

Essay on women in to the lighthouse and heart of darkness

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



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The two novels are literary works which show the patriarchal attitudes which surround the women of the society. The works also express the interrelation between the sexes and study the societal forces which govern our lives.

Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* brings forth the feminist voice against the patriarchal prejudices through the characters of the novel. The novel goes on to critique colonialist patriarchy and the stereotypical assumptions about Englishwomen.

The starting of the novel does away with the masculine “sphere” of activity and thus shakes the opposition between the sexes. The public world of business and “high” culture is referred to at times, but not given much prominence. Rather, within the household, Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed with her power through creativity and care. Mr. Ramsay is a violently patriarchal or even comically pathetic person.

She seems to believe that male folk would suffer doubts as they have to deal with politics and economic business. Thus women are shown to bow down in front of damaged egos and make up with the male being passive themselves. She is a typical character who comes to terms with the society's demands of her staying as the superior force of the home. Her role in outward matters of life and world are not allowed by the society. However, her daughters are quite different from her in this regard.

Her daughters have dreams much different from her and want to be free from the patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf writes about them, “Prue, Nancy, Rose—could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers.” However, they never tell Mrs. Ramsay about their dreams. These characters symbolize the female spirit which is burdened by

the society's demands.

Lily Briscoe's character is the source of the aesthetic vision of the novel. She is shown as an unmarried lady who paints and is in contrast to what the society expects of women. She faces the attacks of Charles Tansley about art and women. The novel shows the opposition of sexes through the opposing ways in which men and women behave in the course of the story. Lily, although having traits of being a free spirit, ultimately surrenders to the pressure of the society.

Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness*, shows women from the Victorian viewpoint. The author shows the importance of saving the women from the dark side of life. However, the inner contradiction of the novel can be understood when he deviates from showing women as inspired persons.

At the time of Marlow's final meeting with aunt, she says how noble the effort of the Company is in civilizing the African natives. However, this seems very strange to Marlow. He says, "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are." (Conrad) He is one of those characters who believe that women are meant for being in the inner sphere of life. He obviously treats them as inferior beings and this attitude is established all the more as the novel progresses.

In his belief, women are not capable of understanding the horrors of life in comparison to men. These patriarchal beliefs are expressed in another example when he refers to Kurtz's fiancée. In his opinion, "They---the women, I mean---are out of it---should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse." (Conrad) His character takes women to be the inferior as the 'Other' in words of Simone

de Beauvoir. The male binds the women to “ correct femininity” as decided by the society.

Conrad later writes in the novel, “ She seemed as though she would remember and mourn (Kurtz) forever she had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering”, while talking of Kurtz’s Intended.(Conrad) The novel implies that such ‘ qualities’ are universal to women as both his fiancée and mistress have the similar traits. Trying to be the ‘ ideal’ woman, the individual loses independence in fulfilling the expectations of the society. She does not give importance to her own desires and starts living a life of inactivity.

However, Conrad also uses his artistry to show women in evil light in the course of the novel. He adds several allusions of the African wilderness referring to the femininity. While discussing about the steamer’s trip, Marlow says, “ Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown.”(Conrad) This reference to “ skirts” points at the female. The character later describes how the wilderness “ had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed its soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation.” (Conrad)

Thus, the author tries to link the women and the omen. Marlowe finds the evil links to Kurtz’s mistress and his Intended similarly. The place where Kurtz’s Intended resides has been shown as an “ alley in a cemetery” and is “ not fit for a human being to behold.”(Conrad) Conrad associates women with evil and thus shows the patriarchal stereotypes which stand against female independence. The novel shows the unparalleled mental conditioning

which women face in society.

Thus, the two novels show the relationship of the male and the female and criticize patriarchy. The literary works explore the psyche of the sexes as well as the feminist aspirations that aim to uproot the social evil. The female characters are examples of real life women who are burdened by our society and are unable to live their lives according to their own free will. Feminism aims to struggle against the patriarchal norms which are prevalent in the society and earn the equal rights for women across the world. The voice of protest can be heard in many works on art which try to help the cause of women's freedom and success in life. The two novels thus remain as very important works of literature which make us understand the socio-cultural factors which define the human race. While Virginia Woolf tries to show the different sides of the female personality through the novel, Conrad brings forth how the male see the women of our society. The novels make the readers think of the injustices which the women face in their lives and urge them to stand up against the evil of patriarchy.

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