

Full Length Research Paper

‘Young Goodman Brown’: The close lane

Naim Ezghoul* and Malek Zuraikat

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts, Taif University, Al- Haweyah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Accepted 26 January, 2010

This study aims to present 'Young Goodman Brown' by Nathaniel Hawthorne as a satire of Puritanism as a prejudiced and intolerable system of belief reflected in the character of Brown who is seen as the incarnation of Puritanism which sees all non-conformists as sinners. Being the incarnation of the Puritan ideology, "Brown is not just one Salem citizen of the late seventeenth century, but rather seems to typify...in a sense every [Puritan]." Brown is the spokes-person and the mouth-piece of all Puritans whose words, actions, and interactions with other characters and the setting gradually unfold the Puritan ideology into a full-fledged system of belief. In trying to establish my outlook of Puritanism, I have been basically guided by Nathaniel Hawthorne's disapproval of Puritanism as being particularly biased and discriminative against all non-conformists. Other signals including Hawthorne's knowledge of his Puritan ancestors have formed the basis of the study. Moreover, Brown's intolerance and his hesitation to follow up the journey on many occasions on the account of what he saw on the journey and his determination at the end of the story of the hypocrisy of the minister in so far as belief is concerned have helped to establish my argument. All this and more support the idea that Brown is as an embodiment of Puritanism which always tends to repeal the other. I have too seen in the setting a continuous revealer of the personality of Brown. The journey through the forest deepens the conflict within his mind leading him unexpectedly to be a stern believer in God. Therefore, I have used the traditional approach to investigate Hawthorne's experience with Puritanism by analyzing Brown's religious conflicts and finally his unyielding stand on Puritanism. The study also shows how the non-acceptance of the other is a reflection of a bigoted belief that tends to reject others in advance on the basis of belief. This further shows how this idea of pre-judging others is related to Brown's close attachment both to his Puritan ancestors and finally to Puritanism which are responsible for Brown's one-way progress to the close lane. To highlight the theme of the story which goes as follows, Puritanism never gives up nor allows its followers to be lenient in favor of assimilating non-conformists, the study discusses some main elements of the story such as the setting, the plot, and symbolism which work together towards showing the work as a satire. The study also sheds light on Brown's most critical moment, the moment when he leaped out of belief. However, the study means to assert that Brown's slip out of belief is only a slip out of consciousness resulting from Brown's losing balance at a moment of great mental deliriousness which immediately shows a firmer retrieval to his previous state of belief. As the study asserts, Puritanism for Brown is a matter of destiny and any deviation from Puritanism is not likely. As "Thomas E. Connolly, has remarked that Goodman Brown has not lost his faith; he has found it."

Key words: Prejudiced, intolerable, Puritanism, incarnation, belief, deviation, hesitation, retrieval.

INTRODUCTION

Puritanism may be viewed in some of its aspects as unrelenting and one-sided. It is one of the Christian sects which looks upon its followers as the only devout and views the followers of other sects as non-conformists and

finally sinners. "... they [Puritans] believed that only the truly elect [the Puritans] should be admitted to church membership, and the congregation of such persons represents the true church." (Puritanism in America: Lecture Three, para.9) This statement which is central to the Puritan ideology definitely widens the gap among the different Christian sects on the one hand and other systems of belief on the other. By not accepting others,

*Corresponding author. E-mail: ezghouln@yahoo.com.

puritanism associates with the devil against humanity in general. Such extremism which some of the Puritan principles demonstrate circumscribe the spread of Puritan ideology and its acceptance among people. Again, being biased, Puritanism prompts hatred, distrust, and division among human beings. "The distrustful society that Puritans created themselves for a prosperous congregation would only return to harm them." (Michael and Mc Cabe, 2010: para. 12).

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: A SATIRE

With this radicalism, especially against accepting the other, Puritanism becomes the subject of criticism by many American writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne himself. Although he is a descendant of a family with a Puritan background, Hawthorne criticizes Puritanism and its biased outlooks against the non-conformists. "The Puritans believed in the innate depravity of man." "...Only the "elect" or "chosen" were in a good relationship with God." (Puritanism in America: Background of Puritanism, para. 3) Hawthorne's Puritan background is a "treasure house of frailties of human certitude..." (Canby, 236).

