

# Ethan Brand



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1804. His great-great-grandfather was one of the judges who oversaw the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692–1693. With financial support from an uncle, Hawthorne was sent to Bowdoin College in 1821. He published his first novel, *Fanshawe*, at his own expense in 1828, although he later came to dislike this youthful work and destroyed as many copies of the novel as he could find. For many years, Hawthorne published his short stories anonymously in magazines and annually printed gift books, but in 1837, he published a collection of these called *Twice-Told Tales*. In 1842, he married Sophia Peabody, with whom he had two daughters and a son. He published *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, after which he and his family moved to the Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts. Although this was an artistically productive time for Hawthorne, during which he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and short stories including “Ethan Brand,” he was quite unhappy by his own report. Following the 1853 inauguration of President Franklin Pierce, a friend of Hawthorne’s since college, he was appointed United States consul to Liverpool, England. He and his family lived in England until 1857, then toured the continent until 1860. After their return to the United States, Hawthorne’s health began to fail, and he died in his sleep in 1864 while on a tour of New Hampshire’s White Mountains.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nathaniel Hawthorne lived and wrote during the Romantic Period (1800–1840). Romanticism represents a reaction against the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. These earlier movements, which dominated 17th- and 18th-century Western philosophy, science, and politics, emphasized the pursuit of knowledge through reason and empirical (observable) information. In contrast, Romanticism emphasized emotion, individualism, aesthetics, and connection to nature. This ideological shift is reflected in “Ethan Brand,” as the story is a cautionary tale about the danger of prioritizing knowledge and intellectualism over human connection and Christian faith.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

“Ethan Brand” explores the nature of sinfulness, the dangers of intellectual pride, and the limits of human judgement. He joined these same themes together in “Young Goodman Brown,” an earlier short story in which a young Puritan man tries to

witness a midnight witches’ meeting in the woods. Like Brand, Goodman Brown seeks knowledge about the nature of sin; and like Brand, Goodman Brown’s journey ultimately separates him from his community. Both “Ethan Brand” and “Young Goodman Brown” resemble the Germanic legend of a man called Faust who, dissatisfied with his life and the limited knowledge he can attain through human effort, sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and earthly pleasure. In some versions, Faust’s deal irrevocably condemns him to hell, while in others, God’s grace saves him. Finally, the themes of intellectual arrogance and fallibility of human moral judgment recalls *The Scarlet Letter*, which Hawthorne published shortly before “Ethan Brand.” Roger Chillingworth and Ethan Brand both lose human warmth and relationship because of intellectual pride. And, like “Ethan Brand,” *The Scarlet Letter* questions legalistic, overly strict ideas about sin and guilt, suggesting that human empathy and connection—or lack thereof—are more important indicators of moral value than puritanical moral codes.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Ethan Brand—A Chapter from an Abortive Romance
- **When Written:** 1850
- **Where Written:** Lenox, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1852
- **Literary Period:** American Romanticism, American Gothic
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** A lime kiln burning late at night on Mount Graylock in Massachusetts
- **Climax:** Ethan Brand commits suicide by throwing himself into the lime kiln.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Slacker Student.** Unlike the highly educated Ethan Brand, Hawthorne once wrote to a friend that he was an idle student in college, preferring to chase his own fancies than to do his assigned homework.

**Salem Sinner.** Hawthorne famously changed the spelling of his name to distance himself from his Puritan forbears, one of whom presided over the Salem Witch Trials and sentenced innocent women to death for fabricated crimes.



## PLOT SUMMARY

While tending their lime **kiln** one evening, Bartram and his son Joe hear an eerie **laugh** and footsteps approaching their clearing. A gloomy stranger greets them and identifies himself as Ethan Brand, the same man who tended their kiln many years ago, before he left to discover the Unpardonable Sin. Bartram sends Joe to the village tavern to spread the news of Brand's return.

While he is gone, Bartram recalls the stories about Brand, which claim that he summoned the Devil himself from the flames of the kiln to discuss the Unpardonable Sin. Bartram's fear of being alone with someone who's committed an unforgivable sin is somewhat soothed when Brand helps him tend the fire, but Brand can't resist asking about the Unpardonable Sin. Brand believes that he himself committed the Unpardonable Sin when he chose intellectual pride over human connection and reverence for God. However, he admits that he would commit the same sin again, if given the chance.

Joe soon returns, bringing the Stage-Agent, Lawyer Giles, and the Village Doctor—men who have succumbed to alcoholism in the years since Brand left. He also brings Humphrey, a wild old man who spends his time searching for his lost daughter, Esther. Brand rejects the tavern-goers' friendly gestures of welcome and denies any knowledge of Esther's whereabouts, although he subjected her to one of his experiments in human sinfulness long ago and likely ruined her soul in the process. The men take offense to Brand's prideful attitude and don't believe his claims that he's uniquely sinful, instead writing him off as mad.

While the older men talk, young people from the village and a passing "German Jew" join them at the kiln. After the German entertains the crowd with his traveling picture show, a dog in the crowd makes a scene by wildly chasing its own tail. Everyone begins to laugh and applaud, until Ethan Brand joins them. His awful, uncanny laugh alarms everybody, and the crowd disperses.

When the others have left, Brand tells Bartram and Joe to go to bed, offering to watch the fire himself during the night. Once he is alone, Brand thinks back to his early days watching the kiln before his quest for knowledge hardened his heart and separated him from other people. Realizing that his life's work is done, he runs to the top of the kiln and throws himself in. At this very moment, both Bartram and Joe hear his frightening laughter in their dreams.

In the morning, they find Brand gone, and Bartram hurries to check the kiln in case Brand's negligence has ruined the lime. The lime is fine, and on top of the heap lies Brand's skeleton, with a heart of stone nestled between the ribs. Although he wonders briefly about the miraculous nature of Brand's transformation in the fire, Bartram quickly concludes that

Brand's remains will add to the value of his lime, and he crumbles them into the batch.



## CHARACTERS

**Ethan Brand** – Ethan Brand was once a humble lime-burner at a **kiln** on Mount Greylock. Many years ago, he began to ponder the nature of sin while he tended his kiln through the night. Gradually, he became obsessed with the idea and embarked on a quest to discover the Unpardonable Sin. In part, he conducted his research by tempting and manipulating other people into various degrees of crime. (One such person was Esther, a woman who once lived in the nearby village and who Brand subjected to a "psychological experiment" that may have "annihilated her soul.") Before Brand left, the Village Doctor treated him for madness, and upon his return, Bartram and others continue to question his sanity. By his own account, he was once a simple but thoughtful man, but in the isolation of the kiln, his serious thoughts turned into a mad obsession. Once he believes he has discovered—and committed—the Unpardonable Sin, he returns to the scene of his early development to boast of his accomplishment to the locals. His gloomy, alarming **laugh** precedes him to the kiln and betrays his sadness and isolation. Brand's words and actions betray the intellectual pride that destroyed his reverence for God and severed his connections with other people: he believes that he *alone* has committed the Unpardonable Sin, that he is vastly superior not only to the town drunks but also to the most knowledgeable philosophers, and that—by his own efforts—he has completed his life's task. Moreover, although he believes he deserves punishment for his sins, he would happily commit them again, and he sees his commission of the Unpardonable Sin as the "delicious fruit" of his life's work. His solitary temperament provided fertile ground for his obsession to take root, and his experiments on others turned him from a fellow human being into a cold observer of human nature. Brand continues to isolate himself even as the crowd gathers around the kiln. He speaks enigmatically to Bartram and Joe, frustrating their ability to communicate with him; as others arrive, he either drives them away with insults or withdraws to sit alone. The strength of his conviction—his belief that he found and committed the Unpardonable Sin, that his life's work is done, and that he is beyond redemption—ultimately drives him into suicide.

**Bartram** – Bartram is the lime-burner who now tends Ethan Brand's old **kiln**. Bartram arrived after Brand embarked on his quest, and he lives at the kiln with his son Joe. In many important ways, Bartram is the opposite of Brand: he is not very imaginative, prone to getting lost in thought, or emotionally sensitive. For example, local legends claim that Brand conjured the Devil from the kiln. Although in a moment of fear Bartram imagines that Brand will do so again in his

presence, when Brand simply tends the fire, Bartram quickly calms down. He rejects most of the supernatural elements of Brand's story, judging him to be crazy rather than dangerous. Bartram's approach to lime-burning is practical and physical, and the only thoughts that occupy his mind relate to his work, also in contrast to Brand. When his son displays fear, Bartram gruffly scolds him, betraying a lack of sensitivity to his son's feelings. Similarly, at the end of the story, he reacts to Brand's death without sorrow or pity.

**Joe** – Joe is a young boy who lives with his father, Bartram, the current lime burner at Ethan Brand's old **kiln**. Joe is easily alarmed and often turns to his father for comfort. He is emotionally sensitive, especially to Brand's extreme sadness, loneliness, and isolation, all of which upset him. His emotions are changeable: when the German Jew puts his magnifying box over Joe's head, for instance, he happily joins in the joke until he sees Brand and again becomes afraid. While everyone else treats Brand as a curiosity or a bother, Joe is the only one who seems to pity him.

