About The Devil and Daniel Webster

Guy Kortsarz

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1 On fascism: Can crimes be justified for the greater good?

The author of this short story is Steven Vincent Bent. This coy story is one of the most important short stories ever written on the USA. The story in my opinion mascaraed as pro American, but this is a trick. If the reader reads it right, the reader will understand that the USA was established on crimes. Crimes that can not be justified. Certainly not as Webster does. The Americans should know this story and perhaps do

In New Hampshire, a farmer sells his soul to the devil. Farmer Jabez Stone, from New Hampshire, has a streak of bad luck. In his anger he says about his luck: "it’s enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil!" A person by the name of "Mr. Scratch", suggests that he will indeed sell his soul to the devil. For that he will get seven good years. Stone agrees. The name Scratch was used for devil in the New England area.

This makes no sense. Who would sell his should for seven years. Maybe for all your life. Given how much people hate lawyers, it is not surprising that the devil portrays himself as "a layer from Boston."

After seven years, Mr. Scratch, who clearly is the devil, comes to claim Stone’s soul. Stone asks for 3 years more, and surprisingly, gets his wish. The devil is very understanding. When the three years pass, Mr. Scratch insists on taking his soul. Desperate Stone convinces the famous lawyer and orator Daniel Webster to plead in his name in some kind of trail.
At midnight Mr. Scratch arrives and Webster, presents himself. In fact he says he is as Stone’s lawyer. But Mr Webster has no luck. Stone signed the letter.

Webster gets desperate and says: ”Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the service of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in ’and we’ll fight all hell for it again!”

The problem of the devil is his pride. Exactly as in the poem Paradise Lost. He likes the challenge. Is sure he will win and has some tricks in his sleeve.

The devil claims that he is part of the USA. In fact he influenced the USA in many terrible ways. The USA committed crimes. Crimes against humanity. This is true.

Webster: lets put this question, if these things were so bad, to a trial. Mr. Scratch agrees out of pride.

As an insurance policy he chooses the jury. He knows that Webster will try to make the impossible. To convince the jury that they are Americans. And Americans have the right for free speech. So the jury is called ”The of the damned”. As the story describes ”with the fires of hell still upon them.” A collection of people who did terrible things. They are?

1. Walter Butler, a Loyalist (this means that he was against the establishment of the USA). He fought for the English army and was responsible for the Cherry Valley Massacre of November 11, 1778. The devil selects him, since he thinks that there is no way this person will agree to call himself an American.

2. Simon Girty, a Loyalist. Lives in November 14, 1741 February 18, 1818. Nickname Katepacomen. An American colonial of Irish descent. Girty was in charge of the connection of the the British and their Native partners during the American Revolution. Known as a terrible person. He lived with the Seneca for seven years, and became fully assimilated, preferring their culture. Hence hated the pilgrims. He was returned to his birth family but retained a sympathy for the natives and the hate to the USA. A very anti American person (also known as the ”white savage”).

3. King Philip (better known as the Metacomet). Fought for the English against the settlers. Hates the USA.

4. Governor Thomas Dale. Hates the USA.

5. Thomas Morton, a rival of the Plymouth Pilgrims. An English naval commander of the Virginia. Dale remembered for the extreme way he ruled in Virginia. Hates the USA.
6. The pirate Edward Teach (more popularly known as Blackbeard). An English pirate. He has nothing but contempt to the USA and:


The jury chosen could hardly be more anti American and Stone is in big trouble. The famous traitor Benedict Arnold is also called by the devil, but is busy. The devil thus the calls John Hathorne, the infamous executor of the Salem witch trials. Who never repented for his sins.

Webster is faced with terrible odds. But agrees to the trail.

Webster speaks on the simple good things in life. "The freshness of a fine morning...the taste of food when you’re hungry...the new day that’s every day when you’re a child". They he gives new perspectives on the early American crimes (see below). A demagogic speech that it is easy to agree with.

In summary he says that its wonderful to be human, but even more to be an American. So be it.

Webster: The American did very bad things. But this was a trick pulled on mankind.

A trick? By whom? The people that became the Americans chose to rebel against the English.

"Mankind got tricked and trapped and bamboozled, but it was a great journey," something "no demon that was ever foaled” could ever understand.”

Remark: So the rebels had no choice but to make war crimes?

Webster defines any person that influenced the USA as an American. The dammed, quite surprisingly say that Stone is innocent. Of course not only Stone is guilty, but the USA is as well. But smooth talking people like Hitler can convince you of anything. The damned loved the way Webster talked. He gave them a great power: if you were involved, you are an American. Of course. What a bunch of nonsense.

Mr. Scratch sets Webster free. The devil never believed that the jury will ignore the fact. But Webster was too talented.

Mr. Scratch who may be angry tells Webster’s that he will never become President. That his sons will die. Also he promises backlash for his speech here. Later, in the North, indeed many considered Webster to be a traitor. And he is. For supporting slavery. But Webster has a one mind track.

