

# The other side of the mirror-representation of women



Texts often represent women as victims in a patriarchal society. Examine the statement in terms of how women are represented in two poems from the stimulus book. The word woman has become synonymous with victim in a patriarchal society. Poems and prose have become literary explanations of the views of women as sexual objects, often condemning the marginalisation of women. Feminist poets such as Adrienne Rich and Charlotte Turner Smith struggle to possess their own voice after being so long the ??? other sex??? and the ??? object???.

Through their poems, ??? Sonnet XLIV??? and ??? Aunt Jennifer??™s Tigers??? they illustrate the married woman??™s predicament in the domestic sphere. Patriarchal society??™s oppression is highlighted in the poems, as ??? Sonnet XLIV??? reflects Smith??™s image of marriage as ??? legal prostitution??™ and ??? Aunt Jennifer??™s Tigers??? depicts a woman who is constrained and trapped within marriage. The era in which both poets lived in as well as their experiences as ??? victims??? in marriage, greatly influenced the content and themes of their poetry. Smith began her career as a novelist in the 1780s during a time where conventional women??™s fiction focused on romance and were generally dominated by the virtuous, male ??? hero.

??? Refusing to conform with these ideals, Smith challenged the orthodox romance themes by inserting ??? narratives of female desire??? or ??? tales of females suffering despotism.??? This was a reaction from an earlier ordeal where her father??™s impulsive spending forced her to marry earlier than even the norm of society at the time, for financial support. The marriage, which Smith described as ??? legal, economic, and sexual exploitation,??? <https://assignbuster.com/the-other-side-of-the-mirror-representation-of-women/>

played a significant part in her ??? Sonnet XLIV,??? where she expresses her frustration of being suppressed and voiceless. This is evident in the line ??? Pressed by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides??? where the narrator lacks voice despite being an internal ??? arbitress??? which is reference to a judge, a person empowered to make decisions.

Smith's use of the word ??? moon??? is an allusion to the woman's moon cycles which represent fertility, an attribute which was primarily valued in a woman where their domestic role was often focused around motherhood. To parallel this, the ??? tides??? and ??? the sea??? become extended metaphors of women under the power of the ??? winds??? and ??? storm??? which represent the male dominance. The imbalance of power between males and females is unmistakable in the statement, ??? While the loud equinox its power combines,??? with the implication that united equally, men and women are capable of great strength. However, it is clear that men in this patriarchal society wield control and women are merely victims, trapped and oppressed in ??? the sea??? and its ??? swelling surge confines???. Smith's inner turmoil can be demonstrated through her death imagery, ??? the grassy tombs, the village dead,??? as symbols of the violence she experienced in marriage. As a consequence, Smith lacks spiritual fulfilment and is emotionally dead, to an extent that she is envious of the whitening bones despite their unquestionably repulsive appearance.

This is enhanced by her wistful tone in the statement ??? While I am doom-  
 ed-by life's long storm oppressed.??? The whitening of the bones become a metaphorical escape from suppression and violence. The ??? frequent

wave??? representing male domination reduce women from three-  
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dimensional beings to victims who are stripped away of their complex layers until they become bleached, whitened ??? bones.??? Clearly, the poem??™s powerful visual imagery and literal devices represent the victimhood that women experience in a patriarchal society as well as reflecting Smith??™s own frustrated emotions as a feminist activist and lobbyist in the 18th century. Two centuries later, women continue to uphold staunch feminist values regarding female independence and to condemn the role of victimhood females still endure. Adrienne Rich, known as ??? one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century,??? is the very definition of female independence. Her metamorphosis from housewife to active feminist and later her announcement of her homosexuality supported the idea of her forthright opinions and rejection of still widely accepted views of women.

Throughout the 1970s, Rich's work reflected her intensifying commitment to feminism and like Smith she endured an unhappy marriage which ended in divorce. This theme of entrapment and escape can be distinguished in Rich??™s poem ??? Aunt Jennifer??™s Tigers,??? which distinctly reveals a married woman??™s life in a patriarchal society. Rich employs hyperbole such as ??? massive,??? ??? weight??? and ??? heavy??? to signify the suppression that Aunt Jennifer endures as a victim in marriage. She parallels Aunt Jennifer to women who are similarly ??? mastered??? by the ??? ringed??? ordeals??? of marriage and thus explores the limited roles of females, as restricted and constrained victims in a patriarchal society. To enhance this, Rich uses imagery of a woman whose ??? fingers fluttering through her wool/Find even the ivory needle hard to pull,??? with the implication that the woman??™s

only escape from oppression is to create a ??? world of green??? as an asylum where she wields complete control. Thus, the tapestry Aunt Jennifer fabricates becomes an extended metaphor of refuge and sanctuary with ??? bright topaz??? tigers as protectors. Ironically, the tigers are described as ??? chivalric??? ??? denizens??? as opposed to men, and consequently Rich compares men to animals; hunters, inhumane and savage, Rich??™s reflection on the manner men treated women in a patriarchal society.

??? Ivory,??? is usually associated with wild animals, however, in the domestic setting, the ??? ivory needle??? is docile and mainly considered a woman??™s tool. This reinforces the wilderness and natural freedom of women that is controlled as a result of male domination and suppression in the domestic environment. Whereas Smith is ??? doomed??? to be forever trapped in her patriarchal society, Rich projects the tigers as Aunt Jennifer, ??? proud and unafraid.

??? This mirrors the 20th century??™s activism in the women??™s movement which continued to grow with Rich??™s involvement and commitment as an active role in political issues of sexual equality. However, despite the projection of the tigers as Aunt Jennifer, the tigers are traditionally considered as ??? masculine??™ figures. This alludes to the notion that as long as power is envisioned in only the terms of what is depicted as masculine, the radical view of Aunt Jennifer which is restricted to a visually imagined and spiritual plane, is insufficient and thus she remains a victim. Through use of parallel notions and powerful metaphors, Rich represents women as victims of oppression in marriage, undermining what is traditionally valued within a patriarchal society.??? Sonnet XLIV??? and ??? <https://assignbuster.com/the-other-side-of-the-mirror-representation-of-women/>

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers are texts that give the marginalised and exploited a voice. As demonstrated by both poems, women have been subjugated for centuries to traditional roles and thus were unable to display their true qualities and potential.

Ultimately, women were targets for mistreatment by men, denied their basic rights and even the possibility for independent thought or intellectual freedom. Women are thus objectified until they are reduced to figures of pity and any response to such portrayals of women in a modern context is often anger and a renewed sense of women's equality.