

The Images of “Scapegoat” in *Young Goodman Brown*

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Young Goodman Brown is one of the representative works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, an outstanding American writer. Many western critics have interpreted the novel from different perspectives, but few in China have made a special exposition of the “scapegoat” model in the novel. Therefore, this article tries to interpret the “Scapegoat” image from the perspective of the myth archetype theory, trying to reveal the failure of redeeming function in scapegoat mechanism, at the same time, it also aims to search out one of the many factors which endow this novel with infinite charm.

Keywords: Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown*, scapegoat, religion, redemption

About the “Scapegoat” Theory

The term “Scapegoat” was first used by the English reformer William Tyndale (1492-1576) when he translated Bible (Vidkery & Sellery, 1972, p. 36). God wanted to test Abraham’s faithfulness to him and ordered him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering. Although Isaac was Abraham’s only hope, he forced himself to obey God’s will. Abraham built an altar on the mountain and tied Isaac up and laid him down on the wood. When he raised his sword to strike down, God sent an angel to stop him. Because he was loyal to God, he stood the test. When Abraham spotted a stray ram in the bushes, he caught it and offered it as a burnt offering to God instead of Isaac. This archetype is repeated in *Leviticus*: Aaron placed two male goats in front of Jehovah and drew lots for them. One of the goats was offered to Jehovah as a sin offering, and the other was driven into the wilderness, and the sins that led them away from Israel would never return.

With the advancement of human society, the “scapegoat” archetype has changed substantially. The change is no longer the original sacrifice of a lamb to God as a burnt offering, the expression of loyalty is transformed into a sacrifice to God or atonement or acceptance on behalf of another person or group in order to ensure a good harvest of the collective peace. In his book *The Golden Bough*, James George Frazer examines the rituals of sacrifice that prevails throughout the ancient world, including the execution of many scapegoats. The book explores in detail the various manifestations of the scapegoat archetype and its variants in the myths and folklore of different peoples. Primitive people do not understand the law of natural development and change. They believe that they could intervene and control the natural environment through their symbolic behavior—the ritual of offering sacrifices to the gods. So human sacrifice has become a common practice. And they think that the king is a personification of God who both rule the country and is responsible for its climate. Therefore, king or his children deserve to die when a bad weather causes a plague of crop failure in the country.

These are kings and their descendants who are used as scapegoats or executed or exiled to make atonement to God so that people could have bumper harvest. Therefore, "scapegoat" is a person who takes the fall for someone else. As an tool against evil spirits, it is widely used around the world, and has a very long history. As history progress, the kings who are executed as "scapegoats" for the welfare of the social group are gradually replaced by the common people, and now, it has the following characteristics: "scapegoat" generally refers to people, including women, children and even saints (tribal chiefs or the King of a country); "scapegoats" are often executed (tortured to death, beaten to death, killed, hanged, drowned, etc.), for his or her death can take away all evil (disease, plague, pain, misfortune or sin against God) and bring peace to a community (tribe, community, and nation) (Frazer, 1998, pp. 795-814). Although the "scapegoat" model has strong religious superstition, it reflects the regular and complicated relationship between individual destiny and social destiny in the course of social history. Therefore, it is used repeatedly to express various themes in literary works.

Brown—"Scapegoat" for Religious Ideas

In *Young Goodman Brown*, a short story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the 19th century, the protagonist Brown is tempted and summoned by the devil, disregard the entreaty of his wife who has been married for only three months, and goes to the forest at night for a meeting of witches and demons. On the way, he hears the devil say that his fathers and grandfathers are his friends. And at the meeting he sees some of the most popular people in the village whom he admires, and his wife. Brown is appalled by all this. Back in the village the next morning, Brown is a different man, incredulous. Henceforth, at home, in public, and even in his sermons, he is melancholy and unconcerned. He finally dies in a state of melancholy.

