

# Brown: the Patient of Obsessive-Compulsive Neurosis Caused by the Pressure of the “Superego”---An Analysis of “*Young Goodman Brown*” from the Freudianism Perspective

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## Abstract

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the greatest Romanticist writers of 19th century America, his short fiction “*Young Goodman Brown*” had profound life philosophies hidden within, embodying the essence of psychoanalysis. This article aimed to explore the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive neurosis in Brown, and explained the reasons for his madness. Through the methodologies of psychoanalysis and pathology, this article found the result that Brown’s journey into the forest as his delusion stemming from the “id” of his unconscious self, he projected the crimes of this “id” onto the outside world, and ultimately became secluded from society as the final stage of his obsessive-compulsive neurosis. At last by analyzing Brown’s obsessive-compulsive neurosis symptoms and causes, this article made the conclusion that the fundamental cause of his tragedy was the devastation to human nature caused by the “Superego” under the strict Puritan dogma of the time, further illustrating Hawthorne’s severe critique towards Puritanism.

## Keywords

Psychoanalysis, Obsessive-Compulsive Neurosis, Pathology, Unconscious, Puritanism

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## 1. Introduction

“*Young Goodman Brown*” is a short story by the 19th Century Romantic writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, the length of the story is not long, nor is the plot complex, but it has always been the focus of much attention by readers and critics alike because of its exploration into the basic elements of humanity. The story describes a young Goodman Brown who leaves his wife in the evening to go and attend a satanic ritual. In the dark forest Brown encounters a demonic figure who constantly urges Brown to keep following him deeper into the woods. This demonic figure is actually a demon in Brown’s own heart, and through this demon’s ploy, Brown discovers that his spiritual guide Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin and his most

trustworthy wife, Faith, are also all attending this satanic ritual in the woods. Furthermore Brown comes to the realization that these people of supposedly high moral stature have a deep and dark secret, and that their hearts are actually filled with evil thoughts. When Brown returns to the village the following morning he is completely distraught and cynical towards the world, he gradually distances himself from society and lives out his remaining life in solitude and glum.

According to research about this work, this article finds that most concentrate on the perspectives of Puritanism, historical origin, narration, psychoanalysis and so on. S. Selina Jamil points out Hawthorne was trying to “ridicule the power of puritan world of official virtue.” [13] (S. Selina Jamil, 2007: 143, and considers Brown’s purpose being to seek

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"carnavalesque freedom." [13] (S. Selina Jamil, 2007: 143) Stressing on the historical source of this work, John Ronan investigates the influence of the Matter's family and the witch trial of Salem upon which draws on Hawthorne's thoughts [3] (John Ronan, 2012: 253-280). Other researchers make the comparison between other stories like Charles Dicken's "The Chime" and this work, attempting to explore the symbolic roles fulfilled by the protagonist [7] (Marilyn Kurata, 1983: 10). More recently, Tian Junwu concentrates on the "night-journey narrative" of Brown, and makes the conclusion that "Hawthorne's novel originates from Hawthorne's own experience of night journey." [14] (Tian Junwu, 2012: 112) But still, most articles analyze Brown's inner mind from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Li Xinlin used Freud's tripartite model to analyze the protagonist's character, and asserts that "Brown's 'id' and 'ego' vies with each other, and the 'superego' causes the ultimate tragedy." [6] (Li Xinlin, 2011: 19) Richard Predmore interprets the relationship between Brown's unconsciousness and morals from psychoanalysis and Jungian theory [10] (Richard Predmore, 1977: 250-257). Hu Xiaoying says the structure of this story being "Brown's 'id' conflicts with 'superego'." [1] (Hu Xiaoying, 2016: 251) Li Hongmei decides that "Brown's despair result from his loss of Faith." [5] (Li Hongmei, 2016: 28)

While applying psychoanalysis to define this work, Tang Yin discovers the tension between the "id" and "superego" in Brown [11] (Tang Yin, 2012: 71-72). But she explores less deeply as to why this kind of tension exists and what exactly is the real force leading to Brown's tragedy. Other articles of this type just make simple connections between Brown and the model promoted by Freud, while failing to see the essential theme of this story. In a word, most articles merely list Brown's characteristics and match them with Freud's model, or interpret Brown's tragedy from other theories. Therefore, in order to add some depth to this insufficient research area regarding psychoanalysis, this article attempts to analyze Brown's characteristics pathologically, and hopefully grasp the critical reason leading to Brown's demise.

