Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown": Early Nineteenth-Century and Puritan Constructions of Gender

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NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S "Young Goodman Brown" traditionally has been read as an examination of crises of faith, morality, and/or psychosexuality. Early readings focused on questions of theology and conduct,[1] but since the opening years of the 1950s, a second category of readings has emphasized the psychosexual elements. Roy Male, for example, argued that "the dark night in the forest is essentially a sexual experience, though it is also much more," while Frederick Crews observed that in his dream experience, the young, newly wed, and still oedipal Brown, fleeing from the sexuality of married love, removes himself to a place where he can voyeuristically and vicariously enjoy that which he directly shuns.[2] The third important category of readings attempts to ground the story in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century documents about witchcraft to which Hawthorne had access. Most significant of these considerations are David Levin's contention that the most important topic of "Young Goodman Brown" is the theological and epistemological issue of "specter evidence" and Michael Colacurcio's thesis that the historical documents from which Hawthorne worked, especially those involving how you tell a saint from a witch or any other sinner, limit the scope of

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[1]For a categorization of these readings, see D. M. McKeithan, "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': An Interpretation," *Modern Language Notes* 67 (1952): 93.

[2]Roy R. Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), p. 77; Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 102.

Hawthorne's investigation into Brown's (or his own) psyche to that made possible by the language and content of the Puritan documents.[3] In all three of these critical categories, the authors generally assume, if they address the matter at all, that Hawthorne is concerned with late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century issues and events surrounding American Puritan life. We must recognize, however, that—contra the assumptions that some scholars make about Hawthorne as a Puritan historian—Hawthorne could not re-create Puritan history in his historical tales; he could only construct it, basing his construction upon his readings of Puritan documents and the experience that he, as a nineteenth-century, middle-class New Englander, brought to them.

At least one reader suggests that part of the experience Hawthorne brought to the Puritan documents was his familiarity with contemporary documents. Frank Shuffleton has pointed out convincingly that, in the climactic scene of the "witches' sabbath," Hawthorne appeared to have been working not only from Puritan archives but also from Frances Trollope's contemporary observations on the demonic aspects of evangelical tent meetings in *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). Without denying the crises of faith, morality, and psychosexuality that earlier critics had discovered in "Young Goodman Brown," Shuffleton notes that Hawthorne was likely to find those issues in contemporary as well as Puritan documents and events. Moreover, in recognizing that "the story's meaning has an anchor in a specific social situation in Hawthorne's nineteenth-century present, we understand the balancing power of the specific richness of the story's historical knowledge as detailed by so many scholars."[4] If theology, morality, and psychosexuality were a devilish brew for

[3]David Levin, "Shadows of Doubt: Specter Evidence in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown'" *American Literature* 34 (November 1962): 344–52; Michael J. Colacurcio, "Visible Sanctity and Specter Evidence: The Moral World of Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 110 (1974): 259–99.

[4]Frank Shuffleton, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Revival Movement," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1979): 321.

Hawthorne's Puritan ancestors, they were no less so for Hawthorne and his contemporaries. Hawthorne places the story in the seventeenth century in order to explore the nexus of past and present in New Englanders' attitudes towards these central life experiences.

In addition to the Puritan problems of telling the saintly from the damned and the innocent from the corrupt, "Young Goodman Brown" takes as part of its context fundamental changes in gender and gender relations in the growing middle-class world of New England. One aspect of these changes in gender and sexuality with which the story surely is concerned is the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, a discourse developed that sought to divide the world into public and private spheres based on gender.[5] Men and women had lived socially, economically, and politically distinct lives in the Puritan period, but what is significant about the new, nineteenth-century gender ideology is that it constructed a "male" world that was even more and decidedly self-consciously distinct from the "female." Men should be the "sole" economic providers of the household, working, increasingly, outside of it, in the public realm. Women should provide all the other needs of the family, laboring (although it was seldom seen as such) only within the house—a structure that during this period became known as the "home" and became identified primarily with women and their children.

Of particular relevance to Hawthorne's story, however, since its concerns are with transgression as much as catechism, is

[5]I have tried wherever possible to pinpoint developments to the decade or decades in which they occurred, but many changes experienced by the middle class in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continued into and only rose to hegemony in the middle of the nineteenth century. Hence, what is true for Hawthorne's family in his youth and for seacoast New England towns like Salem—where the absence of fathers away on work for long periods of time, for example, was a common phenomenon—may not yet be true of America in general until mid century or later. Hawthorne is writing, in part, about the world he knows and for a geographically limited, middle-class reading audience cognizant of these developments from other domestic literature.

that in the last two decades historians have come to understand that the clear boundaries between male/female, public/private, and work/home were blurred—that these separate spheres, essential to constructions of the middle-class world and heretofore thought rigid barriers, more accurately should be seen as thresholds through which nineteenth-century Americans frequently passed.[6] Moreover, historians have also confirmed that the 1830s was a critical decade of change.[7] "Young Goodman Brown," probably written no earlier than the initial years of the decade and published anonymously in 1835, chronicles Hawthorne's observations about the anxieties caused by such discrepancies between ideology and behavior. Young Goodman Brown, who has come to believe with religious fervor what he has been taught prior to marriage about the separation of spheres, is disoriented by the behavioral expectations he confronts once he has entered that institution. The ideology of separate spheres was not transgressed, Hawthorne seems to suggest in "Young Goodman Brown," without some psychological and moral costs.

