

“The Lottery”, “Salvation” And “Young Goodman Brown” Comparison

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Many works of literature shed light on the relationship between man and religion. It often unveils the deep-rooted truths about tradition and beliefs that are otherwise too harsh to voice. The three reading materials, i.e., “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, “Salvation” by Langston Hughes, and “[Young Goodman Brown](#)” by [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), deal explicitly with religion, traditions, and individuals’ belief systems. This essay compares and contrasts the way the relationship between religion and individuals is perceived in these three readings.

Conformity

One of the similarities between the three readings is social conformity, which controls individuals. Religious groups often enforce and encourage their followers to conform to certain norms and beliefs. These are passed on from one generation to another, and in most societies, it is expected that these traditions will be upheld without question. Jackson depicts such tradition through “The Lottery”, where all villagers, young and old, conform to the human sacrifice ritual. The children learn the ways of their society by participating in the ritual and collecting stones for the ceremony – looking for the roundest and smoothest ones. Similarly, “Salvation” portrays a ceremony of saving souls from sins. This idea is instilled in the minds of the children as adults talk about it for days ahead of the ceremony. They create excitement by painting a picture of seeing a light as Jesus enters the lives of children. The pressure of conforming to the expectations of the adults is so high that most of the children join the group right away, while Westley conforms as he grows tired of sitting on the bench. Even the young boy, Langston, ultimately joins the group as he feels ashamed of being the only one holding everything up. Hawthorne portrays this need to conform through Goodman Brown, who decides to go to the forest to meet the devil but tries to hide when he sees other members of the village there. He wants to be seen as an individual who conforms to societal norms.

Public Morality

Public morality is another underlying theme that is prevalent across the three texts. Goodman Brown is more concerned about keeping up an appearance of being faithful rather than admitting that he was there to meet with the devil. Langston could not openly acknowledge that he did not see Jesus; rather, he joined the group to be “saved”. In “The Lottery”, however, when Tessie Hutchinson is nominated for sacrifice, she speaks up and says that this practice is not fair. This shows that while many in that community may disagree with the practice, they would not speak up until faced with the

consequences themselves.

Belief

Belief is an important aspect of the life of individuals. Parents instil their personal beliefs in their children at an early age. In some societies, even today, regressing from this belief system is seen as a sign of disrespect. In the story “The Lottery”, Old Man Warner is quite offended at the idea that villages up north are giving up the lottery. He labels them as fools and blames them for listening to the suggestions of young folks. His outrage is due to the belief that “Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon”. Therefore, it is his faith that human sacrifice would yield him a better crop, and he would not stand anyone questioning it. In contrast, the other two texts shed light on the anguish one feels when doubt overshadows belief. Langston felt confused in the Church as he saw Westley on the platform. He wondered why God had not punished him for lying in the temple. He felt extreme sorrow at lying to and deceiving others. Most importantly, he felt heartbroken as he lost his belief in Jesus as he didn’t come to help him. Similarly, Goodman Brown rooted his belief in others as he perceived his fellow community members to be pious. However, his belief is shaken when he discovers that many among those, including his father, grandfather, the minister, Deacon Gookin, Goody Cloyse, and even his wife Faith, are in league with the devil. This changes him for life as he never fully recovers and lives his life in despair.

Loss Of Innocence

Loss of innocence is another similar theme that is found across the three texts. Langston loses his innocence as he realizes that no one has seen Jesus in reality and that his aunt and everyone around him have been lying to him. He loses his childhood at that moment as he tries to comprehend that Jesus did not come to help him. In “The Lottery”, one moment, children were playing with stones, and the next, the same stones were used on Hutchinson to sacrifice her. Her son Davy Hutchinson was handed stones to throw at his mother. This is an example of the little boy losing his innocence and learning to conform to the expectations of society. Lastly, for Goodman Brown, the loss of innocence was inevitable as he was inherently corrupt. He decided to visit the forest that night to meet with the devil. Whether a dream or reality, the events of that night shed light on the dark side of the character (Hughes; Jackson; Hawthorne).

Conclusively, the three texts present a similar critique of religious conformance and belief systems within societies. However, each reading material has its distinct story and the way characters respond to these societal rituals, beliefs, and non-conformance.

Works Cited

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *Young Goodman Brown*. Simon & Schuster, 1835.

Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea: an Autobiography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940.

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