Therefore, his experience and knowledge of the history of Puritanism and his liberal temperament all together prompt Hawthorne to look at 'Young Goodman Brown' as a satire of Puritanism and at Brown as an incarnation of the Puritan ideology.

In 'Young Goodman Brown', Hawthorne satirizes Puritanism which was the dominant faith of his home-town, Salem Village. Moreover, he makes use of Salem village, as a setting for his works, especially the ones that take up Puritanism as their subject matter. For example, in 'Young Goodman Brown', whose actions take place in Salem village, Hawthorne views Puritanism in a way to suggest his disillusionment and dissatisfaction with it as a system of belief. In 'Young Goodman Brown', Hawthorne seems to trace back his personal experiences with Puritans as the inhabitants of Salem village. "Commentators have long pointed to 'Young Goodman Brown,' The Scarlet Letter, and many other Hawthorne stories to illustrate his obsession with the guilt of his Puritan forbears..." (Guerin, 1985: 64).

Following the same line, I wish to take up Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' as a satire of Puritanism. Before all, I would like to refer to the climax of the story and to the conflicts leading to it. These conflicts show him as a typical Puritan who will not spare any effort to defend his stand of Puritanism. Moreover, the critical moment when he declares his loss of belief, "My faith is gone!" is however, untrue of a man who, such moments of darkness, give him but more energy and spirit to spring back to a yet firmer belief. Therefore, this utterance is merely the result of the accumulated stressed conditions and the heavy strains resulting from the incompatible confrontations in the forest which was finally crowned with

the presence of his wife in the evil procession. The appearance of his wife in the forest made him lose his mental balance and utter words without being conscious of their meaning.

The aftermath of this climatic moment, is suggestive as it consolidates Brown's position as a Puritan whose belief gains further confirmation and force contrary to the voices which insist that Brown's faith has declined and finally dissolved immediately after this experience. The meeting of Brown with his wife and his request of her to raise her hands and ask for God's help is a definite sign of belief confirmation not belief decline. This indicates that he is still a good believer in God. Moreover, when he is back in the village at sunrise, he becomes still clearer in matters of belief. Brown is viewed to be highly ironical and ridiculous of the minister lecturing about Christianity; for Brown the minister, is not more than a "gray blasphemer". This is in a way a candid and stark refutation of all the claims of Brown becoming a renegade after his apparent declaration of his loss faith.

Coming back to the idea of Hawthorne's satire of Puritanism in 'Young Goodman Brown', The Puritan vision of the "goodly procession" which is referred to at the end of the story, leaves the Puritan idealism at a complete loss in the face of the overwhelming reality which defends variety and multi-ethnic participation which Brown, the embodiment of Puritanism, opposes as blasphemy. Again, the ironical "goodly procession" is suggestive as an ideal representation of Puritanism which is contrary to what they call as evil procession in the forest. This makes Brown's own "goodly procession" a make-believe and finally an ideal one. This definitely becomes clear in the impasse which Brown finds himself in at the end of the story. Brown is in total disharmony with his family and the people of Salem Village and therefore, the ideal procession as I have stated stays as if it can never be materialized. In other words, the message which Hawthorne intends to pass is that Puritanism is heading to an impasse, very much like Brown himself. The following pages continue to work out the aim of this study along the same lines.

The title of this study, "Young Goodman Brown": The Close Lane," is particularly suggestive in the way it sheds light on the Puritan ideology and how Brown meets a terrible end as a result of his being a tenacious Puritan. At various points in the story, Brown is seen to be historically and emotionally attached to Puritanism. He takes pride in his family whose members, according to him, never took part in such evil errands. Boasting of his Puritan family background, Brown tells the devil that, "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, or his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs:" This justifies how sensitive and guilty he feels about his present trip through the forest. Moreover, this shows that Brown's experiences in the forest are continuously checked by his archetypal Puritan belief.

