

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

BIBLIOSCOPIC DIALOGUE: *The Scarlet Letter*

In a single (paragraph/page), identify and explain this story's GENERAL THEME and discuss how the author uses this theme to address the idea of *memory*. As always, refer to the events of the story in your answer. For page-length answers, attach a separate sheet if necessary.

By including “The Custom House” in the front matter of his novel and “Endicott and the Red Cross” in the back matter, Hawthorne creates a story frame that enlarges his thematic subject matter to include a discussion of memory. Together with his ideas of law and grace, bondage and freedom, this treatment of memory allows him to adeptly probe the issue of universal human nature.

The narrator speaks of his long, native attachment to Salem, Massachusetts in order to make the exploration of his early Puritan ancestors (who made their homes there) relevant. He gains license and some authority in his storytelling by this connection, even as he indicts himself through it. Moreover, he makes the issue of remembering his forebears a matter of importance. “Planted deep in the town’s earliest infancy and childhood by these two earnest and energetic [Puritan] men, the race has ever since subsisted here; ... Gradually, they have sunk almost out of sight, as old houses, here and there about the streets, get covered halfway to the eaves by the accumulation of new soil” (Hawthorne 22). That these ancestors should be remembered, unearthed, if you will, is a matter of great significance to the narrator; for he bears their cast. “And yet, let them scorn me as they will, strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine” (Hawthorne 21). It is this likeness that supports his exploration of the Puritan mind, the nature of his forefathers -- in their virtue and vice, and in their commitment to theological purity.

Similarly, his concluding chapter, the short story “Endicott and the Red Cross,” allows the author to widen his personal association with the Puritans to include his readers. With Endicott’s daring removal of the church from the sphere of government, Roger Williams looking on at the

deed, Hawthorne works art and historiography together. “We look back through the mist of ages and recognize in the rending of the Red Cross from New England’s banner the first omen of that deliverance which our fathers consummated after the bones of the stern Puritan had lain more than a century in the dust” (Hawthorne 254). His goal, a glimpse of the necessity of separating church and state, which finds its origins in fallen human nature. Thus, Hawthorne subtly turns his morality tale upon his readers as a mirror, suggesting that the same nature that dwelt in the early Puritans resides within them. They are universal man, writ large in all of his grandeur and misery.