[6]Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Ellen Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Nina Baym claims that woman's fiction "showed the home thoroughly penetrated at every point by the world, dominated by man" and that it held out the hope that perhaps "the direction of influence could be reversed so that home values dominated the world" (*Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820–1870* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978], p. 48).

[7]For example, Nancy F. Cott argues in *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 6 ff., that the 1830s "became a turning point in women's economic participation, public activities, and social visibility." Stephanie Coontz points out in *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600–1900* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 34, that "about the 1820s a new family system emerged"; and Joe L. Dubbert notes in *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1979), p. 27, that "around 1830 the number of [guidebooks to male behavior] increased and their tone became more serious, especially in discussing sexual purity." See also Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790–1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 199–201; Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, pp. 28–32; Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 4, 25–29; and Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, pp. 51, 91.

I

Michael Colacurcio has advised that readers look for the historical contexts of early Hawthorne stories in the opening paragraphs, and that is precisely where this reading will begin.[8] It is here in the opening paragraphs that we are introduced to both a Puritan setting and another of what Shuffleton has called Hawthorne's contemporary "anchors." The story begins with an explicit presentation of issues of gender, sexuality, and intimacy, all of which take place in the doorway between public and private.

> Young Goodman Brown came forth, at sunset, into the street of Salem village, but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap, while she called to Goodman Brown.[9]

In this scene, we learn that the setting of the story is Salem village, the site of many mysterious activities in the minds of Hawthorne's contemporaries, and the time is sunset. The scene takes place in the doorway of the Browns' house, a threshold that both joins and separates not only private and public but, literally in this case, female and male. It is a threshold that both characters violate for reasons of intimacy, although she, as we see, is clearly the more intimate of the two. About the two characters we learn that the man is young, that he is embarking on a nighttime journey, and that, apparently, he is distracted or hurried, since he fails to kiss his wife before leaving the house. Of the woman, we learn that she is married to the young man, is named Faith, is pretty, and, although she modestly wears a cap over her hair, she has adorned it with pink ribbons.

[8]Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[9]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, vol. 10 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. William Charvat et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 74. All further references are to this edition and are identified parenthetically.

The ambiguity in the description of Faith—is or is not her name a sign of her spirituality or faithfulness? is she modest or immodest?—will recur throughout the story, and this ambiguity is the cause of Brown's great sadness and the subject of much of the scholarship on the story. Here it is important to note that the ambiguity is repeated also in her not waiting for him to return to kiss her, in her thrusting her own head through the doorway and "letting" the breeze animate the ribbons with which she has dressed her cap. Not only is the "letting" ambiguous when combined with the thrusting, "letting" is an activity that itself raises questions about who is in control of the action. Having thrust her head through the doorway in order to give her husband his goodbye kiss, Faith whispers "softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear,"

> "Dearest heart, . . . pr'y thee, put off your journey until sunrise, and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she's afeard of herself, sometimes. Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!" [P. 74]

Surely Hawthorne means for us to think of this story as taking place in Puritan Massachusetts.[10] Certain other factors, however—such as the threshold setting, the description of Faith, the couple's bad dreams, the implication that he has failed to sleep in his own bed on other occasions—suggest a more contemporary setting. John Demos indicates that the early decades of the nineteenth century produced scads of literature on domestic life, and the "shrill tone of the new advice betrayed deep anxieties about the evolving shape and future prospects of the family."[11] It is of course the Browns' prospects

[10]Levin and Colacurcio, in particular, have strengthened this sense by revealing the depth of Hawthorne's familiarity with Puritan sources. See also E. Arthur Robinson, "The Vision of Goodman Brown: A Source and Interpretation," *American Literature* 35 (May 1963): 218–25; B. Bernard Cohen, "Deodat Lawson's *Christ's Fidelity* and Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown,'" *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 104 (1968): 349–70; James W. Clark, Jr., "Hawthorne's Use of Evidence in 'Young Goodman Brown,'" *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 111 (1975): 12–34; and Robert C. Grayson, "Young Goodman Hawthorne," *American Notes and Queries* 21 (March–April 1983): 103–6.

