

# Puritanism and Witchcraft in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown

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Tea Horvat

**Puritanizam i vještičarenje u Nathaniel Hawthorenovom Young  
Goodman Brownu**

Završni Rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2021.

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on how Puritanism and the Salem Witch Trials influenced Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown." Witchcraft and Puritanism have been a great source of inspiration for most of Hawthorne's works, therefore it is possible to research this particular short story in terms of these two main motifs. It is important to understand the deep complexity of this short story, and to do so, delving into further research of Hawthorne's Puritan background which left a deep mark on the author's life, the backgrounds of Puritanism as a philosophy of life as well as witchcraft and the consequences and victims it left behind after such a short period of time during the Trials in Salem is extremely necessary. Considering that Hawthorne used actual events from the Salem Witch Trials as descriptions in his short story, the Trials are explained in detail, from their beginning to their abrupt and quick end. The purpose of this study is to prove and confirm that Puritanism and witchcraft left a strong impact on "Young Goodman Brown." Both of these motifs are present and quite prominent in the story meaning that they are necessary for the plot. The central claim of the paper itself is that there are indeed many instances of these two motifs being used and that they serve as the two main themes in the story. This research is based on in-depth analysis of the short story with the help of critical works and other relevant texts regarding these particular topics.

**Keywords:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," Puritanism, witchcraft, The Salem Witch Trials

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## Introduction

This paper examines the way that Puritanism and witchcraft are described and used as motifs around which the storyline is built in one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous short stories, "Young Goodman Brown." Puritanism as a motif and way of life is closely knit to Nathaniel Hawthorne since most of his works, including his most famous one, *The Scarlet Letter*, deal with its themes and beliefs by way of a critique. Hawthorne, even though obsessed with Puritanism in general, had a lot to say about its main ideas, most prominently about Calvinism as the main religious starting point. Together with Puritanism, in some of his works Hawthorne touched upon witchcraft, which was inspired by the involvement of his ancestors in The Salem Witch Trials.

The primary thesis this paper is built upon is that Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is a short story highly influenced by Puritanism and The Salem Witch Trials.

The way this paper is organized helps to, in accordance with the main thesis, prove that the aforementioned motifs are prominent in the story and that they left a large influence on the narrative. The first chapter of the paper deals with the introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne himself and the short story. In this chapter, Hawthorne's life is explained in further detail and a summary is provided of the short story to be analysed. The second chapter's main theme is Puritanism and its way of life and religion. In order for a better understanding of witchcraft and how it qualifies as a sin, this particular chapter consists of not only a quick overview of Puritan religion, but of an explanation of what specifically is viewed as a sin in a Puritan society. The third chapter continues to explain witchcraft in relationship with Puritanism and a detailed description of The Salem Witch Trials is presented for a clearer analysis of said motif in the story. The two final chapters, the fourth and the fifth, deal with the detailed analysis of the two prominent motifs in the story by taking parts of the narrative and connecting them to either Puritanism or witchcraft.

# 1. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"

In order for a better understanding of the two main motifs intertwined in Hawthorne's short story, one must firstly examine the life of the author himself and the plot of the story. Hawthorne's life and heritage play an important part in the story itself since it deals with some parts of his past, namely those connected to his Puritan heritage which is not only mentioned in this work, but in one of his most famous works to date – *The Scarlet Letter*. The next two paragraphs deal with presenting Hawthorne's life and work as well as briefly summarizing the story's plot.

## 1.1 The Life and Work of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne, born on 4 July 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts, was often described as a cautious man not so keen on giving away information about himself. It is also said that in order to stay secretive, he had burned all the manuscripts and letters which were sent to him by friends and acquaintances. He even went to such lengths as to hide under a pseudonym, such as Ashley Allen Royce, which he used during the 1840s. Suppressing and hiding information about himself was not something new to Hawthorne, since he worked hard at concealing the publishing of his first novel, *Fanshawe*, which he successfully published anonymously in 1828. Not only did Hawthorne hide behind anonymity and pseudonyms, but he also changed his family name from Hathorne to what is familiar today – Hawthorne (Wineapple 13-14).