What further justifies the point about Brown's intense

attachment to Puritanism is his inheritance-based belief.

Brown has preconceived ideas about his ancestors' strong religious devotion. His religious devotion appears to reflect devotion based more on inheritance than on a genuine devotion resulting from self-satisfaction and approval. When the devil informs Brown of his ancestors' connection with him and his ancestors' participation in the persecution of the "Quaker woman", Brown expresses his doubt about such events by saying, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness." This shows that Brown tries to copy his ancestors' faith irrespective of their malpractices. The way he takes pride in his Puritan ancestors blinds his eyes to many of the evil deeds which his ancestors committed against non-believers. Accordingly, Brown's inheritance-based belief is taking him along the same line to the close end. Therefore, this shows Brown's commitment to the status quo position and his refusal to compromise on the basis of the new information which the Devil gives about his ancestors.

Moreover, Brown is a staunch Puritan even at the moment when he made up his mind to take up the journey. He tells his wife at the moment of his departure, "Say your prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk and no harm will come to thee." And with a broken heart he continues by saying, "What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand!". Brown goes on saying "...; and after this one night, I will cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven." This shows how Brown is greatly attached to Puritanism on the one hand, and to his wife, Faith, on the other, and rules out the possibility of any deviation however small or pity it may be from Puritanism.

I would emphasize that Brown's initial reason for making the journey is not more than a curiosity-based decision as I have already stated. His insistence on making the journey reflects an impulse which can't be satisfied until the journey is made. As Nancy Bunge believes, Brown "follows his impulses" when he decided to make the journey through the forest. (p. 13) In reply to a begging made by his wife about renouncing the journey at night, Brown says, "My love and my Faith'... 'of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee....'". Therefore, this journey through the forest is not imposed upon him, but is made at his own free will.

Brown's growing sense of guilt resulting from the various incompatible incidents which he came by in the forest has brought about a change in Brown's priorities. The journey which he begins with a desire to discover the world in the forest has already changed into a journey that determines his destiny as a Puritan. For Brown, the opposite of Puritanism is evil and finally a total disappearance of light and goodness from earth. Therefore, Brown's curiosity-based motivation does not continue to be the sole purpose of the journey. We have seen

how hesitant he has become in regards to pursuing this journey on the account of the series of the incompatible experiences he has had in the forest right from the moment when he begins to feel the presence of the devil "behind every tree" to meeting the old woman, Goody Cloyse, the Deacon, and the minister in the forest. This state of hesitation is, in a way, prompted by Brown's stern Puritan views. It may be said that at this stage Puritanism has replaced curiosity as the main source of Brown's motivations to continue the journey. Therefore, Brown is now in earnest to fight back all that he believes to be anti-Puritanism.

From the above, we may infer that Brown, as a Puritan, is far from being influenced or redirected in any direction away from Puritanism. Hesitation and the feeling of guilt are pointers to a feeling that he has been taken in and the journey is not more than deception. For him, Puritanism stands for religious perfection and any move away from this religious stand however slight it may be, will not be acceptable. Therefore, any deviation from the Puritan belief will result in a different religious sect, of a non-conformist nature, to which Brown is immune.

We may say that 'Young Goodman Brown' is a story that revolves about Puritanism but doesn't set out to reveal the Puritan ideology directly. Doing this, is much like building a robot to do human things. This becomes more demanding in works wholly dependent on ideology as 'Young Goodman Brown'. It is a work that is set to achieve important human purposes and has to be convincing and natural in the way it is presented to the readers. That is to say, the story is a dramatization of the Puritan ideology.

To achieve maximum ease and swiftness in presenting Puritan ideology, Hawthorne builds up his story giving enough space for each of its main elements towards supporting its themes which may be stated as, Puritanism never gives up nor allows a Puritan to be lenient in favor of assimilating non-conformists and the theme of appearance and reality.

