

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

WORLDVIEW: *The Scarlet Letter*

Answer the following question in a single (paragraph/page). Be sure to refer to the details of this story to explain your answer. For page-length answers, you may attach a separate sheet.

What is the highest good or greatest evil in this story?

How can the good be secured, or the evil overcome?

(or insert any other question from Worldview Socratic List 1a. through 13i.)

Throughout the course of Hawthorne’s narrative, protagonists Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale suffer the consequences of their sin. Hester does so publicly, her shame emblazoned on her breast. Dimmesdale bears his in secret. Hester begs her lover to break free from the law that brands her and separates them; she wishes for them to flee the colony and live together apart from civilized society.

Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale and make thyself another, and a high one, such as thou canst wear without fear or shame. Why shouldst thou tarry so much as one other day in the torments that have gnawed into thy life!—that have made thee feeble to will and to do!—that will leave thee powerless even to repent! Up, and away! (Hawthorne 188)

Freedom is Hester’s greatest good, and she believes that society itself is the source of the severe law that afflicts them. Dimmesdale, however, falters. His earnest faith and theological literacy make him doubt the efficacy of such a path. Furthermore, when he tries the way, he finds it barred by his tormentor, Hester’s one-time husband Roger Chillingworth. Yet because of this obstacle, he finds a different path to freedom, a “narrow way” that few discover. The cuckold concedes the minister’s victory with bitter reluctance:

‘Hadst thou sought the whole earth over,’ said he, looking darkly at the clergyman, ‘there was no one place so secret – no high place nor lowly place where thou couldst have escaped me – save on this very scaffold!’

‘Thanks be to Him who hath led me hither!’ answered the minister.

(Hawthorne 236)

Dimmesdale finds freedom from the law and his accusers through public confession and repentance. As he stands with Hester on the scaffold, he leads her toward this path to freedom—repentance—as well.

According to Dimmesdale, the spiritual leader in the story, the way to freedom lies in repentance, submission, and faith in the just and merciful lawgiver. ‘Hush, Hester hush!’ said he, with tremulous solemnity. ‘The law we broke! –the sin here so awfully revealed! –let these alone be in thy thoughts! ...God knows and he is merciful! He has proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. (Hawthorne 239)

Hester remains in the colony after Arthur’s dramatic revelation and death and becomes a minister, so to speak, of the grace he bespoke. This suggests the fruitfulness of the path Arthur recommended.

She had returned therefore, and resumed—of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it—resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale...But in the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester’s life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world’s scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too. (Hawthorne 244)

Free from pretense and full of penitence, Hester finds forgiveness within her community where she becomes a counselor and encourager to other sinners and sufferers. With them she awaits a better love and a better society.