Images of Women and Politics of Domination in Helen Fields' "Perfect Remains"

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Abstract

As feminism evolved and reshaped ideas on womanhood and its politics over the past three centuries, postmodernist writers seem to continuously present discriminated images of women in novels, including spy fiction. Unless it is properly addressed, these misrepresented images of women underlying its gender politics brings about questions on the effectiveness of gender education and its equality. This study problematized images of women in Fields' *Perfect Remains* in order to understand the politics of domination between genders that suggest a continuous display of power. The analysis of the novel through the use of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework, enabled the identifying images of women and ways in which dominance is exerted in the discourse. Analysis revealed that postmodern societies through the novelist's lens continue to remain remote towards women. In a period, which celebrates women's achievement and freedom of speech, where they are thought to be strong and independent, men continue to ironically exert different methods of power in the strive to maintain their status quo, which is revealed in this research. This study contributes to the existing body of literature in the field of women studies and literature where it identified the presence of male dominance even in this modern era. On another hand, it also explores aspects of domination which appear in the form of intellect as a new field of study.

1. Introduction

History records many examples of women oppression, indicating the prevalence of sexual inequality which is permitted by institutions that are long and complexly rooted (e.g. Reiter, 1975; Rowbotham, 1977). Despite living in the twenty-

first century, women are continuously suppressed in many cultural and geographical regions. India, for example, is a pot of sexual discriminatory practices where a total of 239,000 girls under five, die from neglect linked to gender discrimination (Guilmoto et al., 2018), not including other forms of deprivation and disparities that Indian women undergo i.e. health (e.g. Panda et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2019) or education issues (e.g. Hoque & Mahanta, 2020). In China, women are still refused equal hiring opportunities, indicating clear gender discrimination within the government sector (Human Right Watch, 2020), despite efforts to restrain against discriminatory policies (Zuo, 2019; Gao, Lin, & Ma, 2016). Such oppression involves a play of dominance where women struggle in different situations, is a sad representation of social realities and this is often featured in literary texts to serve as a discursive platform. There is a co-existential relationship between literature and society; the author's language and ideas are very inspired by his society (Machaba, 2011). Since literature mirrors social realities, this requires an examination of the novelist's cultural background, social class, and mores that are influential of the text in different ways (Goldman, 1977), including crime fiction which are described as modern-day morality tales (Gouthro, 2014). Therefore, an analysis of female images in literature has significant relevance in modern politics and issues of democratic governance because women are inspired in their continuous champion for their own liberty and independence by these female images (Machaba, 2011). There is an intertwined relationship between literature and reality which provides a reason for exploring a female authored novel, *Perfect Remains* (2017) since it entails insights to issues of dominance towards and within the gender.

Literature has long served the purpose of educating the masses. Among the earliest propositions for such a role was Coleridge's concept of literature to enlighten and give delight. Literature as a platform to educate has aspired many directions in scholarship of new knowledge. New research directions are developed to innovate the relevance and usefulness of the discipline by incorporating Artificial Intelligence into making literature "alive" and animated (e.g. Bates, 2011). Since there is scarcity (if not none) in studies to understand the impact of imprecise images of women in literary works, one aspect of educating the masses seems to fail its purpose. Ismail (2019) discusses the need to educate Malaysians on the need for gender equality through the use of Literature, citing its roles to sustain national sustainable goals.

This research analyzed *Perfect Remains*—a story of tortured women in Edinburgh, Scotland where the murders are committed by Dr. Reginal King who plays double roles. He fictionalizes his series of high-class female victims to serve as camouflage while murdering prostitutes who resemble his idolized women. Both sets of women share similar physical traits which blurs the tracing of the real victims since the fictionalized women are shaped to be the prostitutes. Dr. King's sets of fictionalized six, includes 1) Elaine Buxton—a single ambitious lawyer, 2) Eva Turner—a single passionate detective inspector whose bold and charismatic

outlook enable her to handle situations professionally, 3) Jayne Magee—a kind-hearted reverend, 4) Natasha Forge—an unmarried lesbian, heading a department at the local college. Meanwhile, he abuses several, including Astrid, a prostitute whose life is gruesomely taken by the antagonist after going through severe torture.

