

What is the impact of the male characters' treatment of women towards a western f...



World Literature Essay SL Assignment I: Works used: Scarlet Song by Mariama Ba and The Waiting Years by Fumiko Enchi What is the impact of the male characters' treatment of women towards a western female audience? In the novels "Scarlet Song" by Mariama Ba and "The Waiting Years" by Fumiko Enchi we as readers are able to experience the way in which the male characters' treat the female characters of the novel. Women in present time are able to sympathize with these women because the way in which the men treat them leaves a very strong and negative impression and ambiance.

It is true that different women may have different reactions toward how the women are treated depending on their cultures; however I believe that in this day and age most women would be displeased. In this essay I will be comparing these two novels which are from two different cultures and looking at how they are similar through analyzing the attitudes of the men towards the women. In Scarlet Song we learn that when the male characters were younger, such as the character Ousmane, they had to always obey their mother. Ousmane grew up respecting his mother, doing house chores for her and as a result he became known as a 'mama's boy'.

To the female reader, we may find his character appreciative and respectful. However, as the book progresses, we get to know more about Ousmane and his personality. We first find out that he falls in love with a diplomat's daughter, a girl named Mirielle who is French. Both characters backgrounds and families forbid them to be together. However, this does not stop them. They both keep their love for one another a secret from their parents. As

their relationship develops and the novel progresses it is clear that Ousmane becomes more violent, aggressive and disrespectful towards Mirielle.

Further along in the novel both sets of parents find out about them and do not approve. Ousmane's mother always tended to blame everything on Mirielle and treats her with disrespect. Ousmane would side with his mother, and then scold Mirielle, " To his wife's stupefaction, Ousmane sided with his mother and shouted, " If you can't stand Yaye Khady's presence here, then you can get out. . . " (Ba, 95). Not only was Mirielle disrespectfully treated by Ousmane, but by his friends as well. They would come by her house and treat her like a slave, showing no respect for her and her own home.

They would rudely tell her to serve them, look through the fridge and spit on the floor. In addition, they would yell at her when she asked them to treat her with respect. Ousmane started losing his feelings for Mirielle and got another woman pregnant. Again, the female reader may see Ousmane's actions as disrespectful; however the character Ousmane just sees it as how women are supposed to be treated. It becomes clear that Ousmane has been taught that women from any background must always obey their husbands. Since Mirielle was brought up in France, what she has been taught is entirely different.

Nevertheless, since Mirielle is living with Ousmane in Africa, she must live under his rules. This is a definite negative impact men have on women in *Scarlet Song*, which is based around the African culture. The novel *The Waiting Years* is somewhat different to *Scarlet Song*, due to the fact that these two books are written by author's oceans apart. Both novels have

different plots, and different ways of conveying messages. However, the way the men treat women reflects that of the male characters in *Scarlet Song*.

The male characters expect their wives to obey their every need.

They also tend to react violently to the women when they do not obey.

Towards the beginning of the novel the main female character, Tomo is asked by her husband, Shirakawa to find him a mistress. Shirakawa describes what he expects “ aged somewhere between fifteen and, say, seventeen or eighteen. From a respectable family, if possible...but she must be good-looking. ‘ As she spoke the last words, the smile around her lips showed itself clearly, and the eyes beneath their heavy lids took on an intense light that went oddly with the smile. ” (Enchi, 13) From this it is obvious that Tomo is expected to obey this emotional burden which hurts her.

Tomo finds a mistress and sends a photograph of her to her husband. After Shirakawa approves her, Tomo has a terrible nightmare that she kills him, and wakes up screaming. This conveys her hidden anguish and feelings which she has to oppress for her husband’s sake. The mistress, Suga, is just a little girl who feels unhappy in possession of a stranger. During the beginning of their relationship Shirakawa spends a lot of money on buying Suga clothes as a way of soothing her, at this time he had not made any physical advances towards her.

This gives us the impression that the men in this culture would do anything for woman to win their hearts, than later demand things from them and expect them to obey commands, “ To clothe a girl from a poor family in the

most luxurious garments possible was in itself almost certainly a means of winning Suga's heart" (Enchi, 42). Tomo continues to suffer from terrible nightmares due to her intense jealousy and upset about her husband's various escapades. Another situation that takes place in the book would be the conflict that occurs between Miya and Michimasa.

Miya runs to Tomo who is Michimasa's mother and complains to her about what had happened. Michimasa tried to force Miya into having sex with him and she refused to, therefore, he ends up throwing everything that he could get his hands on at her and said that even the law implies that it is legal to punish their wives when they do not obey. Yet again, this is part of the culture at this point in time, " He had been terrifyingly out of temper, had told her among other things that a wife disobeying her husband's commands was punishable by law. (Enchi, 99) This proves that men demand things from their wives and when not obeyed they are allowed to punish them and or do whatever they want with them without compromising because they want their own way. Michimasa was suggested from Shirakawa to take a trip and to stay with a relative who might subtly educate him in handling a wife. When he comes back, he treats Miya differently, much more amiably. However, Tomo cannot forget how Miya acted on the day she got in a fight with Michimasa.

Michimasa may be a changed man but still does not change Miya's perspective off him; however, she was persuaded by Tomo to stay. The only reason why Tomo was very considerate of Miya's feelings was because she has gone through the same thing with her husband. Her husband too treats her unfairly and brutally, but she remains calm when this occurs. On the <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-impact-of-the-male-characters-treatment-of-women-towards-a-western-female-audience-assignment/>

other hand, Miya overreacts about it once it happens. Miya in this situation is the right to overreact as she obviously feels uncomfortable. This proves the negative impact men have on woman in *The Waiting Years* which is based around the Japanese culture.

In present time, so much has changed and for the most part men treat woman with respect and with equality. However, there will always be circumstances where men still follow past traditions and allow themselves to beat their wives when they disobey. What we can rely on now is the power of the law. Men who treat their wives badly, or even any woman, will be punished for it. The system has changed and strong law is reinforced towards men who beat women. This also applies to women as well, since both genders must be treated equally.

Involving these situations from *Scarlet Song* and *The Waiting Years* follow the same culture of woman having to respect whatever desire their husband pleases. Though, these two books are written a million miles apart and originated in different countries, they still have similar expectations and culture. As a result from both books, both characters Miya and Mirielle had to put up with their abusive husbands for as long as they could. This shows how strong and fierce women really are. In conclusion no matter what country or culture, opinions always end up being similar to each other.

As mentioned previously Mariama Ba and Fumiko Enchi, may be authors from different countries, are similarly able to portray the women of their novels as women who have encountered the same abuse and unfairness from the male characters. Things may have changed over the years, but

reading and looking back on how women were once treated can only be beneficial. Bibliography: Ba, Mariama. *Scarlet Song*. Trans. Dorothy S Blair. New York: Longman, 2006. Enchi, Fumiko. *The Waiting Years*. Trans. Kodansha International Ltd. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd. 1971.