

Study and Discussion Questions: “The Devil and Tom Walker”

1. How does Washington Irving make the Devil a universal figure rather than identifying him with one particular race or culture?
2. Why is the swamp an appropriate setting for Tom to meet the Devil?
3. How is Tom Walker’s wife a stereotype or stock character rather than a developed character?
4. Besides being greedy, in what ways is Tom Walker both arrogant and hypocritical?
5. Despite his enormous greed, what is the one business that Tom refuses to engage in? Why would Washington Irving have included this detail in the story?
6. What historical allusions does Irving include in the story?
7. Near the conclusion of the story, Tom declares impatiently, “The devil take me if I have made a farthing!” Why is this statement very ironic in the context of the story?
8. At the conclusion of the story, who does Irving suggest should pay special attention to Tom Walker’s fate?
9. How do the great trees in the forest act as symbols?
10. What major theme is developed in the story?