Young Goodman Brown: Humanity Issues Illustrated Through Symbols

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" explores the nature of humanity in a Puritan based atmosphere. Through the uses literary devices such as symbolism, personification, irony, repetition, and tone Hawthorne conveys the message that corruption and evilness exists in humanity, even if it's not clearly being shown, in everyday life.

Hawthorne uses symbolism in the names of his characters to further amplify the façade of pureness within them. The Characters' names are symbolic because they all express a kind of innocence. The use of "Good" in the characters names, Goodman Brown and Goody Cloyse, demonstrate how their town believes them to be good honest people. As seen in what Goodman Brown thinks of himself and family, "We have been a race of honest men and good Christians, since the days of the martyrs." However, this is symbolic because the elder traveller later reveals that they are in fact, not as good and honest as the façade they have put up. The traveller explains all the sinful deeds he's watched Brown's family act on. Faith's name is symbolic for the trust that Brown once had for his wife and his religion. "With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!". This quote expresses Brown's faith he had prior to what he had witnessed in the forest that night.

Personification, tone, and symbolism were heavily used to demonstrate the snake-like staff in order to highlight the vivid details and give example to evilness in humanity throughout the story. The use of personification to describe the snake staff connects the reader into believing that the staff has any true power. The staff appeared to have been "twisting" and "wriggling" represents the tone of corruption and how the staff has power to do so. The touch of the staff was able to interrupt a woman praying, and have her cry out words of the devil. The staff even had power to move Brown along after he clearly stated he was done moving further into the forest. The traveller already knew the power of his staff with the use of, "Sit here and rest yourself awhile; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along." Hawthorne includes this interaction between Brown and the traveller to foreshadow that Brown would later do the opposite of what he intended to do, move deeper into the forest. Also exemplifying the power, the snake staff holds. Hawthorne also includes symbolism as describing the staff to being "remarkable" and to which "bore the likeness of a great black snake". The snake being black further alludes to the mystery, evil, and power that staff holds.

Hawthorne uses repetition of "race" to instil in the minds of the readers that the race he's talking about is humanity as a whole. Specifically, when the dark figure says "Welcome, my children,", "to the communion of your race!", Hawthorne demonstrates the human race in a negative tone. Such as when he includes the phrase "mourn for our miserable race" it's used to dictate his disdain for the human race.

The use of "young" in the title "Young Goodman Brown" is symbolic because exhibits to the reader that Goodman Brown shows youth and naivety; even though Brown is no longer young because he's old enough to be married and lives with his wife. It is shown through use of dialogue and Brown's own thoughts that he never truly knew the evilness that surrounded him until his night in the forest. Brown's confusion when he realizes, "That old woman taught me

my catechism!”, and yet she was partaking in activities of evilness shows the reader that Brown is now having doubts about the pureness and honesty of the towns people. The doubt Brown feels conveys Hawthorne’s message that evil exists in humanity. Yet it’s not always clear where the evil exists. Brown expresses how he thought the woman was going to heaven, and if that’s any reason he should abandon his faith in the religion. Browns out loud expression of doubt is ironic because from this the reader would believe he would stick with his faith. However, Brown goes through a change after witnessing “all faces that would be seen, next day,” “from the holiest pulpits in the land”. People Brown thought to be believers of God “these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins” were all “wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes”. This exposition of Brown’s breaking point conveys what Hawthorne wants the reader to see, “Evil is the nature of mankind.”

Faith’s pink ribbon is symbolic for the love and compassion their marriage holds. When Brown was sure of his religion, he would always call faith his “love”. He loves faith so much that he becomes full of guilt when he thinks about how he left her. “What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand!” This tells the reader he knows what he’s doing is wrong, and yet he keeps going. When he first sees Faith after his night in the woods her pink ribbons were seen “gazing anxiously forth”. Hawthorne uses personification to display the anxiety Brown has for their marriage, and for if Faith made the decision to stray away from the witchcraft. When Brown “looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.” It was clear he felt that way toward the puritan belief. There is a direct correlation to how he feels about his religion, and how he feels about his wife. Brown “turned away” from his wife because his guilty conscious of his new-found disdain of religion. Not only does he lose his faith in religion, that night, but he also looses a part of his wife that night.

In conclusion, Hawthorne uses storytelling to convey how he views humanity. Through the use of tone, the reader is able to gather that Hawthorne feels negatively towards the human race. Hawthorne explores his negative view of the world through the guilty conscious of Goodman Brown. He uses symbolism to create a deeper meaning within his story. Hawthorne tells the story of a seemingly good man, in a town of good people, and with the use of symbolism he alludes to the evilness and corruption taking place in humanity. He explores the meaning of good and bad. The idea that people can seem good, but in reality, are far from it.