[11]John Demos, *Past, Present and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 49.

for the future about which they are most concerned. The family was changing in fundamental ways in Hawthorne's lifetime, and many New Englanders were writing and reading about the uncertainty they felt. That domestic literature was supplemented by sexual advice literature that portrayed men as sexually predatory and—a distinct difference from the Puritan construction—women as virtually passionless. Unlike the Puritan ethos, this same nineteenth-century advice literature also threatened disaster if abstinence were not the rule in all aspects of non-procreative sexuality.[12] It is unlikely that Hawthorne was unaware of this new literature on domestic life and human sexuality, but at the very least his story betrays the same profound anxieties about contemporary family and sexual life.

Although much of Brown's anxiety later in the story involves traditional suspicions that women are especially sexual creatures, a failing of which men must beware, Faith herself may better fit an ideal of womanhood popular in the magazine literature of Hawthorne's time. According to Lois Banner, Hawthorne "gave [this ideal] epic representation in the dovelike Hilda of *The Marble Faun* and the manipulated Priscilla of *The Blithedale Romance.*" Such a woman was known as the "steel-engraving lady" both for the "process by which she was created" and her own "moral rectitude": "When her pictorial representation is colored, her complexion is white, with a blush of pink in her cheeks."[13] Attending a gala New York City ball in 1822, James Fenimore Cooper encountered the real-life counterparts of this American ideal: "'There is something in the bloom, delicacy, and innocence of one of these young things, that reminds you of the conceptions which poets and painters have taken of the angels.'"[14] The ideal's delicacy and spirituality were important; later in the story, Brown will refer to Faith as a "'blessed angel on earth'" (p. 75). Another characteristic of the

[12]Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1850," in *A Heritage of Her Own*, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 162–81; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet and Debility in Jacksonian America.*

[13]Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 45, 46.

[14]Cooper, quoted by Banner, in *American Beauty*, p. 46.

ideal is her youth, which "underscored her purity and reflected both the nineteenth-century romanticization of childhood and its tendency to infantilize women, to view them as creatures of childlike disposition."[15] Such characterizations of femininity contrast quite specifically with Puritan constructions of womanhood, which were based on Eve's seduction by the devil and her deception of Adam in the Garden of Eden.[16]

Perhaps as the last in a series of efforts to keep Brown home this night, Faith pleads with her husband not only to stay home but to sleep with her. The young wife's desire for intimacy with her husband could not be more explicit. Brown's reply is no less direct:

> "My love and my Faith, . . . of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married!" [P. 74]

In this passage Brown has deliberately conflated his wife's name with a belief system. Hawthorne's construction of Brown's speech in this manner, his association of religion with the role of wife, suggests both Puritan and contemporary possibilities. According to Edmund Morgan, for example, Puritans feared that love of spouse could rival and interfere with love of Christ. On the other hand, in Hawthorne's lifetime women, thought to be morally superior to men, were entrusted with preparing children for Christian salvation. Nancy Cott argues that the evangelicals of the early decades "linked moral agency to female character with a supporting link to passionlessness."[17] If Hawthorne's concerns are as much with contemporary as Puritan gender ideology, then having a wife named Faith seems an appropriate characteristic for his main character. However, except for Brown's distrust of Faith, it is at this point

[15]Banner, *American Beauty*, p. 53.

[16]John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 82–83.

[17]Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (1944; revised ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 166–68; Cott, "Passionlessness," p. 167.

in Hawthorne's story that, although the setting seems Puritan and both periods sometimes confuse sex with "going to the devil," the gender relations begin to have more in common with nineteenth-century ideology and behavior than Puritan history.

In Brown's reply to Faith, there is an element of huffy self-importance, as if Brown were giving a prepared speech. Here we find an indication that the events of the forest are not entirely responsible for Brown's becoming a "darkly meditative, a distrustful" man (p. 89); for all his youth and inexperience, Brown is already very serious, and this hyper-seriousness is part of his foolishness. In insisting that he must leave Faith this night, Brown misreads her sexual desire and fear of being alone as anxiety about his marital fidelity. Note the irony of Brown's question: he doesn't realize that it is a sexual life with her that he is running away from when he portrays himself to his young wife ("dost thou doubt me already") as a licentious stud who would take other lovers after only three months of marriage, a self-portrait that suggests nineteenth-century manhood.

In the nineteenth century, with many men away from the home for long periods of time, middle-class Americans needed a gender ideology that sanctified woman's isolation among her children. Whereas men had played important roles in the moral upbringing, education, and socialization of children in former periods, in the early nineteenth century such responsibilities all but evaporated for many middle-class men. At the same time, women's important role in the economic production that sustained the household of the eighteenth century was, at least in the discourse, eliminated. "Having required the bourgeois woman to be both elegant and nonproductive," and leaving her on her own with the children all day, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asks, "how could the bourgeois man ever trust her virtue or rest securely in the symbols of his class" (i.e., primarily, in his elegant woman and well-kept children)?[18] What was to keep this consumer, rather than producer, of resources from

[18]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America," in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 166.

