

Comment closely on Laski's presentation of patriarchy and the silencing of women in *The Tower*.

The Tower by Marghanita Laski deals primarily with women. However, it's not always obvious that Laski is talking about patriarchy. Instead most of the time Laski makes use of more subtle ways like the structure and architecture to present this theme. Alongside this Laski by drawing parallels between two women from very different periods presents patriarchy and the silencing of women as something continuous and persistent despite the day and age.

One of the most prominent devices the story uses is foreshadowing. This foreshadowing is most obviously conveyed through the parallels between Caroline and Giovanna Di Fernamano. Both of them are young brides and as Neville says to Caroline 'she's rather like you' which is concerning as he also calls her 'damned or lost'. But there are parallels to be drawn between Neville and Niccolo di Ferramano. Both the men seem to have a 'constantly accumulating horde of culture' as is shown with Neville's 'pilgrimages' and the stack of books in Niccolo's painting. This parallel is also concerning as Caroline has a visceral reaction to Niccolo's portrait, she shivers when looking at the portrait. And the 'deep black-set eyes' of Niccolo are stuck in her mind. This shows not only a continuity of misogynistic men but also how men are oblivious to their flaws, as Neville immediately recognizes the similarities between Giovanna and Caroline but is oblivious to the similarities between Niccolo and himself. Other less obvious foreshadowing starts right at the beginning with the little description of the tower that is provided. The tower is called 'a tower of sacrifice' and that immediately sticks out to be concerning. Even the other two pieces of architecture that she comes across can be seen as

foreshadowing. The 'two universally admired campaniles' or in other words bell tower can be indicative of warning bells and the crucifix is a symbol of sacrifice and ties in with the tower's description as a tower of sacrifice. The phrase 'moving finger' can be taken as a reference to the Edith Wharton story 'The Moving Finger' which is also about a young wife's portrait.

This reference to Wharton by Laski is also important to note as Wharton was one of the few popular and successful female writers in the supernatural genre during her time. An even less obvious parallel is the mention of gentle curves leading to the tower juxtapositioned with the narrow ill-made roads leading to the place where Caroline first sees the painting. The gentle curves can be seen as a false sense of security, while the narrow ill-made roads can be seen as a warning for the narrow stairs inside the tower. What's even more interesting is that Caroline's path when going to the tower starts with gentle curves in roads but keeps getting more and more troublesome; the gentle curves of the road turn to a rough track leading up to the top of the hill. Even when inside the tower, climbing the tower gets gradually more difficult as she climbs higher; 'At the two hundred and sixty-ninth step, her hand moving forward on the railing met only space. But now the breaks in the rail have become more and more frequent. At the three-hundred and seventy-fifth step the rail, as the moving hand clutched it, crumpled away under her fingers.'

Moreover, this could be representative of the difficult path that women often have to follow to get somewhere in life; it starts relatively easy lulling women into a false sense of ease and then progressively gets worse and worse as they get higher in their position. Similarly, the structure of the tower itself is a symbol of patriarchy. Its shape is described to be phallic (a tall round tower) and then the windows described to be 'too high' indicate that they might have been built for men who are generally physically larger, for women like Caroline it takes effort to look

into them and even then it's not possible. This can be representative of a patriarchal world that caters to men instead of men and puts women at a disadvantage. The high windows with their 'narrow slits' also make it difficult for Carline to see how high above she is and accurately estimate the level of danger, which again creates a false sense of security and prevents Caroline from knowing truly just where her climb is taking her. In addition, the narrow stairs in the tower could be reflective of the narrow mindset societal norms dictate regarding gender roles and how women do not have the same space to express themselves as compared to men. Climbing the stairs mirrors the long and tiring work women have to put in to try and be equal to men. And the whispers that Caroline hears when ascending the stairs 'I really ought to go down now,' said another part. 'I wish, oh, I want to go down now!' mirrors how society discourages such actions. But as Caroline discovers 'the whole thing's pointless' shows how the results of this work are often very underwhelming.