This goes in the same line with Brown's constant and firm attachment to Puritanism. Moreover, the second theme shows Brown's unhappiness about the presence of what he believes to be religious people in the evil procession in the forest.

The Puritan ideology is displayed through the various elements of the story: setting, characterization, conflicts and finally symbolism. The setting is the central element in 'Young Goodman Brown' that takes part in developing the themes of the story. The setting is the journey itself and it is through the journey that we come to know about Brown's character, the conflicts which he began to encounter, and finally about the themes of the story. The journey as place and time has been an element replete with conflicts. The procession and the gothic elements are two major elements which interweave to produce effects that carry the actions along the same extreme lines.

SETTING

Hawthorne uses gothic elements in the story in order to make the major character's experience more convincing and exciting. The gothic elements of the setting partly contribute to the purpose of the story. The mysterious elements of the setting develop the conflicts in the mind of Brown and finally develop his character. The setting as the time and place of the actions, dusk and the forest, together help the devil try to mar Brown's commitment to Puritanism. They try to pull Brown's legs into a devilish trap by offering him a cover along the journey which Brown begins to see as an antagonist. The forest and darkness become haunting elements which deepen Brown's inner conflicts and fear. Out of fear, Brown starts conceiving evil everywhere along his way through the forest. He says, "There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree, ... What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

Therefore, the whole forest now represents for him a gorge of evil and unconsciousness that has overthrown him after the most shocking experience of his wife, Faith, arrival in the forest. As Guerin says, "...the forest, as a place of wild, untamed passions and terrors, has the attributes of the Freudian id." (p.139) In other words, Brown becomes completely lost in the scene under the effect of evil, a matter that makes the forest an antagonist that works against him.

Moreover, at times the forest with all its devilish elements becomes part of Brown's personality. "The deeper he moves into the forest, the more completely he becomes one with his 'evil'" (Bunge, 1993 13). Out of despair, Brown becomes himself a devil after the prevalence of evil everywhere. "[H]e was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors." Moreover, "[the] interior landscape [becomes] more bleak and far more treacherous than the external one" (Johnson, 1981: 11).

Throughout the experience, Brown goes too deep into darkness, state of uncertainty, and religious conflicts which the gothic scenes and the presence of the Deacon, the minister, Goody Cloyse, and finally his wife, Faith, enhance. However, this effect should not be overemphasized as a change which may amount to a real breakthrough in the personality of Brown. However, as I have stated above, Brown is guided by his sense of belief in the complete authority and power of God and so his unconscious leap out of belief remains temporary.

Brown's confidence in God continues to be the source of hope and strength in resisting evil. He relies on God's help with these words "With heaven above and faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" More-over, towards the end of the story, Brown urges his wife to ask for God's help; "Faith! Faith!" cried the husband, 'look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one.'" This undoubtedly shows Brown's unwavering trust in God to the last moment.

CONFLICTS AND SYMBOLS

Conflicts, being essential to the development of the plot, play an important role in the development of characters. 'Young Goodman Brown' is a dramatization of the Puritan ideology and conflicts are one part of this dramatization. The two major elements which cause the conflicts are the journey and the appearance of the devil, the old woman Goody Cloyse, the Deacon, the minister and finally his wife, Faith. These events provide the main conflicts of the story both internal and external.

The internal conflicts of the story are prompted by the external ones. For example, after seeing the magic serpent, Brown became conscious of the evilness of the journey and began to show hesitation about following it up. This is reflected in the devil's words of encouragement which were addressed to Brown, "Come, Goodman Brown" cried his fellow-traveler, [the devil] 'this is a dull pace for the beginning of the journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

Seeing the old woman Goody Cloyse in the forest, further enhances Brown's fear and hesitation and further deepens the conflicts within him "Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther. 'Friend,' said he, stubbornly, 'my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman Does choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven:..." This shows that Brown is deeply divided by what he has seen in the forest and is now in earnest about giving up the journey.