A Google search on *Perfect Remains* revealed zero research studies, indicating a void in its analysis, which appeals to the study on gender studies, particularly those in spy fictions that feature dominance and its role in gender treatment. This study examined images of women and its intricacies in Fields' *Perfect Remains*, besides exploring forms which allow dominance to define both groups of fictional women. Its contribution can be helpful for policy makers to reconsider the author's scope of character selection and representations, especially those concerning women. At the same, issues of gender misrepresentations ought to continuously be within every writer's concern. As such, this research questioned authors' transparency on addressing the continuous treatment against women by the characteristics of certain sub-genres, which appeals to some groups of men, yielding for better improvement within the social practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Women in and out of Literature

The Renaissance produced among the earliest women writers where groups such as the Blue Stockings flourished to later inspire female novelists in the following century, which later, paved new directions, particularly at initiating crime fictions. Female crime writers defied general expectations of women's writing and female characters, which allowed a twist in narrative, giving women writers an outlet to express issues regarding female concerns (Gavin, 2010).

Female images evolve across time where the earliest narrative on women are found in fairy tales, with certain society's views on women. Early images of women in fairy tales are whimsical and dependent, suggesting a form of oppression. They are passive against male images, implying that women are meant to be submissive and self-sacrificing as wives and mothers (Nanda, 2014). These gender roles slowly progressed into accommodating more freedom for women to make choices, especially after the turn of postmodernism. This is seen with a change in perspective over the phrases of women freedom as "feminine, feminist, and female" (Showalter, 1979). The "feminist" phase observed women protesting against their traditional domestic roles, which then allowed more opportunities as the "female" phase depicted self-discovery and a search for identity and provided a reason to change when crime fiction has received scholarly attention (Murray, 2016). There was a mass transformation in penmanship; female writers have transformed the traditionally male dominated genre by writing about strong female characters that drive the plot and solve crimes since the past three decades (Hill, 2017) where women were usually portrayed to be victims of rape and murder (Gavin, 2010). Main messages underlying these new versions of crime fiction

focuses on fighting violence against women. However, surprisingly, Sisters in Crime encouraged women to remain as mystery writers (Gouthro, 2012), indicating society's refusal of acceptance. Murray (2016) explored on gendered constructions of identity and gender violence in crime fiction by the black female authors. A widespread prejudice against women, regardless of their socio-economic status, remains because female characters always have to negotiate their way around rigid and primarily gendered scripts. To the majority, violence against women is an anomaly but as a prevalent act that women in these texts have to endure with physical violence since it is an expression of discursive gender oppression that shapes the lives of female characters' (Murray, 2016).

In the real world, women have achieved plenty after the turn of the century. Their influence has moved beyond domestic spheres into a wider spectrum that affects mass education and thinking, creating waves of change. The female voice is now heard in fields such as volunteerism (e.g. Ai-jen Poo), women's right (e.g. Malala Yousafzai) and literature (e.g. J.K. Rowling), indicating societal acceptance and recognition for their contribution. In literature alone, new themes are woven into narrating female experience at dealing with domestic ordeals and patriarchy (e.g. Fawziya Koofi's *The Favored Daughter* and Sarina Sarwari's *Words from the Heart of a Woman*).

2.2. Gender and Power (Re)negotiation

While sex is defined based on human anatomy and physiological appearance that differentiate between men and women, gender appeals to the behavioural studies that provide a more complex understanding of assigned identities and roles, including social functions (O'Çonnell, 1985; Ismail, 2017). Acker (1990) states that gender images are culturally determined, which explains how gender identities are "invented and produced" across different cultures.

The power play between genders is traceable prior to the eighteenth century, where both genders were inseparable and co-existent. Yet, the distribution of power between both genders was unequal. Burke (1759), for example, discusses the equilibrium of power in the eighteenth century required women to be "modest, humble, dependent … patient, silent, and above all, chaste" while men were allowed to be fearful and coarse. Burke's idea of Sublime and Beauty can be associated with a concept known as *The Cult of True Womanhood* (Welter, 1966) which defined the roles of American white women who shared similar attributes as Burke's concept of women. In order to understand the play of power, the definition of power itself must be laid down where it has intrigued many, revealing many opposing perspectives. A popular dichotomy in definition is observable between Weber and Foucault (1978) where the former views the concept as permanent and hierarchical, which provided the basis for man's dominance over women. Meanwhile, Foucault (1998) perceives power as a form of negotiation; that truth is discovered and received in battles.

