

Study Questions: Chapters 17-18

From last week: George raised the question of whether Hawthorne had read John Milton, particularly *Paradise Lost*. Yes, Hawthorne did read Milton, as a boy! When he was around ten years old, he had some sort of injury as a result of playing a bat and ball game with some local boys. The injury has not been clearly specified, except that he used a cane (sometimes) after having been previously bed-ridden (quite a while it seems) from that injury. The "recovery" seems to have been for about a year because by 1815 he was moving to the house in Raymond, the one built by one of his Manning uncles. Thus, his solitary ways were evident early, and he spent the time recovering (evidently for a year or more) by reading voraciously. According to Brenda Wineapple, some of the writers he favored during this period were: Pope, Rousseau, and Milton. From a letter written by his sister Elizabeth Manning to her niece Una Hawthorne, Wineapple quotes Elizabeth commenting: "If he had been educated for a genius, it would have injured him excessively. He developed himself." The letter is dated March 1, 1865, almost a year after Hawthorne's passing.

Janet brought attention to how frequently hands are referenced. Janet also pointed out the last lines of *Paradise Lost* from Milton, the great Puritan poet:

The world was all before them*, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide;
They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

*Adam and Eve – they've just been kicked out of Paradise.

Please think about these lines as we finish the novel.

Chapter 17: The Pastor and His Parishioner

1. Hester and Arthur meet in the forest. He confesses the pain of his "dark reality" while being so idolized by his congregation. She reminds him of his good deeds and what is his reply?
2. When she tells him about the enemy he lives with, what is his reaction?
3. According to Dimmesdale what sin is worse than the one they've committed?
4. What does Hester mean by their consecration? Check its definition.
5. Here in the forest, their truth is acknowledged, but Dimmesdale is very concerned that Chillingworth knows their secret. Your reaction to his concern.
6. While Dimmesdale feels God's judgment, Hester reminds him of God's mercy and offers a few solutions. What are they?
7. What is Dimmesdale's response? Her rejoinder?

Chapter 18: A Flood of Sunshine

1. Wandering like an Indian through unorthodox regions, Hester has had Shame, Despair, and Solitude as teachers. According to the narrator, how well have these instructed Hester?
2. In contrast, Dimmesdale, with this one exception, has not ventured outside religious norms. Hawthorne says Dimmesdale's sin was one of passion, not of principle. Explain the difference between Hester and Arthur at this point in their lives.
3. Dimmesdale resolves to flee (even though Hawthorne reminds the reader that guilt will have its effects); and asks for pardon. What changes do they experience in surroundings? What does Hester do?
4. What has Pearl been up to?

Chapter 19: The Child at the Brook Side

1. What was Dimmesdale's concern about Pearl's appearance?
2. What are Hester's feelings about Pearl as the child stands watching her parents, on the other side of the little brook?
3. What does Pearl do? What is her reaction to her mother's entreaty to leap across the brook?
4. What is Hester's explanation for her behavior? Dimmesdale's request?
5. When Hester asks Pearl to pick up the scarlet letter, what is Pearl's response? Meaning?
6. What does Hester do? What are the changes in her appearance?
7. What does Pearl do now? What does she tell her mother?
8. When Hester tells Pearl the minister loves them, what is Pearl's question?
9. What are Pearl's subsequent actions when "by an exertion of force...her mother brought her up to ...[Dimmesdale]?"

Chapter 20: The Minister in a Maze:

1. What are Hester and Arthur planning? What final obligation does Dimmesdale need to perform?
2. What are Dimmesdale's perceptions of Salem as he returns from the forest?
3. "At every step he is incited to do some strange, wild, wicked thing...." There are at least five temptations he resists. Consider their order.
4. He has an insight after his encounter with Mistress Hibbins. What is it?
5. When Chillingworth offers him some medication, what is Dimmesdale's response?
6. What is Dimmesdale's final act in this chapter?