**The German Jew** – The "German Jew" is a traveling entertainer who is drawn to the **kiln** by the size of the crowd that has gathered to gawk at Ethan Brand. The German Jew, also called the Jew of Nuremberg, travels through the mountains with his diorama—a box that allows him to magnify and display pictures. He has met Brand in the past, as the two recognize each other, and the German Jew knows of Ethan Brand's Unpardonable Sin. His physical appearance includes a dark or brown complexion, a "strong outline" (or notable profile, likely referring to the stereotype of a hooked nose), and stooping posture. These features, combined with his deference to the audience—he calls everyone "captain"—portray the German Jew as a stock, antisemitic caricature of a Jewish person. His mysterious origins, evidently random travels, past knowledge of Brand, and suggestion that he knows something about the nature of the Unpardonable Sin recall the figure of the "Wandering Jew," who, according to legend, mocked Christ on his way to the cross and was cursed to live and travel the world until Christ's Second Coming.

**Lawyer Giles** – The Lawyer Giles is a tavern patron who comes to the **kiln** with the Stage Agent, the Village Doctor, and Humphrey. A resident of the village since the time Ethan Brand tended the kiln, Lawyer Giles has—like the Village Doctor—succumbed to alcoholism in the intervening years. Once, he was a well-respected lawyer, but his habit of abusing alcohol eventually ruined his legal career. His body bears the marks of his lowered status: as he turned to various forms of manual labor, working accidents cost him a hand and part of a foot. Now, he makes soap. However, his alcoholism hasn't ruined his temperament, and although he wears worn and dirty clothes, his irrepressible spirit and courage in the face of his decline have endeared him to his neighbors.

**The Village Doctor** – Another tavern patron, the Doctor comes

with his fellow drinkers the Stage Agent and Lawyer Giles to visit Ethan Brand at the **kiln**. In contrast to Lawyer Giles, the ravages of alcohol have a more pronounced effect on the Doctor, now a brutal and savage man who gestures and speaks wildly. He also smokes and swears constantly. The Village Doctor's education and title still earn him respect in the mountain towns, where many sick people still seek his counsel, despite the degradation of his character.

**Humphrey** – Humphrey is a wild and shabby old man, whose daughter Esther disappeared from his home years ago. He now wanders the hills asking travelers if they have seen her or have any news of her. He comes to the **kiln** with the Stage Agent, the Village Doctor, and Lawyer Giles to ask if Ethan Brand has any word of Esther. He is desperate for news of his daughter, because few reports of her whereabouts come back to him, and he wants her to return.

**Esther** – Humphrey's daughter, Esther, left the village many years ago to join the circus. She performs on the highwire and on horseback, and news of her beautiful performances occasionally comes back to the village. Esther was one of Ethan Brand's early experimental subjects as he tried to discover the Unpardonable Sin; it seems that her departure may have been the result of Brand destroying her soul in the process.

**The Stage Agent** – The state agent is a patron of the local tavern who comes with Lawyer Giles, the Village Doctor, and Humphrey to see Ethan Brand's return. Although he is old and wrinkled, he still dresses well. He spends his time in the bar dispensing his dry humor rather than selling tickets for the stagecoach.

## TERMS

**Lime** – Quicklime, often shortened to "lime," is the common name for calcium oxide. When intense heat—over 840°C or 1544°F—is applied to calcium carbonate, the resulting chemical reaction produces quicklime and carbon dioxide. A lime-burner is someone who oversees this process by tending the fire in a kiln.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### THE SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE

Ethan Brand, once an uneducated laborer, left his lime **kiln** many years ago to search for the

knowledge that would reveal to him the nature of the Unpardonable Sin. (Even before he left, he was rumored to have conjured a demon out of his kiln to debate with him about the Unpardonable Sin.) In the story's present, Brand has returned to the kiln, and he has more knowledge than the wisest philosophers, but he has lost his ability to feel empathy for and connect with other people. Brand, who has become legendary among the townspeople in the story, mirrors the German legend of Faust, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and pleasure but loses his humanity as a result. The way Brand's pursuit of knowledge ruins him also invokes the story of Original Sin in the Bible, in which Adam and Eve disobey God to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thereby causing humanity to fall from virtue into sin.

Indeed, through its portrayals of Brand, the Village Doctor, and Lawyer Giles, the story suggests that knowledge is meaningless and even potentially sinful on its own. Lawyer Giles and the Village Doctor are nearly as well-educated as Brand, but their training loses meaning when it isn't being used. Giles's drunkenness ended his legal career, and while the Doctor still practices, his own alcohol abuse means that he has little intentional impact on his patients' survival or death. Nevertheless, because their education didn't cost them their humanity, the men are still welcomed members of the community—the doctor because he still visits the sick and the lawyer for his courageous spirit. Brand's intellectual development, on the other hand, divorced him from a sense of empathy or shared human connection, has left him empty and defunct rather than elevating him. Ultimately, his knowledge is worth no more than the minerals that his bones add to the batch of lime when Brand throws himself into the kiln and dies.



### SIN, GUILT, AND JUDGMENT

Ethan Brand, once a humble lime-burner, left his **kiln** years ago in search of the Unpardonable Sin.

He returns because he believes that he found—and committed—it. Both Brand and the locals who come to gawk at him are heavily focused on what he might be guilty of. Brand claims that he is guilty of the Unpardonable Sin, which he believes is his blind pursuit of knowledge and his subsequent loss of sympathy for other humans and reverence for God. As he learned about evil by manipulating others into sinning, he came to stand outside of human relationships as an observer of people rather than a friend to them. Despite owning up to this, however, his words and actions suggest that he's blind to his own pride, which is rooted in the Unpardonable Sin of prioritizing intellectualism over humanity. Indeed, Brand swells with pride when Bartram (who took over the kiln after Brand left) asks him to describe the Unpardonable Sin. He believes that this sin grows in his heart *alone*, takes perverse satisfaction in feeling more sinful than the local drunkards, and even ends

his life because he feels that he has achieved his life's work and done it well. Moreover, although Brand openly admits that he's guilty of committing the Unpardonable Sin and believes he should be punished, he also admits that he would do it again if given the chance. His inability to acknowledge all his faults—namely, his pride—thus suggests that despite his immense knowledge and intelligence, he's still unable to judge himself thoroughly and objectively.

The villagers are similarly flawed in their assessment of Brand's (and, it seems, one another's) guilt. The young people find Brand plain and unimpressive compared to the legendary figure they expect, writing him off as crazy rather than being open to the idea that he's guilty of the Unpardonable Sin. Both Bartram and his son Joe find Brand unnerving, but Bartram's fear ultimately stems from a sense of affinity, because he sees his own sins reflected in Brand's. Moreover, the villagers ignore the Doctor's sins—less seriously, swearing, but more seriously, heavy drinking—and still seek his aid in times of illness. Similarly, they still consider Lawyer Giles an honorable man even though he lost his law practice because of his own alcoholism. In contrasting Brand's sense of his own sinfulness with the villagers' opinions and his own actions, and in pointing out the limits of the villagers' ability to judge one another's character, the story suggests that while it's natural for people to make judgments about guilt and sin, human knowledge is finite and fallible.



### ISOLATION

Many years ago, while tending his lime **kiln**, Ethan Brand began to ruminate on the nature of sin, and his meditations ultimately drove him out into the world on a solitary search for the Unpardonable Sin. After many years, when he believes he has both found and committed it, he returns. Brand believes that his sin is hard-heartedness demonstrated by separation from human connection and a loss of reverence for God. In contrast, Bartram (who took over the kiln in Brand's absence) and villagers from the surrounding area are so imbued with a sense of community that they can't even imagine Brand in isolation, so their legends depict him conjuring a demon from the lime kiln's flames for companionship. In the years since Brand left, both the Village Doctor and Lawyer Giles have fallen into alcoholism. As a result, the Doctor kills as many patients as he saves, and Giles now supports himself with manual labor. Yet these men remain valued members of the community, despite their drunken and diminished states. Moreover, when Bartram's son, Joe, senses Brand's "terrible loneliness," he draws closer to his father for comfort. Bartram and Joe are relieved and comforted when others join them with Brand at the kiln, and in this way, community insulates them and reduces their fear of the uncanny stranger.

Conversely, Brand isolates himself from the crowd, and when

his old acquaintances try to connect with him, he insults them and drives them away. His zealous belief in his superiority and unique sinfulness is harder to maintain in the presence of other people, in part because no one seems to accept that he is any more sinful than the average person. By shunning meaningful connections, both now and in the past while he gained his knowledge, Brand removed himself from the community's magnetic pull. He can only see himself and his own special sinfulness, whether he's remembering his past, looking into the kiln, or peering into the German Jew's picture box. Brand's suicide at the end of the story (when he throws himself into the fiery kiln) illustrates the logical end of his isolation: his death removes him from the community permanently. The villagers' eagerness to visit Brand at the kiln suggests that, perhaps, he could have reintegrated within the community. But, by clinging to his belief in his own superior knowledge and sinfulness, Brand reinforces his isolation, to deadly effect.



### TRANSFORMATION

Day slowly turns to **night** as Ethan Brand returns to his lime **kiln** after years spent searching for the Unpardonable Sin. Over the course of the night, villagers come to gawk at the strange man who claims to have committed the Unpardonable Sin himself, and whom they believe to be in league with the Devil. The lime kiln uses fire to turn marble into quicklime, in a reliable, manmade shortcut of natural processes. And Ethan Brand's quest—because it emphasized intellectual knowledge over human connection—has turned the simple, loving man into a gloomy, aloof figure without concern for other people's lives or souls.

