

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

BIBLIOSCOPIC DIALOGUE: *The Scarlet Letter*

In a single page, evaluate the thematic significance of this story's PROTAGONIST or ANTAGONIST and discuss how the author's use of characterization addresses 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.

Protagonists Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne recall not only 17th c. New England Puritanism, but also universal man. Through their strengths and their sins, Hawthorne depicts man's timeless struggle. The framing remarks of his narrative relate these characters to the author and to his American readers as ancestors, making their plight personal (Hawthorne 21). He holds them as a mirror before the faces of his readers, lest they forget the best and the worst of themselves.

In Arthur, Hawthorne depicts the grandeur and the misery of man. In his eloquence, piety, and sincerity, Arthur speaks of man's dignity. Nevertheless, his passion, selfishness, and pride mar this image and cause its ruin.

It was his genuine impulse to adore the truth, and to reckon all things shadowlike, and utterly devoid of weight or value, that had not its divine essence as the life within their life. Then, what was he?—a

substance?—or the dimmest of all the shadows? He longed to speak out from his own pulpit at the full height of his voice, and tell the people what he was. ‘...I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!’ (Hawthorne 139-140)

His silence perpetuates his pretense, unmanning him.

His companion, Hester Prynne, embodies feminine intelligence, industry, and empathy, even as she houses fierce pride, bitterness, and rebellion.

Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. Here there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect that the world was only the darker for this woman’s beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne. (Hawthorne 63)

Hester is woman warped.

Together, Arthur and Hester recall their earlier, Edenic parents. With them, Hawthorne reminds readers of their own strength and fragility.

Through their ruin and redemption, he recalls the remedy for wrecked man: divine grace. This remembering re-members broken bodies, redeems relationships, and restores communities.