

Study Questions: Chapters 9-12

Bit of Advice: If you come across a difficult sentence, a good idea would be to go for the subject and then its verb (predicate), and overlook how Hawthorne piles on clauses and phrases that amplify his idea. If you've forgotten how to find the subject, look for the verb (the action word) and ask yourself who or what is doing that action. Usually that exercise helps.

Otherwise, please have no hesitation bringing your sentence(s) to class so the rest of us can deconstruct them for meaning, connotation, even their ambiguity!

Also, please pay attention to symbols, connotation, tone, diction as you read.

The Leech, Chapter 9

1. Hawthorne is having fun with his chapter title. Think about the connotations of the word, leech. What is the author's tone when he describes the reaction of the locals to the Chillingworth's practice, and particularly toward one patient.
 2. How would you describe Dimmesdale's commitment to his religion? What does Chillingworth's expertise open up for Dimmesdale? Does the minister venture into Chillingworth's territory?
 3. Describe Chillingworth's method of discovering the cause of the minister's wasting illness. Does it remind you of a profession someone might consult today?
 4. What's the connection of the Gobelin tapestries to Dimmesdale's situation.?
 5. Not everyone on the community feels their relationship beneficial to the minister. Hawthorne says that "when an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, it is exceedingly apt to be deceived." What are the conclusions of this "uninstructed multitude?" Recall the Book of Job.
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The Leech and his Patient, Chapter 10

1. Under the gripe of a fierce necessity, Chillingworth keeps digging at Dimmesdale, coming to what tentative hypothesis?
2. Not surprisingly, both men find themselves in the churchyard where Chillingworth has been digging out the vegetation that his craft requires, particularly one ugly weed growing out of an unmarked grave. On the subject of hidden sin, both men hold a conversation. What is Dimmesdale's rationale for the guilty heart not to reveal its secrets? Remind you of someone else? What is Chillingworth's reaction?
3. Their conversation is interrupted. What is Pearl doing?
4. Chillingworth recounts some of Pearl's other antics and wonders, "What in Heaven's name is she?" What is Dimmesdale's answer?
5. Chillingworth presses Dimmesdale to be more open, explaining that his physical illness has a spiritual origin, that he cannot cure the "bodily evil," until the minister "[lays] open the wound or trouble in your soul?" What is Dimmesdale's answer.
6. Dimmesdale falls asleep – note Hawthorne's sarcasm here – over one of his books, and what does Chillingworth discover? What do you think Hawthorne means by "the trait of wonder" in Chillingworth's reaction to his discovery?

"The Interior of a Heart, Chapter 11

1. In Chapter 10 Hawthorne writes "Trusting no man as his friend, he [Dimmesdale] could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared. What particular quality does Dimmesdale have that prevents him from grasping who is so-called friend actually is?"
2. Dimmesdale's sin keeps him from attaining what clerical heights? Yet knowledge of that sin has him, like Reverend Hooper, a more effective minister to his congregation. How does the congregation's veneration add to his agony? What would you call the sin he keeps committing?

3. Dimmesdale tries in various sermons to expose his pain, but to what effect? Again note Hawthorne's commentary on how most people perceive those in official status.
4. Dimmesdale has his own methods for "purifying" his sin. What are these?
5. Like Hester during her three-hour time on the scaffold, Dimmesdale has a series of visions – these while he looks into his mirror. Consider some of them and how Dimmesdale rationalizes them.
6. What do you make of the following passage about these visions:

But, for all that, they {the visions} were, in one sense, the truest and most substantial things which the poor minister now dealt with. It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. To the untrue man, the whole universe is false, --it is impalpable,--it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist.

The Minister's Vigil, Chapter 12

Warning: many symbols here; be on the lookout.

1. What is Hawthorne's tone in the second paragraph of the chapter? How does the paragraph's final phrase, "the agony of heaven-defying guilt and vain repentance" sum up Dimmesdale's situation? Any motifs come up here from the previous short stories read?
2. Dimmesdale's "great horror of mind" recalls a similar situation with Reverend Hooper.
3. What happens when Dimmesdale screams out his agony?
4. Notice the use of lamps in this passage. How are each used by Bellingham, Mistress Hibbins, and finally, Reverend Wilson. Pay special attention to the latter and his Geneva cloak.

5. Dimmesdale imagines the town discovering him as they awaken. Hawthorne's tone here?
6. Note the moments of laughter at this point in the chapter. Hester and Pearl join Dimmesdale on the scaffold. What is Pearl's request? Pearl's response to his rationalization?
7. What light illuminates the family's stance on the scaffold? Hawthorne, probably thinking of Shakespeare, cites the universal understanding of such phenomena. However, here he makes the meteor light personal – note his comment at the end of this paragraph. So, what does the minister see?
8. Who does Pearl point her finger at? What is Dimmesdale's question to Hester? Pearl's answer? What is her reason for giving her father such answer?
9. Before Dimmesdale answers Pearl, who comes to take him back to his apartment?
10. How are the black glove and "the great red letter in the sky" are perceived by most of the townspeople?