night provided in "Young Goodman Brown" is "so compressed" (Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 49) that the severity of the protagonist's mental manifestations completely undermines a lifetime of worship and doctrine. His deepest suspicions, conjured from his haunted imagination in a procession of encounters, become binding in their clarity — he rejects his family's practice of prayer, and he no longer finds security in the arms of Faith. Brown dies in a forlorn state that even the Puritans recognized as excessively gloomy: "They carved no hopeful verse upon his tomb-stone, for his dying hour was gloom" (138). The conclusion to this bewitching tale is particularly grim and uncompromising because of its origination in the self. While Brown sees himself as a "goodman" who resists the universality of evil with all his might, he is actually an "egomaniac" (Dryden 134) who sets himself apart from all humankind. Indeed, his final state is arguably the worst of all, as he manages to "out-Puritan the Puritans" (Person 47). The cosmic paranoia he suffers does not allow for a sympathetic understanding of "man's complex capacities for good and evil" (Stubbs 73) and instead, having seen their dark capacities, Brown refuses to acknowledge any other capacities.

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