

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

SETTING: *The Bronze Bow*

In a single page, evaluate the thematic significance of this story's HISTORICAL or INTELLECTUAL SETTING – that is, explain how the author uses this structural element to emphasize the story's main themes. As always, refer to the events of the story in your answer. For page-length answers, attach a separate sheet if necessary.

This story is set in pre-Messianic Judea where the anticipation of an earthly, Messiah pervaded society especially among members of a certain Jewish sect, the Zealots. These men refused to await the Messiah patiently while Rome destroyed their beloved nation. Rather, they covertly armed themselves, hoping to establish a ready army in expectation of the Messiah's arrival. The ministry of Jesus represented a challenge to their understanding. Whereas they had expected a mighty warrior who would set them free from slavery to the Romans, Jesus taught them to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." He challenged them to "love their enemies, do good to those who spitefully use and oppress you" and to "turn the other cheek." He explained that His Kingdom was "not of this world," but was instead a spiritual and everlasting Kingdom. He encouraged them to submit to their rulers, and endure the hardships inflicted upon them, teaching them that the Kingdom for which they longed was already among them. These were puzzling words for the Jews. Consequently, the coming of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ represented a confrontation between God's spiritual plan for Israel, and Israel's plan for itself. Speare deals beautifully with these intellectual currents through her characters.

In addition to varying ideas of the Messianic Kingdom, Jesus confronted conflicting ideas of righteousness in his day. Righteousness was a crucial issue for the Jews, who believed themselves called by God to righteous lives. The issue of sin was particularly troubling, since it limited them from participation in the coveted Kingdom. They found remedy for sin in the sacrificial system and in strict obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Jesus challenged the Jews' understanding of righteousness as outward conformity by addressing the more difficult matters of the heart. Speare addresses this idea in the characters of Joel and his Pharisee father, who are both good,

law-abiding Jews. The reader sees their strict adherence to the law played out in their religious hand washing. It is also evident in the inhospitable welcome Daniel receives from Joel's family because of his uncleanness. Jesus challenges this idea of cleanliness, addressing more pressing matters of inward filth. Joel is intrigued by Jesus but confused by his marginalization of the religious elements of law keeping.

Speare highlights these issues when her character, Jesus, speaks to a hospitable Jewish woman who is chastised by her peers for offering food to a large crowd without first insuring hand washing as the law required. "Do not be distressed...it was not needful. In this house the food has been given us with love...Let us make sure that our hearts rather than our hands are worthy to receive this gift" (p. 99). In this way, Speare skillfully demonstrates the shift of emphasis Jesus effected, from the external righteousness of the Pharisee to the internal righteousness of the Christian.