Reader response is essentially placing importance on how the reader responds to the text. As a woman who has taken a couple of college classes about the study of feminism and gender, I was taught and trained to read as a feminist critic in a predominantly patriarchal world. According to Stanley Fish, a well-known reader response critic, he used the term interpretive community to define “a group of readers who share common beliefs that cause them to read a text in a similar way. For example, feminist critics are trained to identify and analyze gender issues, so it is likely that two feminist critics who read the same text will have similar interpretations” (Pennington, Cordell, [150]). Depending on one’s interpretive community, one can see either Goodman Brown himself or his wife as the one to blame for his loss of faith and innocence. After reading the definition of interpretive community, considering what it meant, and talking with my professor, I realized that I would consider myself to be in the feminist interpretive community. Because I am a woman and due to my feminist beliefs, this can affect and possibly even determine how I read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story of “Young this part I think might go better before talking about goodman brown, after “I was taught to trained to read…” “Goodman Brown”. By analyzing the short story using the feminist interpretive community it influences the interpretation and response of the short story from the more common patriarchal interpretation. According to Hawthorne, it seems that Young Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence is a result of his
wife. Goodman Brown’s wife Faith not only loses her pink ribbon, but also loses her faith and innocence when she goes to the Devil’s evil mass ceremony. It seems that Hawthorne is trying to make some sort of statement, he seems to be blaming Faith, for Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence and saying it is her fault, or at least part of the reason. what is the other part of the reason? When in reality, weird phrase, since the story is fiction- you seem to be saying that Hawthorne misinterpreted his own writing Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence is not his wife’s fault at all, but his own. Hawthorne seems to place all of the responsibility of being faithful, pure, and innocent on the wife, or the woman, while disregarding these qualities in the husband, or the man. why is this bold?

According to Cordell and Pennington, “Reader response critics focus on the reader, who “completes” or “activates” the text as he or she reads. In a sense, the reader becomes the most important element in the reading process, supplanting even the author” (145). Reader response critics embrace how a text “affects” the reader. The theory privileges the reader over the writer or the text and views the reader as an active participant in the reading process. With that being said, I remember should you be using “I”? reading the short story “Young Goodman Brown” for the first time in my freshman year of college. When I read it for the first time I did not read it very closely. I vaguely remember the beginning and the end of the story. I remember the suspenseful journey in the beginning and wondering what was going on; wondering where Goodman Brown was going and what he was going to do. I remember having a be more descriptive, “bad” is… well, bad writing, feeling and thinking it wasn’t going to turn out so same thing for good. if othing else, it’d be ‘well” I remember thinking that Goodman Brown should just turn around and go back home to his wife Faith. I remember just skimming the story and not really having any idea what was going on or what it was talking about. I remember being really confused and at the end wondering what in the world did I just read? I thought it was just some scary story. Not only did I not understand what was going on, but I also missed a lot of the symbolism of the story. This year, I read it as a junior in my Literary Theory and Writing class multiple times and wrote a
couple essays on the short story. But this time around, I wanted to write an essay using a different perspective and to cause the reader of story or reader of your paper? to read the story from a different angle. I wanted to examine the story using reader response theory and more of a feminist approach. I wanted to focus more on the character of Faith and her importance in the short story. I hope you include quotes from the actual story throughout the rest of your paper this last paragraph doesn’t contain a lot of merit without textual quotes from the story and you don’t seem to be making any real claim or argum attempted here, you are just summarizing your first experience of reading the story. why is this relevant? agreed, since your first impression as reader seems to have been not a matter of personal interpretation so much as a lack of engagement, not especially interesting.