Even up to the last moment of the burn, Bartram (who took over the kiln after Brand left) worries that his entire batch of lime might be ruined by improper handling. The labor-intensive process of burning lime requires immense heat to turn marble into lime, which is a valuable substance that (among other uses) creates the mortar that secures bricks together in building. But instead of finding in the kiln's flames—and his ruminations on sin while it burned—a way to join himself with others, the solitary Brand instead came to desire a godlike knowledge of sin. In his relentless quest for this knowledge, Brand manipulated other people into committing the sinful acts he thought his research demanded. In coming to see himself as superior to everyone else and in losing his empathy for others, Brand lost his connection with humanity and hardened his heart. Just as the kiln transforms marble into lime, Brand's willingness to lead others into sin transformed him from a man into the Devil in human form. Having destroyed his humanity and his soul, Brand finally destroys his body by throwing himself into the kiln, and his earthly remains become a few pounds of minerals that enrich Bartram's lime batch. By situating Brand's conversion alongside the process of lime burning, the story acknowledges the benefits of human

transformation—through manufacture or through education—but also warns about its inherent risk of destruction.



### SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The night during which Ethan Brand returns to his lime **kiln**, pierced occasionally by the light of the kiln's flames, symbolizes the limited nature of human knowledge. Personality provides one of these limits: where the darkness of night inspired the sensitive and thoughtful young Ethan Brand to muse on the human soul's capacity for darkness, his replacement—the practical and unimaginative Bartram—sees the night as merely another time he needs to work to ensure the proper conversion of his lime batch. And just as the kiln's flames illuminate the surrounding clearing imperfectly and in short bursts, everyone's perceptions are limited by their own beliefs and experiences. For instance, Brand believes himself to be a uniquely damned sinner because of his intellectual pride, separation from humanity, and loss of reverence for God. Yet Bartram and the Village Doctor both believe that Brand is insane, and that his sins are ordinary.

The kiln's limited ability to illuminate—it can only show what is nearby—further suggests that Brand's understanding of himself and of human nature is limited and therefore incorrect. In the story's 19th-century setting, Esther's circus career indicates a loss of virtue and social status, which would seem to support Brand's belief that he's ruined her soul. Yet in the reports that come back to the village, she seems to be healthy and happy—perhaps not as ruined as Brand fears and still capable of redemption. Similarly, the darkness allows Brand to voice doubts about his own sinful status. At several moments, his contact with Bartram and the tavern patrons makes him worry that he's delusional. But his confession of the Unpardonable Sin happens in the dark of night, which reflects the fact that he's keeping himself in metaphorical darkness about the truth in order to reinforce his sense of self. Sitting in the darkness, he reiterates his beliefs before committing suicide in the kiln. This fate prevents him from witnessing the daylight, which reveals a charming world protected by God. The story thus suggests that Brand's beliefs about human nature and his own special sinfulness wouldn't have held up in the light of day.



### THE LIME KILN

In its ability to turn marble into lime, Ethan Brand's

kiln provides a constant reminder of how obsession can warp and change a person's character. The kiln can only reveal what's already there. Only marble and limestone—which have the necessary chemical composition—will yield lime as the flames burn away excess. Likewise, the kiln's flames reflect or reveal the character of those who look into it. Bartram is practical and hard-working, covered with soot from his labors. When he opens the door, the flames illuminate his strong body; he observes the process to ensure that the molten stone will yield its full value of lime in the end. On the other hand, Ethan Brand's obsessive quest for the Unpardonable Sin has hardened his heart. So, when he stares into the flames, their red glow on his face reminds Bartram of a demon.

Lime-burning also requires expert tending, because the lime can be ruined if the fire is allowed to run too hot or burn down too soon. Without careful tending, the fire can ruin the stone instead of creating the lime. When Brand tended the kiln, he began his quest inspired by sympathy for others, reverence of God, and fear of sin. But his zeal for knowledge burned too hot and eventually consumed him, stripping him of positive emotions and separating him from kinship with other people. Much like the kiln's fire burns away rock to produce lime, Brand's quest burns away his humanity, leaving a core of intellectual pride and isolation.



## LAUGHTER

Laughter represents the bonds of common humanity from which Ethan Brand has exiled himself. Since humor is a uniquely human attribute, laughter demonstrates humanity or bonds people together in a shared experience. When the new lime-burner, Bartram, feels frightened because he is alone with Brand, he attempts to hide his fear with a laugh, and Brand responds by calming his fears. Then, the tavern-goers' laughter mingles their voices together into one grand noise, indicating their closeness with one another. Later, the delighted young people in the crowd laugh at Bartram's son, Joe, while he makes silly faces that are magnified by the German Jew's box. Likewise, everyone laughs at the spectacle of the dog chasing its tail.

On the other hand, Brand's laughter demonstrates his isolation. His laugh, which provokes fear rather than merriment, precedes him to the **kiln**. When Bartram and Joe hear it, Joe immediately runs to his father for comfort, because such an unhappy laugh seems out of place in the world. Brand's cold, mirthless laughter scares listeners because it reinforces his isolation from others: he laughs at jokes that no one else finds funny or even understands. Thus, he laughs when he recognizes the irony of searching abroad for a sin that's in his own heart, and when he sees the dog's attempt to catch his own tail as a metaphor for this search. Brand's final laugh—at the moment of his lonely death in the kiln—haunts Bartram and

Joe, giving them nightmares instead of merry dreams.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Hawthorne's Short Stories* published in 2011.

### Ethan Brand Quotes

☹️ Bartram, the lime-burner, a rough, heavy-looking man, begrimed with charcoal, sat watching his kiln at nightfall, while his little son played at building houses with the scattered fragments of marble, when, on the hill-side below them, they heard a roar of laughter, not mirthful, but slow, and even solemn, like a wind shaking the boughs of the forest.

**Related Characters:** Bartram, Joe, Ethan Brand

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**   

**Page Number:** 375

### Explanation and Analysis


The story opens with this image of Bartram and his son Joe tending their kiln at nightfall and hearing the Ethan Brand's eerie laughter up the hill. Bartram and his son live at a distance from the village, but they have each other's company at the kiln, whereas Ethan Brand tended it alone when he had Bartram's job years ago. Being a lime-burner is a solitary job by nature, and the father and son's relationship is what protects them against the social isolation that eventually corrupted Brand's soul. To emphasize the importance of connection, their activities allude to joining things together: Joe builds toy houses out of scrap stone and Bartram burns lime to make mortar. Brand, in contrast, will soon reveal that he's better at destroying relationships than making them. The description of Bartram as "rough" and "heavy-looking" sets up the contrast between him and Brand: whereas Bartram prioritizes hard work over intellectualism and enjoys socializing, Brand is highly cerebral and views himself as superior to other people.

On another note, the darkness of nightfall in this passage symbolizes the limitations of human knowledge, because the darkness limits what one can see. Throughout the story, the darkness continually offers the reminder that Brand's knowledge is limited and imperfect—he is not the all-knowing, supreme being he imagines himself to be.

There was an opening at the bottom of the tower, like an oven-mouth, but large enough to admit a man in a stooping posture, and provided with a massive iron door. With the smoke and jets of flame issuing from the chinks and crevices of this door, which seemed to give admittance into the hill-side, it resembled nothing so much as the private entrance to the infernal regions, which the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains were accustomed to show pilgrims.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 376



### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the kiln where the lime-burner Ethan Brand used to make quicklime, a job that Bartram has since taken over. The description of the intense fire required to burn marble into lime immediately sets up the kiln as a frightening place—and given the story’s Christian overtones, it emphasizes the similarity between the kiln’s flames and the fires of hell, or “the infernal regions.” Notably, the door could allow a person to pass through—and later in the story, it’s revealed that Brand was rumored to conjure a demon from the flames and debate with it about the nature of sin. It’s also later suggested that the solitary nature of Brand’s job as a lime-burner is what pushed him toward excessive rumination about sin and his eventual quest to find the Unpardonable Sin, an effort that destroyed his soul. The kiln thus comes to symbolize the destructive (and perhaps sinful) nature of obsession, and the above quote literalizes idea by likening the kiln to a gateway to immorality—or even to hell itself.

This passage also contains an allusion to the “Delectable Mountains,” which come from John Bunyan’s allegorical tale *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This story details the journey of an everyman called Christian toward heaven and salvation. In these mountains, Christian and his companion learn to avoid sin and strengthen their faith. Similarly, Brand’s story offers a warning about the dangers of socially isolating oneself and allowing one’s intellectual pride to usurp human connection and faith in God.

Within the furnace were seen the curling and riotous flames, and the burning marble, almost molten with the intensity of heat; while without, the reflection of the fire quivered on the dark intricacy of the surrounding forest, and showed in the foreground a bright and ruddy little picture of the hut, the spring beside its door, the athletic and coal-begrimed figure of the lime-burner, and the half-frightened child, shrinking into the protection of his father’s shadow.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram, Joe

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 377

### Explanation and Analysis


As Bartram tends the fire in the lime kiln, he occasionally opens the door to add more firewood. The fire itself is an ambivalent force, strong enough to melt stone but gentle enough to illuminate the dark clearing. Brand’s quest for knowledge shares this ambivalence: there was nothing inherently wrong with the search until it drove him to manipulate other people and lose his reverence for God. In part, Brand’s quest destroyed his soul because he refused to acknowledge the limits of human knowledge. The kiln’s light symbolizes these boundaries: the flames reveal things that the dark obscured, but only to the edges of the clearing. Joe’s fear, inspired by Brand’s eerie laugh, offers a reminder that things exist beyond human perception.

The lime kiln functions as a symbol of both transformation and obsession in the story. The molten rock, partway through its transformation into lime, mirrors Ethan Brand’s own transformation from a tender human being into a hard-hearted observer of other people. The flames’ violence is like the overwhelming thirst for knowledge that drove Brand into obsession, and in both cases, the transformation involves destruction—of the marble and of Brand’s empathetic human nature and respect for God.