In order to avoid a biased explanation of the true reason of Brown's madness, this article applies psychoanalysis as well as obsessive-compulsive neurosis in pathology. As we know, Freud is considered as both a literature critic and neurologist, and only by combining methodology in medicine can we better appreciate Freud's psychoanalysis in literature. So this article explores Brown's inner movement on three levels, namely from Freud's tripartite model and obsessive compulsive neurosis, and at last find the pathological symptoms from Freud's theory. But it is difficult to treat each part separately, since psychoanalysis, obsessive compulsive neurosis and pathology are interlaced with each other. It is this

article's plan to validate the assumption that Brown is a mentally ill patient, thus allowing the reader to better appreciate the essential cause of Brown's tragedy.

The most unique feature of this article is the analysis of the text by applying two interrelated methodologies. What is the purpose of such an attempt? First, it will help with scrutinizing the hidden meaning of this story. Second, it may help us gain a greater depth of knowledge regarding this work, thus enabling us find out the true reason for Brown's tragedy. Lastly, combining psychoanalysis with pathology allows for a completely new way of understanding this work and will provide a new perspective to appreciate it, which ultimately is the principle aim of this article.

## 2. Obsessive Compulsive Neurosis and Tripartite Mode of Psychoanalysis

Obsessive compulsive neurosis is a disease characterized by obsessive and compulsive behavior by the individual. It is a field of study in psychiatry. The patient will usually show signs of "brain lesion, particular in multiple sclerosis, ertrapyrimal disorders, epilepsy." [4] (Kutlubaev MAI: 2016 (4): 70) According to Sumant Khanna & S. M. Channabasavanna's research, obsessive compulsive neurosis can be divided into six types, namely, "obsessional thoughts, obsessional doubts, obsessional fears, obsessional urges, obsessional images, obsessional convictions." [12] (Sumant Khanna & S. M. Channabasavanna, 1988: 13). Obsessive compulsive neurosis is hard to cure by far, as Mr. Jambur points out, "obsessive compulsive neurosis has proven to be treatment-resistant and there is no single widely accepted and effective model of treatment." [2] (Jambur Ananth, 1979: 700) although drug therapy is also used as a secondary form of treatment. Obsessive compulsive neurotics see unexplainable or mysterious things in a much different manner than the average person because their starting point for comprehending everything is based on their own distorted mental state rather than the actual world around them. To these people, their inner mental state is the real world, whereas the outside real world has no relationship to them. It is as if they have their own language and therefore cannot enter the real world because they don't understand the language spoken there. Most obsessive compulsive neurotics see the outside world as evil or frightening, however, psychiatrists are quite clear that what is in fact frightening, is the patient's own inner mental being because they have a misinterpreted picture of the world, namely allowing their hallucinations of what they think will happen to be confused with the reality of what will actually happen, medical expert says that patients "have been defined as notions that are often based on the marginal formula of thought equal

act" [12] (Sumant Khanna & S. M. Channabasavanna, 1988: 15), therefore they are always in a state of fear about the things they are afraid will really happen, whereas in actuality, no matter whether a normal person thinks what they fear will or will not happen, an obsessive compulsive neurotic thinks they will happen without doubt. At this point in time, their "subconscious" has already taken over their "conscious", it is this "conscious" that represents their real world. To be able to understand reasons for these symptoms, this article turns to Freud's psychoanalysis for answers.