straying—economically, sexually, morally, religiously? The solution was a socially redeemed image of womanhood: woman as Angel of the Home. Middle-class woman's sole province became the production of "home" life, where the values of the culture could be instilled into the items she produced, her children.[19]

Yet Faith both conforms to and violates nineteenth-century ideology. Standing inside the doorway, she is pretty, modest, discreet, and her name suggests her spirituality and her devotion to her husband. At the same time, she is, within the terms of nineteenth-century ideology, aggressive in her sexuality. The reversal of the expected that we see Brown encounter on the threshold of his own home is probably not unprecedented. His language seems to suggest that marriage may have been a rude awakening for him. Brown's discovery of Faith's sexuality may have shattered his conception of the passivity and disinterest that women were supposed to demonstrate about sex, and this knowledge may have threatened the security of his home. The events that take place in the woods may be nothing more than his playing out of his anxious fantasies about Faith's sexuality and the ideology of separate spheres that he demonstrates in his speech and behavior at the entrance of his home.

The story's introduction, then, describes several threshold experiences, not just because it takes place in a doorway (although that too is important to our understanding of the action of the public/private discourse) but because it is this parting of Faith and Brown that defines their future intimacy. That is to say, from now on they will cross this threshold repeatedly. Intercourse is also physically and emotionally a threshold experience, and the act itself is suggested in the opening paragraphs where Faith and Brown repeatedly stick their heads in and out of a doorway graced by her pink ribbons.[20] There is much about the physical act of sex—the orgasms, the levels of inten-

[19]On woman's work as social reproduction, see Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life*.

[20]For a psychoanalytic reading of this opening passage as explicitly sexual, see Edward Jayne, "Pray Tarry with Me Young Goodman Brown," *Literature and Psychology* 29 (1979): 103–4.

sity, the sleeping in one's own bed—that involves thresholds, but so too does the emotional aspect, particularly the intimacy that may proceed from as well as contribute to the physical experience. Whatever we may think today, coition and orgasm were not the *sine qua non* of human sexuality in the nineteenth century; a wide range of intimate activities constituted sexuality.[21] But notice also how those recurrent pink ribbons may have blurred Brown's whole notion of privacy, (woman's) purity, and the sanctity of the separate woman's sphere. Brown encounters these ribbons adorning the public world everywhere he goes: each time he sees Faith sticking her head out of the doorway, he notices them, and later one floats down out of the forest sky to convince him that "'There is no good on earth'" and to the devil "'is this world given'" (p. 83).[22]

What happens in the woods, then, is also part of this public/private borderland, only here Brown realizes that the divisions are grotesquely blurred, and the sexual theme significantly expands to include the issues of manhood and fatherhood—much to Goodman Brown's chagrin.

II

As we follow our new husband into the woods, we notice that the image of the threshold recurs when Brown looks back at Faith before turning the corner of the meetinghouse and, presumably, going out of her sight. Upon entering the woods, he

[21]See Lystra, *Searching the Heart,* pp. 57–58.

[22]Perhaps Brown's insistence that Faith and her ribbons remain inside the public/private threshold is related also to the taboo that menstruation has a chaotic effect on social behavior. One best-selling marriage manual of the 1830s declared that menstruating women were "'out of order'" and should be kept at home (see Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy,* quoted in Joel Pfister's *The Production of Personal Life: Class, Gender, and the Psychological in Hawthorne's Fiction* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991], p. 35). In addition, the repetition of "of all nights in the year" suggests that this particular night is important to both of them. Perhaps her ribbons are a sign that she is ovulating. It was generally held prior to the twentieth century that when a woman was menstruating she was also ovulating (see Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], p. 3). Hence, Faith's omnipresent pink ribbons and sexual desire may be signs of her wish to pull her husband through yet another threshold into the joys of parenthood.

finds that the "dreary road" he has chosen is "darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind." The trees seem to cut him off effectively from his life with Faith and from Salem village. He will soon pass a "crook" in the road, which will further isolate him. Or so it would seem. His only emotions at this point are his loneliness—the same emotion his wife is, presumably, experiencing—and his guilt. However, even this guilt and loneliness, we are told on two occasions, may be occurring in the midst of "an unseen multitude" (p. 75). Having left the private sphere for the public as the story begins, Brown now apparently enters another sphere in which the public and private have been completely blurred.

As for Brown's thoughts of his wife and his pangs, if any, about his mission, we read:

> "Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch I am, to leave her on such an errand! . . . Methought, as she spoke, there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done to-night. But no, no! 'twould kill her to think it. Well; she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven." [P. 75]

Brown finds it impossible to believe that Faith could imagine her husband so immoral.[23] As we soon learn, however, Faith not only can imagine Brown on such a mission, she herself takes part in one. More interesting, perhaps, is his conviction that later he will "cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven." This vision suggests the strength of Brown's *au courant* identification of his wife as a morally superior "blessed angel." But modern too is Brown's figuring of his wife as a mother to whose skirts he can cling, an image that bears witness to the difficulty Brown has in differentiating love of mother from love of wife, a dilemma with which Hawthorne and his contemporaries were not unfamiliar.