To a careless eye, there appeared nothing very remarkable in his aspect, which was that of a man in a coarse, brown, country-made suit of clothes, tall and thin, with the staff and heavy shoes of a wayfarer. As he advanced, he fixed his eyes—which were very bright—intently upon the brightness of the furnace, as if he beheld, or expected to behold, some object worthy of note within it.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram, Joe

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 377-378

### Explanation and Analysis

As Ethan Brand—still a stranger to Bartram and Joe—enters the clearing, Bartram opens the kiln door to get a look at him, and this passage describes what Bartram sees. The light of the flames reveals a plain, unremarkable traveler. But the kiln’s light represents the limited nature of human judgment and knowledge, especially when a person (like Bartram) isn’t particularly imaginative or thoughtful. Just as the exterior stone of the kiln conceals a blazing inferno, Brand’s superficial appearance hides the burning obsession that turned him from a compassionate person into a puppet master who manipulated others into sin and crime.

Brand’s unremarkable appearance also allows him to function as an everyman—a character who could be anyone and who thus provides a mirror that readers can use to examine their own lives. As an everyman, Brand’s life offers a cautionary tale against excessive intellectual pride and social isolation, warning that obsession can dangerously warp a person. The fact that Brand is drawn to the kiln itself rather than to other people—like Bartram and Joe—emphasizes his isolation and points to the emptiness of a life driven by knowledge over human connection.



☞ And, indeed, even the lime-burner’s dull and torpid sense began to be impressed by an indescribable something in that thin, rugged, thoughtful visage, with the grizzled hair hanging wildly around it, and those deeply sunken eyes, which gleamed like fires within the entrance of a mysterious cavern. But, as he closed the door, the stranger turned towards him and spoke in a quiet, familiar way, that made Bartram feel as if he were a sane and sensible man, after all.


As Brand slowly reveals who he is to Bartram and Joe, Bartram’s opinion of him oscillates between dismissal and fear. This passage revisits and revises Brand’s initially normal description and reveals a little more of his character. A moment earlier, his eyes were merely “very bright,” but now they “gleam” with a fire that seems “mysterious” or even sinister. Of course, neither Brand nor his eyes change from moment to moment, only Bartram’s feelings do. Thus, the passage conveys the limitations of human judgment and knowledge. For one thing, it’s bound to the observer’s limitations: Bartram’s lack of sensitivity prevents him from understanding the depth of Brand’s unhappiness, something that Joe senses intuitively. It’s also tied to the viewer’s subjective experience; Bartram’s emotional state determines, at least in part, what he sees when he looks at Brand’s face.

This second description of Brand also reinforces his connection with the kiln’s fire. Even his name links him with the flames, because a “brand” is a piece of flaming wood. Just as the violent flames turn the marble to lime, so Brand’s maniacal quest turned his heart to stone (both metaphorically and, as is revealed at the end of the story, literally). And given that the story has compared the kiln to a doorway to hell, the flames gleaming in Brand’s eyes point toward his transformation from human being into a demonic, fiendish creature. Notably, Brand’s attraction and similarity to the flame suggest not only that he is destined for hell, but that hellfire has replaced his soul. Given later revelations that he manipulated other people into sinning, references to the flames in Brand’s heart and mind suggest that he has become something like a demon, because he’s taken on the role of tempting Christians into sinning.

☞ Laughter, when out of place, mistimed, or bursting forth from a disordered state of feeling, may be the most terrible modulation of the human voice. The laughter of one asleep, even if it be a little child,—the madman’s laugh,—the wild, screaming laugh of a born idiot,—are sounds that we sometimes tremble to hear, and would always willingly forget.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram, Joe



**Related Themes:**  


**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 378

### Explanation and Analysis

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram, Joe, The German Jew

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 379





**Explanation and Analysis**


Ethan Brand left his kiln many years ago and traveled long and far in his quest to discover the Unpardonable Sin. Ironically, he claims to have found it in his own heart, and having to admit this provokes him to laugh. This quote explores why his laugh is so very uncanny and uncomfortable for Bartram and Joe to hear. Laughter should connect people together in common feeling or common experience. Later in the story, for instance, the German Jew's picture show and the dog chasing its tail both unify the crowd through their shared laughter and merriment.

In contrast, Brand only laughs at himself and only laughs alone. His laugh, then, is a marker of his distance from humanity, as it aligns him with figures that lie on the outskirts of communities, like a "madman." The modulation of Brand's laugh—its difference in tone from the standard sound—also hints at his internal transformation. Just as his laughter is dark and scary instead of light and happy, his heart is hard and cold instead of tender and sympathetic.

☛ The lime-burner's own sins rose up within him, and made his memory riotous with a throng of evil shapes that asserted their kindred with the Master Sin, whatever it might be, which it was within the scope of man's corrupted nature to conceive and cherish. They were all of one family; they went to and fro between his breast and Ethan Brand's, and carried dark greetings from one to the other.

**Related Characters:** Bartram, Ethan Brand

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 380

**Explanation and Analysis**

While Ethan Brand sits on a log and stares into the kiln's fire, Joe runs to the village to herald his return. No sooner has he gone than Bartram feels unsettled. In part, he is scared to be alone with a man who has supposedly committed the Unpardonable Sin, but he's also plagued by a sense of his own sinfulness. Brand doesn't have a monopoly on guilt, and the dark communion Bartram imagines—in which his sins and Brand's welcome each other—suggests that anyone can commit serious misdeeds. Brand views his sin as singular while Bartram sees all sins as connected, and the disconnect

between their opinions raises doubts about any one person's ability to truly understand or judge the sinfulness and guilt of another.

Moreover, in recognizing the similarity of their sinful natures, Bartram acknowledges Brand's humanity as like his own. Thus, he implicitly questions Brand's belief in his complete removal from the human community. Brand and Bartram share not only common humanity but particular circumstances, as both have burned lime in the same kiln. Facing evidence of shared humanity, Brand withdraws, alienates others by his laugh or his voice, or ruminates on his own Unpardonable Sin, suggesting that he may be cutting himself off from others purposefully.

☛ "It is a sin that grew within my own breast," replied Ethan Brand, standing erect, with a pride that distinguishes all enthusiasts of his stamp. "A sin that grew nowhere else! The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims! Freely, were it to do again, I would incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly I accept the retribution!"

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand (speaker), Bartram

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 381

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Brand mocks him for the shallowness of his sins, Bartram dares to ask about the nature of the Unpardonable Sin. This quote is Brand's answer. The several elements of his description are all related to pride. In this way, Brand describes and enacts his sin at the same time.



First, he expresses pride in his accomplishments, arrogantly insisting on his own achievements and swearing that he'd commit the same sin again if he had the chance. Second, his sin involves a presumptuous belief that he can access divine knowledge. In Christian theology, God is the only being who can truly judge Brand's guilt—or anyone else's. By asserting that he has committed a sin that God will not pardon, Brand claims that he has at least as much knowledge about himself as God has (and, in making this claim, he commits the sin of excessive pride). Finally, Brand declares that he has forsaken "brotherhood with man," or his humanity. Because the story operates in a Christian framework that considers everyone inherently sinful, the very act of being a sinner should be enough to remind Brand that he's connected to

others. Yet, in contrast to Bartram, Brand can no longer see any way in which he is still joined to humanity.

Brand elevates himself above others with his pride and thus emphasizes how barren knowledge is in and of itself. Because he eventually lost control over his quest and became dangerously obsessed with his pursuit of knowledge, any information he's uncovered about the nature of sin has brought him misery and isolation instead of peace, connection, or betterment for humankind.

☞ No mind, which has wrought itself by intense and solitary meditation into a high state of enthusiasm, can endure the kind of contact with low and vulgar modes of thought and feeling to which Ethan Brand was now subjected. It made him doubt—and, strange to say, it was a painful doubt—whether he had indeed found the Unpardonable Sin, and found it within himself. The whole question on which he had exhausted life, and more than life, looked like a delusion.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Lawyer Giles, The Village Doctor, The Stage Agent, Bartram

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 383

### Explanation and Analysis

When the Stage Agent, Lawyer Giles, and the Village Doctor return to the clearing with Joe, they offer Brand a drink in an attempt to welcome him back into the community. They joke that it's more worthwhile to seek out alcohol than the Unpardonable Sin. Their lowbrow drunkenness contrasts sharply with Brand's high-minded pride. In this passage, Brand struggles with real doubt about himself and the Unpardonable Sin. This suggests that his isolation is not the *consequence* of his guilty feelings, but rather the *cause* of them. Brand isolates himself from others but also needs their petty faults to contrast with his sense of uniqueness in being more sinful than anyone else.

Brand's need for isolation is related to his obsessive quest for knowledge. The ease with which the tavern patrons make Brand doubt himself further indicates the limits of human knowledge and judgment, because Brand assesses his sinfulness through his own interpretation of his actions. Twenty years earlier, the Doctor labeled him insane; in the present, both the Doctor and Bartram doubt that Brand's sins are anything beyond the usual human failings. In this sense, different perspectives yield different assessments of

guilt, which underscores the idea that human perception and judgment are inherently flawed.

