

Role of women in literature analysis essay



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From time immemorial, women have been depicted as the weaker sex. This stance is evident from the historical treatment of women and the laws that governed the people sometimes could show male bias. With passage of time we have witnessed women being treated with relative amount of respect.

This is because of the modern research showing that the woman is not any lesser being. However, still acts of bias against women continue to be witnessed in the modern society. The bottom line still remains that from ancient times to present male and female roles have never been and will never be the same and that the assignment of these roles only serve to amplify male superiority. The atrocities against the “weaker sex” are evident in the ancient Greece (as can be seen from some plays and other literary works) and ancient Hebrew (as can be seen from the Hebrew’s bible also known as the Old Testament). The two serve to show the roles of male and female in the ancient societies and the degree of male superiority, female inferiority and gender balance. In ancient Greece, bias against women was outright and rampant.

Women were seen as objects of male fancy, beings with no legal rights (thus not expected to protest whatever the case), and slaves of the men, submissive and passive. In fact, in the Athenian society women had no legal rights and apart from their role of motherhood, their major role was to ensure that the home ran smoothly and their husband’s lives were more secure and more comfortable. The ancient Greece literary works such as the Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, the Euripides’s Medea and The Epic of Gilgamesh can attest to the fact that women were seen as lesser beings in the Athenian

society. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is a tragic play about a king, Agamemnon, who dies in the hands of his wife Clytemnestra.

The wife says how she has suffered in the hands of her husband. She also tells us of the loss of her daughter, Iphigenia, who is sacrificed by Clytemnestra's husband, the king. The play portrays a woman who the audience (any audience anywhere) can sympathize with. This is so because in ancient Greece, women were looked at as slaves. Women had no legal rights and apart from motherhood, their major role was to ensure their homes ran smoothly and that their husbands were happy. Clytemnestra therefore kills her husband in cold blood by stabbing her thrice in protest of the inequality between men and women.

She comes out as a feminism heroine whose barbaric act is accepted under her circumstances and her commitment to stand against male chauvinism. For this, she gains the sympathy of the audience. The male in this same play is portrayed as always in charge and favored by the law and tradition. He's shown to own everything including the wife and he is free to do as he wishes without restrictions.

Secondly, in the Euripides's *Medea*, Medea as a woman is portrayed as a being who is out of her mind and whose actions are out of proportion to her reasons for doing them. She kills her brother, her husband new bride and later her children in protest of inequalities against women. There is no love between her and the husband, Jason, who trades her with another woman. Medea portrays the woman as the "other" because they are not exactly as men and they are capable of doing things like killing in cold blood. The

message is, despite women being seen as passive, they have far more capabilities.

Killing for vengeance was a male's responsibility but Medea did it. Medea is set in the same environment as the Aeschylus' Agamemnon and the similarities between the two women is that they come out as strong, passionate women who commit horrendous acts to protest against inequality (Mack, 1998) In the epic of Gilgamesh, the woman is portrayed as passive and submissive. Men are seen to be strong. This is a Sumerian tale where women tend to be passive but they are capable.

Woman is also viewed as a powerful temptation that is able to easily control any man. ("Women in Early Literature". 123HelpMe. com) Finally, in the Old Testament, the view of women is partially biased and partially balanced. In the same breath that women are looked down upon is the very same that they are respected. In the story of Adam and Eve, Eve is blamed for the fall and Paul uses this to conclude that women should not be allowed to hold any position of authority or teach.

In the same story of creation, Eve is created as a helper and this gives the man an upper hand as the head that has a helper. (Weitzman, 1998) This portrays the woman as inferior. However, the Genesis 2: 24 version of creation has a non subordinating view of the woman whereby God gave the pair a joint responsibility of rulership. Another thing worth noting though is the male bias in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 20, Ten Commandments, the wife is depicted as part of the husband's property that should not be coveted. Generally, whether in the <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-women-in-literature-analysis-essay/>

bible or in ancient literature, the fact remains that women have been treated with contempt and as lesser beings and it is high time this stopped. It is going to start from every individual, male and female alike by believing that God created both equally and they should act out the other sex as equals.