

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

WORLDVIEW: *The Scarlet Letter*

Study questions 1a. through 1e. 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.

***Do the story's answers to these questions
tell the truth as the author saw it?***

Hawthorne creates an inherently theistic world in *The Scarlet Letter*. Not only does the author set his story within the borders of seventeenth century, Puritan Boston, but the unspoken assumptions of his narrator, who often criticizes the Puritan theology Hawthorne depicts, remain theistic – even Christian in tone. For example, the narrator assumes universal Laws that transcend social codes. Consequently, the concept of sin presented within the novel transcends the mere violation of social mores. Quite apart from the severe application of punitive law that the Puritan community imposes upon Hester, there exist internal and external consequences for adultery.

These consequences, however, differ in nature from those socially contrived. Whereas Puritan justice makes Hester an outcast, this other justice makes her a mother, knitting her together with little Pearl. This child, an obvious reference to the Pearl of great price in the gospel of Matthew, seems a grace in the midst of Hester's sorrow. Although an embodiment of Hester's passionate transgression, she represents the promise of fruitful relationship redeemed sin would inevitably create for those involved.

Similarly, although the Rev. Dimmesdale, Hester's partner in sin, escapes detection by human law, he cannot evade the pangs of conscience that ensue his duplicity. Though he retains honor among his fellows, his transgression of moral law disturbs his peace. Likewise, the timely return of the husband Hester counted lost or dead seems no mere narrative coincidence. In wrath, Chillingworth becomes a cattle prod of conscience in the life of Dimmesdale, who

cannot evade him. This underscores the inflexibility of universal Law.

In truth, the God behind the narrative voice seems the picture of the Protestant triune God, whose posture toward Law and attitude toward sin seems designed to redeem rather than to condemn. His pervasive Law, though vigorous and inflexible, seems designed to drive the story's transgressors to Himself, rather than to alienate them. Themes of grace, mercy, and forgiveness permeate the story's critical scenes and function as restoratives for Hawthorne's suffering sinners. Their honest repentance inspires faith and community.

Finally, a variety of mystical signs foster the growing conflict in the character Dimmesdale. The meteoric omen in the night sky, which appears during the minister's scaffold vigil, for example, seems an ominous narrative device implying divine knowledge and censure of his hidden sin. Likewise, the revelation of the mystical stigmata upon his breast at the story's climax suggests a supernatural branding.

The Law, conscience, even the malignant machinations of Chillingworth combine to drive the story's sinners to repent, to trust in divine mercy, and to extend that grace in love to one another. The God behind the narrative voice is the Christian God of love, who uses man's sin to save him and his community.