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Nathaniel Hawthorn
Allegory and Symbolism
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Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of the great American authors whose style allows the readers to sample allegory and symbolism at its best. In this essay, we will concentrate on the short story “Young Goodman Brown” and the novel *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” is an allegory, filled with symbolism about the human mind, its destructive side, and how society and its faith are perceived by some people. For them reality is not what it appears to be, and Hawthorne does a great job unveiling many of the thoughts and feelings that these people experience. Readers become aware that evil has its roots in the everyday people, and that some of them do great injustice to their kind, by trying to decide the fate of others.

Young Goodman Brown is the main character. His name has symbolic connotations. Hawthorne chose this name purposely, to inform the readers that the young man has a good nature, although he seems challenged by ambivalent feelings. Like the color brown, warm and dark at the same time, so are his mind and soul. Young Goodman Brown’s wife, Faith, is the one that kept him sane in his insane world, but only for a while. Her name has symbolic connotations as well, allowing the readers to understand that, for Young Goodman Brown, she represents love, hope, and everything that’s good in his world. Even he admits it: “Faith kept me back a while” (*Literature*, 437).

Hawthorne chooses to write about the day when Goodman turns to his dark side, while crossing through a forest. Why does the forest trigger this psychotic episode? Could it be fear itself; the fact that he feels lost without his wife, Faith; or the fact that he feels overwhelmed by the surrounding dark elements that represent his own madness? One of them is represented by a large cloud, which blocks the starlight, and seems to bring out the worst from Goodman's mind. Also, the path he follows, symbolizes his convictions, which become more dangerous over time, in the same way that the road grows "wilder and drearier, and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward, with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil" (*Literature*, 441).

Goodman avoids taking responsibility for his own madness. Instead, he imagines a stranger who convincingly lures him into the forest, which symbolizes his own madness and dark side. Here, Hawthorne makes an allusion to the Bible. Goodman is lured into his madness, like Eve was lured by the evil snake to eat the forbidden apple: "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go, and if I convince thee not, thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest, yet" (*Literature*, 438). For a while, Goodman seems to try resisting his own madness, "Too far, too far," but with no success (*Literature*, 438). Suddenly, it becomes very clear that the stranger is just a vision of Evil, with deep roots in Goodman's family:

I have been as well acquainted with your family as ever a one among the Puritans...I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you, for their sake. (*Literature*, 438)

In *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne uses allegory to unveil how the sins and evil of the past influence the fate of the next generations. The house itself has symbolic meaning; it symbolizes the preservation of evil through the centuries. The seven gables, like big eyes, are all-knowing, all-seeing, punishing all the decedents of Colonel Pyncheon, because of his wrong-doing to the rightful owner of the land. The house seems alive, and it appears to be the reason for all of the bad things that follow its inhabitants. Here's how the author describes the way the house makes him feel: "The aspect of the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive, also, of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes that have passed within" (*The House*, 1).

Although the house is the most important and obvious symbol in *The House of the Seven Gables*, there are many other symbols in the book: the elm tree, the garden, and especially a portrait. The house shelters Colonel Pincheon's portrait, which symbolizes the essence of evil that caused the house to become evil as well. Even after all this time his portrait continues poisoning the house.

Hawthorne's writings are loaded with allegoric and symbolic meanings. Evil plays an important part in the lives of the people portrayed in Hawthorne's works. The readers are not always sure who will win in the end. What is important is that Hawthorne succeeds to challenge the readers' minds long after the story ends.

Works Cited

Hawthorne, Nathaniel . *The House of Seven Gables*. Bantam Books: 1981.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel . “Young Goodman Brown.” *Literature: An Introduction to Writing*. Roberts, Edgar V. and Jacobs, Henry E. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. 436-445.