[23]That many husbands, including Hawthorne, could, following the advice literature of the early decades of the nineteenth century, accept the moral superiority of their wives is clear from their letters and diaries. See Degler, *At Odds*, p. 30, and T. Walter Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Wife came to replace mother as the moral guardian and disciplinarian of a nineteenth-century, middle-class young man's family. The move from mother's home to wife's, from child's world to man's world should not, then, be all that difficult. Of course, in reality it is far from simple, particularly because the grown son must spend half his life away from mother-wife in the world of men for which his childhood in woman's sphere has not prepared him. Many young men must have found adult life frightening and confusing. T. Walter Herbert believes that Hawthorne did: "Nathaniel maintained a 'childlike' persona because his effort to become a 'man' was complicated by the difficulties of crossing the gap between the maternal/marital sphere and the world beyond."[24]

Faith has referred to what Brown is leaving home for as a "journey," but it is clear that he does not think of it as such. He first refers to what he is about to do as an "'errand'" and two sentences later as "'work.'" There is also no doubt that Brown is both fleeing Faith and setting out to "go to the devil," as he phrases his errand when talking about Goody Cloyse further on. What is it the devil can offer him that his Faith cannot? When Brown meets up with the devil, the gravely dressed man, mentioning the striking of the clock on Boston's Old South Church, reprimands Brown for being a "'full fifteen minutes'" late (p. 75). In this reference to the clock, the "devil's work" becomes associated with contemporary work—labor of a modern, rational, time-ordered sort—and thus "going to the devil" carries the connotation of "men's business." Here also in this encounter we notice that the devil has been expecting Brown

[24]Herbert, *Dearest Beloved,* pp. 131–32; see also chaps. 8 and 10. In later decades, historian E. Anthony Rotundo proposes, a distinct "boy culture" grew up to counter the forces of "tender affection and moral suasion" each boy encountered when he crossed the threshold into his mother's home. This more "masculine" youth culture outside the home helped prepare boys for a manhood in which crossing the threshold between male and female worlds was more natural. In fact, some "of the most important lessons that a youngster learned from boy culture were those about living a life divided by a boundary between the two spheres." But in the early decades, such acculturation was quite limited. E. Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle-Class Boyhood in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America,* ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 16, 29.

and knows him by name and appearance, as if the two had met before (and we are reminded of Faith's implication that this is not the first night she has spent alone). When to the devil's reprimand Brown replies, "'Faith kept me back a while,'" we realize that he knows the devil well enough to use his wife's first name with him and, further, that he believes the devil will accept the explanation that a woman was interfering with his ability to set to the "errand" or "work" that is to be done (p. 76).

Brown's morality is Manichean, gendered, as is his religious sensibility, which is reminiscent of the Puritans and evangelicals. He has been catechized to believe in the ideology of separate spheres, and his faith brooks no blurring of them. Figuring the world of wife/mother/home as on the side of good, angels, and heaven, Brown constructs the world of men/father/non-home as siding with evil and the devil. Hence, we meet the devil in the shape of Brown's father and grandfather.

Brown's new traveling companion is described as being "about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features." So similar are their appearances that "they might have been taken for father and son"; indeed, Goody Cloyse later recognizes the similarity immediately (p. 76). But Brown does not.[25] Within the context of our present concerns, that lack of recognition can be understood as reflecting middle-class fathers' absence from the home. Middle-class mothers and children were not to cross the threshold of the father's soiled workplace (the disaster that could result when masculine space was invaded by the feminine is the subject of Hawthorne's "The Birthmark"), and so increasingly sons' experiences of what fathers did and who they were were limited to a few hours a day. Advice literature

[25]Levin and Colacurcio read this story as, in part, concerned with the theological and epistemological problems the Puritans had with specter evidence, that Brown might mistake the specters in the forest for the people of the colony. Yet neither critic asks what specter evidence has to do with not recognizing that your companion is the "specter" of your father. Clearly the issue at this point in the story is not that Brown cannot tell a specter from a person or a saint from a sinner but that he does not recognize that someone looks like his father.

even urged that the son's sexual education be supervised by the mother.[26]

Brown's failure to recognize his father and to see the world as anything other than devil's work might also be attributed to the devil-father's magical power: "the only thing about [the devil-father], that could be fixed upon as remarkable, was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself, like a living serpent" (p. 76). In Brown's immature sensibility, in his underdeveloped sense of fatherhood and manhood, the father has never escaped the expression of his mature sexuality, his erect and animated phallus. It is in Brown's mind the most significant feature about him, in fact the devil-father's only remarkable feature.