Webster does not care. He asks "Will the Union prevail?". Scratch: yes but a big war will be fought over slavery. Webster is fully happy. The only thing he ever was is a defender of the union. Even if he has to commit treason. But the devil disappears for good. Apparently very angry. He was tricked.
2 How could Webster defend the USA?

He uses Patriotism. Webster: "The Devil cannot take the soul because he cannot claim American citizenship. The devil asks "Who has such right?". The devil presents a list of terrible things the U.S.A. did. In order to show that the devil was part of the U.S.A. The devil: "I am merely an honest American like yourself and of the best descent for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don’t like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours."

Webster insists on a jury trial as an American right, with Americans for the jury and an American judge. The devil then provides the worst from Webster’s perspective (and certainly, they are evil people. All of them.) They will serve as the jury. But will also be the judges. In Daniel’s speech "He was talking about the things that make a country a country, and a man a man" rather than legal points of the case Webster uses a demagogry to work on the dark emotions of the damned. For Webster, freedom and independence defines manhood: "Yes, even in hell, if a man was a man, he should have free choice". Webster has to do two things. Convince the jury that they are Americans, when all of them hate the USA, and convince that it was not the devil that caused the crimes of the USA.

The mistake of the devil is clearly, that people are very influenced by demagogry. So Websters flatters the damned to think of themselves as Americans as well. Who would not take something for free? American are independent to decide whatever they want. But Webster has to justify his strange claim that the jury is composed of Americans.

Governor Dale, Morton, Hathorne, and Blackbeard were English. King Phillip was a Wampanoag. Butler and Girty would were Americans. However, they were Loyalists. You have to use a hugely wide concept to claim that they are Americans.

Webster” "All those who had are important for American history, are Americans, who opposed the creation of the U.S.A, and those Natives (see King Philip) who suffered at the hands of the pilgrims, were made American by Webster. Scratch protested the claim that all those people were Americans by calling this slavery.”

Sure: King Philip, that was responsible for the genocide was one of the "Americans" is an "American himself". But the kind ignores logic and agrees that he is an American. A very strange thing to think, and a mockery. The story in many ways, does not make sense. But Webster has the speaking abilities of Hitler. A thing that we should not discount.

Daniel Webster convincing this jury that they are Americans has to be a to be a miracle. In my opinion the reader should see the absurd here and
understand the irony. Even if there are people who take this terrible story at face value.

But given that, the devil is in a terrible place. The inclusive way that Webster had toward the term ”Americans” implied that each one of the jury was free to decide what he wanted. This was his big tool. American have freedom of thought and of will. The devil did not take into account the miracle that Webster pulled. The devil lost the first round.

3 The crimes of the USA: the genocide of the natives and slavery

The devil claims that he is responsible for the genocide of the natives. The devil: ”When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck.” As for Webster: ”True. But this also resulted in good things. It created new. And everybody was part of this new great thing. Even the traitors.”

Similarly Webster then talks about the slavery and admits ”slavery was evil.” But he makes the fascist claim: People died but it created a great thing.

The fascist claim of the greater good, is here to justify a genocide and the slavery. Appalling.

Daniel Webster did not like slavery but also did not fight against it. He was afraid that such an act will kill the union. Abolitionists said terrible things about him. Webster did not listen. Only the the Union is important. Not only that, the union had anti-slavery forces active in the slave areas. Ever the opportunist.

Webster makes far fetch claims. The result is highly unlikely. The damned decide against the devil. His vanity costed him dearly.

The devil is presented in a very strange way. Quite unusual. Polite. ”soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger” He has a just case. Beyond a reasonable doubt. but loose, and calmly accepts his loss. Webster tricked the devil using his powers of speech. This reminds me of the positive way the devil is presented in the poem Paradise lost. In both cases, it highly non convincing.

Webster is a fascist. He does not dispute the facts, which is that the USA committed crimes. He just commits the fascist act of claiming that that terrible acts, completely ethically wrong as they were, are justified by the long-term beneficial effects it produces.

Stalin executed millions under this principal, and so did Hitler and basically every tyrant.
The best example of a fascist argument is saying that keeping the union is more important than ending slavery.

I doubt the author supports evil. The story is ironic, and is a trap. Its on the power of demagogry. A soft introduction for the Americans, The Americans, in most cases will not be willing to read a story that is anti American. Thus the author gives them reasons to read the story, as a trail justifies both genocide and slavery.

In schools the genocide of the natives is not taught. I had two daughters that attended the American educational system. Feeling good for the USA being vindicated, an ethical American should stop and say: Webster admits the guilt of the USA. It serve it purpose. Webster *condemns* slavery and genocide in the speech, after all. After the reader is trapped into liking Webster, the reader has to cope with the fact that Webster said that the slavery and genocide were crimes. The reality is that Webster is the real devil. A very attractive one, but a devil nevertheless.