

Is the scarlet letter a
proto feminist novel?
essay sample



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The Scarlet Letter is a very well-known novel, between the scandals and lies. It starts off with a woman named Hester Prynne. Hester decides to leave her husband behind to migrate to Boston. A couple years later, Hester gives birth to a baby girl named Pearl in prison. Hester refused to reveal the father of Pearl. The town then forces Hester to wear a scarlet letter "A" upon her dress. This stands for adultery. When the town briefly allows Hester out of prison, they force her to stand on a scaffold to show her sin. While this is all going on, Hester's husband shows up in the crowd and asks why Hester was on the scaffold. The person then replies she committed adultery. Hester's husband then decides to tell the town he is a physician, and changes his name to Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth suspects Arthur Dimmesdale to be the father of Pearl. For seven years, Chillingworth seized to ruin Dimmesdale.

Hester realizes what her husband has caused. Dimmesdale and Hester then plan to move to New England and create a new life together. Dimmesdale does not go through with the plan. He decides to stand upon the scaffold and show the town the scarlet letter "A" carved into his chest. To admit to his sin just like Hester has done. Dimmesdale and Chillingworth die a year apart, leaving Pearl a great fortune. Hester and Pearl then move out of New England to escape the shame. A few years later, Hester decides to move back to New England to resume wearing the scarlet letter "A" on her own free will. Hester ends up dying years later and buried near Dimmesdale. "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules" was engraved into Hester's gravestone. (Shoomp Editorial Team, pars. 1-3)

There are many different symbols in The Scarlet Letter novel. For example, the letter "A" changes throughout the novel. At the beginning of The Scarlet Letter, the letter "A" stood for adultery. As the novel went on the letter "A"'s meaning changed to able. Towards the end of the novel, it stood for the importance of a person. In chapter twelve of the scarlet letter, when Dimmesdale stood on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl, they noticed that a meteor traced the letter "A" in the sky. The literary analysis of this would be that Dimmesdale feels as if he should wear the letter "A" of shame just as Hester does. The townspeople believe that the letter "A" traced in the sky stands for an angel. The meteor would actually mean either puritan or literary. Even Pearl would be considered a symbol. Although she is a complex character, Pearl is her mother's living version of the scarlet letter. (Shoomp Editorial Team, pars. 1-4)

"If thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer!" (Turley, 3. 26)

Dimmesdale argues that to sin is to suffer. What is revealed here is that sin is often invisible, that sinners can easily disguise themselves unless their sins mark their bodies, as with Hester's pregnancy? Punishment and absolution of sin has a lot to do with outward appearances and hearsay. (Shoomp editorial team) Adultery is now against the law in the twentieth century. It is not taken lightly and is a very serious crime. Punishment for adultery is still around the same consequences as in the eighteenth century. During the Puritan time period, crimes for adultery ended in execution. In Hester's case, she was only required to wear the scarlet letter because of the

unknown information of who her husband and her lover were. Execution is too severe for a crime such as this, the taking of a life never compensates for a crime that doesn't physically take a life of another. (Turley, 1-4)

Wearing the letter 'A' on the other hand seems reasonable at first; It subjects the adulterer to public humiliation and criticism.

People still get sent to prison, but do not have to wear the scarlet letter "A".

Across the country, some social conservatives are fighting for what they view as a critical article of faith: criminal adultery laws. In the U. S., in the year 2010, people can still be prosecuted for breaching their marital vows. The laws are some of the last remnants of our Puritanical past, where infidelity was treated as not only a marital but also as a criminal matter.(Turley 1-4)

About two dozen states still have criminal adultery provisions. While prosecutions remain rare, they do occur. And beyond the criminal realm, these provisions can be cited in divorce proceedings, custody disputes, and employment cases and even to bar people from serving on juries.

Though someone such as Tiger Woods might not be prosecuted, these laws could be cited in any divorce proceedings to show not just infidelity but also possible criminality in his lifestyle.(Turley 1-2) When the Puritans came to this land, they left a country where the English treated adultery as largely a civil and personal matter. The Puritans wanted to create a society where moral dictates were enforced by harsh corporal punishments. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* accurately portrayed colonial America under such criminal laws enforcing religious values. There was extensive

entanglement between church and state, with adulterers punished for their immorality. In 1644, Mary Latham and James Britton were hanged for their
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adultery in Massachusetts. (Turley 1-3) The adultery law does not have as much of an effect as it did back in 1644.

There are many pros and cons about the decision Hester chose. For instance, She had to endure in public humility, and no longer live a quiet life. She could not go to town without the townspeople looking at her a weird way or judging her. Even her child Pearl was judged. Not only did she ruin her own life, but she ruined Pearl's too by the decision she decided to make.

Dimmesdale endured in an awful life as well. After he admitted his sin along with Hester, the townspeople judged him, but didn't throw him in prison.

Sexist maybe?

There are some pros to Hester's decision even though she had broken a law, she opened many eyes to the townspeople. Hester showed her respect for the poor people by bringing them food and clothing. In the end, she still made a difference with the townspeople showing she was a compassionate woman. The scarlet letter slowly wore off by the good doings that she has done. It proves that even when you make a mistake or bad decision, it does not make you a bad person. Everybody makes mistakes, which in the end is our choice to learn from them and not dwell on the past.

Overall, The Scarlet Letter shows that just because we make mistakes does not mean we are failures. By Hester's decision she taught us a lesson in real life. We have to own up to our mistakes and learn to better ourselves. Even though it may be hard to understand why she did what she did, in the end she still proved herself as a good person just like the rest of the

townspeople. We are only human, we all make mistakes. But it is up to us to learn from the mistakes we committed to better ourselves like Hester did.

“ But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed, from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness. . . . The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,—stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.” (Sparknote editors)

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