The devil-father wishes to speed the pace of their travels and taunts Brown, saying: "'this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary.'"[27] Instead of accepting the challenge, Brown gives his companion his reasons for refusing to take up the staff: "'having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples, touching the matter thou wot'st of'" (p. 76). That is to say, the son replies to the devil-father's taunt by challenging his moral authority by virtue of the "scruples" he learned in the woman's sphere to which he now would return.

In this passage we also learn why the appearance of the devil-father was not unexpected: the son had previously agreed to the rendezvous. It is nothing other than the sight and offer-

[26]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," *American Quarterly* 23 (1971): 575.

[27]We might see this taunt as well as the serpentine phallus as challenges to Brown's manhood. The devil-father offers the competition and possible humiliation that a nineteenth-century son might find outside the home. David Leverenz argues that "any intensified ideology of manhood is a compensatory response to fears of humiliation" and that throughout his career Hawthorne "dramatizes manhood as demonic possession, often explicitly." But Leverenz virtually ignores "Young Goodman Brown," preferring to focus for the most part on one or two late stories and the novels. *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 4, 239.

ing of that twisting, writhing, serpentine staff, then, that energizes the newlywed's scruples. As he has done more than once since he walked through the door of his home, young Goodman Brown hesitates, pauses, looks back. Even as he unconsciously walks on, urged forward by the devil-father, identified in all his "evil" sexuality as "he of the serpent," the son objects to proceeding any further; again he renounces his "friend's" paternal relationship to him, claiming that *his* "'father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him.'" The devil-father, smilingly reassuring young Brown that he need not fear being "'the first of the name of Brown, that ever took this path,'" confides that "'I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans. . . . They were my good friends, both. . . . I would fain be friends with you, for their sake'" (pp. 76–77). The devil-father comforts Brown by promising him that he is following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps (which of course he literally is in this scene); he is fulfilling an honorable paternal tradition, and the devil-father would befriend Brown so that the tradition of the fathers might be perpetuated. Of course, the foremost and essential tradition of the fathers of any multi-generational family is the continuity of past, present, and future achieved through the production of a family, through intercourse and sexual intimacy, through the literal blurring of many boundaries between the genders.

When the naive young man insists that none of the patriarchs of his family engaged in "'such wickedness,'" all being men of prayer and good works, the devil-father replies that, wicked or not, such behavior is common among all the patriarchs of the colony (p. 77). In the midst of going about his father's business, Brown next encounters, much to his surprise, a woman intruding upon their forest space; she is not just any woman, this Goody Cloyse, but Brown's religion teacher. Hiding out of her sight, Brown overhears an exchange between his traveling companion and his teacher which begins with the devil-father touching her neck with his staff and the old hag recognizing him as the devil "'in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is.'" Despite

the fact that someone has stolen her broomstick and the old woman must travel on foot, she is determined to get to the meeting because, she says, "'they tell me, there is a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night'" (p. 79). As he had once extended it to Brown, the devil-father now offers his staff to Goody Cloyse to aid her on her journey to the evening's assembly, and she disappears from sight.

Goody Cloyse's interest in things sexual is explicit in this encounter; this and her appearance in the woods break down the supposed barrier between male and female, public and private, work and home, husband and wife.[28] Brown calls it a "'marvel'" to find Cloyse in the woods at night, and the narrator points out that it was Cloyse "who had taught [Brown] his catechism, in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin" (p. 78). After witnessing her intimacy with the devil-father, Brown reiterates that "'[t]hat old woman taught me my catechism.'" Hawthorne's narrator emphasizes that "there was a world of meaning in this simple comment" (p. 80). Hawthorne's association of women and ministers with the religious education and spiritual welfare of the community is another characteristic of this part of the story that is more reminiscent of nineteenth-century gender relations than those of the Puritan period.[29] Goody Cloyse's reference to Brown as that "'silly fellow'" indicates some sense on her part, too, that much of his life Brown may have had trouble distinguishing belief from practice. Moreover, Goody Cloyse, in her references to "'that silly fellow'" and the "'nice young man to be taken into communion to-night,'" unwittingly has confused two aspects of Brown's identity: as child/innocent and as man/sexual creature.

As the devil-father and Brown proceed through the forest,

[28]On the possible sexual implications of Goody Cloyse being Brown's grandfather's gossip, see Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 163. For additional discussion of these sexually-laden paragraphs and the sexual aspects of the story, see Robinson, "The Vision of Goodman Brown," pp. 221–24; Jayne, "Pray Tarry with Me Young Goodman Brown," pp. 100–113; Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision*, pp. 77–78; Crews, *Sins of the Fathers*, pp. 96–106; and Elizabeth Wright, "The New Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism: A Reading of Melville and Hawthorne," *Poetics Today* 3 (Spring 1982): 89–105.

