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Abstract	Media has a role to play in achieving gender equality (SDG Goal 5) as it is an influencer and is influenced by the culture it inhabits. The *Poldark* novels and adaptations offer a unique and useful case study due to the period setting and the time span of the writing and related broadcast iterations. The 12 Winston Graham *Poldark* novels were written over a period spanning seven decades from 1945 to 2002 and yet set within 1783–1820. The popularity of the stories has led to three television adaptations: in 1975–1977 for BBC, in 1996 by HTV, and 2015–2019 for BBC and Mammoth Screen. The latest of the adaptations has already received some academic scrutiny related to the depiction of masculinity (Taddeo, 'Why Don't You Take Her?': Rape in the Poldark Narrative. In J. Leggot, J. A. Taddeo. *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from the Forsyte Saga to Downton Abbey*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015; Wheatley, 2016; Goodman and Moseley, 2018). And yet, the *Poldark* stories include some complex and well-loved female characters who have not had the same academic attention. This chapter aims to redress this gender inequality and focus upon several of the female characters, with the story of Demelza as a central concern. Demelza is initially depicted as an abused teenager. However, she learns quickly and develops into a strong, respected woman by using her natural intelligence and instincts. By analysing how characters in a story are .represented over time, some underlying assumptions about gender can be foregrounded with a view to promoting positive future change.	

Q1

AUTHOR QUERIES

Q1 We found "Poldark" in roman as well as italics. We have italicized Poldark when referring to "Poldark novel", "Poldark stories" and so on when referring to the work and have retained in roman when referring to the person. We trust this is okay.

CHAPTER 12

‘T’Ain’t Right, T’Ain’t Fair, T’Ain’t Proper’: Examining the Representations of Women in *Poldark*

Barbara Sadler

The United Nations General Assembly set out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 as part of the UN-GA Resolution 2030 Agenda. Notwithstanding the contradictory nature of some of the goals, and the connection between the United Nations and the controversial World Economic Forum via Memorandum of Understanding, the issues relating to Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality, are of genuine concern for a large proportion of the global population. Gender is one of the most hotly debated categories in contemporary Western culture. For evidence of this look no further than the UK press where there is debate and (heated) discussion about gender almost every day. From the inequality in medicine related to women’s health, ‘Why wasn’t it mandatory for doctors to be taught about women’s issues before now?’ (Thorp, 2022), the issues related to transgender sport, ‘Here’s how trans people

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feel about YouGov's survey on trans rights' (Stone, 2022) to men experiencing 'social body pressures' and 'feeling under threat from rising equality' in 'Oh boy! The scourge of topless men in London parks' (Muston, 2022). The issues and debates around gender spill into social media too—on Twitter in particular—where the name of J K Rowling is currently tantamount to an explosive device. The concerns in most of the stories relate to gender inequality and issue of what gender means and its relationship to human bodies and how they are categorised. The exclamation of this chapter title is often uttered by Jud, Prudie or Demelza, in the *Poldark* stories and it may prove a fitting description of the discourses and discussions of gender within popular culture where the battle over gender is currently raging. Popular culture as an item of study is very useful for it acts as a barometer of contemporary concerns because it is an 'arena of struggle' (Storey, 2003, p. 51) where competing ideas aim for supremacy: essentially popular culture is an ideological battleground. I have selected the case study of *Poldark* because it offers a unique opportunity to review gender and related inequalities over several different time periods. The 12 Winston Graham *Poldark* novels were written over a period spanning seven decades from 1945 to 2002 with stories within the novels set within the period 1783–1820. The stories are well-loved, with Leggot and Taddeo (2015, p. xxvii) mentioning the notion of a 'Cult of Poldark'. This popularity has led to three television adaptations: in 1975–1977 for BBC, in 1996 by HTV/ITV, and 2015–2019 for BBC and Mammoth Screen. The latest of the adaptations has already received some academic scrutiny related to the depiction of masculinity (Goodman & Moseley, 2018; Taddeo, 2015; Sadler, 2022; Wheatley, 2016). And yet, the *Poldark* stories include some complex and well-loved female characters who have not had the same critical attention. This only serves to highlight the existing gender inequality. This chapter will aim to redress that deficit and focus upon the representation of the female characters and femininity and make links to the concerns of gender theory and feminist politics. As problematic as the notions of 'waves' may be in feminist politics, the historicising aspects of the 'waves' offer an opportunity to map some theoretical ideas to the time frames of the story and its various versions with the social world at the time of production. The awkward concept of postfeminism spans some of the 'waves' but it is useful as a concept for our purpose of analysing female representation over time. To paraphrase Gill on postfeminism she suggests (2007, p. 161) the media now seems to be the place where feminist debate takes place. In this case each of the versions of the

story will be reviewed to check how they respond to aspects of feminist politics. Consequently, the story of Demelza and the themes relating to the status (legal and social) and role (function) of women will be a central concern. There are at least five time periods to consider, although the main focus will be the first four novels and corresponding adaptations. Throughout the analysis of female characters and female concerns there will be connections made to gender theory which will enable assumptions and issues about gender to be foregrounded and a measure taken of any changes over the decades—perhaps a consideration of how far we have to travel to achieve gender equality.

Representation, Gender and Adaptation

The focus of how women are portrayed on screen has been a concern of Rosen's (1973) *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* which explored women's roles and characterisation in films from 1900s to 1970s. This book was a significant part of the coming to consciousness in the second wave of feminism and following on from it the examination of representation became an important aspect of scholarly work. Nevertheless, depictions on screen are not 'real life' so why should anyone be bothered by representation of characters? Why is representation so important? According to Storey, 'modes of representation seek to construct us as particular subjectivities' (2003, pp. 80–81). It is the identity positions which representations offer and encourage audiences to occupy and the repetition of types of representation which make representation of gender such a key cultural battleground in the drive for gender equality. It is in media culture that discussions are expressed through representations about topics society is considering at that moment. The *Poldark* story offers an opportunity to discuss gender representation in relation to the time frame of the setting, source text and era of production to highlight any similarities or changes in how gender is portrayed. As the waves of feminism progressed scholars began to question more about women's position of inequality; was the issue a lack of legal rights (Liberal Feminism), a lack of access to property (Marxist Feminism), or cultural systems (Radical Feminism) or psychology (Psychoanalytical Feminism). The work of Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble* 1990) created a fundamental shift in asking serious questions about what gender means and where in fact it originates. Butler argued that gender is socially constructed and performative and that it is reinforced through repetition and can change depending upon

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contexts. 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender…identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1980, p. 25). The struggle about this still rages. This may be compounded by a lack of accuracy about the terms 'sex' and 'gender' within Western culture more generally, where the two words are used interchangeably when in fact they refer to quite different referents. For the purposes of this chapter 'sex' will refer to a sex act or biological sexed body, and 'gender' will refer to how a body is enacted or performed. Whether or not the binary terms masculine or feminine are sufficient descriptors are further ongoing debates. Clearly none of the discourses about gender are straightforward. For some there is a deep-rooted belief that gender is biological and from the body and yet for others there is evidence that gender is socially determined, the results of social and cultural influences. Even if there is a tiny proportion of cultural impact upon gender, then gender representation really does matter. Constant repetition of specific attributes makes those attributes seem natural and normal and have the effect of regulating human behaviours. This is especially true when media stories illustrate the consequences of any 'transgressive' behaviour. In film analysis the transgressive woman is punished through death, illness, or isolation (Doane, 1987) and this trope is mirrored in the *Poldark* stories with Keren Daniels' death after her affair with Dwight Enys and Aunt Agatha's death after maliciously planting seeds of doubt in George's mind about Valentine's paternity. In both cases the characters have transgressed boundaries of so-called ideal feminine behaviour. Historian Yuval Noah Harari has warned about the danger of humans being 'hacked' by algorithms on social media, but all media—including period drama television—has this potential to have impact on attitudes and beliefs which in turn influence behaviour and lead to real world impact. It is crucial to pay attention to what exactly is being represented and how, and consider the consequences.

In this chapter that means looking closely at the depiction of gender within the *Poldark* stories and also taking account of the genre. There is a multitude of research about genres being aligned with gender (Ang, 1985; Geraghty, 2000; Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1978) and that period drama is particularly associated with a female audience. All genres are cultural constructs and the generic boundaries are policed variously by critics, audiences and academics. The extent to which a genre is thought to be aligned with the masculine (news, documentary) or the feminine (soap operas, period dramas) is also culturally decided and this aspect has much to

demonstrate about how a culture values certain characteristics over others and perpetuates the lack of visibility of females in public roles. As Tong describes this is the focus of liberal feminism which argues that 'female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance and /or success in the so-called public world' (1992, p. 2). For example, soap opera is aligned with femininity and feminine concerns, and it is no accident that soap operas are denigrated. Very often soap operas deal with the concerns of working-class women in the private realm of the home rather than public worlds and roles, so the lack of value attached to the genre is doubly meaningful. The intersections of class and gender also work in the examples of genres which are highly valued, such as news genres or documentaries which are historically the television programmed choice of middle-class males and are focused on the concerns of public life. As a period drama, *Poldark* is aligned with middle-class, middle-aged women. This intersection of age, class and gender is important to consider because culturally this group is usually consigned to invisibility. A postfeminist viewpoint here might suggest that it is the women's buying and viewing power which makes them valuable (Keller & Ryan, 2018).

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The middle-aged female fans achieve a level of recognition as an audience, though existing fans are more likely to tune in and a new adaptation will open the stories to new audiences. Naturally, a whole series of well-loved novels, such as *Poldark*, is the 'Holy Grail' for producers because of the opportunity for returning seasons. Saunders, writing about adaptations, explains:

> Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalised. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via processes of proximation and updating. (2006, p. 19)

In adapting the *Poldark* novels for television the producers enter a dialogue with the source novels and its themes and characters. The 'proximations and updating' that Saunders discusses are specifically relevant to the time when the adaptation is produced and articulates concerns within the culture at the time of production. The representation of Demelza is a useful example to illustrate how this works.

Winston Graham introduces Demelza in the first novel *Ross Poldark* (1945). She is described as thin and looking like 11 or 12 years old when she and Ross meet at the fair and he rescues her from a beating by some village boys who are using her beloved dog in an animal fight. Ross offers Demelza a position as a kitchen maid at his house, Nampara, and this rescues her from her home life of acting as surrogate mother to her six brothers, and housekeeper, cleaner and cook for her father, who would regularly beat her when he was drunk. At this point Demelza is represented as an abused teenager. The exact age of Demelza is somewhat unclear, she tells Poldark she is 14, but this is later disputed by her father (1945, p. 133). It is explained that in law a girl of 14 can decide where she lives, so this may be an attempt by Tom Carne to ensure Demelza is returned home to her household duties. Later when she has been at Nampara a short while it is confirmed, 'the child was like a young animal which had spent fourteen years in blinkers' (Graham, 1945, p. 192), immediately the legal and social position of females is apparent. Demelza is a chattel, used by her father as unpaid help and subject to abuse and beatings. Even as Ross Poldark offers her an escape route the legal position of female children is clear: 'There is a law to these things. I must hire you from your father' (1945, p. 113). Demelza will not receive any money for her work but will obtain food, lodging and better clothing. At the time the novel was written (1945) feminism was not established, yet Graham wrote a female character who actively resisted her life of poverty and abuse—Demelza had already attempted to run away from home at age 12—and continues to seek improvements to her circumstances once she is at Nampara. Indeed, the way Demelza strives for her opportunities against a system which only offers disadvantages highlights the injustice of her gendered situation. Tong states these are foremost concerns of liberal feminism: 'gender justice…requires us, first, to make the rules of the game fair' (1992, p. 20). Taddeo goes so far as to suggest that Graham himself has a feminist perspective (2015, p. x) which is commendable considering he wrote the novel prior to feminism emerging.

Whatever Graham's motivation for Demelza, it is certain that he did not appreciate the first four episodes of the 1975–1977 BBC adaptation of *Poldark*. Writing his memoirs, Graham exclaimed, 'What stuck in my crop beyond all swallowing were the ridiculous liberties taken with the characters and with the stories' (2003, p. 203). Graham had sold the rights to *Poldark* to London Films/BBC and as he laments, he had 'no more than parental control over how she developed'. The main issue being that in

this iteration of Demelza she is depicted as a promiscuous thief. Demelza (played by actor Angharad Rees) first appears in Episode 2 where she steals bread and cash and offers to remove her knickers for a shilling. All representations are in dialogue with the anxieties of the time of production and in this case a dialogue with source text too. At the time of production second wave of feminism was in full bloom. Humm points out that in the 1970s 'Critics focused on sexist vocabulary and gender stereotypes in the work of male authors and highlighted the ways in which these writers commonly ascribe particular features, such as "hysteria" and "passivity" only to women' (1998, p. 196). This must have been awkward for the *Poldark* producers and show script writers. What transpires is evidence of the struggles playing out in the 'life world' via the inherent complications of 'proximations and updating'. In the 1975–1977 version, Demelza moves from a abused girl to a work-shy, thieving, promiscuous teen until she is 'saved' by the hero Ross Poldark (played by actor Robin Ellis). In several aspects, Demelza's story only serves to bolster the position of Ross as a hero. He rescues her from the village boys, feeds her and overlooks her thieving and laughs when she explains the promiscuous aspects of her life (1975, S1, E2).

Ross: Why don't you grow your hair?
Demelza: It is growing – a man cut it off – he said I stole his watch.
Ross: Did you?
Demelza: It fell out of his pocket when he was dressing.

Demelza transgresses expected gender behaviour in her battle to eat and remain safe. However, it is her place within the law which puts her in such a bind as she protests later in the same episode when her father is given the wages she worked for: 'A woman's got no rights, no nothing. Men, you're all the same when it comes to it, you stick together' (1975, S1, E3). Throughout the 1970s series, Demelza is represented as a mix of traditional femininity and fiery independence. During her first years at Nampara she develops a close friendship with Ross and they chat together frequently. On the day of Jim's trial, Ross returns home drunk. Demelza provides his supper and more rum. She is already in love with him and tries hard to speak properly to please him and ask about the trial proceedings that day. She then makes an effort to seduce him by asking if she is pretty and showing him her stockings. She jokes she'd remove them for a shilling echoing their very first meeting. Ross realises what is occurring and tells

her to go to bed. She then confides her love for him and asks him to take her to bed. At this point Ross is seated upright in his chair and Demelza is on her knees on the floor begging and grasping his leg. He stoops down and kisses her. The scene is set up to foreground the inequality in the relationship through the physical size and relative position of the two characters. Demelza is diminutive and emotional—literally begging on the floor; Ross is tall, even whilst seated, and composed, even whilst drunk. What is expressed here is Demelza taking control and following what Tong describes as the feminist position of 'following the lead of her own desires', (1992, p. 5) but being simultaneously subject to stereotyped framing devices within the scene as it was shot.

On the morning Ross explains to Demelza that he will find her a suitable position in another household and that she must leave for he will use her. Demelza believes she is being punished and says she 'should have been like Margaret and asked for money this morning, but I did it for nothing and said I loved you'. Demelza's desire here is outside of marriage and as Doane discusses related to woman's film of the 1940s, such excessive female sexuality poses a threat and must be eliminated or punished (1987, p. 99). This is a very clear expression of the difficulties feminism posed as it disrupts cultural systems of hierarchy, family and domination/subordination. How the issues are handled within the story suggests the ways media culture expresses arguments that are ongoing within a culture in a given moment. After some discussion Demelza gets angry and takes control: 'You don't owe me anything, you needn't worry on that score. I haven't lost anything being here. I have done my work and given nothing short, so we're equal and that's fair' (1975, S1, E3). She walks out and returns to her father who has now remarried and lives a life of sobriety. In the first tv adaptation, a huge plot divergence, Demelza is pregnant to Ross from that first encounter. Her father insists they go to Ross for financial support for 'there's no marriage there, he's gentry'. In this aspect the intersection of gender and class has a double impact upon Demelza's options. She refuses and leaves to live with Ginny. In another plot divergence, Elizabeth Poldark (played by Jill Townsend) is set to leave Francis Poldark (played by Clive Francis) and be with Ross. They even speak of her divorce from Francis. However, everything changes when Ross realises Demelza is pregnant with his child and she is on her way to Truro to meet a woman who will perform an abortion. Prudie explains: 'I've heard of her, doesn't stay around to see what happens. Takes her money and lets it in the lap of the Almighty. Like as not, there'll be two dead afore morning'

(1975, S1, E3). Demelza has limited choices. No one expects Ross to marry her because of their differing social status, and her pride will not allow for Ross to support her without marriage. If she remains unmarried her reputation is ruined and if she has the abortion she will likely die along with the child. It is almost as though Demelza is at war with herself torn between being independent and being feminine. What is articulated are the extra behavioural sanctions which exist for women but not for men and this has long been an area of concern for feminists. Various branches of feminism seek to challenge essentialist ideas on sexuality (Jackson, 1998, p. 139) and question the 'natural order' (Tong, 1992, p. 3) which ultimately 'controlled women's sexuality for male pleasure' (Tong, 1992, p. 5). In the story Ross catches up with Demelza and tells her she won't be alone and that they will be married. Taddeo points out that this scene is deliberately constructed to demonstrate Ross' chivalry: 'Viewers cheered (and still cheer) this seemingly romantic gesture and recall with pleasure those beautiful scenes of Ross carrying her (Demelza) to his horse' (2015, p. 210). In the process, she points out, Demelza herself is reduced as Ross is elevated. When Ross tells Elizabeth that he cannot now marry her, Elizabeth responds with anger, calling Demelza a trollop and encouraging Ross to give Demelza up. Such plot changes only serve the purpose of emphasising Ross' benevolence and simultaneously emphasising both women as unscrupulous and transgressive. In doing so it re-establishes the dominant system of females only being valuable whilst chaste and restores male supremacy. Figuratively gender equality is dismissed.

The scripts for the first four episodes of the 1975–1977 series were written and edited by Jack Pullman and Simon Masters. Winston Graham was provided advance copies of the first scripts during the early part of the production. He was so displeased with the changes that he tried to have the whole series cancelled, but the BBC and producers London Film Productions refused as so many scenes were already filmed. In his autobiography Graham provides anecdotes and detail about the fury he felt. Throughout his memoir he comes across as a gentle and intelligent man, but his reaction to the plot changes moved him to thoughts of violence: 'If anyone had offered me a helicopter and a bomb, I should have leapt at the chance and should have known just where to drop it' (2003, p. 203). The liberties taken with the characters and storyline were doubly problematic where Elizabeth was to seek a divorce from Francis, because as Graham pointed out divorce was only achieved through an act of parliament which took years to secure and would cost over £10,000. The

absurdity of Elizabeth being able to afford this when she has no income of her own made the adaptation of that part of the story unrealistic. Similarly, the use of modern phrasing and language evident from the first episode when someone exclaims that 'they must be joking!'. This serves to highlight the care and attention to historical accuracy that Graham lavished on his novels and also that all adaptations are in a dialogue—not only with the source material, but with the social and economic context of the time of production. Viewed in context, the 1975 script articulates the issues of the era; the 'problem' of unmarried mothers, the changes the Feminist Movement had brought, the increased numbers of divorces, the contradictions of traditional femininity, and the role of women as married, domesticated chattels of their husbands. The male script writers seem to struggle to represent the female experience and instead elect to strengthen the role of the male hero.

Domesticity, Laws and Sexual Violence

Narratives in popular culture help to construct and re-enforce specific meanings, and social roles through repeated representations. In the time frame setting of *Poldark*, 1783–1820, there were very limited options for women, but crucially it is during this period that Wollstonecrafts' *Vindication of the Rights of Women* was first published in 1792. Despite Graham's feminist perspective he still focused on representing the conditions of the period with precision. Demelza's situation as a housekeeper to her father and then to Ross—both before and after marriage—is normalised. Indeed, the domestic labour of women is taken for granted and not questioned. What is interesting in the 2015 adaptation is that the scriptwriter Debbie Horsfield admits to finding any possible ways to provide Demelza with additional storylines.

> It is true to say that she [Demelza] recedes a little in books 3 and 4 in terms of feistiness […] and she becomes more of a housewife […] and we did feel that was a bit of a shame. (BFI, 2016)

This seems to position the newer iteration *of Poldark* as having a post-feminist sensibility. Horsfield develops plot deviations to give Demelza the role she deserves: she interferes in politics, fundraises, and manages the mine and farm while Ross is away. All the while Demelza still manages her usual household duties and a side line as a midwife to some of the local

women. This foregrounds the subtle ways that much of women's work goes unseen and is only valued when work is in the public sphere. Demelza (played by Eleanor Tomlinson) typically steps up to manage the Poldark business, and discusses this fact with Prudie her housekeeper when Ross does not return from France with the others but sends his hat and apologies (2017, S3, E3). The scene is constructed with the two women side by side kneading bread dough and throwing the dough down on the table with such force to make a loud thud. What seems to occur here is that 'feminist notions are systematically reworked to accommodate mainstream ideas' (Keller & Ryan, 2018, p. 4). Their anger is evident, but so is their shared experience and friendship. Essentially, it has the appearance of feminism but without the activism.

> Demelza: 'Young Captain Ross do most sincerely regret' [mimicking Tholly's voice]…Oh he'll regret ever sending home his hat for it won't fit his head when I've done with him.
>
> Prudie: T'ain't right.
>
> Demelza: T'ain't fit.
>
> Prudie: T'ain't fair.
>
> Demelza: T'ain't proper.
>
> Prudie: And a child to raise and another on the way.
>
> Demelza: With a farm to run and a mine beside. What a cheek the menfolk expect us to do their bidding. [Throws bread dough on the table with a thud.]
>
> Prudie: Lucky we never do. [Smirking].

In the novels, the servant role is taken by Prudie and later Jane Gimlett. Horsfield is compelled to conflate several characters from the novels into one for the sake of brevity and ease of understanding for a television audience. She does so with Dr Dwight Enys and Prudie, and in each case produces more meaningful characters as a result. The female friendship between Prudie and Demelza is a further plot change, but one that reflects female experience and the importance of female friendships which is not developed in the novels and initial 1970s adaptation. The impact of Horsfield as a writer is evident here making a difference to the authenticity of the female characters and their associated plotlines. Demelza's character as written by Horsfield disrupts male dominance several times. When Ross returns from his night with Elizabeth Demelza responds by slapping his face so hard he falls over (2016, S2, E8); she questions why she should love, honour and obey Ross when he is reckless and absent (2017, S3,

E3), and by continuing as a midwife to local women, Demelza disrupts the male medical practice of attending and controlling childbirth (2017, S3, E4). Her refusal of male medical help at the birth of Clowance demonstrates her defiance of the social class convention of paying for medical care to demonstrate higher social status. She dismisses this idea because it puts her body into the hands of Dr Choake who she does not trust. In this way she privileges the support of Prudie and her own knowledge of childbirth. What this suggests is that postfeminism is a media phenomenon (Keller & Ryan, 2018, p. 4) where feminist politics are expressed, and some aspects accepted and some rejected.

Not all of the female characters are as independent as Demelza. Very few of the *Poldark* women have means to take care of themselves with two notable exceptions; Caroline Penvenen is an heiress so does not need a husband—indeed she has several suitors who seek her fortune for themselves. Caroline is strong-willed and Upper Class and decides to marry Dr Enys who is of lower rank. Her independent wealth enables more options, and she marries for love. Margaret Vosper is a marginal character who makes a living as a prostitute and is frequented by Francis, George and Ross. She is interesting in that she seems to overcome the notion that 'prostitution is irrecuperable' (Doane, 1987, p. 119) because she marries a lord. Such transgression usually leads to illness, death, madness or isolation, but Margaret prevails.

The more usual representations are evident in characters such as Verity Poldark. She remains unmarried at 23 and it is presumed she will be a spinster forever and augment the household staff making preserves, sewing and mending and looking after the family. When Verity elopes to marry Captain Blamey, her family think of her as selfish for leaving them although the grounds for this belief relate to her value in the domestic sphere. She is a valuable free extra help. However, marriage is seen as a solution for many female characters, even if it most benefits the male characters. This is due to the Common Law of Coverture where a women's rights are subsumed to her husband on marriage. This legal situation makes marriage a double bind for women such as Morwenna Chynoweth. In the life world this is the justification for many of the concerns of first wave of feminism. Morwenna is Elizabeth's cousin and the Chynoweths have several daughters and little money. George encourages Elizabeth to hire Morwenna as a governess for her son, Geoffrey Charles. George is motivated to divert Elizabeth's attention away from Geoffrey Charles in order that she can focus upon the baby she is expecting. Subsequently,

George uses Morwenna again by arranging a marriage between her and Osbourne Whitworth. He achieves the marriage by coercion. Morwenna agrees to marry Whitworth to save Demelza's brother, Drake Carne from hanging for stealing the Bible. This charge was engineered by George to ensure the marriage occurred—the purpose of which was to secure a useful connection for George's parliamentary ambitions. The matter highlights that women had little power and were regularly used by men for their own purposes. Morwenna's marriage to Osbourne is disastrous for her and leads to two years of marital rape. Projansky (2001) discusses the history of rape and points out that it is significant that in 1382 legislation in England gave fathers and husbands legal rights to bring a charge of rape to protect women of their family but that far from being protective of the woman who had suffered this was an issue relating to property ownership. This reduced women to chattels. In George's manipulation of Morwenna (forcing marriage to Osbourne, defeating Drake) he treats her as his property. Under such law, marital rape by Osbourne was 'theoretically impossible, since she "belonged" to him' (2001, p. 4). Byrne and Taddeo comment that in the story George and Elizabeth and even Dr Enys bear some responsibility for Osbourne being able to continue to rape Morwenna and they suggest that 'society as a whole is complicit in rape' (2022, p. 152). These storylines were written by Winston Graham in the 1970s when rape and sexual violence against women was a key focus of feminist activism. Notably Graham's writing is careful to illustrate the psychological and physical damage that marital rape has upon Morwenna. However, Projansky points out that such narratives promote 'psychological interiorisation' which despite Graham's feminist perspective, function to provoke fear. Unsurprisingly, Osbourne Whitworth tries to justify his actions through law and religion to have Morwenna acquiesce to his sexual demands. When she repeatedly refuses, he aims to have Morwenna committed to an asylum for failure to perform her wifely 'duties'. It is shocking to consider that such beliefs prevailed for so long and that marital rape was not considered a crime in the United Kingdom until Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. There is no ambiguity in the rape of Morwenna and the fact that Osbourne is a thoroughly bad man, but it is notable that there is another significant rapist in the story.

In the earlier *Poldark* novel *Warleggan* (1953) a rape is perpetrated by the hero Ross Poldark. This rape has a different tone and there is great debate in the *Poldark* fandom about whether it is or is not a rape. It is worth considering the representation in detail in the novel and 2016

television adaptation. The novel written in 1953 was produced before the second wave of feminism. The relevant episode (2016, S2, E8) was first screened in the United Kingdom on 23 October 2016—one year prior to #MeToo and #TimesUp and produced in the era of later postfeminism. The story concerns Elizabeth, Ross and George. When Francis dies he leaves Elizabeth Poldark without money. She seeks support from Ross about financial matters and running her estate as it is assumed that she cannot run the estate alone. George Warleggan, Ross' sworn enemy, proposes marriage to Elizabeth. George offers stability and wealth and the security of marriage. Elizabeth sends a letter to Ross to advise him of the intended marriage. Ross rushes to Trenwith House and breaks in through a window. He enters Elizabeth's bedroom and confronts her aiming to prevent the marriage. In the book Ross is aroused when Elizabeth becomes angry 'her eyes were lit with anger. He's never seen her like it before, and he found pleasure in it' (1953, p. 313). Ross kisses her, she slaps his face, and tells him to stop but he picks her up and carries her to the bed. At this point it does not state he raped her; it's implied. Winston Graham's observations were accurate and the point that rape is often motivated by anger and power is supported by research (Anderson & Swainson, 2001). Ross is furious that Elizabeth would even consider marrying his enemy George and when she shows anger it serves to provoke further. The lack of detail in the novel leaves a little ambiguity which fans on social media debate regularly and passionately. Projansky takes a firm line with such implicit or offscreen actions particularly where the sexual violence is obscured but it motivates the narrative progression. She states, 'If rape is everywhere in film and yet often offscreen, alluded to, or not acknowledged as "really" rape', she insists 'on identifying all these types of representations and naming them as forms of rape within the narrative' (Projansky, 2001, p. 29). Such a political act may be a move forward towards equality.

Media representations such as Ross' rape of Elizabeth contribute to layers of misunderstanding about sexual violence. Additionally, pervasive rape myths which circulate in culture and complications about types of femininity that are valued make rape representations appear more ambiguous when they are not. One of the issues relates to the representations of the past and the sanctions facing female characters who transgress the ideals of femininity. In feminist terms this serves to deny a woman her own desires and make her chaste for male pleasure. Doane (1987) pinpoints the likely outcome to be punishment in the narrative. Over time such repeated patterns become internalised and seem natural. This in turn has

subtle degrees of impact on the shared beliefs of readers and viewers that transgression of feminine ideals—sexual or otherwise- leads to negative outcomes. Belief systems form attitudes which ultimately regulate behaviour and re-enforce the ideal in the 'life world'. It is against this background that the defence of rape can be better understood. Byrne and Taddeo (2022) suggest period dramas often depict rape as 'eroticised ravishment' (2022, p. 8). The ravishment scenario is problematic because the woman does not transgress the feminine ideal and initiate or encourage sex whilst *secretly*, she desires it or enjoys it. Such a plotline perpetuates the rape myth that 'she said no but meant yes'. This is observable in the 2016 iteration of the rape scene. Ross is angry about Elizabeth's intention to marry George. He enters the house by kicking the door open, shouting for Elizabeth as he goes through the house. In her bedroom the two quarrel. As he moves towards her with his anger blazing across his face, he is also backing her towards the bed. He says, 'I oppose this marriage Elizabeth and I'd be glad of your assurance that you won't go through with it' (S2, E8). The threat of sexual violence here is evident. He is threatening her with rape unless she agrees to refuse George. Elizabeth responds saying he's hateful and she detests him to which he responds, 'No you don't, and you never will'. She looks at the bed realising what is about to happen and exclaims 'You'd not dare, you'd not dare' and he replies, 'Oh I would Elizabeth, I would…and so would you'. He throws her onto the bed. However, she appears to yield to his kissing and caressing and begins to kiss him back. There is no ambiguity that he was using the threat of sex as a weapon to prevent her marrying his enemy. As Byrne states such scenes are 'violence served up as entertainment but also that it is ultimately more about masculinity, and male identity, than it is about the victim' (2015, p. 185). The motivation for the visit was the feud between Ross and George—it is about Ross claiming rights over what he feels is Poldark property (Elizabeth is Francis Poldark's widow). In depicting Elizabeth as capitulating it strengthens the 'she meant yes' myth. The fact that she was threatened and coerced is obscured.

Whilst such gendered representations endure there can be no gender equality. The system is weighted in favour of masculinity at the expense of femininity. Knowing this is fascinating to consider the lengths that BBC and Mammoth screen go to manage the rape plot line in their promotion of season two of *Poldark* in 2016. In a BBC Breakfast interview between Aidan Turner, who plays Ross, and the host, Louise Minchin, both go to lengths to avoid using the term 'rape' when describing the scene they

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know will cause controversy (BBC Breakfast, 2016). At the premier screening of *Poldark* season two at BFI 22 August 2016 writer Debbie Horsfield also tries to avoid using the 'rape' word, but ultimately must use the dreaded term as she reads a statement from Andrew Graham (Winston's son) who was an advisor to the production. Graham's statement said that there was:

> the potential for rape but what then happens is not described but is left entirely up to one's imagination. The only way to judge what my father intended is to read the novels as a whole. Doing so it becomes clear that from earlier scenes and Elizabeth's immediate reactions and later mixed emotions that what finally happened was consensual sex born of long-term love and longing. (BFI, 2016)

The attempted management of the controversy only serves to highlight the gender inequality in the story and in the life world. Where was actor Heida Reid in these discussions about what happened to her character, Elizabeth? If Graham's guidance to look to the novels is followed, answers become evident. In *The Four Swans* written in 1976 and set two years after the rape incident, Ross and Elizabeth meet and speak directly to each other for the first time since that fateful night in May 1803. Graham describes Ross' internal thoughts; 'He was only too aware of the indefensibility of his actions then…He knew it was something for which Elizabeth would never be willing to forgive him' (1976, p. 199). I argue that this is not the ruminations about a consensual sex act. The scene continues with Ross and Elizabeth discussing Valentine's paternity and George's suspicions. Ross provides Elizabeth with a plan to allay George's concerns, but this plan ultimately leads to Elizabeth's death. Even the fact that a plan is required brings into sharp relief the centrality and privileging of male identity and male concerns to the detriment of female identity and female concerns. If more evidence of rape is required there is a notable scene in season three (2017, S3, E9) where Elizabeth confirms to George by swearing on the Bible that she has only ever given herself to two men. The sentence she omits is that she did not give herself to Ross. It is clear that Ross did rape Elizabeth, but the fact that BBC/Mammoth resorts to a statement from the novelist's son does indicate the level of discomfort about the scene. There are efforts to protect the series, the story, the actor, and characters, and by extension their profits, by finding ways to excuse or defend the actions of the hero. A direct consequence of this reputation

management is the response of some fans on Facebook fan pages taking the same line of argument and refusing to acknowledge Ross' crime. Instead of rape they call the incident VBT or the Very Bad Thing. This proves the importance of gender representations and as Storey avers texts and practices are 'reflections and expressions of power relations' which conceal the reality of domination and subordination (2021, p. 3). Only by close analysis of the details can the issues be foregrounded, and opportunities taken to redress the balance. Byrne and Taddeo are clear on the issue 'that rape should be an issue for society and state' (2022, p. 16). I am arguing that the case is the same for gender equality—there is a collective responsibility to be aware of the inequalities which exist and take collective steps to create balance.

Conclusion

If gender equality is to be achieved and it is everyone's responsibility then it is worth considering who are the women of *Poldark*, for it is not just the characters on screen; it is the writers, producers, actors, fans and audiences all expressing and adding to the textual environment. The analysis in this chapter of specific themes related to female experience and the representation of women indicates that many issues still exist and even while there are assertions of gender equality, particularly with Demelza, there are also simultaneously depictions of oppression, omission and exploitation. The complications brought about with the intersection of social class and age often make the gender inequality more keenly felt and this is evident when considering the economic position of characters—poverty limits the options of women in the story and in the life world. Demelza succeeds because she is rescued by Ross, but she also makes sure to educate herself at every opportunity. Winston Graham may indeed have some feminist credentials as Taddeo suggests (2015). He is ahead of his time in representing certain of the concerns about female experience such as the storylines for Morwenna and Verity. His attention to historical detail is laudable. This makes his fury at the changes in the 1970s adaptation more understandable. Pullman and Masters do capture the mood of the times in the 1970s and there is no doubt that having 15 million viewers is evidence of a successful show. The representation of women does not progress as might be expected. With the exception of the handling of the Elizabeth rape storyline, having a female writer, Debbie Horsfield, and female executive producer, Karen Thrussell, may have been beneficial in the

2015–2019 adaptation. There are some small but significant steps to provide Demelza with the storyline she deserves and develop the female friendship between Prudie and Demelza, but ultimately, it may be more of the same, where female friendship is foregrounded as a token at the expense of feminist activism. Keeler and Ryan suggest this is a trope of postfeminism which functions as 'a set of neoliberal cultural ideas that privilege the individual, apolitical empowerment of girls and women, who are hailed as productive feminized workers, citizens, and mothers' (2018, p. 4).

Despite the initial aim to redress the deficit of scrutiny on female representations there is a large section of this chapter concerned with men and masculinity. This echoes the structural inequalities and the myths which continue to uphold them. For even while the legal position has altered over time, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1970, the situation has not improved for everyone. Indeed, the persistent gender pay gap exists because of prevailing beliefs about femininity and masculinity and whilst representations of oppressed and exploited women continue to circulate real change will be hard to encourage. For representations influence thought and thought effects attitudes which impact behaviour. This is very clearly the case with sexual violence. Perhaps #MeToo will make a difference, but sexual violence is a daily concern for many women and that has not changed even over the long periods considered here. Byrne and Taddeo's position on rape that it is an issue for all society (2022) is instructive. For the same is true for gender equality. Everyone has their role to play to bring gender equality into being and a good starting point is to recognise how inequality is perpetuated through texts and practices of culture.

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Author Queries

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Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU2	The citation "Leggot et al. (2015" has been changed to "Leggot and Taddeo 2015" to match the author name/date in the reference list. Please check if the change is fine in this occurrence and modify the subsequent occurrences, if necessary.	
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AU10	References "CBS News (2021) and Poldark (1975–1977)" were not cited anywhere in the text. Please provide in text citation or delete the reference from the reference list.	