

Reflection Statement

"Feminism is dated? Yes, for privileged women like my daughter and all of us here today, but not for most of our sisters in the rest of the world who are still forced into premature marriage, prostitution, forced labour".

Isabel Allende

At the forefront of our societal ascendance is the defining and categorising of certain individuals and groups of people. The social systems which impose these classifications often do so, in order to control and dominate. I found this societal framework interesting when grappling with the motivations and moral rationalisation within paternalistic social systems that advocate forced marriage.³⁶ My interest in this disturbing practice was prompted by my personal cultural experience while visiting the Middle East and being surrounded by distinct maternal voices and storytelling where marriage was often a topic of discussion. I remember being puzzled when hearing stories about young girls being forced into marriage and the subsequent abusive situations these young women faced. From my privileged western perspective, the custom of forced marriage was both foreign and detestable and I wanted to research how such an injustice is able to take place.

At the heart of my major work is a deconstruction of the ways that Imperialism and Colonialism have categorised the eternal feminine. Historically, patrilineal societies embedded this eternal feminine as a constructed 'essence' of women, whose virtues were regarded subordinate to that of the masculine, including "modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy...compliance, reticence, [and] chastity". This constructed feminine is propagated by paternalistic societies for enforcing the woman as the 'other', in order to assert male to dominance to their own advantage, including forced marriage. The eternal feminine, like

³⁶ A forced marriage differs from an arranged marriage in that there is no choice – one or both spouses do not consent to the marriage or their consent is extracted under duress. This duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.

literature, has transcended time and place, existing in representations of both Imperial and Colonial ruling systems of power. Thus, as I recognised that the eternal feminine in the Imperial was most particular in the commodification of women into marriage, I was able to connect it to the Colonial where this paradigm and their valuation resulted in marital inequalities. Ultimately, I illustrate through *The Forc'd Marriage* and *The Piano*, that literature as the most powerful mode of storytelling, with its representations of forced marriage and women, challenge the oppressive eternal feminine, to empower responders, particularly women, to critically reflect on their paternalistic societies and see women as multidimensional individuals.

The conceptual focus of the 'other' and the ways that literature can empower oppressed voices was inspired from my study of Geraldine Brooks' speech "A Home in Fiction' during the HSC Module B critical study. Brooks' speech poignantly expresses the value of literature in communicating the stories and voices of the unheard. I directly express the value of literature in exploring my concept by arguing that "deconstruction of the eternal feminine in *literature* empowers women by breaking their societal roles...and thus helps them realise they are not simply the eternal feminine, the 'other', rather, they are multidimensional characters". In addition, my theoretical study of genre in Extension 1 English is Science-Fiction and it introduced me to Ursula Le Guinn's *Left Hand of Darkness* wherein the colonialist overtones provide a threshold for the evaluation of 'otherness'. I wanted to take these ideas and create a critical response that applied the notion of 'otherness' to women and how they are perceived as such by men; thus, I suggest that "the gendered bifurcation of a patriarchal system...deems women as the 'other'. Further research into 'otherness' using the lens of the eternal feminine enabled me to examine the ways that forced marriages can be seen as a result of objectification. Furthermore, my study of narrative theories in Preliminary

Extension English provided me with Imperial and Colonial frameworks that supported my analysis of how values and ideologies perpetuate women as ‘other’.

Ideally, the intended audience for my major work would be an academic publication such as the *Feminist Studies Journal Online*, whose viewership specialises in research with both theoretical rigour and the representation of the female in literature. Publishing my Major Work on this forum, I am confident it will gain exposure to my intended demographic as my intent corresponds with that of the online journal, offering “social and political questions that...significantly affect women and men around the world”³⁷. I hope to immediately engage with my particular demographic with my formal and academic style and because my research and criticism address theoretical issues and offer analyses of interest to feminist scholars about the notion of forced marriages in literature.