In this romantic fiction, the author uses Brown as a scapegoat to convey to the reader a religious puritanical idea, namely that all men are sinful, whether they are God worshipper or representatives of God, or the common people. And everyone is covering up their sins. Brown's disappointment to the people around him is the despair of the entire human race, the affirmation of the original sin of humanity, the denial of human hypocrisy (also a sin). Brown's attitudes toward life and death become a bridge to bring God's truth to the world. In terms of expressive techniques, the author mainly adopts symbolic techniques to express the theme of the novel, which enhances the artistic appeal of the novel. Brown is a "Good man", a pure and innocent man, but the monster in the forest causes his transformation for the rest of his life. His wife is Faith, a symbol of loyalty. He loves his wife and believes in her. Little does he know that this belief is deceptive and false. He finally acquires a sense of disillusionment after being duped. Here, "Goodness" and "Badness" symbolize the opposition of them, namely, "Goodness" becomes the victim of "Badness".

Therefore, it warns the reader from the opposite side: It is very important to know "Evilness"; human can not get rid of and control "Evilness"; human can only obey God's arrangement. It is easy to see that from the perspective of religion, the novel uses a more abstract "scapegoat" model to depict Brown's ideological changes, showing the theme of the novel. Brown's state of mind changes greatly when he returns. It is God's will that Brown is chosen as a scapegoat, both in religious sense and in the text's subject matter. Before he become a scapegoat, society presents itself to him and others in such a way that everyone is innocent, good, and a believer in God.

However, when he carries the “scapegoat” mission and goes through the “Journey of the night”, his mind violently shocks. In his pain, he finds the appearance to be an illusion. Therefore, the process of his being the scapegoat is the process of revealing the truth to the world: exposing the evil in people’s hearts one by one. The completion of his mission and the devotion of his life show his acceptance of the social reality that “Truth” is evil for all. In this way, the three processes of “scapegoat” archetype can be clearly distinguished in the novel, and the theme of the novel is accomplished through the “Three-step”. The “scapegoat” model is perhaps the best expression of this theme.

The Deviation of Redeeming Function of “Scapegoat”

Guirard’s research on “scapegoat” mechanism shows that social groups attribute the responsibility and suspicion of all crises in real life to the victim—“scapegoat”, by eliminating the “scapegoat” to remove threat factors in group security and interests so that “scapegoat” could object through the crisis and reconstruct the order. However, Brown’s journey through the woods is bound to be painful because he discovers the darkness and evil in people’s hearts. Brown, who witnessed the dark heart of everyone, is not redeemed, and his quest for the true nature of the human world leads to the loss of his faith and the questioning of God, and finally his personality is seriously split. Is Brown experiencing a fantasy or reality, a demonic sorcery, or just a nightmare? He doesn’t know, and the author refuses to answer. Anyway, he never got over it. The next morning he runs away from the old clergyman whom he has long admired; he wonders what the old man was worshiping; and when he sees other man preaching to the little girl, he pulls her away. He saves her from the devil. From then on, he become a sad, suspicious, brooding man. The church hymns are no longer pleasing to the ear, and the minister’s sermons leaves him as pale as death. When the family kneel to pray, he always scowls, mumbles to himself, and glares sternly at his wife. Though he lives long years, he is unhappy till the day he dies. In this sense, it is also a deviation from the function of scapegoat redemption. When Brown recognizes the sins of the world, he does not change himself to integrate himself into society, nor does he changes the world to save people, but he simply refuses to be a part of it, in the mood of self-pity and despair, can not tolerate the sins of the world. *Young Goodman Brown* is a cautionary tale of sin and redemption.

Conclusion

In our society, the ancient scapegoat ritual has become a historical statement, but it is dormant in people’s subconscious. Because dangerous social struggles still require scapegoats to alleviate conflicts, there are still people like Goodman who are pure, and innocent, but are taken as scapegoats by some inexplicable force. The tragedy of his fate lies not only in the puritanism that made him a scapegoat, but also in an era of alienation and loss of faith. However, at the end of the story the sins of the people remain, proving once again the inefficacy of the scapegoat ritual. Therefore, through the analysis of the scapegoat image of English surname, we can understand the root of his tragic fate from this new angle, and can deepen our understanding of the theme of the article.

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