Even as a small child, Hawthorne was an avid reader, according to his sister, Elizabeth Hawthorne. At the age of six he could have been seen reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Wineapple 15), which is quite interesting for the research at hand, since with this fact, his obsession with his Puritan roots, which he later channelled into his work, is already noticeable at such a young age. Namely, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan, a Puritan author, is a Christian allegory, which was, at a certain point in time, second to the Bible when it came to its popularity. The work deals with the explanation of a man's life journey as a good Christian where he is faced with many temptations (Bauer and Cregan-Reid). Therefore, one can recognize Hawthorne's religious points of view and the need to showcase his beliefs through his characters and their lives.

For example, in one of his most important works, *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne focuses on Christian morals and beliefs and offers the readers a better understanding of the 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena of ostracism among society as well as the marking of people with opposing views and beliefs. The novel features Hester Prynne, who is said to have been the fictional depiction of a real-life historical figure,

Anne Hutchinson, who was marked and punished for the sin of adultery. It is also important to mention that *The Scarlet Letter* served as a type of revenge on Hawthorne's political enemies since he began writing the novel as soon as he lost his government job. Even though Prynne was a personification of Hutchinson, there are some theories which involve Hawthorne being connected with the character of Hester since he was also someone who was not always of the same religious views as those around him (Person 10). This was also a fact mentioned by his sister, who stated how Hawthorne was not so keen on some of the religious rules around him and found the sermons difficult to go to, not just because he had to wake up early, but because the Calvinist preachers were not always easy to listen to (Person 1).

Before his peaceful death, on 18 May 1864, Hawthorne continued to publish many noteworthy works such as, *The Blithedale Romance*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Marble Faun*, and many others. After his death caused by a serious illness which he was faced with in the spring of 1864, he left behind three children, two daughters Una and Rose, and a son named Julian, as well as a pain-stricken widow, Sophia (Wright 9, 21).

## **1.2 “Young Goodman Brown”**

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, “Young Goodman Brown” was first published in April of 1835 in *The New-England Magazine* (Wright 235). This short story encompassed a great amount of information and allegory because it is a lot more personal than the reader might think since it deals with the topic of introspection and can be interpreted in many ways through the use of knowledge about Puritanism, witchcraft, Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and his own ancestry which haunted him his whole life.

The following paragraph consists of a summary of the short story for the purpose of its further detailed analysis in terms of the two most prominent motifs – puritanism and witchcraft.

The short story “Young Goodman Brown” is set in Salem village. It begins at sunset as Goodman Brown says goodbye to his wife Faith, who is begging him to stay and pray with her, but all he tells her is that he needs to leave because he has to do something important and he has to do it in that moment, more precisely between sunrise and nightfall. He continues to tell her to pray and that the Lord will keep her safe, so she does not need to worry about being left alone. Goodman Brown begins his journey in the forest, constantly looking over his shoulder making sure that there is no evil lurking, and soon enough he stumbles upon an older man resembling himself, who joins him on his journey. While walking, they discuss many things about life; the old man even mentions Brown's troubled

ancestors (John and William), and Brown notices the man's strange staff which appears to be a snake. Goodman Brown is defending himself by stating that he does not know of the crimes his ancestors committed, and that his family is a good Christian family. Brown adds that knowing of his ancestry would trouble his dear, godly wife, Faith. After a while, the pair notice an old woman walking towards them who ends up being Goody (Sarah) Cloyse; the old man touches her with his staff and she proceeds to name him as the Devil which makes Goodman Brown very uncomfortable and all that he keeps repeating is how this woman "taught him his catechism and" acted as his "moral and spiritual adviser" (Hawthorne 2446). The two men also meet some more people from Brown's life, such as the minister of Salem, Deacon Gookin, Martha Carrier, and even his young wife, Faith. What happens next is a meeting with the Devil in which all of the aforementioned persons, good Christian people, participate alongside Goodman Brown who is constantly trying to fight it, but ends up being converted to the Devil worshippers with his wife. When this rather horrific and mysterious event comes to an end, the reader is met with the idea that all of this might have been Goodman's dream, but nevertheless, the event was key to the transformation of Goodman Brown's complete character and view of religion. The short story ends with the chapter describing the next morning in Salem village where everything takes place as ordinarily as possible, nothing has changed, nor have any of the people been afflicted by the scene in the forest. The only person who was damaged was young Goodman Brown whose life will never be the same again (Hawthorne).