A negotiation of power over women's traditional gender representation is seen

in the present media where women are depicted as sexy, economically independent, and politically powerful, including in literature (Vincent & Naidu, 2013). This too, brought about a revamp in gender roles that Henry James's coinage of "new woman" exemplifies privileged women who are independent in spirit and readily to act on their own, providing new opportunities for women to take up in society, politics and economy as due to socio-political and economic forces (e.g. world wars and industrial revolution) (Mahajan, 2015). At the same time, these newly-constructed gender roles elevated women's level of power in society (Birch, 2011). As such, this new image of woman might have alarmed men, causing them to reaffirm their masculine power and reinforce control that some hypothesize that men opt for abuse, rape and murder over women (e.g. Murray, 2016). Violence towards women is not a matter of inflicting pain, but a means of establishing dominance and submission (Storr, 1964). Therefore, the rise in violence towards women reflects a crisis in gender order, where men begin to feel a loss of power and see a necessity to re-negotiate their masculinity. In other words, violence towards women is a way of positioning the weaker gender within a hierarchy, where manhood is associated with norms such as authority, prestige, rationality, strength and bravery, while womanhood is associated with passivity, irrationality, weakness and subordination (Vincent & Naidu, 2013).

2.3. CDA, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework and Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis

CDA aims at understanding discourse, that takes shape in the form of language use either in written or oral contexts, where it is a social process of constructing meaning that shapes social action (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Different discourses and ideologies can be found in texts that serve as semiotic elements of events (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). CDA links linguistic text analysis with a social theory in political and ideological processes (Fairclough, 1992) where these processes assist in identifying the internal blocks of discourse and their implied connotations. A text is featured may have are experiential value, relational value and expressive value (Fairclough, 1992).

In general, discourse analysis examines the way that discourses contribute to broader sociocultural systems and structures of meaning (Fairclough, 1995). This level of analysis focuses on the function of sexist discourse, and its role within organizations, institutions, and societies. This embedded process of analysis leads to approaches to studying texts, such as CDA, which narrows the process of analysis on the way power, domination, and ideology circulate through discourse. Fairclough (1992) believes that discourse, as a social practice, is shaped mainly by power relations in society, where it is interrelated. This is because language constructs specific political positions which causes unequal relations of power. Using this view as a base, CDA exhibits the positive effects discourse has on social identities, social relations, knowledge and belief systems.

Fairclough's (1992) Three-Dimensional Framework, which was employed for

this study (as seen in Figure 1) is made up of three dimensions. Firstly, a text (e.g. speech, writing, visual images or a combination of these), secondly, a discursive practice which involves the production and consumption of texts, and thirdly, a social practice. These dimensions thus, formed the three stages of CDA—description, interpretation and explanation. To him, discourse is a type of social practice, which embodies a social structure, which combines context, interaction and text. The text lies within the central, to indicate the result of an interaction. Both the process of production and process of interpretation rely on context (Fairclough, 1992).

Later, Van Dijk (1993) looks into placing discourses as a platform to identify the presence of inequality where specific complementary strategies include positive representations of a certain social group in contrast to the negative ones. The battle between the two is determined by hierarchy, where in order for control to be gained, one party needs to submit to the other; forming a control over the other. Among the key principles of CDA as identified by Van Dijk (1993), they emphasize on the nature of power relations that is discursive, which is later reiterated in Van Dijk's (2008) acknowledgement of power as a form of control.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This qualitative study employs CDA where its scope is not language-based since it aimed to discover patterns of reproduction in power asymmetries, which is a common methodology used in fields such anthropology, philosophy and communication (Ghazali, 2017). CDA takes normal discourse as a form of social practice in language that is socially influenced and influential. It targets to understand the relationship between language register, power, and ideology (Cots, 2006).
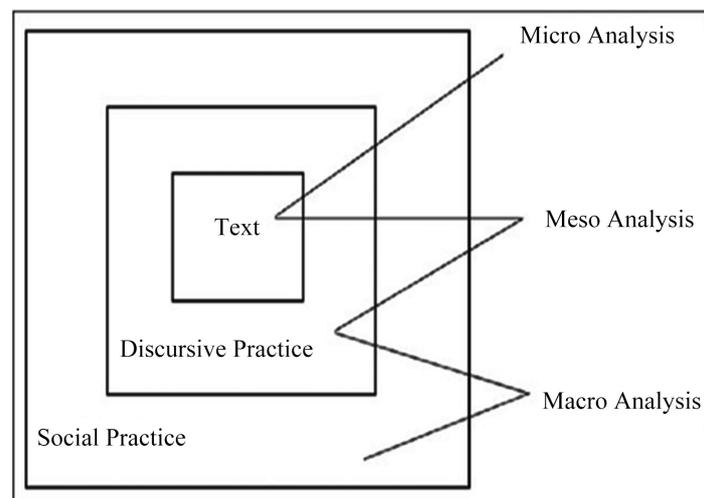

Figure 1. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework.