The story has an omniscient third-person narrator who talks as if they are living that moment with Caroline. Certain lines like 'What was it called?' or 'Why a portrait?' seem to be talking from Caroline's perspective and yet they have no inverted commas. This not only adds to the supernatural aspect of the story but also adds to the voice of the woman who is taken away. The voices she hears throughout her climb and especially when she reaches the platform also show how women's voices are taken away, it adds to the theme of silencing women. The line 'There is no other way,' said the voice in her brain, 'there is no other way', not only shows Caroline's voice being taken away but also shows her thoughts being taken away. It shows the manipulation of a woman at her breaking down, influencing her to the point where she cannot tell which thought is hers and which is not. She cannot even tell that these are not her thoughts until she hears them out loud and realizes. This also adds to the idea of conditioning that

Caroline has probably experienced due to Neville. In another instance the immediate correction of ‘no — not a picture a portrait —’ that Caroline does even when she is just thinking shows the extent of Neville’s influence. The dashes especially pinpoint that this correction is not natural but a result of Neville’s training, that this thought of correction does not belong to her but Neville.

The narrator also seems to be biased as indicated in the wording when talking about Neville often has some negative connotation, for instance, phrases like ‘urging on’, ‘constantly accumulating horde’ ‘Neville had been contemptuous’ ‘well-bred voice’. Both horde and contemptuous have strongly negative connotations. The word horde being used in a derogatory way to describe a group of things and contemptuous is a very strong word that means to be mocking or scornful. The alliteration in the words ‘hesitatingly, halting’ also conveys a certain bitterness. This bias that bleeds into the narration also shows how women express their bitterness towards patriarchy and how the complaints of women are more often than not extremely subtle. An obligatory sense of duty is also expressed in the phrases: ‘duty as a British Council wife’ and ‘dutiful’ and Caroline’s trips with Neville are called ‘pilgrimages’. What’s interesting is that this duty requires Caroline to obey Neville and please him which is a very clearly misogynistic view that sees women as lesser than and obliged to obey men.

Given that, Caroline's story can be used to study the struggle of women who are materially richer and more important in society and the conditioning they go through. The subtle manipulations that Caroline experiences are mirrored in the story’s content as this aspect of misogyny is tucked away between lines and it seems like the overall story is about supernatural experiences rather than a commentary on the lives of women. The subtler way of weaving in the theme of patriarchy reflects how patriarchal elements have woven themselves into the unexplained norms of society. The first word of the second paragraph is ‘Triumphantly’.

Caroline's triumph is being able to do something independently, away from her husband Neville, who in his well-intentioned approach has suffocated her. Signifying that gender norms are so incredibly woven into daily life that men and women do not stop to question them. Neville does not feel as if he is doing something wrong in 'was always urging' Caroline to educate herself more and Caroline herself although feels stifled by it, also does not think it wrong rather is eager to impress him.

While the story is largely about Caroline, the other female character that Laski sneakily introduces and uses to foreshadow Caroline's fate, is Giovanna di Ferramano. Giovanna only appears in a portrait in the whole story, but even though just her painting Laski communicates the patriarchy through the words 'rich pale colors' are very peculiar as one would not commonly describe rich colors to be pale. These colors can be indicative of how women's rich personalities are watered down for them to fit into societal norms. And Neville by saying Giovanna is rather like Caroline implies how Caroline's original personality has been watered down to fit Neville's ideal. His desire to 'accumulate Tuscan culture for himself' suggests that his understanding of culture is acquisitive. He scorns Caroline's suggestion that she attend art galleries because, in his eyes, they are just filled with 'stuff', whereas he has access to much more, indicating that women are not seen as equally capable as men and that men are considered to be greater than women. It is also important to note that the English translation of the name 'Ferramano' would be 'iron hand', another indicator of inflexible masculine control.¹ The tower hence by talking about two women shows how the patriarchal nature of society stays the same, even in different periods.

Laski through several different devices gives the story more depth than just being another story that deals with supernatural aspects. It deals with the theme of patriarchy in several sneaky

¹ <https://literaturestudies.co.uk/prose/stories-of-ourselves-volume-2/the-tower/>

ways rather than outright declaring that it is a story discussing misogyny, which is reflected in the intangible nature of the voice that Caroline hears when in the tower. In conclusion, the tower successfully albeit subtly presents patriarchy and the silencing of women which is characteristic of modern patriarchy that is so obviously there but one has to know where to look.