## **2. Puritanism**

According to Francis J. Bremer, “Puritanism did not begin as a distinct faith but as a reform movement within the Protestant Church of England in the sixteenth century. Puritans were Christian men and women who sought to shape their lives in accordance with God’s will” (4). Puritanism is one of the most important philosophies and ways of life connected to Nathaniel Hawthorne and is therefore very important for further research into his life as well his work, namely the short story which is the subject of this research.

### **2.1 Religion and Way of Life**

When it comes to discussing the Puritan way of life, it is necessary to constantly consider Puritan beliefs since they go hand in hand with their practice of everyday life. “While perfection was impossible, one was called to strive for it. Each puritan sought to make him- or herself a shining light” (Bremer 49). Puritan beliefs and religion were what guided them in life. All Puritans were striving for the same thing – making God happy and content. They believed that sinning came from the abusing of what God made available to them, not from simply using it (Bremer 49). It is interesting to focus on this particular piece of information because it deals with the overall guide to Puritan life – it was very important not to overindulge in anything, since it automatically made it sinful, it was fine for them to have a drink or two, but drunkenness was condemned and viewed as a sin. They created many other views and beliefs on various aspects of life to be able to live the godliest life possible.

The Puritans had developed a very distinct image of God and his relationship with Man. They found religion as one of the most important aspects because it was what guided them through their lives. Taking into consideration that the whole Puritan movement developed itself from the Church of England and its Protestant beliefs, it is obvious that particular beliefs of the Puritan religion were rooted in Protestant understandings of Christianity (Bremer 34). Their religious views were not so different from the traditional Christian views, but they had rather different ideas on certain points.

A specific and unique way of practicing their religion which is interesting to explore was the great focus on self-examination. The concept of looking deep into oneself to be able to become one with one’s sin was adopted by the Puritans from the Protestant doctrine. Adopted, but understood in their specific way, this self-examination was truly demanding for the Puritan. In one of his sermons, Thomas Hooker, explained how self-examination and the sense of self did not mean that it was enough for a

man to just think about what sinful behaviour he had conducted, but he was supposed to feel it, or simply put – experience it (Brooks et al. 38). Because of such a strong sense of religion, the Puritans were quick to judge and excommunicate anyone who did not comply with the rules.

An important source of information which allows one to delve deeper into the understanding of Puritan religion was written by John Calvin, the author of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin's famous theory of predestination, according to which there were a few people specifically elected by God to be saved, was later adopted by many Puritans who decided to have their entire way of living revolving around it ("What is Calvinism?"). This theory is quite harsh and terrifying since it basically means that, anyone who is not part of the elect, will have to face eternal damnation and there is no way for them to work towards salvation because the choice has already been made. It is, however, important to note while discussing this theory in terms of Puritanism, that not all Puritans were, in fact, Calvinists. As mentioned above, there was no way of changing God's decisions. Thus, having a hardworking Puritan spirit was not always very helpful, and it is interesting to note how devoted Puritans were to their faith. Even when they knew that they were not the elect ones for salvation, they still remained truthful and followed all of the rules necessary to live a perfectly religious and godly Puritan life.

## **2.2 Sin in the Puritan Society**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the sin of witchcraft was introduced to the Puritan people. Before explaining the beginnings of witchcraft in detail, it is important to define what a sin was according to the Puritan religion.

When it came to religion, Puritans had many concepts developed on how to live a proper godly life. They were very focused on the original sin and many of them on the doctrine of predestination as explained through the Calvinist movement. The original sin bases itself on the theory that all people are sinners because Adam sinned, but God has still decided to choose a few elect to be saved. (Woodlief). The most important idea was that they would often emphasize how sinning was a breach of the covenant each person had with God (Bremer and Webster 545). Their lives were completely devoted to religion and it is interesting to notice how they decided to lead very religious lives even though none of them knew for sure whether they were saved.

So, simply put, sin was anything which was going against the Scripture and God in general, and naturally, witchcraft fell into the category of sin. Thus, whoever "was 'disobedient' without repentance, meant that you were a follower of Satan, and therefore your actions reflected the devil's

will” (Hansen). Since Puritans were of the belief that Satan was in their world as much as God was, anyone who would commit sins was considered a follower of Satan, essentially a witch (Carr et al.).