The main objective in all the various approaches to critical discourse analysis is that it promotes awareness regarding the strategies used in establishing, maintaining and reproducing symmetrical or asymmetrical relations of power as enacted by means of discourse (Ghazali, 2017). Critical Discourse analysts focus on the elements of discourse in which dominant ideologies are adopted or challenged, and competing and contradictory ideologies coexist (Tenorio, 2011). CDA is a discipline that questions the status quo, by identifying, analysing, resisting and counteracting portrayals of power abuse as transmitted in private and public discourses (Ghazali, 2017), which thus, explains for the use of CDA in this this study as it focuses on how women are portrayed and how domination towards them is manifested in the text.

3.2. Research Analytics

This research used Fields' *Perfect Remains* as a discursive text in order to prove the execution of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework (Figure 1) where the novel was selected clearly to imply that despite modern call for gender equality and act against discrimination, there are subconscious messages that suggests others. Spy fictions, such as *Perfect Remains* are examples of popular reading selection among young adults whose minds are prone to be programmed at continuing traditional practices of gender inequality.

Although categories initially guided the study, there were other aspects that emerged later throughout the study such as relevant situations, settings, meaning, and nuances. An inductive process was employed as the data was coded by making short notes to label what the data implies, then it was organized into themes, and patterns and structures that were significant to the topic were identified. The general purpose of this process was to link the sections of data that fit within the broader categories of how women are portrayed and how domination towards women is shown in the novel. Next, the data was interpreted to build theories, in the form of arguments that provided answers to the research questions stated earlier. Finally, the analysis was presented not just by mere description, but by using the data in the analysis section to pose further arguments.

Table 1 shows the process of analysis. A careful reading was conducted to fully understand the context that sets the plot and later identify how women are portrayed through the eyes of each character, especially the protagonists and antagonist. This step is crucial because of two reasons: 1) to avoid misinterpretations caused by misconceived context of a statement or view, and 2) to understand the reasons behind the negative or positive portrayals of women, along with exertion of dominance towards them. The second step was to extract examples of positive and negative portrayals of women from each chapter that reflect the exertion of dominance towards them. During this process, short notes was taken to indicate what each statement implies in order build a list of themes. The data extracted was then categorized into various themes in the form of a table which also included the name of characters that said the statement and whom

Table 1. Steps in research analytics.

Steps	Description
1	Careful Reading
2	Extraction of examples
3	Note taking on contexts
4	Form a table of explanation
5	Writing a detailed analysis

the statement was referring to. Among some of the themes on domination towards women include intellect, inflicting fear, physical abuse, religious manipulation, manipulation of rights. To further quickly identify these themes, a table was formed using Excel; two columns were formed with one identifying the statement and another to explain the reason for statement, where the latter is meant to provide context of the statement to assist analysis.

Upon the completion of this process, a few relevant themes emerged on the portrayals of women (both positive and negative) and the exertion of dominance towards them. This step helped associate an understanding of the textual functions to the elements in Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework. The final step was to write a detailed analysis on the variety of women portrayal as well as the reasons and methods used by men and the society to dominate women with respect to the various situations, contexts and background of the characters.

4. Discussions

4.1. Images of Women in *Perfect Remains*

Prefect Remains provides both positive and negative images of women.

4.1.1. Positive Images of Women

While Dr. King mostly views women positively, he has divided impressions of them (which are made up of Professor Forge, Detective Turner, Reverend Magee and Attorney Buxton). His perception towards this group of women hints innuendos of admiration and awe, which ranges from intelligence, bravery to successful.

