

Romanticism and Realism in Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown

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Romanticism and Realism in “Young Goodman Brown”

Herman Melville in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” (The Literary World August 17, 24, 1850) has a noteworthy comment on Hawthorne’s romantic style:

And now, my countrymen, as an excellent author, of your own flesh and blood,--an unimitating, and perhaps, in his way, an inimitable man--whom better can I commend to you, in the first place, than Nathaniel Hawthorne. He is one of the new, and far better generation of your writer. The smell of your beeches and hemlocks is upon him; your own [broad](#) prairies are in his soul; and if you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far roar of his [Niagara](#).

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” includes both the “inimitable,” nature-oriented style of romanticism as well as elements of realism.

M. H. Abrams defines romantic themes in prominent writers of this school in the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as being five in number: (1) innovations in the materials, forms and style; (2) that the work involve a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”; (3) that external nature be a persistent subject with a “sensuous nuance” and accuracy in its description; (4) that the reader be invited to identify the protagonist with the author himself; and (5) that this be an age of “new beginnings and high possibilities” for the person (177-79).

Let us examine “Young Goodman Brown” in light of the above. First of all, Hawthorne was a real [innovator](#) in his use of the psychological approach to characters within a story. A. N. Kaul considers Hawthorne “preeminently a ‘psychological’” writer – “burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance. . . .” (2). Q. D. Leavis says: “Hawthorne has imaginatively recreated for the reader that Calvinist sense of sin. . . . But in Hawthorne, by a wonderful feat of transmutation, it has no religious significance, it is as a psychological state that it is explored” (37). The reader experiences most of the story through the eyes and feelings of the protagonist, Goodman. In the following passage the reader is allowed, as is typical, to read his thoughts:

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too.

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