### **3. Witchcraft and the Salem Witch Trials**

When discussing Puritanism in general, Massachusetts is usually used as one of the most common examples and when it comes to witchcraft, Salem serves as a prime example of the reaction the people had to this grotesque sin. Even though Puritanism is usually connected to the witch trials and witchcraft in general, it is important to note that witchcraft has little to do in the context of Puritanism. Puritans had their ideas of witchcraft, but it was not such a common topic of discussion, however, there were individuals who decided to make sure that this type of behaviour was properly prosecuted. There were many such types of proponents of this prosecution idea such as William Perkins, a figure who decided to argue in favour of a godly state and thought of witches as traitors much like any enemy of the state (Bremer and Webster 582-583).

The idea the Puritans had about witchcraft was a lot narrower than the one of Catholicism since they did not include many of its characteristics, like the witches meetings (the Sabbath); but an idea which really angered them was one of the demonic pacts signed by the witches which confirmed their relationship and their pact with Satan. This particular idea was quite menacing to the Puritans because it clashed with the covenant theology by inverting it making the witches have a pact, or covenant with Satan, the complete opposite of God. Not only witchcraft was considered a tragic sin, but any kind of semblance of the practicing of magic (Bremer and Webster 583).

Witchcraft was highly prosecuted by the Puritans, and it is important to note that Puritans were, in fact, involved in a number of famous witch trials, such as the ones in Salem, which will be discussed in this chapter. According to Bremer and Webster, the panic which came about at Salem Village in 1692 was one that saw over 100 people arrested, 19 hanged, and even one person pressed to death (Bremer and Webster 585). In the following paragraph the Salem witch trials will be examined in depth. Questions such as, when they began, and how they were executed will be answered, as well as a few important and peculiar cases explained.

In order to properly understand the need for the people of Salem to prosecute such a sin, one must be aware of the fact that Salem was founded under a strict fundamentalist religion, meaning that the people believed in the literal interpretation of scripture relying heavily on the writings of Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin ("What Is Religious Fundamentalism?"). Simply stated, the residents of Salem Village believed in a God that was constantly judging and observing what the people were doing (Stewart 9).



The Salem Witch Trials began in January 1692 in Salem Village in Massachusetts when various young girls began to complain about having odd experiences and behavioural changes such as hallucination, screaming or even cursing. Things started to change at a quicker pace when the aforementioned girls began to name people in their community as being witches. This resulted in even more people throwing fits and claiming they were bewitched by other residents of the town. (Stewart 8).

Even though the first notion of witchcraft in Salem is dated in 1692, there were suppositions preceding that faithful year. Namely, one of the first cases recorded of being properly prosecuted was the one of Alice Young, occurring in 1647. She was a resident of Windsor, Connecticut and became the first person who was hanged in New England because of her ‘crime of witchcraft’ (Goss 19). Regarding Massachusetts Bay Colony, the first recorded case of a woman being hanged for the ‘crime of witchcraft,’ was that of Margaret Jones (Goss 48). The situation became a lot more complex in the years following the start of the trials, and 1688 saw the Goodwin Family of Charlestown, Massachusetts, claim to be attacked by Goody Glover (Goss 48). One of the most important events leading up to the trials, was when Reverend Samuel Parris accepted the offer of the Salem Village Church to become its minister. After accepting the offer, he naturally moved with his family to Salem Village (Goss 48). An important piece of information for further investigation is noticed in the members of his family – his niece Abigail Williams, his daughter Betty Parris and the wife of his Indian slave, Tituba (Goss 48). Parris’ daughter and niece were two of the girls who belonged to the ones who began to exhibit this strange behaviour which made Parris call in the local physician William Griggs in order for him to examine the girls properly (Goss 48).

In January of 1693, with the new Superior Court presided by William Stoughton meeting in Salem, the situation started to change (Goss 51). Governor Phips decided to forbid “the use of spectral evidence” which is “the evidence which refers to a witness testimony that the accused person’s spirit or spectral shape appeared to him/her witness in a dream at the time the accused person’s physical body was at another location” (“Spectral Evidence”), which resulted in all of the testimonies of the then afflicted witnesses to be nullified. The problem was in the Deputy Governor, Stoughton who still did not want to stop the condemning of the accused alleged witches and he even went to the length of bringing three more guilty verdicts to add to the five already waiting for execution, but Governor Phips helped by granting a stay of execution to the remaining eight cases (Goss 51).