[29]Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

the older man breaks off a branch of maple limb and fashions yet another walking staff. When Brown once again refuses to go any further, the devil-father suggests that he rest for a while and, before disappearing, throws the young man his staff. Brown then thinks he hears in the forest the voices of his spiritual patriarchs, his minister and Deacon Gookin, conversing about tonight's meeting. When one of them also stops to "pluck a switch," Brown overhears Deacon Gookin saying that he is looking forward to the impending ceremony, where they will find "'a goodly young woman to be taken into communion'" (p. 81). Shaken, Brown cannot decide whether or not what he is witnessing is real. His doubt is so great that, looking up into the night sky, he cannot make up his mind whether "there really was a Heaven above him" (p. 82).

Brown's belief system, his moral certainty, dependent as it seems to be on the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres with which he has been catechized, is quickly shattering in the heavily peopled forest. The voices of additional fellow townspeople fall on his ears, and it is obvious that all are hurrying to a late-night rendezvous. In the heart of this commotion, Brown hears "one voice, of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain" and for which the townspeople "both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward" (p. 82). Brown immediately recognizes the woman's voice as Faith's. But how much more ambiguous could Faith's voice be? She both is and is not a sexual creature in this description of her cries. She both is and is not present. Faith's disembodied voice, as well as Goody Cloyse's ability to fly, to travel effortlessly, without labor, may speak to the nature of Brown's gender fantasy. One recent scholar has suggested about the ideology of separate spheres that as it "engenders and demarcates the spaces of work and personal (as opposed to working) life, both labor and women are divested of their corporeality, defined as different rather than extensive with the body."[30] Brown screams Faith's name out into the night, only to

[30]Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 63.

have the forest mockingly echo his "cry of grief, rage, and terror." Brown should indeed be terrorized by this experience, for he has built his entire belief system on the moral rectitude of his mother and wife—and on their rightful place nowhere but in the home.

Surely, Goody Cloyse and his Faith have no business in this forest of moral uncertainties. Brown listens in silence for a response to his cries, only to hear "a scream, drowned immediately in a loud murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept" by. Something substantial floats down out of the sky, filled as it is with insubstantial voices, and Brown snatches it off of a tree limb. It is one of Faith's pink ribbons. Just as the serpentine staff is Hawthorne's synecdoche for the sexual potential of the father, this pink ribbon is, as earlier implied, his synecdoche for the sexuality of Faith. Brown cries out, "'My Faith is gone!'" It is usually argued that with this outburst, Brown proclaims his lost religious belief, but much more has been lost: his wife Faith is also literally gone; if she is present in the forest, then she cannot, according to his belief system, be who he thought her to be.

Now Brown takes up the devil-father's staff and hurries to the communion. Along the way he encounters a forest "peopled with frightful sounds." And soon the scariest noisemaker in the forest is he: "all through the haunted forest, there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown" (p. 83). Now deep in the heart of the forest, where no trail remains, Brown encounters "a numerous congregation . . . peopling the heart of the solitary woods" (p. 84). In fact, much of the adult population of Salem village has crowded into this space, both the "grave, reputable, and pious people" and "men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes." Most telling is the narrator's comment that it "was strange to see, that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints" (p. 85). Here in the forest private and public spheres blur into one another; or, perhaps, the difference between public and private is nowhere as certain as Brown once thought it was.

As Goodman Brown feels himself called forth with the rest of the converts, he "could have well-nigh sworn, that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance." Indeed, he meets his spiritual fathers when his village "minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms, and led him to the blazing rock" to be initiated. But this "community of men, as we have seen, includes both men and women. Even his mother seems to appear, if only, in keeping with her role as angel of the home, to throw "out her hand to warn him back" (p. 86). The master of ceremonies, a kind of devil-preacher, then invites his "children" to turn around and see "'all whom ye have reverenced from youth'" for their "'righteousness, and prayerful aspirations.'" This night of their conversion, the children will learn of their spiritual leaders' "'secret deeds'":

"how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime, and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels—blush not, sweet ones!—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral." [P. 87]

These deeds are, broadly speaking, crimes of human sexuality. Clearly Brown's devil-preacher associates sin with sexuality.

The promised knowledge of the secret deeds will give the converts the ability to determine

"all the places—whether in church, bed-chamber, street, field, or forest—where crime has been committed, and [they] shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood-spot. Far more than this! It shall be [theirs] to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power . . . can make manifest in deeds." [P. 87]

The language of human sexuality is omnipresent: "one mighty blood-spot," "penetrate," "bosom," "fountain," and "deep mystery." Notice also the language of unification, of the "communion of [the] race," and the way in which the devil-preacher contradicts Brown's belief in separate spheres, especially his

belief that only certain wicked people, usually men, have "evil" sexual longings (p. 86).