In the first group, the intelligent women are mainly professionals, who are in their mid-thirties with high social status in society. In Professor Forge's case, her intelligence is recognized by Dr. King who is her envious subordinate; her "intellectual gifts were undeniable", he exclaims (p. 123). Not only is she intelligent, she supersedes his expectations of a regular intellect among most faculty members since she is young. His amazement with her intelligence initiates the moment when she speaks of philosophy as an independent discipline, declaring that that he has heard enough. Of course, his amazement for Professor Forge is compared to his mother whom he views to be only limited to her house, having to mind the house and "fussing" over chores and cooking. As such, his mother's

state of intellect is only limited to such small domestic geography, unlike Professor Forge whose pleasure aims to "enlighten the mind". Similarly, Det. Turner is also evaluated based on her capacity to think, instead of her looks. He recognizes her as "a woman who values mind above body, who can analyse and comprehend" (p. 331). She appears to be pale without any make-up, giving the impression that she does not aim to impress others. Even a non-threatening character such as the policeman acknowledges Rev. Magee for her brightness, informing others that she "Always has her nose in a book" (p. 56).

This group of women are also described to brave individuals who are capable of protecting themselves, making bold decisions and facing situations fearlessly. A particular character with the most frequent description of bravery is Detective Turner. She is the source of inspiration when danger lurks. Prof. Forge, for example, sees Turner as a role model when the former receives threats, which marks clear recognition for the latter's bravery. Professor Forge exclaims, "Ava got a death threat and she didn't run away" (p. 231) and that "she is unafraid". Even Dr. King is astonished by Det. Turner's lack of fear, acknowledging her bravery that: "Perhaps she genuinely had no fear" (p. 300) and that "she wouldn't be intimidated as easily as Elaine and Jayne". In fact, the professor herself is bold enough to declare her ability to defend herself if danger lurks—"I've got chains on both doors and I'll lock all the windows. Don't worry about me". Similarly, Rev. Magee is also portrayed as a brave person. It is her bravery that fuels her composure during the scariest situations, which allows her to champion her fears by relying on her faith for emotional and mental strength. Unlike the precedent traditional female images, the reverend challenges Dr. King to a game of chess in order to save Grace's life. This leaves the antagonist off guard, shocked at her brave gesture; "He hadn't anticipated that she would do anything either so brave or so brazen as to challenge him to a game for the woman's life" (p. 117). Similarly, Attorney Buxton to shoulder her status as a divorced woman to champion in one of the city's largest firms shows her courage and single-minded in keeping things organized. Yet, she remains the easiest one to be "erased from the living world".

Women in *Perfect Remains* are also portrayed as successful in terms of their career merits. Their success is not measured by material possessions but by intellect, position in the organization and career progress, which privilege them with a higher social status that their profession modifies their names. For example, Attorney Buxton, who serves in one of the biggest commercial law firms in the city, is described extensively for her career performance. She excels in her profession, managing a rigorous lifestyle of an attorney in a big city such as Edinburgh. Prof. Forge is the youngest Head of School at the University of Edinburgh. Heading a faculty in a university with a reputation such as Edinburgh, would require charisma and peer recognition for her scholarship and leadership. Not only that, Prof. Forge establishes her reputation with her students by implementing the carrot and stick exercise, only suggesting that she leaves no room

for failure. After the reverend's abduction, the protagonist was able to identify a pattern in the types of women being abducted. All of them share a similarity because "each was an achiever. They were women to admire. And Rev. Magee had left quite a legacy" (p. 168). Each is capable of reinforcing power onto themselves, through their merits in career performance.

While there are other positive images associated with these women, these combined descriptions project a group of strong women who are capable of manifesting presence that dismantles a weak man's mind against what he is accustomed to. His perception of women during his formative years are influenced by his mother, who is mainly confined in her domestic space, that causes her limited intellect and capacity.

4.1.2. Negative Images of Women

While the antagonist fictionalizes his idol women, Dr. King deals with another type of women in reality, which are portrayed negatively. These women (which are made up of Astrid and several other unnamed women) are described through his lens, which reduces their essence in societal presence and purpose. It should also be noted that these women are not given their surnames, unlike the socially-respected group of women. Nonetheless, there are times when his idolized women are also perceived negatively.

