
"Young Goodman Brown" by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Young Goodman Brown

In literature, an archetype is a typical character, an action that seems to represent such universal patterns of human nature. The universal symbol may be a character, a theme, a symbol, or even a setting. Red can represent blood, violence, passion, intensity, and anger. White can represent purity, enlightenment, wealth, and timelessness. A serpent represents independence, evil, and knowledge. In "Young Goodman Brown," Nathaniel Hawthorne uses archetypes to convey the message that losing faith will lead to temptation.

Hawthorne utilizes a combination of the white and red archetypes to make pink, which represents passion and purity in this story as "purity appears white, as passion appears red" (Hudson). Even though everyone else in the town has turned to the devil, for Faith's wellbeing, young Goodman Brown will stay true to God. However, during his journey through the forest, he hears voices and recognizes his wife, Faith's voice. When Goodman Brown notices the pink ribbon in the forest, he loses his faith both literally and metaphorically. At a point when he considers whether or not he should continue, "something [flutters] lightly down through the air and [catches] on a branch of a tree. The young man [seizes] it, and [beholds] a pink ribbon. 'My Faith is gone' [cries] he... 'there is no good on earth; and sin is but a name'" (Hawthorne).

Hawthorne uses the ribbon to subtly reinforce the idea that Faith is part of the satanic ritual, therefore showing that his Faith has left him. This powerful symbol leads Goodman Brown to divorce himself spiritually, emotionally, and physically from the rest of the townspeople. The ribbons Goodman Brown found in the tree, shows that he has lost his innocence and love for God. Despite the fact that he plans to return to Faith, he no longer evokes the husband or man that Faith watched go into the forest.

Hawthorne uses a serpent-like staff archetype to persuade Goodman Brown to keep moving into the woods. Goodman Brown tries to convince himself that he had made the wrong decision of walking into the demonic forest, but the devil's staff urges him in. His gaze was "fixed upon his remarkable staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen... as a living serpent". When the devil tells Goodman Brown to use the staff to travel faster, Goodman Brown takes him up on the offer and, like Eve, is ultimately condemned for his weakness by losing his innocence. Besides representing Eve's temptation, the serpent represents her curiosity which leads her into that temptation. By Young Goodman Brown losing his faith, represented by Faith's pink ribbons, he was apt to be lead into the devil's temptation.