When Brown is finally face to face with his wife, just as the "Shape of Evil" prepares "to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin," he looks at his Faith and realizes what "polluted wretches would the next glance" mutually reveal them to be. He cries out to his wife to forego this baptism into adult sexuality and to "'[l]ook up to heaven, and resist the Wicked One'" (p. 88). Brown actually reverses roles here, now imagining himself leading Faith up to heaven. But it is all too late. The entire forest scene, including his wife, vanishes. He is alone because he has refused to acknowledge his wife's sexuality in this threshold experience, just as he had refused it in the doorway of his home. He has rejected the blurring of separate spheres that is the reality of adult life. Once peopled with an invisible multitude, the forest around him now is calm and quiet.

The reader is unsure what has happened to Brown, but Brown himself is quite certain that in his last words to Faith in the forest, he has resisted the devil; every inhabitant of Salem village he had formerly trusted, however, is in league with the devil or, at the very least, has secret sins of which each should be ashamed. Brown is quite right, of course, but his very lack of sin is a crime.[31] He returns to a community in which the blurring of the separate spheres is for the first time apparent to him, and he rejects it nonetheless. Deacon Gookin is inside his home now, but his words can be heard coming through his open window. Goody Cloyse, "that excellent old Christian," stands outside her house at the latticed gate "catechising a little girl." Brown's reaction—he snatches away the "child, as from the grasp of the fiend himself"—acknowledges his fears that the little girl could be deceived as he was—not by Goody

[31]That Brown is so confident that he is sin free leads to the possibility that he is pure of sexual "sin," that he left his wife and came to the forest still a virgin. This idea has been suggested to me by Professor Elizabeth Jane Hinds. Such a possibility would make Faith's pleas at the beginning of the tale all the more poignant, Brown's focus on stains and bloodspots covering the earth that much more vivid and significant, and his return to the village and his future life as the father of "a goodly procession" of children all that more personally tragic.

Cloyse's catechizing, because Brown still believes in what he was taught, but by the old woman's failure to live what she preached. Approaching his home, he sees "the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him, that she skipt along the street, and almost kissed her husband before the whole village." But whatever attractions Brown had to human sexuality when he left the village—as, for example, when he turned back to kiss his wife in the doorway—are now banished by the events he witnessed in the forest. So convinced is he of her sinfulness that "Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting" (p. 89).

Goodman Brown becomes a "stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man . . . from the night of that fearful dream" (p. 89). Whatever huffiness and silliness Brown possessed before leaving home has been tragically transformed by his forest refusal to recognize the blurring of spheres. Brown has "a goodly procession" of children and grandchildren, but clearly there was little joy in those sexual experiences (p. 90). The initiative was seldom his it seems: "Often, waking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith" (p. 89). And when he dies, "they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom" (p. 90).

III

When we penetrate the oedipal and sexual anxieties of Hawthorne's early fiction, we tend to divorce them from the historical, and when we unearth the stories' historical concerns, we tend to separate them from the psychosexual and from Hawthorne's immediate social environment. In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne was not only asking his readers to imagine the synthesis of the historical and the psychosexual; he was investigating for them the relationship between Puritan anxieties about faith, morality, sexuality, and gender and his contemporaries' and his own anxieties about those subjects. A renewed interest during the 1830s in the Puritan experience

and what it could offer the present probably led Hawthorne to believe that his ancestral line and his own research into Puritan history uniquely qualified him to contribute to the discourse that sought to construct a bridge between past and present New England.

In addition to recognizing Hawthorne's examination of the nexus of Puritan and contemporary experience in "Young Goodman Brown," we must also consider the importance of contemporary gender issues. Nina Baym has argued that a sophisticated feminist criticism of Hawthorne's work "would be based on the presumption that the question of women is *the* determining motive in Hawthorne's works, driving [his female characters] as it drives Hawthorne's male characters."[32] Recent works by T. Walter Herbert and Gillian Brown have, while throwing men into the equation, largely heeded this call.[33] But when scholars turn their attention to issues of gender as well as other nineteenth-century contexts in Hawthorne, they tend to focus on the later works. This virtual neglect of the early material is repeated by David Leverenz, Joel Pfister, Richard H. Millington, and the above critics in their recent books focusing on Hawthorne as an observer of contemporary middle-class culture.[34] It appears, then, that adequately to give Hawthorne his due, we must focus on the whole question of gender—both masculine and feminine—in *all* of his works—early and late. Such a masterful critic of human nature deserves no less than a fully comprehensive view.

[32]Nina Baym, "Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist," in *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Fritz Fleischmann (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), p. 62.

[33]Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, and Gillian Brown, "Hawthorne, Inheritance, and Women's Property," *Studies in the Novel* 23 (1991): 107–18.

[34]Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance;* Pfister, *The Production of Personal Life;* and Richard H. Millington, *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For some explanation of Pfister's preference for the later Hawthorne, see *Production of Personal Life*, p. 43.

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