

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

WORLDVIEW: *The Scarlet Letter*

Study questions 5a. through 5c. in the Worldview Socratic List. Answer the questions with respect to this story in your own notes. Then, in the lines below, answer the following question in a single page, using the details of the story to support and explain your response. For page-length answers, attach a separate sheet if necessary.

Are the story's answers to these questions consistent with the worldview the author builds into his narrative?

According to Hawthorne's narrative themes, man's happiness depends upon honesty. Human relationships require truth: in particular, the ubiquitous truth of human depravity. Likewise, dishonesty provokes conscience, which will not be silenced until wrongs have been publicly owned. Fallen man cannot be happy without repentance, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

When the townsfolk scapegoat Hester, distancing themselves from her sin, they deny their likeness to her. Although Dimmesdale's silence prevents his public disgrace, it provokes his conscience, which torments him. Hester's dishonesty likewise subjects Arthur to the artifice of her vengeful husband, Chillingworth, making her complicit in both their misery. Once Hester recognizes this, she is driven to repent to Dimmesdale, who forgives her with difficulty. Yet, the relationship that results between them allows him the strength to repent publicly of his deceit and to lead Hester toward faith in God, according to his original calling. This demonstrates his divine restoration and leads to hers. Likewise, this public confession begets Pearl's kiss of acceptance. Relationship is restored. This forgiveness and mercy likewise brings Hester back to the community and makes her a conduit of mercy to other sinners.

According to Hawthorne's narrative, graceful living produces the greatest degree of freedom, individual happiness, and communal relationships. Hawthorne suggests that, while human law may not produce this, Natural Law may. Hawthorne censures the harsh application of law in Puritan society, but he does not quibble with its content. Rather, he notes by means of Dimmesdale's character that God's Law is written upon the heart. Once

transgressed, it cannot be evaded, but only silenced through penitent confession and divine mercy. Through the novel, Hawthorne questions not the moral absolutes of the Bible, but the possibility of a theocratic utopia on earth. In this, even while censuring the Puritan experiment, his work comports with a Christian understanding of the world. He sees in the Puritans' original sin and a need for redemptive grace both from God and the community of man.