The 5<sup>th</sup> of May marked the indictment against Tituba which was rejected by the court’s Grand Jury and she was finally allowed to be set free. Another event from May of 1693, when Governor Phips received word from England that he is to stop the trials and put an end to all proceedings which had to

do with witches and witchcraft. He immediately listened to the given order, stopped all court activities and pardoned all of the remaining people in jail. The people even went to such lengths of apologising for the trials even taking place and for the roles that certain people had during the proceedings (Goss 51). After the proceedings officially ended and the trials were now the ones which were condemned; in December of 1711, the Great and General Court of Massachusetts gave a payment of 578 pounds to all of the families of executed and convicted witches (Goss 52).

#### 4. The Impact of Puritanism on “Young Goodman Brown”

Puritanism, one of the main themes, left quite the impact on the short story itself. Namely, one can discuss Puritanism in terms of “Young Goodman Brown” because most of its main ideas stem from Puritan philosophies and beliefs. Before delving into the examples themselves, it is important to explore why exactly Hawthorne decided to write a story which is so closely knit to his own Puritan heritage.

As previously stated, Hawthorne was doing all that was necessary for him to conceal his Puritan ancestry. He even went to such length as to change his surname which was originally not the version that he was known for. Both of his ancestors participated in the Salem Witch Trials, which were later harshly condemned by the Puritan community (Reynolds 23).

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s great-great-great-grandfather, William Hathorne, was a rather important “public figure in Salem after settling there in 1636 while serving on the Board of Selectmen and having been fighting in King Philip’s War” (Person 17). One “of the most (in)famous cases for which he is known is when he ordered a Quaker woman by the name of “Ann Coleman to be whipped through the streets of Salem” (Person 17).

Justice John Hathorne, a judge on the Superior Court of Salem, the third son of William Hathorne, was born in 1641 ( *The Paternal Ancestors of Nathaniel Hawthorne*). He is best-known for his involvement in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 (*The Paternal Ancestors of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Introduction*). After becoming a local Salem magistrate, Hathorne was chosen by Governor Sir Williams to participate in the Salem Witch Trials as a judge. He was specific about his technique while presiding the trials and was even known for his taking of the role of a prosecutor rather than one of a judge. Hathorne always began his examinations with the premise of guilt, not even allowing the accused to try and defend themselves, let alone, prove their innocence (*Important Persons in the Salem Court Records*). Another fact Hathorne is well-known for is that he took it upon himself to alter the traditional proceedings in a witch trial by encouraging the accused witch to name all others he/she might know. This move accelerated the number of accused, and ultimately executed during this time of great panic at Salem (*Important Persons in the Salem Court Records*).

Both of his ancestors were a frequent target of disapproval in his works since he wanted to make sure that everyone was aware of the fact that, even though these are his ancestors, he is not like them, nor does he wish to be. Hawthorne continued to try to accentuate his respect and need for a proper Puritan lifestyle which can be seen in many of his works, and “Young Goodman Brown,” consisting of many

Puritan motifs interlacing themselves with his knowledge on witchcraft and the witch trials, and ultimately with the introduction of some of his ancestors and their sins, is no exception.

In the paragraphs which follow, motifs which draw upon Hawthorne's Puritan heritage and Puritanism in general, are analysed in detail.

#### **4.1 Faith and Goodman Brown**

When it comes to the interpretation of the character of Faith in Hawthorne's short story, one must understand its complexity. Namely, Faith can be interpreted in various ways, simply as Goodman Brown's young wife, or something more symbolic – his own faith.

Young Goodman Brown and his wife Faith are a newlywed couple of just three months (Connolly 372) and are exploring their brand new life as married people. This interpretation is extremely simple and does not even scratch the complex surface which Hawthorne built his story upon. For a first-time reader, who has not done much research, the meaning of faith tends to get lost because it assumes the role of a simple character of a wife saying her goodbyes to her brand new husband who is about to begin a journey.

