

Abstract

The main purpose of the present work is to analyse the role of female characters in Joseph Conrad's writing and consequently to challenge his conventional image of a misogynistic writer. Three novels of his late period are chosen for close reading and detailed examination: *Chance*, *Victory* and *The Rescue*. All the three novels belong to the late period of Conrad's literary career which has produced a contradictory critical reaction among Conradian scholars. According to some critics this period shows signs of decline of Conrad's genius. Others, however, observe the woman's question as a new concern of the writer. Thus, the second chapter of the thesis summarizes critical approaches to women in Conrad's late novels. It illustrates the way they have developed and transformed from the beginning of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty first century. The rest of the work is divided into three sections, each focusing on the analysis of one individual novel and its main female character. Each novel is considered separately in terms of its form and structure in order to demonstrate the way Conrad experiments with the genre of romance and other related forms. Consequently, we prove that he creates a parody of the genre and its effects. With the intention of determining the significance of the main female protagonists in these so-called romances we examine the means of their representation in the narrative. By analysing specific examples we show that seemingly idealised portrayal of women is not Conrad's unconscious perception of women but a carefully chosen technique. For instance, Flora de Barral embodies a stereotypical heroine in Victorian novels which is systematically subverted and ridiculed in the narrative by the author. Lena, on the other hand, becomes a mythical symbol of femininity and a woman's power. Finally, Mrs Travers demonstrates the influence of deceptive images of femininity on woman's consciousness. Although certain similarities are observed between them the study attempts to prove that each analysed woman has her unique value for the theme which Conrad explores in his late works. Therefore, it is not simply an idealised and romantic presentation of female characters that we find in Conrad's late novels but a profound and thorough study of a traditional presentation of women in fiction.