☞ Ethan Brand's eye quailed beneath the old man's. That daughter, from whom he so earnestly desired a word of greeting, was the Esther of our tale, the very girl whom, with such cold and remorseless purpose, Ethan Brand had made the subject of a psychological experiment, and wasted, absorbed, and perhaps annihilated her soul, in the process.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Humphrey, Esther

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 384



### Explanation and Analysis


Old Humphrey has come along with the tavern patrons, and he asks Brand for news of his daughter, Esther, who left the village long ago to join the circus. This aside reveals some of the history between Brand and Esther. The backstory outlined very briefly in this passage is one of several moments in the story that suggest "Ethan Brand" was originally meant to form part of a larger work that Hawthorne never completed. The gaps in Esther's backstory—with their hint that there is much more that readers don't know about Brand's quest—offer a vivid reminder that human knowledge is limited by circumstance. So too does her fate. Within the context of the story itself, it's impossible to assess Brand's belief that he destroyed Esther's soul, although the impropriety suggested by a single woman joining the circus in the 19th century could corroborate it. This raises questions about Brand's certainty that he discovered and committed the Unpardonable sin, because his perspective is limited by his knowledge and biased by his beliefs.

Nevertheless, Brand demonstrates guilt here, rather than pride. He shows shame in his inability to maintain eye contact or answer Old Humphrey. Yet, his guilt is as cold as his heart, and he turns away from the old man more reassured in himself than remorseful for his actions.

But now, all of a sudden, this grave and venerable quadruped, of his own mere motion, and without the slightest suggestion from anybody else, began to run round after his tail, which, to heighten the absurdity of the proceeding, was a great deal shorter than it should have been. Never was seen such headlong eagerness in pursuit of an object that could not possibly be attained; never was heard such a tremendous outbreak of growling, snarling, barking, and snapping,—as if one end of the ridiculous brute’s body were at deadly and most unforgivable enmity with the other.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, The German Jew

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 386

### Explanation and Analysis


As soon as the German Jew’s exhibition has ended, an old dog takes center stage and makes a spectacle of himself by loudly and unsuccessfully chasing his own tail. The dog’s pointless pursuit mimics and mocks Brand’s search for the Unpardonable Sin. Man and dog are both isolated in their actions: no one tells the dog to chase his tail, and Brand conceived of his quest alone while he tended the lime kiln at night years ago.

However, lack of instruction doesn’t cost either Brand or the dog any energy, and both pursue their goal with zeal. The dog’s abnormally stubby tail renders his chase even more hilarious to the crowd and represents how unnatural and hopeless Brand’s quest is. Moreover, the tail is attached to the dog, and sin lies within people, suggesting that Brand’s search for the Unpardonable Sin is inherently self-destructive. Divorced from human empathy and community, Brand’s quest for knowledge has no more point than the dog’s impossible attempt to defeat his own tail. When the dog stops, exhausted, he’s no closer to reaching his goal. Brand’s quest will likewise never be completed. In contrast to Brand, however, the dog becomes quiet, sensible, and respectable when his chase is done. Although this points to the possibility of redemption for Brand, he rejects any return to human community by committing suicide at the end of the story.

But where was the heart? That, indeed, had withered,—had contracted,—had hardened,—had perished! It had ceased to partake of the universal throb. He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand, Bartram, Joe, Esther

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 388

### Explanation and Analysis

After the crowd has dispersed and Brand has sent Bartram and Joe off to bed, he tends the kiln while reflecting on his life’s quest. In his final moments, Brand imagines his heart shriveled and hardened in a way that foreshadows the discovery of his hard stone heart in the kiln in the morning. His intellectual development from illiterate laborer to the very summit of knowledge came at the expense of his kindness and humility. The story claims that without empathy, Brand’s quest was pointless and that knowledge, divorced from humanity, is worthless. Rather than gaining access to the inner workings of the heart, Brand lost it. Initially, he could search in its innermost “chambers and dungeons,” but as he became distant from others, his perspective changed from looking “in” to looking down “on” humankind as an observer.



Losing the ability to investigate what lies in others’ hearts suggests that he may be unable to investigate his own. The only person who believes that Brand committed the Unpardonable Sin is Brand himself. And while the memory earlier in the evening of him manipulating Esther contextualizes his claims, he still judges himself from his limited human perspective. The differing accounts of his sinfulness and the shifting descriptions of Brand himself undermine any attempt to nail down the truth of his beliefs. Finally, Brand’s transformed heart links him again to the kiln, which transforms marble stones into the lime that makes mortar for buildings. The link between the lime and Brand’s heart suggests the violence of his transformation, because lime burning is a time-consuming, tiring, laborious process. It also suggests the depths of his obsession: the lime-burner must be willing to watch the fire around the

clock for many days at a time to ensure a proper conversion. Likewise, Brand's search for the Unpardonable Sin—or his commission of it—required such devoted effort that it destroyed all other aspects of his life.

☛ The early sunshine was already pouring its gold upon the mountaintops, and though the valleys were still in shadow, they smiled cheerfully in the promise of the bright day that was hastening onward. The village, completely shut in by hills, which swelled away gently about it, looked as if it had rested peacefully in the great hand of Providence. Every dwelling was distinctly visible; the little spires of the two churches pointed upwards, and caught the fore-glimmering of brightness from the sun-gilt skies upon their gilded weathercocks.

**Related Characters:** Ethan Brand

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 389

### Explanation and Analysis

After Ethan Brand commits suicide by throwing himself into the lime kiln, the morning light reveals a world stretching far beyond the clearing. Nighttime, which symbolized the limits of human knowledge, was dominated by Brand's arrogant assertion that he'd found and committed the Unpardonable Sin. However, his quest was limited by his inability to look into his own heart or other people's hearts and by his obsessive zeal for intellectual knowledge over human connection. The sun rising high above the valley offers a reminder that Brand's perspective—and everyone else's—are earthbound and limited. The sun lies closer to heaven and suggests the vantage point from which God looks down on the world. This divine point of view encompasses the whole valley, even the parts that are still in shadow.

Brand threw himself down into a furnace, which resembled and symbolized hell. His fall from grace happened over the long years in which his quest for knowledge devolved into his maniacal search to uncover the Unpardonable Sin. In contrast, the morning light, which illuminates everything that the night obscured, symbolizes God's infinite knowledge and ability to judge objectively, in contrast to humankind's limited perspective.


☛ So little Joe ran up the hillock, and stood by his father's side. The marble was all burnt into perfect, snow-white lime. But on its surface, in the midst of the circle,—snow-white too, and thoroughly converted into lime,—lay a human skeleton, in the attitude of a person who, after long toil, lies down to repose. Within the ribs—strange to say—was the shape of a human heart.

“Was the fellow's heart made of marble?” cried Bartram, in some perplexity at this phenomenon. “At any rate, it is burnt into what looks like special good lime, and, taking the all the bones together, my kiln is half a bushel richer for him.”

So saying, the rude lime-burner lifted his pole, and, letting it fall upon the skeleton, the relics of Ethan Brand were crumbled into fragments.

**Related Characters:** Bartram (speaker), Joe, Ethan Brand

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 390

### Explanation and Analysis

When Bartram wakes in the morning, he finds Brand missing. Worried that Brand left and that the abandoned fire burned down and ruined the lime, he hurries up the hill to check. There, he finds the startling sight of Brand's bones and a perfectly preserved heart atop the heap. While bones could theoretically turn to lime in the kiln, the soft tissue of the heart couldn't, which seems to indicate that the heart was already stone when Brand fell into the flames. The heart's miraculous preservation is one of the few supernatural elements of the story. In literalizing Brand's hard-heartedness, the story confirms at least some of his beliefs about his faults while offering a warning about the danger of pursuing pure knowledge. Brand's grand quest was, ultimately, futile. What he sought was in himself, he left the kiln only to return there to die, and he left those he encountered worse than he found them.

The “snow-white[ness]” of the lime and the bones suggests purity and cleanliness, in opposition to the sense of sinfulness that overwhelmed Brand at the end of his life. However, the ruthless materiality of Brand's remains undermines any hint that his soul may have been cleansed in death. These aren't the miraculously preserved relics of a saint or holy person, they're just common lime. From his bones adding a small amount to the overall batch, Brand's quest benefited only Bartram, and only with a small amount of extra money. The cruel and ironic emptiness of Brand's quest drives home the story's assertion that knowledge

without empathy is worthless.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## ETHAN BRAND

At **twilight**, while Bartram and his son Joe tend their isolated lime **kiln** on Mount Graylock, they hear sad, eerie **laughter** rising up the hill. The sound frightens Joe, so Bartram assures him that it's coming from a drunken man in the village. Joe, more sensitive than his father, fears the laugh because it doesn't sound happy. Bartram berates his son for being foolish, afraid, and too like his mother. As the pair converse, the mysterious laughing person approaches them.

*A lime-burner's job is rather solitary work, and the kiln's distance from the village further separates Bartram and his son from others. But they aren't completely isolated: not only can they evidently hear the tavern, but they also have each other for company. Their companionship seems to benefit both of them: Bartram offers Joe a sense of safety, and the sensitive child's awareness of the subtleties around him provides Bartram with knowledge he otherwise wouldn't be able to access. The laughter alarms Joe because it sounds so uncanny—it signals sadness instead of happiness. This observation provides the first clue that whoever is laughing has been transformed into something not-quite-human, because the person's laugh doesn't function the same way that everyone else's does. It's possible that the growing dark also scares Joe. Beyond the literal fact of the sun setting, the impending darkness also symbolizes the idea that human perception and knowledge is limited.*



Bartram and Joe tend the lime **kiln** where Ethan Brand began his search for the Unpardonable Sin many years before. The kiln stands exactly as it was when Brand tended it. It is a round, rustic tower of stones that stands about 20 feet high. It has dirt packed up against its sides part of the way around, so that it's easier to unload carts of marble into the furnace. At the bottom, an iron door set into the mounded earth provides access to the fire. The smoke and flames that shoot out around this door make it seem like the doorway to hell.

