

Protofeminism in the scarlet letter

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In the eyes of some, *The Scarlet Letter* may seem like a protofeminist novel. In the eyes of some, had Hester been a man, her punishment would not have been nearly as embarrassing and deceitful. In the eyes of some, Hester did nothing but the right thing based on her trying to protect other women from gender-based prosecution, though it meant completely disregarding Puritan laws in her society. Then again, in the eyes of some, Hester deserved all of the harassment and harsh, negative attention that she received from the townspeople.

It is all a matter of opinion based on facts. Sexist punishments? You decide.

Comparing to today's society and laws, *The Scarlet Letter* seems about as protofeminist as America not electing Hillary Clinton for president in 2008. To the majority of society, men are superior in almost every aspect. Therefore, men are said to not be punished nearly as harshly as women are. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is punished for adultery.

Her punishment consisted of having to be labeled with a glowing, bright red symbol of her supposed crime. As a result, townspeople treated her like nothing more or less than dirt on the ground because of what she had done. However, a man may not have suffered as harsh of a punishment in any society. In the eyes of some, *The Scarlet Letter* may seem like a protofeminist novel.

Women always seem to be underestimated and stereotyped. Although adultery is a serious crime in times like based in *The Scarlet Letter*, a man doubtfully would have had as harsh of a punishment as Hester Prynne. If a man's wife had vanished without his knowing and not been seen for a very

long period of time, surely he would move on without assuring what had happened to his spouse. Nobody wants to be alone for so long with not a clue of where their significant other may be.

Like any normal person, moving on would be a last resort. What happens when your spouse comes back and you have another spouse? You are punished for adultery in that time. However, many feel as though a man, in fact, would not be as severely punished with adultery. In the eyes of some, had Hester been a man, her punishment would not have been nearly as embarrassing and deceitful.

During Hester's punishment, she is treated very unfairly. She moves out and onto the outskirts of society where she can no longer be harassed or publicly humiliated. While feeling that her punishment is unfair, Hester undertakes to protect other women of the Puritan society from gender-based persecution.

Her punishment is inexplicably sexist and unnecessary on a majority-based opinion. Her actions seem to point to a larger political statement, not only in the sense of unfair Puritan laws, but the fact that her punishment is gender-based and a man would not have been symbolized the way that Hester Prynne was. In the eyes of some, Hester did nothing but the right thing based on her trying to protect other women from gender-based prosecution, though it meant completely disregarding Puritan laws in her society.

If a man would have the same punishment as Hester Prynne suffered through in *The Scarlett Letter*, then there was no evidence of this in the novel. To most, the storyline of this novel gives off protofeminist evidence. Maybe Hester did deserve all of the harassment and harsh, negative

attention that she received from the townspeople due to her crime, but it is all a matter of opinion based on facts. Sexist punishments? You decide.