However, faith is not just the character of the wife. It is also one of the ways with which Hawthorne exemplified Puritanism. "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" (Hawthorne 2451). Faith's pink ribbons serve as a motif of Puritanism. They are the symbol of purity, but also the symbol of Goodman Brown's initial conversion to a certain religion, most probably Calvinism (Connolly 372), seeing as the story takes as its major motifs the motif of Puritanism which has its philosophy's roots in Calvinism.

Focusing back on religion, as previously mentioned, Faith signalizes Goodman Brown's embracing of religion which one might consider his conversion to the Christian faith. "Well; she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven" (Hawthorne 2444). Goodman Brown is stating how he will take just one more taste of sin, and afterwards, his Faith will help him get to Heaven since he believes he is one of the elect (Connolly 372).

This particular character trait of Goodman Brown shows the major impact Puritanism has had on this story since it bases itself around its beliefs, he is completely sure of the fact that Faith will bring him to Heaven and there is no reason for him to worry about wanting to experience sin one last time.

Goodman Brown is depicted as a man who is torn between his Calvinistic and Puritan views and the ultimate opposite, the Devil. Through the character of Faith, symbolic or simple, Hawthorne is trying to show the reader that Goodman Brown clings to her because of the main philosophy of Puritanism, predestination.

#### **4.2 Critique of Calvinism in Puritanism**

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Hawthorne used the character of Faith to introduce Puritanism into the story, and with it, Calvinism. From there he went on to show his opinion and critique of the main philosophy of Calvinism, which is predestination, meaning that there are a select few who have been chosen by God to go to Heaven. As Faith is the personification of religion, Goodman Brown is presented as a “staunch Calvinist” (Connolly 372) who is completely sure of the fact that he belongs to the elect and he even goes to such lengths as to allow himself one final meeting with the Devil.

Since he is sure that faith opens up the path to Heaven, he believes that even a covenant with the Devil would not break his predestined path. After meeting with the Devil who decides to scrutinize him for being late, Goodman Brown responds in an interesting way which lends itself to be interpreted in the following manner. “ ‘Faith kept me back awhile,’ replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice” (Hawthorne 2445). Brown is excusing himself to the Devil by saying how his Faith kept him back and with this quote, the arrogance of a man thinking to himself that he is in the elite of the elect and that whatever he does will have no consequences whatsoever when it comes to his safe arrival in Heaven is shown. Since his Faith kept him back, it is most certain that he is either not as religious as he presents himself to be, or he becomes disillusioned by the theory of predestination by which it is shown how Hawthorne wishes to “demonstrate the unresponsiveness of Puritanic Calvinism to the needs of the believer” (Levy 385). This view could be interpreted by the fact that Puritan religion and Calvinism in general, both do not feature a conversation with the believer, they are told what to do, which rules to follow, and basically how to live their lives in order for them to lead a life fit for a Puritan.

When it comes to Calvinism and its main theory of predestination, one could conclude that it offers even less understanding towards the believer than Puritanism itself since it presents a state to which a person, in this case the believer, can never reach if they were not chosen. Stemming from the concept of how inconsiderate the Calvinist religion is towards the believer, comes the irrational understanding of evil by the Puritans. Namely, Hawthorne wanted to showcase that exact intense understanding by describing the meeting in the forest as well as with the overall theme of the story (Levy 385).

### 4.3 Hawthorne's Puritan Heritage

The final use of the motif of Puritanism in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is shown through the character of Goodman Brown himself. As with his most famous work, *The Scarlet Letter*, there are theories of the possibility of a connection between the main Puritan character of Hester Prynne and the author. One could in this case, conclude upon the existence of another such similarity between Goodman Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Namely, at the story's very beginning, Goodman Brown is said to have Puritan ancestors, much like his character's creator, Hawthorne. It is therefore interesting to draw a parallel between the author and the main protagonist since both are so keen on keeping their heritage safe. As previously mentioned, Hawthorne did all he could in order to hide his ancestry, even by changing his last name. When it comes to his character, in the conversation with the Devil, Brown is trying to protect his ancestors as he says, "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians, since the day of the martyrs" (Hawthorne 2446). He is trying to explain to the Devil how he is the first of his family to do such a thing, get himself into a covenant with him, but the Devil has prior knowledge on what his family has done in the past and he makes sure to mention it:

I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. 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 Phillip's War. They were my good friends, both; (Hawthorne 2446)

In the quote above, the connection with Hawthorne is evident in the Devil's mentioning of the fact that he helped Brown's grandfather, since this particular event actually happened and included one of the author's ancestors, more precisely his great-great-great-grandfather, William Hathorne. This particular ancestor can also be connected with the events during King Phillip's War. The Devil concludes his statement by saying how both of Brown's ancestors were his good friends. Metaphorically speaking, this is Hawthorne's way of judging his ancestors for doing such deeds and not living a proper Puritan life with which he was obsessed from a young age. Connecting Brown's ancestors to a direct relationship with the Devil, Hawthorne is blaming his own ancestors for the deeds they have done.