*The kiln is first and foremost a worksite, constructed to facilitate the process of burning lime. However, the description of its flames being like hellfire immediately signals that this place—and perhaps Brand's association with it—is potentially sinister and even sinful. It's unclear why Brand was searching for the Unpardonable Sin (or what this even means), but it seems that he left his job as a lime-burner in order to discover something about human nature. Notably, the kiln is a site of transformation by definition (since every batch of marble that goes in is converted into lime), but the tower itself hasn't changed during the years that Brand's been away. This contrast suggests that, while some things may change, others can—and perhaps should—stay the same.*



Many similar **kilns** dot the countryside around Mount Graylock because the area has an abundance of the white marble stone which is used to make quicklime. Some of the oldest ones have been deserted; because they lie open to the sky, weeds, wildflowers, and grass now grow in and around them. Operating kilns offer resting places for visitors to sit down and chat with the lime-burners who tend them. The solitary nature of lime-burning provides an abundance of time for thinking and rumination, which allowed Ethan Brand to muse “to strange purpose” in earlier days.

*As abandoned kilns slowly disintegrate, the environment around them returns to its undeveloped state, which suggests that transformation is a constant and natural process. On another note, given that the previous passage likened the kiln to a gateway to hell, it's possible that Ethan Brand's isolation and subsequent “strange” ruminations morally corrupted him in some way, and that Bartram and Joe's companionship has protected them from going down this same path.*



Bartram, however, is not a thoughtful man. He frequently opens the iron door to add huge pieces of oak to the fire or stir the logs. Inside the **kiln**, the logs and the nearly molten marble burn brightly. With the door open, the flames illuminate the surrounding trees and the lime-burner's hut; Bartram's strong, dirty figure; and the frightened Joe, who sticks close to his father for safety. When Bartram closes the door, the half-moon and the final pink clouds of sunset become visible again in the **night** sky.

Joe creeps closer to his father, and although Bartram is annoyed by his son's fear, he can't help but feel somewhat unnerved himself at the sound of approaching footsteps. As the figure bursts into the clearing, Bartram arms himself with a chunk of marble, which he threatens to throw unless the stranger shows himself clearly. The stranger complains about this unwelcome treatment, although he also says it is the kind of homecoming he expects. Bartram opens the **kiln** door for **light**, revealing a tall, thin, nondescript man in the plain clothes and heavy shoes of a person who has been travelling on foot. The blazing fire in the kiln transfixes the stranger, who stares as if he expects to see something notable in it.

Bartram greets the man and asks him where he's coming from. The man replies that he has returned from a completed search. Because this answer doesn't make sense, Bartram believes the stranger to be drunk or crazy, so he resolves to drive him away as soon as possible. Joe, trembling with fright, begs his father to shut the door to the **kiln**. He fears the man's expression, although he can't look away from his face. Likewise, the stranger's thoughtful but wild face and his eyes, which "[gleam] like fire within the entrance of a mysterious cavern," alarm Bartram. But the stranger soothes Bartram's fears when he calmly notes that the marble is nearly converted to lime.

*Ethan Brand represents intellectualism, while Bartram's lack of thoughtfulness and his athletic physique represent a more bodily and instinctual approach to life. Both approaches are limited, but Bartram's at least provides a useful product—lime—in the end. The flashes of firelight that illuminate the clearing symbolize the limitations of human perception, as the firelight shows nearby things but obscures the night sky. When Bartram closes the door, the moon and the pink clouds reappear, but the hut and the trees disappear. This suggests that one perspective isn't better than the other; they are complementary. One can only see the whole picture by alternately welcoming one perspective and then the other.*



*Bartram and Joe benefit from each other's company. Joe's sensitivity balances his father's unimaginative nature, warning them both that there's something strange about the approaching figure. (The stranger is implied to be Brand, since he suggests that he's returning "home" to the kiln he used to work in.) In contrast, Brand has apparently become so used to his isolation that he expects to be unwelcomed wherever he goes, even when he comes home. Brand approaches in darkness, indicating the limits of his knowledge, despite his lengthy quest to find the Unpardonable Sin. When Bartram opens the kiln door, he and Joe can see Brand—but only his superficial, physical form. The personality that lies beneath isn't immediately evident, because human perception is limited. In contrast, Brand stares into the fire as if he expects to find something hidden within it, thus demonstrating his interest in what lies below the surface appearance of things.*



*Brand's awkward attempt to talk with Bartram betrays his social isolation and arrogance. He seems to expect Bartram to recognize him, even though there's no indication that the men knew each other before Brand left and Bartram took over the kiln. Although Brand is nondescript in his plain clothing, his expression in the firelight alarms the sensitive Joe. Given repeated suggestion that the kiln's flames are—or are at least related to—hellfire, the fiery gleam in Brand's eyes points to his transformation from human being into a hard-hearted, possibly evil creature.*



Bartram asks the name of this man who seems to know the business of lime-burning as well as himself. The stranger answers that he used to tend this very **kiln** and asks Bartram if he has never heard of Ethan Brand. Bartram recognizes this as the name of the man who left in search of the Unpardonable Sin, an idea he seems to find ridiculous. The stranger confirms that this was Brand's quest, noting "He has found what he sought and therefore comes back again." Realizing that the stranger is Brand, Bartram expresses surprise at meeting him. Although Brand left at least 18 years ago, the villagers still frequently talk about him.

Bartram asks Ethan Brand if he has indeed found the Unpardonable Sin, and Brand affirms that he has. When Bartram asks where Brand found it, he points solemnly to his own heart. Unhappily, as if recognizing the irony of searching the world for something that was so close to him, Brand breaks into the "same slow, heavy **laugh**" that Bartram and Joe heard earlier. This extremely unpleasant sound makes the whole mountainside seem miserable.

When **laughter** comes from the wrong feelings, at the wrong time, or in the wrong place, it is the most terrible sound that a human can make. It's alarming when someone laughs in their sleep. Laughter is an appropriately frightening sound for fiends and monsters in stories or poems. Despite his lack of emotional sensitivity, even Bartram finds the sound of Brand's laughter unnerving.

Bartram sends Joe down the hill to the tavern to tell everyone that Ethan Brand, having found the Unpardonable Sin, has returned. Brand sits down on a log and stares at the iron door to the **kiln**. Once Joe has left, Bartram regrets sending him. He felt safer with another person around as a buffer against the presence of a man who has just confessed to finding a crime that can't be forgiven. In the silence, Bartram considers his own sins, recognizing that they are relatives of the Unpardonable Sin. Bartram feels as if his and Brand's sins run back and forth between the two men, linking them uncomfortably together.

*Brand's reputation precedes him; his search for knowledge has yielded him fame as well as the Unpardonable Sin. In keeping with his legendary status, he introduces himself in the third person, an act that demonstrates his arrogant belief in his superiority over other people, like Bartram. It also hints at the distance between the Ethan Brand of old and the transformed man who has returned. His return to the starting point of the quest foreshadows the revelation that he found what he was looking for close to home.*



*Brand's cyclical journey—away and back again, out into the world to find a sin that lies in his own soul—show the fruitlessness of pure knowledge. Brand has discovered the Unpardonable Sin, but without empathy or human connection, the knowledge doesn't take him anywhere. His bitter laughter, which indicates hopelessness and shame rather than joy and success confirms Joe's intuition and provides further evidence for the boy's sensitivity. Furthermore, the extremely alarming sound again suggests that the quest has transformed Brand into something inhuman.*



*Throughout the story, the common noun "fiend" stands for non-specific devils or demonically inspired creatures, while the proper noun "Devil" represents Satan himself. If Ethan Brand's laugh is fiendish, then, it's because his search for knowledge transformed him from a man into something closer to a monster.*



*Although Bartram doesn't want to be alone with Brand, it's impossible for him to avoid feeling connected to Brand as a fellow human being. Unfortunately, he only knows Brand's reputation, so he experiences that connection through his sense of shared sinfulness. In contrast, Brand believes that the Unpardonable Sin distinguishes him from others, so he doesn't appear to feel the same connection as Bartram.*





Then, Bartram begins to remember the stories that have been told about Ethan Brand. Bartram feels that people who were dead and buried for years would have more right to return to a familiar spot than Brand, who is making himself at home after descending on Bartram like a shadow. The legends say that Brand talked with Satan in the light of the **kiln**; while Bartram used to think this was an entertaining tale, he finds it easier to believe in Brand's presence. It's said that before Brand left on his quest, he used to conjure a fiend from the kiln with whom he would spend the **night** debating the nature of the Unpardonable Sin. While Bartram remembers these tales, Brand stands up to open the kiln door.

Bartram half expects to see Satan himself in the fire. He yells at Brand to stop while also trying to laugh. He is scared and ashamed of a fear he can no longer control, and he begs Brand not to release the Devil from the **kiln**. Brand chastises Bartram and says that the Devil is for lightweight sinners like Bartram; Brand brags that he "left [the Devil] behind me, on my track!" Instead, he's opening the door to tend the fire out of habit. Brand adds logs to the kiln, apparently unbothered by the intense heat. He stands so close to the kiln that Bartram suspects him of trying to make himself look like a fiend, or of planning to throw himself in. However, Brand finishes his task and closes the door.

Ethan Brand tells Bartram that he's looked into hearts so full of sinful passion that they were even hotter than the **kiln**, but he didn't find the Unpardonable Sin there. Bartram asks what the Unpardonable Sin is but immediately inches away from Brand because he is afraid to hear the answer. Brand stands up tall, speaking with pride as he describes how the Unpardonable Sin grew in his heart—nowhere else—when his intellect triumphed over his sense of common humanity and his reverence for God. Brand believes that this is the only sin that deserves immortal agony and no chance of mercy. Yet, he declares that he would commit the same sin again if he were given a chance.

