

By: Charles Titus

English 201 On-line

Essay test #3

Question:

Discuss the use of symbolism in any 2 of the following – how do symbols lead to an interpretation of the work?

- **The Raven**
- **Young Goodman Brown**
- **My Kinsman, Major Molineaux**
- **Rappaccini's Daughter**

Ever since authors have written stories they have used many different ways to help get their message across. One way that authors have gotten their message across in the stories is by using symbols. One author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, uses symbols in both *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, and *Young Goodman Brown* to help the reader be able to understand and interpret the stories.

In the story *My Kinsman, Major Molineux* the author uses symbols to help get his message across. The symbols that Hawthorne uses are Robin who is the kid in the story and then Major Molineux who is the man that Robin is going to go meet to help get his feet on the ground in America. When Robin got off of the ferry he asked numerous people where he could find Major Molineux, the people he asked mostly “answered him in a tone of excessive anger and annoyance” (Hawthorne, *My Kinsman* 2247). As the story goes on people start making fun of him because he is lost and poor. Robin finally gets to a church. Where “he seated himself, however, upon the steps of the church-door, resolving to wait the appointed time for his kinsman's appearance” (2252). Then while sitting at the church an old man starts talking to Robin. While there talking with the old man Robin notices a commotion going on and then sees Major Molineux “in tar-and-feathery dignity” (2256). Robin then ask the old man how to get to the ferry, so he can get back home. However, the old man replied “no, my good friend Robin, not to-night, at least” (2258). The old man then says “some few days hence, if you continue to wish it, I will speed you on your journey” (2258). The old man goes on to say “or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux” (2258). The symbols in this story are both Robin and Major Molineux. Robin symbolizes the American people while Major Molineux symbolizes the British. Americans (Robin) thought that we needed the help of the British (Major) in order to succeed in the new world. However, we realized that we did not need the help of the British and so the American Revolution started up. So, the reader is able to interpret the message that America no longer wanted or needed the help of the British and that we could do it on our own all along.

Another story that Hawthorne wrote that he used many different symbols to help get his message across was *Young Goodman Brown*. In this story the symbols were not as hard to find as in other stories. The only symbols that I am going to discuss are the names, ribbon, marriage, and evil. The most noticeable symbols in this story is the names of the characters. The name of the main character, *Young Goodman Brown*, is the one of the biggest symbols in this story. His name is a symbol because it is trying to show the reader that this man is a good man. Then at the beginning of the story *Young Goodman Brown's* wife is introduced. "And Faith, as the wife was aptly named" (Hawthorne, *Young* 2258). Faith turns out to be another symbol in the story, because it turns out that she is more than just his wife. Faith also turns out to stand for religious faith, and what a good wife stands for. The marriage between Faith and Goodman also symbolizes that Brown clings to a faith in good in this story. Another symbol that is given off early is Faith wearing "the pink ribbons" (2258). The pink ribbons symbolizes a symbol of heavenly faith. As the story goes on, Goodman Brown goes out into the forest and ends up running into the devil. The devil said, "You are late, Goodman Brown" (2259). Goodman Brown replies "Faith kept me back awhile" (2259). The narrow, dark path in the forest symbolizes the evil that is within the forest. Goodman decides to take the narrow, dark path in the forest which means that he followed the path of evil. As the story goes on Goodman comes upon a crowd of people from town that included his Sunday school teacher, his minister, and his wife. Then a voice cried "Bring forth the converts" (2265)! "At the word, Goodman Brown step forth from the shadow of the trees, and approached the congregation, which whom he felt a loathful of brotherhood, by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart" (2265). As the ceremony went on he stood beside his wife and he was about to be baptized. "Herein did the Shape of Evil dip his hand, and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own" (2266). Goodman then looked at his wife and then cried "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked

One” (2266)! After he said that everything around him just went away. Once the next morning came he came out of the woods and “came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man” (2266). When Faith saw her husband she ran up to him “and almost kissed her husband before the whole village” (2266). However, “Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting” (2266). As the years passed Goodman was “a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream” (2266). The story uses these symbols to help the reader interpret that once someone takes a wrong turn onto the path of evil then it is hard if not possible to come back from. Goodman Brown's life changed because of the turn that he took in the forest. He went down the path that he did not want to go down, and he payed the consieous for it. He ended up not being able to trust anyone ever again and died a bitter person.

Authors can use many different techniques in order to get their message across to the readers of their stories. One effective method of getting the point across is by using symbols in a story. One author that used symbols in a good bit of his work was Hawthorne. In both stories Young Goodman Brown, and My Kinsman, Major Molineaux, he was able to help get across his message by using symbols.

Works Cited

- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." The Heath Anthology of American Literature Volume B. Ed. Paul Lauter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. 2245-2258.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Young Goodman Brown." Th Heath Anthology of American Literature Volume B. Ed. Paul Lauter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. 2258-2267.