It is important to note that though Faith a prominent character in the story, we don’t really learn about who she really is, her personality, or what she is actually like. All we ever really know for certain about the person Faith is that her distinguishing characteristic is a pink ribbon that she wears in her hair. Reader response critic Robert Ellis says, “Brown identifies Faith by her pink ribbon, a very fragile and decorative artifact for a character representing such a presumably powerful virtue” (1). The lack of concreteness to Faith’s character also reflects Goodman’s eventual loss of sense of certainty in his “spiritual faith.” Faith almost does not even seem like a real woman, much less an actual person. odd phrasing in last line- order of magnitude, i think: it seems more natural for a character to feel more like a person but not necessarily a realistic woman than seeming like a “real woman” but not a person- if a character is a woman, then by definition it’s a person She mainly plays the role in the story as Goodman Brown’s faith in God, and almost is not even seen as an really need to cut back on the contractionsactual person. The character traits the reader does learn about her is mostly through her husband, Goodman Brown. As I reread the short story, I focused on the character of Faith as a woman character and analyzed the ways she is portrayed by the main character of Goodman Brown. tie this back to the interpretive community idea.
is important to note that she is an important character and does play an important role in the short story. Hawthorne seems to place all of the responsibility of being faithful, pure, and innocent on the wife, Faith, while disregarding these qualities in the husband, or Goodman Brown.

Faith is often described as the ideal woman and wife by critics or by Goodman in the story. She plays the stereotypical roles as a woman and the perfect wife, at least in the beginning and the last scene of the story, before Goodman leaves to go on his journey and when he returns home. The separate spheres of life and gender roles are also evident in the short story. Reader response critic, James Keil brings this to light when he says "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" (37). This is exemplified by the opening scene of the story:

Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at 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…

Though it does not directly state that they are standing in the doorway, it is inferred by the wording “threshold” and the way it is described. This passage illuminates issues of the time period previously mentioned. The wife stays at home, while the husband ventures off, without even telling her where he is going or what he is doing. Though she does not know where he is going, she still plays the role of a good wife: whispers a parting good bye and watches him leave.

Reader response critic James Keil also points out, “Another characteristic of the (female/woman) ideal is her youth, which underscored her purity and reflected both the 19th-century Romanization of childhood and its tendency to infantilize women, to view them as creatures of
childlike disposition.' 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" (40). This is unclear—either needs more development or excision—how does Eve specifically contrast the infantilization of women? This trend of femininity and childlike tendencies is also evident near the end of the story. At the end of the story, Faith is waiting to greet Goodman Brown on his way home. Again she is wearing her pink ribbons, which he saw fluttering in the forest. Ideal women of the 1800’s were expected to be responsible, pure, act innocent, and be religious and faithful in God, which is what the character of Faith seems to embody. Though the names of both the husband (Young Goodman Brown) and the wife (Faith) represent young, good, pure, and innocent people, the name Faith also represents more. In the story, not only does Faith represent being faithful herself, but she is also expected to represent Goodman Brown’s faith in God. In the beginning of the story, Goodman Brown believes that Faith is religious and has a strong faith in God. He goes on his journey into the forest with the idea that his wife will redeem him and they will both ascend to heaven. This is evident in the story when Goodman is debating whether or not to continue and says, “Well, she’s a blessed angel on earth, and after this one night I’ll cling her skirts and follow her to heaven” (Hawthorne, 3). Goodman blatantly states that he sees Faith as the religious, faithful one, while he sees himself as not. Reader response critic Robert Ellis adds, “Part of Brown’s initial firmness in

1 This article had the most helpful and useful information that helped my write my essay. For more information see:

his resolve to go into the woods and in his confidence that his wife, by staying at home, saying her prayers, and going to bed early will remain unharmed, is his sense of the uniqueness of his own daring” (1). This image also shows how much Goodman Brown relies on his wife for religion and spirituality. Throughout the story, the more people Goodman Brown sees going against their supposed faith, and acting in sin, the more his original faith falters and the more he turns to his wife Faith for religious and spiritual inspiration. This is really good Goodman Brown seems to be holding on to his faith by a thread, until the biggest blow to his faith in God is when he sees his wife Faith also on her way to the evil Devil ceremony. This is really good interpretation- but qualifying your cited critics as “reader response critics” doesn’t make the essay reader-response. This feels like a close reading.

Goodman Brown seems to be blaming his wife Faith for his loss of faith and innocence and saying it is her fault, or at least part of the reason. Goodman relies heavily on his wife for being religious and faithful in God. This is evident throughout the story when Goodman Brown uses Faith as an excuse to the Devil odd phrasing, saying that he cannot continue on the journey into the woods because his wife is religious and faithful and he does not want to would disappoint.

