

Seohui Choi (Tara)

Professor Foster

English 31

November 28th, 2023

Critical Analysis of the drawing in comparison to *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*:

Women's Desire for Freedom in the Medieval Era

The Red rose contained in the case in the center of the picture resembles what Society expected from a woman- beautiful, graceful, and flawless like a red rose. In Annette Stott's *Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition*, she states "From the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, portraits of women often included a single bloom or a bouquet of flowers to convey more general connotations of fertility and beauty." (Stott 61) The flower depicts how Society wanted a woman to look like a perfect wife and mother with pure morals. The rose could also be viewed as a symbol of freedom, just like how Nature helps Joan realize her desire to be free and not be forced to be married to a man she barely knows. The woman in the picture looks at the rose as if it is what she longs for, symbolizing this scene from the story. However, the rose is trapped inside the case, and the woman holding the case is simply staring at the trapped flower. The woman is looking at herself, the rose. Despite her acknowledging that the rose is trapped in this glass case, she cannot free the rose- as women did not have the right to pursue freedom. On the other hand, a ray of light is coming from the rose's direction, and it is the only light source in the drawing. This embodies the hope within herself, hoping she can be considered an individual and independent person, unlike an exhibition in a museum.

The dark background symbolizes the grim expectations of Society revolving around women living in the medieval era, similar to the period when one of the main protagonists of

Virginia Woolf's story, *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*, was based on. *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500* mentions that Medieval views on patriarchy automatically granted the husband authority to be the head of the household, which led to the wife's legal personality and the property she owned and brought to the marriage being subsumed into her husband. (Ward 50)

While Society thought stereotyping women was keeping women safe and beneficial for themselves, in reality, a lot of women's rights and freedoms were unfulfilled- as they either ended up being the property of men when they were married or were viewed in negative ways when they wanted to be independent. However, Joan Martyn expresses desires that align with Demenchonok's analysis of the works of Kant that state "For Kant, domination and subjection trample human dignity and run contrary to human nature." (Demenchonok 192) Near the end of Joan Martyn's journal, Joan forgets about the desire for freedom she once had, as nature fails to remind her of her desire to be free and instead, reminds her of the responsibilities she has over land as a wife of a nobleman. (Woolf 266) Joan Martyn's personality changed after Society's expectations pressured her to change; her views of romanticizing love and the freedom she wanted to pursue disappeared after she had to fulfill her role. Despite the woman's desires shown in the picture, overall, the drawing portrays the stereotypes and standards of women created by Society, which ended up pressuring and surrounding them everywhere they went.

Works Cited

- Demenchonok, Edward. "Learning from Kant: On Freedom." *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2019, pp. 191–230. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26625467>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2023.
- Squier, Susan M., et al. "Virginia Woolf's The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 1979, pp. 237–69. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/441323>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2023.
- Stott, Annette. "Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition." *American Art*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1992, pp. 61–77. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109092>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2023.
- Ward, Jennifer. *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500 : 1200-1500*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csufresno/detail.action?docID=4507362>.