

The other side of the mirror



Society throughout history has treated females as victims. Patriarchal societies have shown that male values are more dominant over females. A poem that shows this is 'The other side of the mirror' by May Elisabeth Coleridge. Although this representation of women was extremely common in texts, there were cases where Oodgeroo represented women as strong independent beings such as in the poem 'Gifts'. Male patriarchal values were dominant over female's values.

This caused them to be treated unfairly and inferior to men. Language in the poem shapes the image of a woman in a white patriarchal society. In 'The other side of the mirror' 'A face bereft of loneliness' as she sat before her glass one day shows the image of a woman sitting in front of a woman preparing herself to be acceptable for society and to please males outside of the home. In the male gaze, females are only an object of beauty and must conform to this image as their opinion is not valued. 'It had no envy now to hide' shows a woman's jealousy of male's dominance.

Males of aboriginal society were different however. Although 'gifts' does mention male's values as the more dominant over females with the action of objectifying the female with 'pendants' and 'parrot feathers'. But it is female which are the more powerful figure and the one to take action against the male. The female is dominant and her values are respected. Females were victimised through male dominance. They were oppressed, not given a voice and severely marginalised.

This however was not the case in 'Gifts' as Oodgeroo uses action words in association with the female such as 'she shook her head'. A voice is also given through the use of 'no, she said'. This contrasts the idea in patriarchal societies where as men are usually the dominant and females victim. The woman is given a voice and poem shows the importance of female acceptance and the value of a woman in aboriginal society. Oodgeroo shows women as realistic, strong, powerful and in control of situations. Coleridge's approach to representing females was focused on female oppression and suffering. The woman in 'The other side of the mirror', had 'no voice to speak' and lived 'in silence' and 'in secret'.

Her 'speechlessness' shows her lack of voice and her 'hard unsanctified distress' her exclusion from society. Female gender roles cause them to be victims of their own gender. They are forced into these roles, as they have been born females. 'Parted lines of red', 'hideous wound' and 'bled' are symbolism for a woman's biology and fate to be a woman. The use of 'wound' and action word 'bled' show the pain and suffering of being a woman. Women were also victim to domesticity.

Symbolism using 'glass' as item of something indoors symbolises how they belonged indoors. Coleridge has given us the image of women being trapped in their own lives. The idea of marriage in society is evident in 'Gifts'. Although this poem is focused on aboriginal society, Oodgeroo has written about universal experiences. She shows that how in a home it is not always the females who are locked into doing what role has been

traditionally assigned to them. The voice of the woman saying '???' bring me tree grubs??™ shows her belief that both genders should have equal roles and work to do as practicality in a relationship is more important than gifts and adornments. Texts often victimised women as in patriarchal societies a woman??™s voice and opinion was not valued.