The "conscious" and "subconscious" models of the human being's mental state used in psychoanalysis were first identified by Freud. The "conscious" and "subconscious" are the two components of this dynamic model, which influence one another and affect both our mental and physiological state. The "conscious" is rational, allowing us to understand and record the outside world, it is the rationality of the human mind. The "subconscious" does not use rationality to control our behavior, it is in this "subconscious" where lays human beings' desires, ambitions, fears, motivation etc. These feelings combine to form human beings' inherent nature and individuality. Although the "subconscious" is not something that humans are consciously aware of, its potential is enormous for determining our actions in the physical world. In most people, the "subconscious" is kept under control by legal, ethical and moral principles, but under certain situations an overly strong subconscious will influence an individual's behavior without them being aware of it. Freud brought up the idea of a three part model, namely the "id", "ego" and "superego". The "id" is equivalent to the "subconscious", it is our inner desires and urges, which act in accordance with pleasure, Freud concludes that "the 'id' is primitive, unorganized, and emotional, and the realm of the illogical." [15] (Yi Li, 2013: 60) The "superego" abides by ethical and moral principles, it prevents the "id" from reaching satisfaction, as well as giving it a sense of fear, as Freud observes, "the superego originally derived from parental prohibitions and criticism." [15] (Yi Li, 2013: 63) The "ego" on the other hand, acts to harmonize the relationship between the "id" and "superego", it abides by the principles of reality. Once possible explanation for the cause of obsessive compulsive neurosis is that the desires and ambitions from an overly strong "id" are suppressed by the "superego" for too long, and therefore are looking for some form of release. But this release by the "id" does not occur in the natural way, because it is being suppressed by the "superego". When the "superego" has a very strong suppressive power, the "id" will often use a coping method to find another path for liberation, and when this occurs, the situation dramatically changes, the "superego" banishes the "id" and takes over the entire property of the individual's mental state, and therefore the

desires and crimes of the "id" are transferred to other things in the outside world, and from this point on, the individual does consider his actions caused by the "id" as crimes at all, then taking into account the all encompassing power of the "superego", the individual soon becomes cynical and removed from the world, and ultimately develops the obsessive compulsive neurosis disorder.

### 3. Symptoms of Brown's Obsessive Compulsive Neurosis

As mentioned before, an obsessive compulsive neurosis patient and a normal person differ in their perceptions of the real world, the former allows their distorted mental state to become the real world, and are living in a state of constant fear that this hallucinatory fake world will become reality at any moment, whereas a normal person can distinguish between these two different worlds. This story observes this entire phenomenon from the perspective of the third person narrative of Brown. After waking up in the forest Brown is unclear whether he is still dreaming or is back in reality, as the narrator asks us "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?" [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 152) "Be it so, if you will" [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 152), Is this a dream or reality or just some comment jokingly made by Hawthorne has receive careful attention by many critics, but from the perspective of an obsessive compulsive neurosis analysis, this statement does not need be explored because to this type of patient, both worlds are essentially the same, a dream is their reality, and also their inner mental state. They cannot distinguish between the boundaries of this mental state and reality. The outside world is basically just a distorted version of the patient's own inner being, and so Brown at this point, is completely engulfed in his own emotional world. Brown thinks himself to be righteous and other villagers to be evil. When his wife Faith comes to see him, "Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting." [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 152) Brown's faith has been substitute by evil and he no longer recognizes his dear Faith. The amiable preacher, the respectable alchemist and Brown's own caring hearted wife are all seen as fake imposters in the eyes of Brown. Unknowingly, this is a projection of Brown's own "id" cast onto others, however, at this point, Brown cannot see the forest beyond the trees.

