

Original sin

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In Hawthorne's intricately woven tale *The Scarlet Letter*, his characters create a parallel theme with the Biblical story of Original Sin. By examining the characters and their interactions and insights about each other, one can examine the symbolic parallels with the Garden of Eden. One aspect of the Garden of Eden theme is portrayed by the connection of Hester and Dimmesdale. Hester's story parallels Eve, the original mother of mankind, a woman exiled from the New Garden of Eden due to an unforgivable sin. She is doomed forever to walk outside the garden, no longer able to partake of the fruits of paradise, barred from reentry by seeming "divine intervention." Hester is the temptress of Dimmesdale, offering him the fruit of good and evil which, heretofore, removes all naivete and forces him to walk, tortured, through the world with the knowledge of right, wrong, and the magnitude of his sin seeming to accost him at each new turn of the dim path down which he walks. Dimmesdale is a fallen hero, one of God's chosen, who has fallen from grace in the moment of his original sin. He, also, is excluded from society because once his eyes are opened with the knowledge of good and evil, he cannot remain a true member of the blind, child-like Puritan society. Instead of leading the life of brilliance one would expect to arise from Dimmesdale's profound faith, he is ever tortured by his two-faced appearance. He imagines, "A herd of diabolic shapes grinned and mocked at the pale minister, and beckoned him away with them" (Hawthorne 141). Thus, Dimmesdale provides his own character insight as he examines his divided character and his appearance. He realizes that society is innocent and blind, and that, even while admitting to his guilt, they cannot believe him because they do not see the evil. "He had spoken the very truth, and

transformed it into the veriest falsehood” (Hawthorne 1410. Hester’s connection with Dimmesdale appears more deeply rooted, just as Eve was Adam’s wife in such a connected way because “ from Adam’s rib there was made a woman” (the Holy Bible). When Dimmesdale and Hester meet again after their sin, their reaction is close to that of Adam and Eve who, having eaten of the fruit, discover their nakedness and hide from the Lord in the shadows of the garden. When Hester meets Dimmesdale on his forest walk, the pair feel an unvoiced need to hide in the shadows, in both a moral and a physical sense. “ Without a word more spoken neither he nor she assuming the guidance, but with an unexpressed consent they glided back into the shadow of the woods whence Hester had emerged” (Hawthorne 181). Here they feel they can nearly return to the position of innocence they held before their fall. Yet none of this sin would have occurred without the serpent, the earthly embodiment of the Devil, a creature seeking the ruin of morality and righteousness. Chillingworth represents this Black Man, outright named as such a satanic character numerous times throughout the novel by the insights of various characters. Chillingworth, once an upright man, reduces himself to a state of groveling, condemned to crawl across the earth on his belly because of his role as an evil tempter. He admits to Hester, “ Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay” (Hawthorne 79). He admits that he is the cause of Hester’s sin, the malevolent character who pushes an innocent youth quickly toward the brink of ruin. Once he has wreaked this original havoc, the poisonous evil has entered his soul, causing him to determine, “ I shall seek this man as I have sought truth in books, as I have sought gold in alchemy”

(Hawthorne 80). This serpentine character is determined to carry his evil plot to a revengeful level, prodded onward by his selfish, scheming heart. The pearl that Dimmesdale steals by violating the marital trust is sought ceaselessly by Chillingworth. When the devilish fiend finds he cannot again obtain the beautiful treasure, he decides instead to destroy the soul of the innocent thief, who has only a vague notion of his presence. Just as Satan leaves a trail of sin and sorrow, so does Chillingworth leave a trail of black decay of morality. When Hester confronts her former husband about his behavior, she finds a darkness in his soul that he delights in. Surprised, “Hester gazed after him a little while, looking with half-fantastic curiosity to see whether the tender grass of early spring would not be blighted beneath him, sear and brown” (Hawthorne 168). Thus, Chillingworth handsomely finishes the parallel of Original Sin, ensconcing himself in darkness and malevolent desires. By examining thematic links to the story of the downfall of man, one can trace a new level of character insight. One examines the role of Adam, Eve, and the Devil in the New Garden of Eden, following their sin and exile closely in the characters of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth.