Taking it further: ideological perspectives

Perspectives can also be described in terms of the ideologies they represent. Ideologies are systems of beliefs and values. Creators of texts who adhere to particular ideologies represent their subject matter in ways designed to reinforce those beliefs and values. Recognising these within texts can help you articulate perspectives more precisely. Some common ideological perspectives are listed below.

- A feminist perspective challenges stereotyped, traditional or disempowering views of women specifically and gender roles in general. A patriarchal perspective reinforces them.

- A postcolonial perspective challenges stereotyped, traditional or disempowering views of colonised peoples.

- An environmentalist perspective advocates for environmental conservation over human exploitation.

- A humanitarian perspective values human life over economic considerations.

- A Christian perspective views the world in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

ACTIVITY

Explore ideological perspectives

Livestock farming is a contentious issue, with different ideological perspectives contributing to the debate. These include an animal rights perspective, a capitalist perspective, an environmental perspective and a religious perspective, among others.

1   Adopting one of these perspectives, write a brief persuasive text that aims to convince an audience to moderate their meat consumption.

2   Identify a challenge to one of the perspectives above. For example, the role of livestock farming in promoting social justice within developing countries by organisations such as Oxfam challenges the animal rights perspective. Write an imaginative text, adopting a perspective that represents this challenge.

Endnotes

① Lisa Scaffidi cited in 'REX Architecture's Perth tower gets nod from council', *ArchitectureAU*, 13 July 2017, https://architectureau.com/articles/new-yorks-rex-architecture-to-transform-perth-waterfront/

② Jörg Imberger cited in 'Elizabeth Quay seen as litter magnet' by Daniel Mercer, *The West Australian*, 19 September 2012, https://thewest.com.au/news/wa/elizabeth-quay-seen-as-litter-magnet-ng-ya-296630

③ Deborah Cullinan cited in 'Perth's Elizabeth Quay lacks soul, sense of place, US urban art expert Deborah Cullinan says' by Laura Gartry, 2 April 2016, ABC News, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-02/elizabeth-quay-lacks-soul-expert-says/7294002

④ 'Go Back To Where You Came From needs to go back to the drawing board' by Ben Neutze, *Daily Review*, 31 July 2015, https://dailyreview.com.au/go-back-to-where-you-came-from-needs-to-go-back-to-the-drawing-board/27695/

⑤ 'Birdcall: 33°21'N 43°47'E' by Liam Davison, published in *The Best Australian Stories 2013* edited by Kim Scott, Black Inc., Collingwood, 2013.

How texts construct Others

The Other can be represented in different ways: as one to be feared, pitied, scorned, excluded, destroyed, exoticised, infantilised, stereotyped, romanticised or mythologised. These same processes are apparent in texts, in which textual features and conventions – such as characterisation, authorial voice, structure and language – are used to create perspectives from which certain individuals and groups are perceived as Other. Some ways in which this is achieved in visual and written texts are explored below.

Othered by gender

In analysing texts through the lens of gender studies, 'hegemonic masculinity' is the term often used to describe the culturally dominant version of masculinity that is authoritarian, physically strong, resilient, heterosexual, competitive and associated with the public rather than the private or domestic sphere. This ideal of masculinity and being male is represented as the preferred manner of being and, by binary definition, femininity and being female or any other gender identification is Othered and therefore devalued.

An obvious example of this is through exclusive language such as chairman, policeman, fireman and headmaster, which presume those roles to be undertaken by men and thereby exclude women. While we now know to use gender-inclusive terms such as chairperson, police officer, firefighter and principal, it is important to look out for the ways in which language can naturalise certain gendered identities and behaviours, thus Othering gendered identities that are not consistent with the norm.

Othered by race

To be Othered by race means to be excluded from the dominant group by means of racial classification. Historically, as a result of colonisation, the dominant group or norm in Australia has been white or European. Membership of an imagined 'white' race or Western cultural group has given certain individuals and groups easier access to power because, due to their status, they can perpetuate the system of exclusion by employing, promoting, publishing and marketing from the dominant racial group.

The opinion piece on the next page conveys the racial Othering experienced by columnist Claire Low as she grew up in Australia. You can find similar experiences in Anh Do's autobiography *The Happiest Refugee*, Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* and the anthology *Growing Up African in Australia*, edited by Maxine Beneba Clarke, Magan Magan and Ahmed Yussuf.

Exoticisation

To exoticise someone is to represent them as foreign and unusual. The individual who is exoticised may appear glamorous, but they are also represented as outside the social mainstream, not quite belonging to or having power in conventional society.

For us to analyse these representations critically we might question how they reinforce stereotypes and to what extent such stereotyping disempowers certain groups through the process of Othering.

Pom Klementieff as Mantis in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*

EXAMPLE Exoticisation in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*

The following sample analysis focuses on the exoticisation of the character of Mantis in the film *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*.

Identifies the Other and associates it with stereotyping. Opening sentence also establishes the context of Western film but could provide more specific contextual information.

Uses the term 'exotic' to refer to a specific aspect of Othering and identifies a feature of Mantis that is 'exotic'.

Parentheses used effectively to add explanatory detail without losing the main thread of argument.

An extension of this point might analyse the way in which, in Western literature, the exotic 'East' is often represented as feminine in contrast to the masculine West.

The stereotype of a beautiful, compliant, alluring Asian woman is a familiar inclusion in popular Western films. Mantis in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is one such example. She is represented as 'exotic' through her exaggerated eye make-up that emphasises the almond shape of her eyes. Because eyes are so central to our understanding of the self (as 'the window to the soul') we read this as accentuating her difference from Western characters. Mantis is a docile character whose superpower is to calm and induce sleep. Initially in thrall to the character of Ego, she is depicted as supporting an older white male she refers to as master. She is also represented as stereotypically feminine in her compliance, sensuality and, as Drax the Destroyer describes, 'weak and skinny'. Mantis is constructed as 'empathic' and

acknowledges her sensitivity to emotions. This is in direct contrast to the original construction of Mantis in the Marvel comics as a strong, powerful woman who is skilled in martial arts. She is also human and of Vietnamese heritage, and her reconstruction as a literal alien in the film exaggerates her foreign Otherness. Overall, her representation in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* reinforces the representation of Asian women as exotic, submissive and vulnerable, acting in a binary against the masculine strength of the West.

Comparison to the representation of Mantis constructed in the original comics highlights the filmmakers' conscious choice to exoticise her character.

This linking sentence suggests a lead-in to further analysis of the East/West binary.

Infantilisation

Another way of representing the Other is by infantilisation, which means depicting an individual or a group in a condescending way, or as though they are infants.

For example, the image above Others the elderly by representing them in a patronising manner. The way in which the doctor leans over the older woman, along with her smiling facial expression, might be read as condescending because, while she appears happy and caring, her body language signals that she is treating an individual who has less power (due to age and immobility) as incapable, incompetent and pitiful. This approach to vulnerability reinforces a power difference between the norm (young) and the Other (old).

Individuals who are Othered by exoticisation are sometimes also infantilised. The character of Mantis in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is both exotic and extremely childlike; despite her empathic powers, she has a child's innocence and naivety. Similarly, in Claire Low's recollection of being regarded as 'a cute foreigner whose speech was no better than a baby's' (see page 209), she is both exoticised and infantilised.

Features of a feminist reading

Feminist literary criticism has three main broad features.

- It looks critically at writing by men and critiques stereotypical depictions of gender identities and roles. These depictions could include male characters who are dominant and active, and who are able to express themselves freely, in comparison to female characters who are submissive, passive and often silent (especially in public). A feminist reading would also examine the extent to which the text represents these sorts of identities and roles as 'natural' and legitimate.

- It looks for positive representations of women as independent, autonomous subjects who are not defined purely in terms of their relationships with men or their biological sex. The concept of *agency* is central to this approach.

- It advocates strongly for a female tradition, suggesting that women's writing has been neglected and has different qualities and aesthetics from that of male authors.

A **feminist reading** of Sylvia Plath's poetry might explore the degree to which the poems **critique the limited roles available to women in the 1950s**. In 'The Applicant' (published in the posthumous collection *Ariel* in 1965), the speaker offers the applicant a woman – a 'living doll' – who will sew, cook, 'bring teacups and roll away headaches'. Referred to only as 'it', the woman is a nameless and faceless commodity who exists solely for the benefit of a potential husband. Plath thus satirises the prevailing middle-class view of what a young woman might aspire to, revealing it as both farcical and demeaning, and critiques the objectification of women in an increasingly materialistic postwar society. The idea of a doll is taken to another extreme in 'The Munich Mannequins' (also in *Ariel*), in which the image of perpetually youthful and beautiful womanhood is embodied in the mannequins in a shop window, existing 'in their sulfur loveliness', 'Naked and bald in their furs'. Here, female physical 'perfection' (the first word of the poem) is exposed as unnatural and appalling, as it 'tamps the womb' in a rejection of fertility and results in a deathlike state, 'cold as snow breath'. Plath rejects both physical beauty and domestic proficiency as artificial, meaningless and ultimately constricting aspirations for women.

In general, a feminist reading interrogates any version of society that sees men as occupying the central, dominant roles *and* that does not suggest this situation should be changed.