Obsessive compulsive neurotics create their world based on their own skewed mental illogical fallacies, they project the world they imagine onto outside reality. Brown's journey in the forest is an illusion of his mental state, this hallucination creates a particular environment through the stimulation to the senses

from the outside world. Normal people would say that Brown just had a bad nightmare, but this dream from Brown's own perspective, is in fact the real world. The dream is still the same dream, but because Brown's inner being and the outside world have reversed roles, the dream itself is no different than reality.

The journey in the forest happened in Brown's inner mind, from the moment he set foot in the evening until his return home the following morning, everything seemed perfectly normal, all the village's events continued on as normal, the only thing different was that Brown had a nightmare, but no matter how frightening the dream was, it was still not reality, and therefore should not affect someone's mind the way it did to Brown. Brown had a terrifying discovery during this dream, he realized that everyone living in this world is evil, including his own wife.

At the beginning readers are told that "Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street of Salem village." [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 124) From this sentence, there is nothing abnormal, Brown's eyesight, hearing and other senses all appear perfectly normal, what is reflected in Brown's inner mental state and the outside world are completely the same, he was completely aware that he left home, that he went onto the street, even when he blames himself for leaving his wife, readers still can understand his choice for leaving home, but once he enters the forest which are covered with trees, the forest is described as "barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind." [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 126) During this time, Brown's mind is undergoing a subtle state of change, he has already become suspicious and anxious, although being a pious "good man", and he firmly believes that behind every tree in the forest is a demonic creature created by the Indian shaman. This imagery shows that Brown is already beginning to show signs of his mental disorder. And as expected, a traveler appears, who is very similar to Brown in appearance and status, readers are told that the traveler is "apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him" [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 128). this traveler is in fact just a demonic illusionary figure created by Brown's mind, it is Brown's "id". If at this point the hallucination created is not clear, when Brown mistakes the traveler's staff for a snake (although lighting could cause this kind of misperception), this shows that the snakes figure has actually appeared earlier on in Brown's "id". The symbol of this snake represents Satan, who tempted Adam and Eve, it is the symbol of evil, whose staff have resemblance with Satan's snake, with temptations from Satan, Brown continues to regress, this shows that his mental disorder has become significantly more severe. In Brown's own mind, not only did he see his ancestors persecute pagans and burn down Indian villages, he also saw the pious Goody

Cloyse, not willing to fall behind, taking the satanic staff and heading towards the satanic ritual place. At this point, Brown still casts doubt on whether the evils he witnesses are real or not, but afterwards, once the highly esteemed preacher and Deacon Gookin are also in assembly, Brown's inner state goes into a state of complete collapse, Brown "caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground." Now, Brown becoming more and more out of touch with reality, his subconscious is taking over more and more of his conscious, as more and more of his desires of the subconscious become fulfilled, the projective power of this subconscious is strengthened even further.

Now let us specifically analyze Brown's obsessive compulsive neurosis disorder, from his heart's own inner demons to Cloyse using the satanic staff, as well as afterwards the preacher and unwilling to be left behind Deacon Gookin, are all examples of scenarios created by Brown's strong inner "id", where these illusions are projected onto others rather than Brown himself. An obsessive compulsive neurosis patient's mental state gives them a form of overconfidence, and therefore misguidedly combines their own deluded version of the world with reality, and furthermore allows this integration to be accepted as the ultimate truth. The evilness and demons of the "id" have been hidden in Brown's subconscious since the beginning, only they had not yet been noticed by Brown's conscious, in the subconscious, Brown has allowed the evil libido of his "id" to essentially shift the blame to the supposed demons, Cloyse, the preacher, Deacon Gookin, and his wife. Gradually over time, his subconscious begins to accept this framing and corrupting behavior of the "id", which gradually allows Browns's "subconscious" to become the true conscious of the obsessive compulsive neurosis patient, these "obsessive compulsive" symptoms now become evident, one on hand Brown still possesses the remnants of the conscious of a normal individual, but his illness causes him to painfully dig out this inherent conscious and fearfully allow this conscious to become reality. The more he becomes afraid of his subconscious, the quicker he allows this subconscious to become the real world, which then allows his obsessive compulsive neurosis to take hold of him. An outside world filled with rationality and complexity is then replaced by his simple modeled "subconscious", as soon as these symptoms are present without a chance for remission or treatment, the patient will continue to suffer frightening and torturous hallucinations of his subconscious, and these symptoms will only increase in frequency and scale, much similar to a child having hallucinations and nightmares during a high fever.