Women from the lower social ranking are repeatedly given a vilifying impression by Dr. King; to him, they are vile—someone who is morally bad (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). As the antagonist expresses disgust, labelling the prostitutes as equivalent to "these feces on the shoe of humanity" (p. 363), he degrades them by lowering their credibility to the lows of mankind. In his perception, prostitutes deserve no respect since he perceives them as inhibiting the lowest social status. However, Attorney Buxton is also portrayed that way in certain instances as the antagonist called her a "putrid cunt" (p. 47). The reference of "cunt" is derogatory in nature, indicating disrespect. The attorney's presence is further equated to a "disgusting creature" that causes a vilifying effect on him that has shaken her head to and fro like a rabid dog" (p. 41). However, these words were only thrown at her when he was angry and did not get cooperation from her.

Besides that, certain groups of women (which are made up of teenage and working girls) in this novel are portrayed to be incapable of controlling their sexuality, deeming to be categorized as lustful. Dr. King describes young girls as lustrous at colleges—"flash their bare legs and their under-developed tits at the childish boys who strut around campus as if they were gods" (p. 358). Such a perception is not solitary. The Sisters from a religious institution, for example, also share the same views about young girls as lustful as they discuss about these teenage girls: "they weren't children when they were shaming themselves, were they" (p. 192), particularly referring to impregnated teenagers. A few other characters including the protagonist also viewed Astrid as lustful which was reflected in the line "rubbing her feet in my crotch by dessert" (p. 235) and "Astrid threw herself at me in the most vulgar way imaginable and I had to push her off" (p. 236).

In exploring types of women images in *Perfect Remains*, women are mainly portrayed as positive and negative. These women either fall within two extremes—intelligent, brave, professional and successful, or vile, lustful, stupid and sex objects. As such, the concept that discourses are used to justify inequality through paired complementary strategies: positive representations of one's own group, and negative representations of others was used (Van Dijk, 1993). This was mainly because while collecting the data from the novel, two portrayals of women were identified. One category being positive portrayals and the other being negative portrayals. However, when analysing the portrayals in relation to the context and characters in the novel it was evident that all the positive portrayals referred to women of a high social status and the majority of the negative portrayals referred to women of a lower social status.

Thus, social status is the key to how women are portrayed in this novel. The women in this novel who are considered of a high social status are women who are educated, working as professionals, independent and in the age group of 30 - 40 years old. Women considered as from a low social status are women whom are uneducated, sex workers or working as administrators, dependent and in the age group of 13 - 40 meaning this category include teenagers as well.

Despite the literature implies women as the weaker sex (Vincent & Naidu, 2013), this research suggests that domesticated women and homemaking is viewed negatively as women are expected to educate themselves and strive to be successful in life. This is the reason for the need to feature Attorney Buxton, Rev. Magee, Det. Turner and Prof Forge as intelligent, successful and professional women who are admired and respected for these qualities. Despite their positive representations, the novel shows that women are still expected to be submissive, being pure and religious, which are traditional expectations for women in society.

In the wake of hope, Mahajan (2015) shares a shift in women representations where Indian literature includes women portrayals as individuals, who are not silenced and controlled by patriarchal norms but also turned into "new women" that resist traditions, orthodox concepts and values emerged in literature. This is an attempt to break away from the conventional social expectations of women and their representations which is equally discussed in this study. Det. Turner, for example, resists the traditions, orthodox concepts and values and managed to be a successful independent individual. The traditional practice of restraining women from holding high positions in organizations are dismantled and given a new image of success in *Perfect Remains*. However, the study confirmed that despite the development and changes in women's status quo they are still being silenced and controlled by patriarchal norms. This provided evidence that the portrayal of women in literature has not fully evolved from the traditional ways and still embodies elements of being the weaker sex.

Moreover, Gavin (2010) states that violence against women was the primary concern of feminist crime fiction as they are usually portrayed as victims that are

captured, raped, murdered, slaughtered and dissected into evidence by forensic detectives. Through the analysis done on the novel, this concept was reassured because that was exactly what women were portrayed as. Gavin (2010) also highlights that female detectives in crime fiction are often narrated as intelligent, confident and independent women who pay attention to domestic environments and follow their intuition when solving crimes. This was true for *Perfect Remains* as Det. Turner has all the characteristics—bravery and intelligence, which makes a wonderful combination as a detective who is equipped with her instinctive feeling upon solving a crime. However, it was disappointing that she is also abducted, showing that crime fiction still portrays even their strongest female characters remain victims of scavenging males.