## **5. The Motif of Witchcraft in “Young Goodman Brown”**

The motif of witchcraft, much like the one of Puritanism, is explored in detail in the short story, making it one of the major themes it revolves around. Hawthorne used this motif in order to depict a Witches’ Sabbath and to include real-life women who were hanged under suspicion of being witches. Another very important piece of information is that, in the story, Hawthorne also decided to showcase spectral evidence as a basis of the Salem Witch Trials.

### **5.1 Spectral Evidence in “Young Goodman Brown”**

“Young Goodman Brown” is a rather complex story in the sense that the reader is not able to understand whether the events happening to Brown are a dream or a reality. This distinction has never clearly been made when it comes to Hawthorne’s short story since he never declared it himself, nor have any critics completely agreed on one of the possibilities. The one aspect many can agree on is the use of spectral evidence in the story.- In regard to that, one can easily discuss large amounts of the aforementioned evidence in terms of the story (Levin 346) This specific evidence was used for a brief time during the Salem Witch Trials after which it was banned and was one of the reasons why the trials were put to an end in the first place. Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” features a large amount of spectral evidence being laid out. Namely, the evidence comes about during the discussions Brown has with the Devil. After Brown decided to tell the Devil how his ancestors are a good Christian people and went on to deny their wrongdoings, the Devil decided to convince him to enter a covenant with him since it is only logical. Some of the instances of spectral evidence used by the Devil are, for example, shown in the moment when he conjured up the figures of the minister, deacon, and the two women who were actual victims of the Trials (Levin 349).

The Devil included other figures from Brown’s life, in particular the most important one, his wife Faith: ““Faith!’ shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation;” (Hawthorne 2451). It is interesting to mention this instance of the Devil introducing Faith as spectral evidence because of the way in which it is done. Namely, the use of spectral evidence to showcase Faith in the setting of the Witches’ Sabbath, is assumingly its most prominent use. The Devil used Faith’s ribbons as an indication of her lost purity and of her existence in this universe of Brown’s dream or reality. The only fact different with this use of spectral evidence is that Faith’s ribbons can indeed be interpreted as such, because, after Goodman wakes up the next morning, Faith is still wearing them (Levin 349).

## **5.2 The Meeting in the Forest**

As already mentioned, one of the main themes “Young Goodman Brown” explores is the Witches’ Sabbath, or the meeting of the witches in the forest. While Goodman Brown was walking along the forest with the Devil, he was slowly being introduced to certain figures familiar to him from his everyday life and with that was guided onto the Sabbath featuring all of the people he knew and thought highly of, in terms of them being devout Christians and Puritans. The Sabbath went on to change his mind, but also, him as a person, making him cold and desperate in the end, leaving him with nothing but questioning whether it was all a dream.

After everyone had made their way to the meeting, the Devil spoke and welcomed them all: “‘Welcome, my children,’ said the dark figure, ‘to the communion of your race! Ye have found, thus young, your nature and your destiny’” (Hawthorne 2453). With this meeting, everyone present was converted and entered a covenant with the Devil, even though, at the very end, the reader is still not sure of whether Goodman Brown lost his Faith, symbolic and real, or kept it and whether he kept his Faith and it helped to lure off the Devil.

## **5.3 Real Victims of the Salem Witch Trials**

The final evidence of witchcraft being used as one of the main motifs of the short story is Hawthorne’s inclusion of the two women murdered during the Salem Witch Trials. Not only did Hawthorne include these two women in his story to depict the real victims of the Trials, but he also showed his immense knowledge and familiarity with the Trials themselves.

