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Ellen Burton Harrington. Conrad's Sensational Heroines: Gender and Representation in the Late Fiction of Joseph Conrad. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 173 Pp. ISBN: 9783319632964.

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est human beings that civilization has produced. And these letters could have found no better editor than Laurence Davies. He remarks that Conrad had “one of the finest ears of any English novelist of his or any other time, and he wrote to be heard as well as read” (xxvii). When Davies, in his introduction, says “Representation and quality are not exclusive terms,” or “it is better to be damned for plenitude than paucity,” (xxvii) or “[Conrad] didn’t string platitudes; he skewered them,” (xxxii) and when he tells us that gaps in the correspondence “are intriguing, even welcome, for they give the hermeneutic net some slack,” (xxvi) we find that Davies, too, writes to be heard as well as read. Joseph Conrad from Poland and Laurence Davies from Wales are united by the sensuous love of lucid prose.

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Ellen Burton Harrington. *Conrad’s Sensational Heroines: Gender and Representation in the Late Fiction of Joseph Conrad.*

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How far we have come! Not so long ago it was a critical truism that Conrad could not write about women or sex. Since then, groundbreaking feminist criticism has made the women in Conrad’s fiction visible, enabling critics like Susan Jones, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, Carola Kaplan, and Isobel Baxter to reassess his late work. Now Ellen Harrington joins this distinguished cohort. Just as Baxter revised our understanding of Conrad’s use of romance, Harrington reframes his use of sensational genre novels. She challenges critics who disparage his later work because it resembles popular forms by arguing that he used these forms subversively. Popular fiction reinforces patriarchal roles, but Conrad’s fiction, she argues, undermines them. Conrad emerges from this study as a critic of male dominance and an advocate of women’s autonomy.

Harrington organizes her book according to the stereotypes of women in sensational Victorian fiction: the mother, the pornographic object, the suicide, the fallen woman, the adulteress, and the “embowered” woman. This structure allows her to consider texts that speak to one another without sticking to the sequence of composition. As a result, texts that are often dismissed or ignored acquire new meanings. For example, “The Idiots” is discussed in relation to “Amy Foster” in one chapter and in relation to *The Secret Agent* and *Chance* in another. The final chapter compares “A Smile of Fortune” and *The Rover*. Harrington’s extensive research allows her to refer to many Conrad texts in addition to her primary examples, to cite other critics generously, and to use contemporary fiction and non-fiction to sketch the cultural context.

The leitmotif of each chapter is the impact of patriarchal institutions on women’s autonomy. Harrington demonstrates that Conrad exposes the deleterious effects of patriarchy. He dramatizes the consequences, for men and women, of trying to live up to traditional stereotypes as well as trying to oppose them. *Victory*, for example, contrasts Mrs. Schomberg and Lena. Mrs. Schomberg clings to her respectable marriage despite her husband’s contempt for her; Lena is indifferent to respectable forms and welcomes Heyst’s protection. Nevertheless, both women suffer. Schomberg’s lust for Lena causes him to disregard her feelings. Even though Heyst has more respect for her feelings, he suspects her of manipulating him for her own ends. Neither attitude saves Lena.

Similarly, Harrington’s chapter on “The Victorian Woman Suicide” finds more complexity in *Chance* than most critics acknowledge. Despite Marlow’s pejorative comments about women and his animosity toward Mrs. Fyne and her feminist theories, he condemns the social causes of Flora de Barral’s helplessness. The cruelest treatment comes from her father. Selfish, dishonest, and deluded, he embodies the worst abuses of capitalism and patriarchy. Like Bernie Madoff, he perpetrates a Ponzi scheme yet blames his downfall on others. In the name of paternal love, he tries to poison the man who rescues his daughter. Harrington concludes that Conrad uses “specific critiques of fatherly failing to illustrate the larger failings of society with regard to women” (71).

Harrington’s readings contest the widespread view that there was a falling off in the quality of Conrad’s fiction. The usual indicia of aesthetic quality such as narrative complexity, irony, and multiple meanings are present throughout his career. In addition to reclaiming Conrad’s late fiction for its literary quality and feminist stand, Harrington argues that it is modernist in its “ambivalence about changing gender roles” (79). Conrad conducts “a self-conscious critique of traditional roles for men and women without, however, envisioning any kind of productive resolution” (80). This refusal to affirm a solution is

characteristic of modernist forms. If *Heart of Darkness* is their prototype, Conrad's late work exhibits the same qualities.

Harrington establishes Conrad's insight into the social constraints on women's autonomy as well as his conviction that such constraints are wrong. He not only shows how patriarchy harms women, but how it backfires on men. Reading Conrad's late fiction from a feminist perspective, Harrington discerns the same qualities that critics praise in his early work.

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