I conducted extensive independent research into forced marriage in order to uncover the motivations and implications behind this contentious social custom. Thus, in a historiographical analysis of forced marriage, I recognised that Imperialism and Colonialism provided insight into paternalistic power structures that constructed ‘otherness’ through a common underlying paradigm of the eternal feminine. This directed me to a literary grounding, where through its various representations modern perceptions of forced marriage can be challenged. I looked at Behn’s play *The Forc’d Marriage* under the lens of Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions and Review of J.A. Hobson's Imperialism*. Thus, I came to understand that the unequal human and territorial relationship (without direct settlement) extended to the economic treatment of women (forced marriage): “conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure”. Campion’s film *The Piano* guided my investigation

³⁷ Tambe, A. (2015). About Us. Available: <http://www.feministstudies.org/aboutfs/history.html>. Last accessed 10th Aug 2015.

to various academic texts, including Reshela DuPuis' *Romanticising Colonialism: Power and Pleasure in Jane Campion's The Piano*, which explored how the male colonialists established significant power inequalities not only on the colonised but also women: "...the brutality of the British invasion of the Maori's homelands...must have been intended...as a 'parallel example of power'".

Investigating the critical essay medium, by viewing the works of essayists such as Reshela Dupuis³⁸, and Sara M. Evans³⁹, I discerned that in order to sustain a coherent argument, subsections would be most effective. By adopting this structure within my own analysis, I was able to write a concise dissertation that chronologically evaluated forced marriage in literature that embeds separate Imperial and Colonial timelines to reflect the dynamic nature of societies. However, this format, complete with a quote introducing each section, elucidates with clarity that literature, by representing different systems of power underscores the common social expectations and gender constructs, such as that of the eternal feminine, which enforces 'otherness' onto women for various personal advantages.

As I explored my central theories, I came across other composers and their theories, including Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* where she suggests the "importance and the impact [of] the very dissimilar experiences that divided women of diverse classes and races"⁴⁰. This influenced my understanding that the representation of the unique and multidimensional voices in literature can "empower women by breaking their societal roles". Cheryl McEwan's Review Article, *Journal of Historical Geography: Gender, Culture and Imperialism*, was also influential in the development of my critical response highlighting the

³⁸ Dupuis, R. (2000). *Romanticising Colonialism: Power and Pleasure in Jane Campion's The Piano*. In: Hanlon, D. L. and White, G.M. *Voyaging Through the Contemporary Pacific*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. p350-370.

³⁹ Evans, S.M. (1968). *Women's Liberation: Seeing the Revolution Clearly*. *Feminist Studies Journal*. 41 (1), p138-150.

⁴⁰ Hooks, B (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press. p1-15.

parallel between “context... being...explicitly gendered and of the varying roles of...women” as the inferior. I express this in my critical response, recognising that Behn’s *The Forc’d Marriage* and Campion’s *The Piano*, depict within the institution of marriage that the woman has become the ‘other’; an object assigned a value according to the possession of docile attributes considered affable to her male counterpart, thus, resulting in commodification and marital inequalities.

I am confident that my research has appropriately directed my use of sophisticated language and terminology applicable to the concept, that has also been alongside a careful selection of quotations has been also been critical in confronting complex ideas such as deconstructing the convention of the eternal feminine paradigm to support my concept of the entrenched patriarchy by ruling systems of power. This research into form, structure, language features and conventions developed an argument that culminated in my resolve that the patriarchal societies in Behn’s *The Forc’d Marriage* and Campion’s *The Piano*, may impose the eternal feminine to dominate women, but individuals can challenge. Thus, literature as a medium for providing such insights is a source of empowerment for victims of these cultural oppressions, endowing them with a voice.

This Major Work is the result of a deep passion for the empowerment of those who do not have the opportunity to express their voices, whether it be cultural, social, or personal reasons. After an extensive process of editing, drafting and questioning, I believe my critical response; ‘The Imperial and Colonial conquest of land and women alike’, has realised its purpose and effectively explores forced marriage in terms of imperial and colonial patriarchy that enforces ‘otherness’ under the lens of the eternal feminine. This Major Work has not only enabled me to explore and develop my conviction for the powerful expression of empowerment through literature, but it has also endowed me with a greater understanding of the relationship between texts and society. Thus, this course has taught me to assert my own

identity to challenge the expectations of society, to empower not only ourselves, but also those around us.

Word Count: 1499.