Moreover, the appearance of Brown's wife gives him a harder blow which amounted, unexpectedly, to a deceleration of his disbelief. The appearance of Faith in the forest deepens his disillusionment pushing him to say in a moment of total deliriousness "My Faith is gone!". This incident brings Brown to an overwhelming conclusion about the spread of evil everywhere and the disappearance of goodness from the world when Brown says, "There is no good in earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given". At this moment of complete disillusionment, Brown "doubts that anyone is good- his wife, his neighbors, the officials of the church and state- and he remains in this state of cynicism until he dies" (Guerin, 1985: 61). However, Brown faces doubt and such moments of disbelief with a sense of reaffirmation and clarity. In other words, conflicts don't affect Brown so as to make him compromise with other sects and beliefs. On the contrary, with him, conflicts work as a repercussion in which doubts and even the sudden rifts in belief immediately dissolve in favor of his Puritan belief. Therefore, this state of disbelief is not more than a moment of imbalance resulting from the overwhelming shock which he has received by his wife's appearance in the forest. For Brown, these moments of disbelief are merely brief stages for assessment and reassessment of his stand on belief and therefore, the

possibility of his going astray is not likely.

Such development in Brown's character, as mentioned earlier, reflects the personality of Brown as an incarnation of Puritanism. However, it all was as if such moments of disbelief are meant to work on him the other way round. Brown is finally getting a firmer hold on belief than earlier. In other words, the experiences that Brown has encountered in the forest enrich his ability to distinguish between truly religious people and other pretenders. "Thomas E. Connolly... has remarked that Goodman Brown has not lost his faith; he has found it" (Guerin, 1985: 66).

However, the actions that follow the climax alleviate Brown's conflicts which are inevitably heading for a release. Brown's knowledge of human nature has alleviated his shock and conquered his fears and the terrible effect of the situation on him at least temporarily. Thinking of Faith, "...hope came into his heart,..." Moreover, "Goodman Brown believes that he understands the significant of the Calvinistic teaching of the depravity of man; this realization makes him doubt and dislike his fellow man and in effect paralyzes his moral will so that he questions the motivation of every apparently virtuous act." (Guerin, 1985: 66) In other words, Brown is now more than at any time before clear about the reality of man as being reprobate, unprincipled and, highly deviant, but remains true to his Puritan sensibility that refuses to compromise when things are related to faith.

Moreover, symbolism is meant to create a parallel situation of deeper and indirect references. Symbols besides creating depth resulting from indirectness, they enrich his experience by deepening the conflict in the mind of Brown. Further, by employing a various number of symbols, "Hawthorne violates the fixed conceptual meaning associated with his character" (Levy, 1986: 123).

The story, 'Young Goodman Brown', is highly symbolical. It contains a cluster of symbols which represent a series of opposites reflecting both: the conflicts Brown experiences, and the depth these symbols render to his personality. For instance, "dusk" and "sunrise" represent two extremes which mark consecutively the beginning and the end of the journey. On the one hand, "dusk" is the time that precedes darkness and it therefore, stands for the coming evil. Hawthorne wants that "dusk", a time between light and complete darkness, to reflect the moments of hesitation which Brown begins to experience after meeting with the devil, the old woman, Goody Cloyse, and the Deacon. Moreover, darkness which is the reflection of evil is meant to place Brown in the real experience of facing evil. On the other hand, "sunrise", which marks the end of the journey, is a representation of the state of certainty which Brown arrives at by the end of the story. This moment marks unprecedented clarity in Brown's belief and attitudes towards his village people, his wife, Faith, and more importantly his faith in Puritanism.

For instance, in the morning, after the end of the

journey, Brown is described to view the people of Salem village ironically, especially the Deacon and the minister, as being particularly hypocrite. This is clear from what Brown feels when he sees the minister preach his sermon, "then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers."

Moreover, the name of the main character, Young Goodman Brown is symbolical. The word "Young" represents innocence and purity. At the beginning of the story, Brown makes the journey out of his sense of curiosity. As Leo B. Levy says, "[Brown] is a naive and immature young man who fails to understand the gravity of the step he has taken . . . succeeded by a presumably adult determination to resist his own evil impulses" (p. 117). Again, as Darrel Abel believes, "[Brown] has the vulnerability of youth . . .," (p.131) which takes him to make such a decision.