The first person mentioned in the story is Goody Cloyse, or Sarah Cloyse, one of the victims of the Salem Witch Trials. Cloyse was the sister of one other victim accused of witchcraft, Rebecca Nurse, who was executed before her (Goss 26). Namely, after Nurse’s hearing, Sarah went on to Samuel Parris’ service and quickly became enraged by his sermon with which she believed he called her sister out for her wrongdoings. This all resulted in Sarah storming out of the church and not long after that did the afflicted young girls from the beginning of the Trials state that they had seen Sarah’s spectre drinking blood with the other women accused of witchcraft (Stewart 49-50), and that statement cost Sarah her freedom and made her the victim of the Trials.

Sarah, or Goody Cloyse, as Hawthorne calls her in the short story, is mentioned in the very beginning. In the story, Goody Cloyse “explains why she is walking instead of flying through the air in the manner



of witches” (Cherry 342). By claiming that another witch, Goody Cory, stole her broom, she is revealing another persona who took part in the Trials (Cherry 342). Goody Cloyse becomes the first person who awakes suspicion in Goodman Brown since she was a person in his life whom he saw as being extremely pious and religious: “That old woman taught me my catechism!” (Hawthorne 24484), he seems very surprised that he is seeing someone from his life who showed him the proper and religious way to life. He even sees her going to the Witches’ Sabbath which instigates even more suspicion in his mind and makes him question his religion even more (Cherry 347).

Martha Carrier, the second real-life victim of the Salem Witch Trials, is mentioned in the story by Hawthorne’s use of her own testimony and Cotton Mather’s description of her. This particular information proves Hawthorne’s familiarity with the cases of the Salem Witch Trials which is quite evident seeing as his ancestors had a big role in the Trials themselves. Namely, John Hathorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ancestor, was one of the two people responsible for Martha Carrier’s arrest warrant. She belonged to the second group of victims accused during the period between July and August and was hanged on August 18. She was the first person to be accused of witchcraft in Andover, Massachusetts. Carrier was charged with harming Mary Walcott and Abigail Williams among other young girls. This particular group of girls also accused her of killing 13 people in Andover. Elizabeth Hubbard, one of the five girls who ended up accusing her, in her second indictment, confirmed that she was indeed a witch and Cotton Mather referred to her as being the “Queen of Hell” (Goss 69-72).

## Conclusion

Puritanism and witchcraft are and continue to be quite interesting topics of research and literary motifs. They are usually analysed together since they represent complete opposites, one which stems from the theory that men are in a covenant with God, and the other which finds its primary belief in the fact that people have joined into a covenant with the exact opposite of God, with the Devil. Nathaniel Hawthorne was just one of the many authors who decided to produce works which dealt with these two concepts around which the storyline of one of his famous works, "Young Goodman Brown," is built.

One of the main points of this paper was to analyse and describe how the two motifs tie into Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Brown." After extensive research of Puritanism, witchcraft, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's life, it becomes evident that these motifs were used in order to build the storyline. Research of Hawthorne's past and the Salem Witch Trials gave the story another dimension. It helped show how both of the motifs shaped the work as well as how the newfound information about Puritanism and witchcraft as well as The Salem Witch Trials is necessary for a better, more in-depth interpretation. This paper started off on the premise that, in order to fully understand this rather complex literary work, one must have an understanding of the underlying context, i.e. of the Puritan's tendency to reject anything which goes against the scripture and very often against the theory of predestination and Calvinism in general, of Nathaniel Hawthorne's complex life and Puritan ancestry and of the Salem Witch Trials.

One of the most important concepts the story is built around is Faith, which conveys to the reader the importance of innocence and purity in the Puritan religion. The paper focuses also on Hawthorne's heritage (John Hathorne) and the critique of Calvinism in Puritanism both of which played a significant role in Hawthorne's writing. Lastly, when it came to witchcraft, this paper was able to prove the existence of this motif as one of the storyline builders by describing the use of spectral evidence and the meeting in the forest (the witches' Sabbath) as well as by introducing the description of two real victims of The Salem Witch Trials, Martha Carrier and Sarah Cloyse, present in the short story. Witchcraft plays a significant role in Hawthorne's story as a force that is in opposition to the Puritan religion which was at the centre of Puritan life. Thus, it can be concluded that the two motifs, Puritanism and witchcraft, are at the core of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown."

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