In conclusion, the novel portrays women positively but still fails to break the traditions of women's portrayal in literature. Regardless of the positive attributes given to women in the novel, they are still portrayed negatively and as the weaker sex. One of the significant differences this study has with past research is that women are now portrayed and perceived according to their social class where a higher social class has positive attributes and the lower social class has negative attributes.

4.2. Women as Dominated Objects

Women are described in numerous ways to be inferior in *Perfect Remains* where dominance is exerted and established by imposing power onto the intellect of women and inflicting fear. These forms of domination are interconnected as one leads to or as a result of another. Women in the novel are mostly educated and intelligent who hold high positions in organizations, gradually progressing towards achieving equal treatment as men. In fact, some are superior to men. Since intellect is the new domain of competition, men try to subjugate women through their intellect, reinstating the traditional social power as suggested by Van Dijk (2008). The antagonist, for instance, is caught in a dilemma as he constructs a tug between admiration for these intellectual women and refusal to accept their intellectual superiority against him. As such, he makes various attempts to reshape their thinking according to his preference where despite their intellectual capacity, they remain as his subordinates in status. Dr. King expresses this dilemma, saying that: "Whoever thought it was an easy task persuading an intelligent woman to do what was best for her, was a fool. It was a challenge, even for a man of his faculties. The brighter the woman the harder it was" (p. 3).

Because of this dilemma, Dr. King creates a tool of domination through the enforcement of fear in order to subjugate his intellectual women by forcing them to behave according to his liking. Fear is inflicted through threats and physical abuse in order to obtain "compliance" in order to "help subdue her" (p. 43) The women in the novel who turn to be his victims often fear his presence as a consequence of their actions. In a conversation between Ava and the antagonist, he explains his actions, justifying that "there will be fear if punishment is necessary,

and that only results from bad behaviour. Without one, there will be no need for the other" (pp. 331-332). Once rules are set, failing to comply results in severe consequences. This shows his manipulation with the conviction of rule-following and how he uses fear to turn these women into submission.

Power in a social relationship is central to the concept of CDA (Wallimann, Tatsis, & Zito, 1977) which is usually institutionalized by hierarchy (Van Dijk, 1993). For power to exist, it must be manifested through orderly submission in ranking which is performed through dominance, or the abuse of power where it involves one group controlling the other (Van Dijk, 1993), including the control of action (e.g. limiting the freedom of others) or cognition (e.g. influencing others' ideological stance) (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In *Perfect Remains*, dominance is established by controlling women and their actions that include the most basic of rights (such as using the toilet) while their cognition was controlled by breaking their inner fortitude. This was clearly presented in the findings of this study.

Fairy tales personify ways that societies' attempt to oppress women, making them passive as it continues to ingrain a traditional idea that women should be submissive wives and self-sacrificing mothers (Nanda, 2014). Despite the change of time and advent of technology, this study traced high frequency of submission and self-sacrificing in the novel which continue to provide an argument for unwavering past traditions that remain present. The novel shows how religion is used to emphasize the idea of passivity and submissiveness through quotations from the Bible (1 Corinthians, 14: 33-35), which is the essence of sublimity. The excerpt was used to manipulate a misconceived notion for disgrace when women speak in church, suggesting that they remain silent and practise submission.

Another interesting observation is drawn from Murray's (2016) study on gendered constructions of identity and violence as presented in crime fiction where physical violence is the expression of discursive gender oppression that shapes the lives of female characters. Similarly, this study observed the use of physical violence was in order to instil fear and to oppress women. Once abducted by the antagonist, the women go through various forms of physical abuse in order to instill fear and submission. This was also explained in the findings of the current study.

Furthermore, Henry James's coined term "new woman" is an example of the many privileged women who are pleasured by their new independent spirit and ability to act on their own. These representations of new women can be seen in *Perfect Remains* which highlights characters who are equally independent, intelligent and successful in their careers. As Murray (2016) states, men abuse, rape and murder woman to reaffirm their power and control. This notion was reaffirmed in the current study as the antagonist did abuse and murder woman to establish his power which was exemplified in the findings. Storr (1964) states that violence towards women is not a matter of inflicting pain, but a means of establishing dominance and submission and a method of controlling women which was proved by the line "then again if the prospect scared her sufficiently

to induce compliance, why shouldn't he use the threat as part of his portfolio to help subdue her?" (p. 43).