We may also exploit the relation between the name, "Brown" and the word, "dusk" as words that represent a middle position between two extreme opposites. "Brown" as a name of color that lies between whiteness and blackness, reflects a state indecision and hesitation which Brown experiences throughout the journey. In the same way, "dusk" stands in the same relation with light and complete darkness. Moreover, Brown's, reference to the minister as "the gray blasphemer" right before the end of the story is suggestive because "dusk" is closely related to "gray" and "brown" as colors indicating hypocrisy.

CONCLUSION

Eventually, as a round-up, the story is a satire of Puritanism as a system of belief that systematically pursues an ideology that deepens, widens division, and disperses all attempts at creating any common ground among the various Christian sects on the one hand, and other beliefs on the other. Puritanism, through distrust and doubt plainly enhances the possibility of splitting societies over religious issues at the cost of unity and togetherness. It tends to excommunicate non-Puritans as non-conformists and looks upon them as sinners.

Hawthorne's satire of Puritanism is plainly seen in the terrible end of Brown as "A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, . . . , they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone; for his dying hour was gloom." As a steadfast character, Brown's insistence on following the same line of thinking puts him, in a way, on the wrong side as a human being. "Goodman Brown, who returns to Salem determined to be more "pure" than anyone else in town, in fact becomes a failure as a human being." (Karen Bernardo, para. 9) This recapitulates the fact that Puritanism is wholly responsible for Brown's being cornered and finally persecuted by himself before being persecuted by others.

Moreover, Puritanism prevents Brown from realizing the fact about human nature which shows man as a creature who can't help advocate and practice freedom consciously or unconsciously and shows indifference to all types of suppression whether it be religious, political, social,...etc. Brown is moreover, ignorant of the diversity of human desires and nature. He seems to be ignorant of the fact that to avoid parochialism and gain the favor of the majority, man is required to have what George Trevelyan (1983) calls "the holistic world-view" that "can lift and lighten our hearts with hope and even joy" (p.12). This means that one has to have one's eyes on the whole.

From the above, Brown's outlooks seem to be rooted in a belief which Hawthorne himself denounces as one-sided and hardly in harmony with the natural flow of life. Hawthorne's treatment of the Puritan ideology in this story aims at achieving a limited purpose namely, to criticize and finally show his disillusionment with Puritanism as an outmoded system of belief.

Therefore, while Hawthorne in 'Young Goodman Brown' tries to unfold before the reader the various tenets of Puritanism, he shows that Puritanism is an out-dated ideology. It needs to be evolved and updated in order to cope with the new world in which acceptance of others is not only today's social religion as I may call it, but the religion of this world. A world, in which liberal thinking is not only a system that neutralizes one's political thoughts, ideology, and interests in favor of the majority, but also affects one's attitude of others in relation to religious matters too.

REFERENCE

- Abel D (1988). *The Moral Picturesque: Studies in Hawthorne's Fiction*. Indiana: Purdue UP.
- Bunge N, Nathaniel H (1993): *A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne.
- Canby HS (1939). *Classic Americans: A Study of Eminent American Writers from Irving to Whitman*. New York: Russell and Russell.
- Guerin WL (1985). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- Johnson CD (1981). *The Productive Tension of Hawthorne's Art*. University, AL: U of Alabama P
- Levy LB (1986). *The Problem of Faith in 'Young Goodman Brown.'* *Modern. Critical Views: Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House. pp. 115-126.
- Mc Cabe, Michael E (2010). *American Literature Research and Analysis: Nathaniel Hawthorne "Young Goodman Brown"*. Retrieved from <http://itech.fgcu.edu/faculty/wholpart/alra/Hawthorne.htm>
- Trevelyan G (1983). *Operation Redemption: A Vision of Hope in an Age of Turmoil*. Great Britain: Turnstone Press Limited.