*Even though the two men watch the kiln together, Brand's intense sense of isolation maintains the distance between them. This yet again demonstrates Brand's difference from other people: neither Bartram nor the villagers can imagine his near-total isolation from humanity, so in their stories they invent a demon to keep him company at the kiln. Whereas Bartram burns lime impartially, without much thought, it seems that the solitary nature of the job caused Brand to ruminate on the nature of sin to the point that it may have actually driven him to commit sin. Bartram's—and the readers'—feeling that Brand's quest for knowledge was unnatural or possibly evil slowly builds through imagining Brand's late-night conversations with his own personal demon.*



*Bartram's fear makes his laughter sound hollow, but it's still less alarming than Brand's, further underscoring Brand's abnormality. Standing close to the flames, Brand begins to look like a fiend to Bartram, suggesting his devilish transformation. Brand confirms his fiendishness when he brags about his guilt. The image of passing Satan on the road suggests the depths of evil he has reached: Satan was cast out of heaven for his sins, but Brand's thinks the sin he committed is even worse. Notably, he doesn't demonstrate any shame or guilt over his sins; instead, he seems proud of their immorality.*



*Ironically, the very act of looking for the Unpardonable Sin caused Brand to commit it. His quest for knowledge is thus related to the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Bible. God forbade Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of this tree, but they ate it anyway to find out about the nature of good and evil. But in disobeying God, learning about evil meant sinning at the same time. Likewise, Brand's quest for knowledge leads directly to the intellectual pride, social isolation, and misanthropy that make up the Unpardonable Sin. His attitude suggests that his disinterest in being pardoned is perhaps what makes his sin Unpardonable, rather than the nature of the sin itself.*



Bartram thinks that Brand must be insane, and that his sins are probably no worse than anyone else's. However, he still feels uncomfortable sitting alone with Brand, and he's relieved when he hears approaching voices. Joe returns with the loudly talking and boisterously laughing tavern-goers. When they enter the clearing, Bartram opens the **kiln** door slightly to provide **light**.

The Stage Agent, who is "wilted and smoke-dried [...] wrinkled and rednosed" but wears a smartly cut suit with brass buttons, steps forward first. He has a dry sense of humor, although this could be due to the cigar smoke and brandy that have soaked into him over the years. Lawyer Giles has also come along. He was once a respected member of the community, but his alcohol consumption cost him this job. Now he is a manual laborer dressed in worn-out, dirty clothes. Moreover, he has lost part of one foot and one hand, although he still claims to feel the lost hand's fingers. Nevertheless, he has kept his courage and his manly spirit while eking out a living without depending on charity.

The Village Doctor, who once treated Ethan Brand for insanity, has also come to see the returned wanderer. Like Lawyer Giles, he retains some gentlemanly qualities, but he is generally "wild, ruined, and desperate" thanks to his dependence on alcohol. Nevertheless, people for miles around still seek him out, believing him to be a good doctor. Undoubtedly, he has both miraculously saved some dying people and sent others to premature graves. He constantly smokes a pipe; because of his habit of swearing, someone once said it was "always alight with hell-fire."

These three men greet Ethan Brand and offer him the contents of a bottle they've brought with them from the tavern. The solitary nature of Brand's quest and his intense rumination have turned him into a fanatic, but the locals' unrefined thoughts and expressions make him doubt whether he has, indeed, found the Unpardonable Sin.

*The gulf between Brand's certainty that he alone has committed the Unpardonable Sin and Bartram's belief that Brand is more likely to be insane than a dreadful sinner illustrates the wide range of opinion that divides people. This gap suggests that human judgment is imperfect, and without hard evidence either way, the question of Brand's sinfulness remains open. Moreover, Bartram's persistent refusal to believe that Brand's sins are categorically different than his own suggests that Brand isolates himself in part because companionship with others compromises his sense of pride—which is a component of the Unpardonable Sin.*



*The Stage Agent's body bears the signs of old age, although he still dresses well. He thus symbolizes both continuity and change over time, which contrasts with Brand's assertions of complete transformation. The changes Lawyer Giles has undergone since Brand's departure are more drastic, yet he, too, has maintained key elements of his temperament and thus escapes becoming a pitiable figure. Lawyer Giles also demonstrates one of the limits of knowledge: in itself, it is essentially worthless. Without the ability to practice law, his training and education do not benefit him.*



*Like Lawyer Giles, the Village Doctor demonstrates the emptiness of knowledge without practice: although he still visits patients, he's stopped having a meaningful impact on whether they recover or die. The fact that people still call a doctor who swears incessantly and shows up drunk testifies to humans' imperfect judgement of one another's virtues and faults. On another note, the story once again associate hell with fire, and fire with a character's sinful behavior (in this case, the Village Doctor's pipe smoke is associated with his swearing).*



*Lawyer Giles, the Village Doctor, and the Stage Agent instinctively try to form a feeling of community with Brand by offering him a drink. But Brand's alienation and social incompetence have already become apparent in his awkward interactions with Bartram. This encounter suggests that Brand maintains his isolation by choice because interaction with normal people compromises his fanaticism.*



Suddenly, Brand's life's quest—his willingness to sacrifice human interaction and his faith—seem delusional. He criticizes the men for their drinking and their shriveled souls, then declares that when he probed their souls years ago, he found no sins there worth his attention. Offended, the Doctor calls Brand an “uncivil scoundrel,” declaring that he hasn't found the Unpardonable Sin any more than little Joe has. Instead, the Doctor maintains that Brand is just as crazy as he was 20 years ago, and that he's only suited for old Humphrey's company.

The Doctor points to Humphrey, an old and shabby man who has been wandering the hills for years in search of his daughter, Esther, who ran away to join the circus. Occasionally, news of her glittering performances comes back to the village. Humphrey approaches Brand to ask if he has seen Esther on his travels, or if she has sent word to her father about her return. Brand cringes, because Humphrey's daughter was one of his earliest subjects; he believes that his experiments on her likely ruined her soul. Remembering the girl, Brand regains his conviction that he has found—and committed—the Unpardonable Sin.

*Intellectual pride and separation from humanity are not only the form of Brand's sin, but also how he maintains a belief in his sinfulness. Ironically, although he characterizes his sin as separation from humanity, he needs to be around other people to assure himself that he is, indeed, especially sinful. He reinforces his sense of guilt by declaring the tavern-goers' sins unremarkable—even though the Village Doctor may be guilty of manslaughter. When the doctor reveals an important part of the backstory—that he once treated Brand for insanity—he calls Brand's transformation into question. Like Bartram earlier, the Village Doctor believes that Brand is an ordinary sinner.*



*Humphrey's disheveled and wild state provides yet another mirror for Brand's decline. He, like the doctor, also unlocks an important piece of background information: the loss of his daughter at Ethan Brand's hands. In the 19th-century context of the story, Esther's fate as a circus performer certainly insinuates immorality and loss of status. Yet, the reports that come back to the village emphasize her success and beauty, so it's not at all clear that she has been as ruined as Brand wants to believe. In the privacy of his own memory, Brand reasserts his conviction that he's the Unpardonable Sinner, yet again pointing out how much guilt and sinfulness lie in the eye of the human beholder. In any case, however, Esther's story shows how Brand became so consumed with his search for knowledge that he drew other people in to use as research subjects (though it's unclear how, exactly, he experimented on them). So, her story provides a cautionary tale about the dangers of human knowledge without morality or empathy.*



During these conversations, young men and women from the village approach the **kiln** to see the legendary Ethan Brand. Because the plain man they find fails to live up to their expectations, they quickly grow bored. However, a “German Jew” travelling as an itinerant entertainer turns aside to see if he can make some money by displaying his collection of pictures to the crowd. His pictures, worn and stained with use and time, include European cities, buildings, and castles, as well as scenes from the Napoleonic Wars. Once he has shown all his pictures, he asks Joe to put his head into the box, behind the magnifying glass. The optical illusion of his gigantic face amuses the child and the crowd. However, Joe grows pale and frightened when he realizes that Brand is staring at him.

*The German Jew's traveling show emphasizes the size of the world and the length of history. While this suggests a reason for Brand leaving the kiln—the area was too isolated for his research—it also points out the finite nature of human knowledge, which is limited by time and space. Brand is unlikely to have any ultimate knowledge of good and evil because his experience is limited to his single perspective. The German Jew recalls the story of the Wandering Jew who, according to folklore, taunted Jesus Christ on his way to the cross and was cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. By invoking the crucifixion, the German Jew offers a quiet reminder of God's mercy toward sinners—at least those who seek forgiveness. However, in his eternal punishment, the Wandering Jew also offers a warning to unbelievers that this mercy isn't automatic—he was cursed because he didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. On another note, Joe's brief turn in the German Jew's magnifying box transforms him into something monstrous, but only for a moment. This suggests that transformation isn't an irrevocable process, at least in people. No one but Brand himself believes that he's not salvageable, and this belief alone is what ensures that he isn't.*



The German, noting how scared Brand makes Joe, says that if Brand will look in his box, he will show him a very fine picture. Brand looks for an instant, then jumps away, glaring at the German. When someone else peeks into the box, however, they don't see anything there. Brand says that he now recognizes the German Jew, who replies that it is very heavy to carry the Unpardonable Sin in his picture viewer. Brand demands that the German be quiet or throw himself into the **kiln**.