Vincent and Naidu (2013) conclude that the rise of violence towards women reflects gender crisis, where men feel the loss of power and their need to re-establish their status. As such, subjugating women into a state of physical humiliation is deemed to be an appropriate way to reposition women into their supposedly place within the hierarchy where womanhood is associated with subordination. This is in line with the findings of the current study as the antagonist feels inferior to his boss, Prof Forge and desires a partner similar to her. This obsession for a woman who he cannot obtain leads to his many abductions of random women who share similar characteristics as Prof Forge and later, tries to subdue them into imitating the desired image while re-establishing his power status. His failure to possess and control a successful woman must have caused uncertainty with his power possession. This could be viewed in the line "she had her arms crossed defensively over her chest. Little did she know how appropriate it was, he thought" (p. 59), to be man-handled.

In a new direction, this current study adds onto the Body of Knowledge by shedding light on the role of religion as a tool of domination against women, which has not been included in the reviewed literature. Despite the progress in the studies of gender roles and concepts, certain religious institutions seemed to have remained indifferent about the deviant concept of women subjugation and manipulation. Religion as the pillar of human beliefs and worldviews widely affects the way women are perceived and treated. *Perfect Remains* provides continuous evidence that women are still manipulated through the use of religion with orthodox concepts still practised. This shows that religion plays an important role in the failure of obtaining gender equality.

In conclusion, the current study is in line with the findings and conclusions of previous studies stated in the literature review. The novel reflects that little development has been made in achieving gender equality. The growth of women is highly appreciated, admired and respected by the society and men in particular, however, as portrayed in the novel men are still struggling to accept the fact that women are their equal and can even be in a superior position to them. Thus, reaffirming the pattern in crime fictions where men abduct, abuse and murder women to establish their dominance.

5. Conclusion

Women in Fields's *Perfect Remains* are portrayed both positively and negatively. The positive images of women are those with the reputable success and brilliance while those with negative portrayals are associated with the underprivileged lifestyles, suggesting a lower social class as due to their occupation and age. Both categories of women are dominated into different groups based on separate domains: intellectual, fear-inflicted, physically abused, piety, mental and emotional state, possession, and manipulation of rights.

This research echoes Vincent and Naidu (2013) in suggesting that women portrayals and power play has not gone through a major breakthrough in literature. In comparison to the earliest form of literature, the present literary works reflect a change in gender roles. Women in literature have shown changes over the years—from domesticated individuals who are submissive to their family into women who are independent, strong, intelligent and professional while possessing the capacity to make brave decisions and compete with men. The way the society views women as reflected through literature also shows the way perception towards women has evolved. Women, who were once expected to be domesticated, take up new forms of admiration; instead, society and men, in particular, view educated working women as ideal. However, one aspect remains similar—literary works, including crime fiction, seem to continuously feature women subjugation. Dr. King as the antagonist, represents the more conventional set of thinking that oppresses women and contains them as the weaker sex. Fields's *Perfect Remains* shows that women are portrayed as victims who are abducted, tortured and murdered regardless of their strength and intelligence.

As such, there is a dire need to reconsider the input on education and its syllabus when it comes to gender equality and women empowerment. Questions on the sufficient availability of women empowerment in the required reading materials in schools and the type of education given with regards to gender equality, need to be asked. This is because despite how rigorous and competitive women are in the challenges of the new era, they will never equate a similar position as men unless the latter are enlightened to provide equal respect in social growth, made possible through the use of creative education. This paper is double-sword in its contributions where on one hand, this study contributes to the existing body of literature in the field of women studies and literature where it identified the presence of male dominance even in this modern era. On another hand, it also explores aspects of domination which appear in the form of intellect as a new field of study. It also analyses aspects regarding positive and negative women portrayal and methods of power play in relation to women. The portrayal of men and women in various roles as fair should bring about positive effects and motivate learners (Ismail et al., 2013). This eventually enable learners to engage in wider reading of good literary works and also develop an understanding of other societies, cultures, values and traditions (Isa & Mahmud, 2012; Naser & Aziz, 2017). In Malaysia alone, despite the numerous studies done on evaluating text selection and its relevance at including gender representations (e.g. Yasin et al., 2007; Hamid et al., 2007; Othman et al., 2012; Bakar et al., 2015; Hashim et al., 2018), a report on Gender Equality (Social Sustainability Index Foundation 2015) informs us that gender equality remains lacking in the nation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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