When first meeting the Devil who accuses him of being late, he simply replies “Faith kept me back awhile” (Hawthorne, 4). On the pathway into the forest and while walking with the Devil is when Goodman Brown really begins to question himself and his faith is that passive voice? regardless, sounds awkward. This is when he begins to reason with himself and the Devil. Brown tells the Devil that he wants to stop and turn back and says “Well, then to end the matter at once there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I’d rather break my own” (Hawthorne, 5) Here, Brown is saying that it would break his wife’s heart if he decided to continue to walk on with the Devil, but doesn’t really mention his own faith. Instead he mentions how his loss of faith would affect his reputation. So in this way, Faith is a major part of what he thinks is his own faith. His wife Faith is the main reason why Goodman Brown continues to think he believes in God. Goodman Brown is shocked and upset when he discovers that his wife isn’t
religious and faithful to God after all. Goodman Brown’s complete loss of his faith, decline into
distrustfulness, and depression happens when he hears his wife Faith in the forest on her way to
the ceremony and sees her at the Devil’s mass and gives himself up to the devil’s evilness. This is
because in the beginning Brown originally looked up to his wife, Faith, and was inspired by her
purity, holiness, and faith in God. But when he sees her in the forest and at the Devil worship
ceremony his perception of her completely changes and he can no longer look at her the same.
After Goodman sees that his wife has lost her faith and gone over to the bad side, Goodman
Brown is disappointed in her, but does not see a reason to believe in God anymore is faith the
only reason that goodman brown lost his faith?. It is evident that seeing Faith in the forest is the
tipping and falling point of Brown’s own faith by the way he reacts to the sight of Faith and her
pink hair ribbon. He shouts Faith’s name but got no response. But something fluttered lightly
down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a
pink ribbon. “My Faith is gone!” cried he after one stupefied moment. “There is no good on
earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given” (Hawthorne, 9). After
this climax of the story, Brown without faith or anyone to trust and believe in, he begins to panic
and freak out. He gains knowledge about what his townspeople and his wife are actually hiding
behind their Puritan facade and he loses his innocence to this newfound knowledge. In the
quotation he declares that there is no good on earth and invites the Devil to join him again and
picks up his magical staff. By following his wife Faith and what she does, Brown can
conveniently excuse himself from guilt by claiming that “she” made him do it. too much plot
summary, redundant statements, and lack of a reader-response element to last paragraph

When I was reading this story, I automatically connected it to the Biblical story of Adam
and Eve. The story of “Young Goodman Brown” parallels this Biblical story, which is ironically
also known as the “fall of man”, which is what I think the idea Hawthorne is alluding to. weird
phrasing- and you’ve gone back to interpreting the author rather than analyzing the readerIt is
important to note these connections because both of these stories have similar themes and
messages. Hawthorne uses this Biblical story to illustrate what he sees as the fallibility and hypocrisy in American religion. The image of the snake appears in the story of Adam and Eve and is also related to the story of “Young Goodman Brown” because of the theme of evil and sin. There are many similarities and connections between these two stories. The story of Adam and Eve in the Bible attempts to explain how evil and sin entered the world. Going back to the story of “Young Goodman Brown”, although Brown eventually leaves the physical location of the forest, mentally he stays there for the rest of his life. Just like Adam and Eve in a way lose their innocence and gained knowledge, so does Goodman Brown. But there are a couple of important differences to note. One difference is that Brown is cursed with the knowledge that the Puritans in his community are not as holy and faithful as he originally perceived and now they are evil in his eyes. But there are also similarities when comparing the character of Faith with the Biblical woman of Eve. For the story of Adam and Eve, the traditional interpretation is the original sin is often seen as the woman’s fault because she is the first one to disobey God and eat the fruit. Not only was the woman tempted, but she also tempts and persuades Adam to eat the apple also. So in this way, Goodman Brown saw that Faith was the first to lose her faith and due to her curiosity in evil and the devil, continues into the forest to the Devil’s evil forest ceremony. Just like Adam, Goodman Brown just follows her and imitates what she does, but is able to accuse and blame her for ultimately being the first to follow the Devil. In the end, it does not seem like Goodman Brown accepts his loss of faith as his own fault. It is evident that he at least partly blames his wife Faith for his loss of faith by the way he responds to Faith and treats his wife at the end of the story: i like the connection you make between adam and eve and faith and her husband

Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without greeting (13).
Goodman Brown seems to be upset and disappointed in his wife and treats his wife like it is her fault that he lost his faith and enthusiasm for life. Later, there is another instance of Goodman Brown reacting toward his wife as if she had done something wrong and as if it was her fault, though it never even said if Faith accepted the Devil’s invitation or obeyed her husband’s command to “look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one” (Hawthorne, 12). Goodman Brown seems to automatically assume that his wife accepted the Devil’s invitation and treats his wife as lessor than himself. The narrator explains that “Often awakening suddenly at midnight, he (Goodman Brown) shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away (13). In this part also, Goodman Brown seems to be accusing his wife and also reacting to his loss of faith by not praying publically or privately showing faith in God. He seems to be treating his wife too harshly and not really accepting the fact that he did the same exact thing too. If he is guilty of the same exact thing, why is he so judgmental and so cruel to his wife?

Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence is not his wife’s fault at all, but his own fault. Not sure if such concrete statements should be in a reader-response paper- maybe you could argue for the possibility of multiple interpretations depending on interpretive community. Benjamin Lawson agrees and adds that it is important to note that, “Hawthorne does not focus on universal evil or human hypocrisy. Rather, he criticizes Brown as an either/or thinker who never acknowledges the evil in himself. Initially, Brown seems aware that his mission is sinful, but eventually he perceives sin only in others” (1). Goodman Brown made his own choice to go into the forest and to continue to walk with the devil. In fact, Faith even persuaded him not to go on the journey and to stay at home, but he decided not to listen. But it is important to note that he is greatly influenced by many people throughout his journey and this in turn affects his faith in God and his choice to continue on into the forest. The fact that Brown’s faith in God is weak makes him an easy target. Because the Devil seems to know that deep down Brown wants to just give in
to his pleasures is the reason why the Devil is trying to get him to go over to the bad side. The fact that Brown relies on the faith of you’ve gone over goodman’s faith already ad nauseam other people, especially his wife, is probably not a good thing. This reliance on other people and constant comparing of other people’s faith shows that Goodman Brown himself is not very religious, or at least not very serious about his religion. In fact, Brown cares more about his and his wife’s reputation, and then he does his beliefs and faith. From the story, one can tell that Goodman Brown does not believe strongly in God and that his belief in God is weak. His faith is reliant on other people and their beliefs and is easily shaken by other people sinning.

It seems that Hawthorne is trying to make some sort of statement. According to Young Goodman Brown’s fall of faith and innocence is a result of his wife. Goodman Brown’s wife Faith not only loses her pink ribbon, but also loses her faith and innocence, when she goes to the Devil’s evil mass ceremony. For some reason he seems to be blaming Faith, for Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence and saying it is her fault, or at least part of the reason. When in reality, Goodman Brown’s loss of faith and innocence is not his wife’s fault at all, but his own. Hawthorne seems to place all of the responsibility of being faithful, pure, and innocent on the wife, or the woman, while disregarding these qualities in the husband, or the man. This is also similar to the story of Adam and Eve. I think that Hawthorne is trying to make a statement about women. Reader response critic brings up an interesting idea when he says, “Gender-conscious readers might see Brown’s problem as an inability to accommodate to women as complex individuals” (1). I think the same thing could possibly be argued about Hawthorne himself. I think that Hawthorne might have had bad experiences with a woman or women in his life that caused him to question or loss his faith. way too abstract and hypothetical- besides, author doesn’t matter- it’s the reader I think that Hawthorne does not have faith in women.

- Opinion on the ending of the essay…? Okay I need help; I have no idea how to end this essay… Any suggestions?
P.S: We are required to include one content endnote in our essay. Why would you want to make an endnote? Any ideas of what I should use one for or what I should write?

Work Cited

Your essay is very interesting but also very long. I feel like you make the argument that because faith lost her faith so did her husband multiple times throughout your paper. Perhaps once you shorten your paper this idea will seem less repetitive. I really do like your connection to Adam and Eve that was very well done.

You spend too much time doing a close reading. I think there's a really good 6 page reader-response essay in this (about 4 pages of which are written), but you need to be more exact about how interpretive communities affect interpretation rather than choosing one possible interpretation and demonstrating it. I think if you specify and focus on the idea of different interpretive communities can see either faith or Goodman as the one most to blame it’ll help see what’s really relevant.