Lastly, once Brown hallucinates that his own wife Faith is also attending the satanic ritual he becomes completely hopeless, the entire world in his conscious is nothing but a place of evil, to the

point where “men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had heard aught but the murmur of the forest” [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 140). In the end why is it that when Brown cries out to Faith to look up to Heaven and this dreamlike scenario suddenly vanishes? It is because Brown’s inner mental state can no longer bear burden to this final nail in the coffin. Brown knows in his subconscious that his wife cannot fend off against the evil forces at play, after many years of Puritan indoctrination, Brown would rather die than see this demonic conscious take over his wife as well as himself. Therefore at this point, the outside world’s people and things have all become a target for Brown to release his subconscious tensions on, therefore this dream world is just his own inner mental state, where the direct cause of his insanity is that he has demonized the entire world and at the same time, accepts this demonization as the way things ought to be, his state can be best summarized by Meng Xueqing, “Brown regards evil as the essential nature of whole world, and perceives all others as his enemy, and finally lost the harmonious relationship with other.” [8] (Meng Xueqing 2016: 115)

#### 4. The Cause of Brown’s Obsessive Compulsive Neurosis

Freud believes that the “id” is extremely powerful, it contains the human’s libido, when this libido is suppressed for too long of time it becomes very destructive to the person’s physical and mental well being. In the beginning, Brown is a normal person whose inherent desires have been suppressed, which include sexual desires and his inherent nature. Although the story does not clear indicate what exactly this inherent nature is to Brown, but it is most certainly a secret, since he does not even tell his wife, the person he trusts the most. Freud emphasizes that any action involves sexuality is some way, since sex is the root source of all forms of behavior. According to this theory this article speculates that Brown’s decision to leave his wife is a result of some unsatisfied sexual urge. In this story one can find some hints to support this kind of explanation. The story’s description of Faith will almost certainly influence the reader’s sexual desires, such as “exchange a parting kiss with his young wife”, “Poor little Faith”, “sleep your own bed to-night” [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 124). All of these descriptions indeed relate to sexuality in some form. Whether it is Brown or his wife who has a problem related to sexuality, the answer may never be known. Furthermore, since Hawthorne did not explicitly write about this issue, so this article interprets Brown leaving his wife after just three months of marriage is because his inherent desires of his subconscious have not been satisfied in some way, and it is these particular desires that society does

not permit to be satisfied, which is why Brown has to wait until “sunset” to go out, because only at this time no one else will notice him. Only in this “forest” type of place can Brown hide from the suppressive hand of society, therefore the true reason for his journey is to allow the built up tensions of his “id” to find a place to be released.

During the journey in the forest Brown sees all the evils and demons and witches are hidden in the shadows behind him. But why is it that Brown shifts the blame from these dark forces onto the forest, Satan, the respectable preacher, Deacon Gookin and Faith? This is the natural result of the Puritanism representing “superego’s” relentless suppressing and punishment towards the “id”.