*No one else sees what Brand does—or thinks he does—in the box, although the German Jew knows what it is. The German's reference to the Unpardonable Sin suggests that Brand is reacting to his own sinfulness and guilt. Because he alludes to the figure of the Wandering Jew, the German may represent another sinner who is just as unapologetic as Brand.*



The next moment, a dog in the crowd begins to make a spectacle of himself. He doesn't appear to belong to anyone in the crowd and had been quiet up to this point. Now he starts to chase his absurdly short, stubby tail, although he'll never be able to catch it. He acts like the two halves of his body are deadly enemies, making a great commotion while whirling faster and faster, barking and snarling louder and louder until—exhausted—he stops as suddenly as he started. Everyone **laughs** and applauds the dog's performance, crying out for him to encore, although he doesn't repeat his efforts.

*The dog chasing his tail invokes the ouroboros, an ancient symbol of a snake eating its own tail. This image is usually interpreted to represent the inevitable and cyclical nature of transformation—particularly the cycle of birth, life, and death. In this instance, the dog serves as a metaphor for Brand's quest for knowledge. The fact that the dog can't catch its own tail implies that Brand's search for the Unpardonable Sin, which supposedly lies in his own heart, has been similarly impossible, since he can never know for sure (nor prove to others) if he really has found it. Moreover, the Unpardonable Sin (as Brand sees it) is circular in the fact that searching for it necessarily entails committing it—which means that it can't be objectively assessed. In searching for the Unpardonable Sin, then, Brand has become his own enemy, driving himself away from human connection and behaving against his own interests. Where the dog makes a lot of noise, Brand makes many assertions of his own sinfulness—but without presenting any evidence or referencing anything external to himself that could be used to evaluate his claims.*



Ethan Brand sits on a log **laughing** at the dog. However, perhaps because he perceives a similarity between the chase and his own search, his laugh sounds alarming and unlucky. Uncomfortable silence falls, and the crowd soon disperses. Only Bartram, Joe, and Brand remain in the darkness of the **night** and the vast, old forest. Joe thinks that the forest must be holding its breath in a fear that mirrors his own. Putting more wood into the **kiln**, Brand tells Bartram and Joe to go to bed. Because he himself cannot sleep, he will stay awake to meditate and watch the fire as he used to do.

Muttering his belief that Brand will call the Devil from the **kiln** for company, a slightly drunk Bartram gladly retires to his hut. Joe follows, looking back and beginning to cry because he has intuitively grasped the dark loneliness that surrounds Ethan Brand.

Ethan Brand now sits alone, listening to and looking at the tongues of flame licking the **kiln's** door. In his mind, he reviews the changes that his quest made to his character. Once, he was simple and loving, filled with tenderness and sympathy for humankind and pity for their guilt and suffering. He began his search with reverence, believing that a person's soul was divine, even when polluted by sin. At first, he even hoped that he might never actually find the Unpardonable Sin. However, his intellectual pursuit ultimately disturbed the "counterpoise between his mind and heart." His search was an education, during which he transformed from an illiterate laborer to someone with more knowledge than philosophers and professors. But this caused his heart to shrivel up and die.

*While laughter at the dog brought the rest of the crowd together, Brand's laughter both demonstrates his isolation and reinforces it by driving everyone else away. Joe's feeling that the forest is scared like him shows the deep-seated human need for understanding and community: if his father remains unaffected by Brand, Joe will imagine himself a companion in nature. Brand, however, so welcomes solitude that he sends the others off to bed.*



*Joe's sensitivity to the feelings of those around him makes him the sharp but kind observer of humanity that Ethan Brand once was. Unlike Brand, however, Joe still has empathy for others—including someone as alienating as Brand himself. His tears of pity for Brand contrast with Brand's pitiless experimentation on other people and his sinful pride. In this way, Joe is someone who is perhaps just as introspective and intellectual as Brand, yet his companionship with his father and communion with other people prevent him from the same moral corruption Brand has fallen into.*



*Brand's transformation from illiterate laborer to heartless philosopher seems to offer a warning against the pursuit of knowledge. But, as Brand himself realizes, the search for knowledge itself is not inherently good or bad. Early on, even Brand understood that the knowledge he sought was dangerous, and when his intellectual and emotional motivations were in line—when his mind and his heart were in balance—he feared success. He went astray when a desire for pure knowledge overpowered his sense of humility and empathy. Now, his shriveled heart testifies the limits of human knowledge in and of itself.*



In his quest for knowledge, Ethan Brand lost hold of the chain that connects human beings together. At some point, he no longer looked into the “chambers and dungeons” of human nature with sympathy or empathy. Instead, he became an observer, experimenting on others by turning them into puppets that he manipulated into greater and greater degrees of crime. In this way, he stopped being a man and became a fiend. This happened when his moral sense could no longer keep up with the improvement of his intellect. The “rich, delicious fruit” of his life’s work is not only discovering Unpardonable Sin but also committing it himself.

*Brand’s isolation and quest for knowledge are intimately connected. He never articulates a purpose for discovering the Unpardonable Sin, which suggests that his quest would never have benefitted anyone. Thus, he progressed from considering the whole of human nature, good and bad, to experiments that only considered its criminal and sinful aspects. In Christian theology, fiends or demons tempt people into committing sins. So, because Brand’s experiments manipulated people into committing crimes, he himself became demonic. In considering his sin a “delicious fruit,” Brand alludes to the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible: they committed the Original Sin by disobeying God to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But if Brand ate the fruit of knowledge like Adam and Eve, he also played the role of Satan, tempting himself to do so.*



Now, Brand realizes that there’s nothing left for him to seek or achieve—he has admirably completed the task he set himself. He abruptly stands up and climbs the hill to the lip of the **kiln**. He looks down on the heap of broken, red-hot marble and the mesmerizing patterns of the blue flames. Blistering heat rises from the fire, striking Brand’s body. He lifts his arms to the sky as the flames give his face the appearance of a tormented fiend. Crying out to Mother Earth, the human brotherhood he abandoned and trampled, and the stars of heaven, he bids farewell to all. Embracing the fire as his “familiar friend,” he falls into the kiln.

*Brand’s sense of purposelessness yet again points to the emptiness of pure knowledge in itself: the discoveries he’s made give him a sense of accomplishment, although he hasn’t improved himself or helped anyone else along the way. The flames of the kiln once again evoke hellfire, and Brand throws himself into them to guarantee the punishment he feels he deserves. By enacting his own punishment, he asserts his superiority not only to other people but also to God, whom he denies the chance to judge his guilt. Additionally, Brand finalizes his alienation in this moment, as he dies alone in flames that he finds friendlier than the company of other people.*



At the moment of Ethan Brand’s death, a terrible **laughter** disturbs the sleeping Bartram and Joe, giving them both nightmares. Even when they wake up in the morning, it still seems like they can hear the laughter’s echo. Bartram jumps up, pledging that he will watch his **kiln** alone every **night** for a year rather than have another visitor like Brand, whose uncanny attitude and alarming conversation undercut the “favor” of watching the kiln overnight.

*Brand’s life ends with his alienating laughter rather than with any testimony that would improve the world or anyone’s lives with the knowledge he’s found in his quest. In this way, his isolation from humanity is complete. Bartram’s willingness to watch the kiln alone forever rather than to be subjected to Brand’s company further emphasizes how far outside of humanity Brand fell.*



As they leave the hut, Bartram and Joe see the top of Mount Graylock turning gold in the dawn; the valleys are still in shadow but seem cheerful at the approaching **light**. The village lies peacefully in the valley, as if “in the hollow of the great hand of Providence,” with the sun shining on the church spires. Drinkers stir in the tavern. Mist and clouds seem to form steppingstones from the valley up to heaven itself. Completing the scene, a stagecoach rattles down the mountain towards the village, its horn echoing off the mountains cheerfully. Joe cheers up, since “that strange man” is gone. Bartram unhappily notices that Brand has let the fire go down, and he rushes up to the top of the **kiln** to see if the lime has been spoiled.

*In contrast to the night’s focus on darkness and sin, everything looks brighter and happier in the light of day. The morning reasserts a view of the world directed by God: the village is nestled in and protected by His “great hand of Providence.” Nature (represented by the mountains, mist, and clouds) and civilization (seen in the villages and the church spires) both reach up toward heaven. The heavenly view that the morning reveals suggests that Brand’s perspective was limited (as represented by the fact that he came to the kiln at night, when this view was obscured by darkness), and it serves as a reminder that human knowledge in general is limited.*



Bartram shouts for Joe to come to him. Joe looks down into the **kiln** and sees that the marble has converted to snowy lime, but Ethan Brand's skeleton lies on top of the heap. Within his ribcage lies the shape of a human heart. Because it hasn't burned, Bartram wonders aloud if Brand's heart was made of marble. However, because it looks to him like particularly good lime, and because Brand's remains add half a bushel to the overall production, he lifts his pole then brings it down on the heap, crumbling the "relics" of Ethan Brand into fragments.

*In the end, Brand's heart of stone demonstrates both the degree of his transformation and the emptiness of his quest for knowledge. Up to this point, the story has been completely realistic—Brand even mocked Bartram for believing that he could summon a demon from the kiln's flames. By reversing that stance here and literalizing Brand's metaphorically hard heart, the story underlines the degree to which he strayed from humanity. Because the heart represents the center of human emotion, Bartram's decision to incorporate Brand's remains into the lime might seem shocking. The last connection between Brand and humanity is destroyed, and he's denied even the dignity of a normal burial. This cold treatment underlines the futility of his quest for knowledge: Brand leaves literally nothing behind of himself. His pride in his accomplishments and knowledge are, in the end, only mineral dust.*





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