Puritans are extremely religious, hard working, disciplined people who hate any form of excess pleasure in life. Without question, Puritanism has been an integral part of American history and development, however being too extreme in any direction is never a good thing, this form of strict religious life causes the lives of many to become mundane and uninteresting. In another one of Hawthorne’s works titled “The Merry-pole and Merry Mountain”, Hawthorne criticizes the brutality, ignorance, and hypocrisy of Puritanism. In this story, the moral obligations of Puritanism are like a heavy iron ball and chain that gives Brown never ending torture. To any normal person, finding some way to release their tensions of the subconscious is perfectly reasonable, but to a Puritan with a heavily suppressing “superego”, feels heavy burdens for his crimes and believes the pain caused by the suppressing Puritan environment far outweighs any form of pleasure created from some liberation of the subconscious. Brown’s tragedy is not that his “id’s” limitless liberation has caused him to become an evil human being, but rather the extreme suppression of the “id” by the superego, and under this heavy suppression, he has no choice but to project his subconscious, which ultimately means his crimes, onto others and the outside world. According to psychoanalysis, when a patient acts in this way, he can temporarily eliminate his anxieties and feelings of guilt, this way he will not be condemned by his “superego” and he can also find a form of release for his “id”. In the right situation, If Brown openly discusses the demons in his subconscious in the Salem village, all the villagers including the preacher, Deacon Gookin and Faith will most certainly condemn him as a pagan or perhaps even as a reincarnation of Satan. Furthermore, Brown himself cannot bear to have these kinds of thoughts, therefore his only option is to transfer the blame of these “basic instincts” of the subconscious onto other people.

However, the effortless simple reversal of the “id” and “superego” are extremely dangerous, this can directly cause the inner being of a normal person and the outside world to become in serious misalignment. In the battle between the “superego” and the “id”, the “superego” is the victor and only legitimate

force in Brown's inner being, and therefore eventually becomes his only perception of reality, whereas the real world is completely taken over by the "id", Brown smoothly transfers his crimes onto the outside world and others, such as the forest, Satan, the preacher, and Faith. From Brown's own point of view, he has created a world filled with evil and demons, this is a typical symptom of obsessive compulsive neurosis.

Obsessive compulsive neurotics mistakenly interpret these two different worlds, their inner mental state becomes reality with the "superego" under full control, whereas the outside world is taken over by the evil "id". Under this scenario, they are unable to realize that their crimes derive from their inner mental state and not from the actions of others. These mental patients are drifting closer and closer to crime, whereas in their minds they believe they are becoming more pure and good hearted, the whole world is evil and only they themselves are the savior. They believe they are the representative of the "superego" and everyone else is just a disciple of Satan, and from this point on, they have a fictitious relationship with the outside environment, they become more and more dissatisfied with the outside world. As these symptoms become more and more severe, the patient will believe that others are becoming more and more despicable, whereas the patient himself is becoming more righteous, but also more isolated and hopeless at the same time. With regards to Brown's later years, Hawthorne did not give us much to see, he only wrote, "he had lived long, and was borne to grave, a hoary corpse", This is a true example of what Hawthorne satires as "a world of meaning in this simple comment". "Lived long" is a form of brutal torture, and in the end become hoary corpse" [9] (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2012: 154), readers can see that his final years were spent living out a meaningless dull existence. His spirit followed his dream and became nothing but ashes in the wind. After reading this final sentence, it is only natural to be somewhat shocked.

In essence, Brown's tragedy is his inability to see the crimes of his "id" in true light, however this is not his own fault per se, but rather the end result of the suppression and persecution of people by Puritanism in the Salem area. Even if these people have inherent instincts that want them to do otherwise, they are not willing to rebel against the strong suppressing Puritan forces at play. It is this type of environment that forced Brown's "id" and "superego" to have such extreme divergences resulting in the ultimate tragedy.

## 5. Conclusion

From the viewpoint of Freud's psychoanalysis this article through the analysis of Brown's obsessive compulsive

neurosis to help readers understand the fundamental reasons for Brown's tragedy. The author observed that Brown's tragedy was triggered by the release of the "id's" tensions, but the root cause of this tragedy was that the strict inhumane doctrines of Puritanism had a stranglehold on people's fun and livelihood. It was this Puritanistic "superego" ball and chain that was suffocating Brown and eventually caused his complete breakdown and neurosis symptoms.

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