

becomes apparent that no amount of books or papers could do a better job of explaining the implications of slavery, than those who are the living products of that history.

Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that there are several common threads that tie together the experiences of Emma and her ancestors. The first one being that they all came to loathe the colour of their skin; living in a society where whiteness is valued, it was easy to see why these women felt their skin was often the source of abuse, discrimination, and the inequalities that they faced. They all had experiences of being debased and devalued, all because they were black women. Much like the reader, Flore, too becomes enthralled with this new insight to her people's history, and is awed and inspired by Emma's determination to resist these oppressions. However, Emma sadly reveals through her story, that it was because of her fear that her daughter would fall into the same cycle of hatred as her ancestors and not be able to resist it, that she murdered her. As she says "that curse from the holds of the slave ships is such that the very womb that carried us can crush us.... That's why Lola needed to die. What did it matter? Like me, Lola was condemned." Similarly, by the end of the book Emma loses the power to fight a system that she feels breeds racism, and unfortunately takes her own life. However, she does this only after she passes on the history of her people, and she hopes that through Flore, the voice of the women before her will continue to live and grow.

The Book of Emma is a book that can be enjoyed by all those who are interested in the history of slavery. Moreover, it can be enjoyed by audiences who felt belittled and oppressed by a system that only values a very select group. This book is easy to relate to, because it does not just tell the story of one woman but the story of any woman who has felt powerless or dismissed because she did not fit into the neat categories that have

been set up by the dominant members of society. *The Book of Emma* is an empowering book, which should be cherished and shared amongst a circle of friends.

Ramanjit Dhillon is a fourth year women studies student and also in the concurrent education program. She has a strong dedication to the anti-racist feminist movement, and believes the words one said by Mahatma Gandhi, "you can be the change you want to see."

SILENT GIRL

Tricia Dower
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REVIEWED BY RACHEL LAUDERIO

I used to think the Virginia Slim tag line "You've come a long way, baby!" was empowering and celebrated the achievements women have made in the last hundred years in gaining equality. On the surface, women have certainly come a long way. What about under the surface? Women are still kidnapped and given away as brides for financial gain. Girls are still sold into the sex slave trade. In some cultures, women are socially isolated just because they are women. Domestic abuse against women is still very prominent in all areas of the world. There's still a great deal that happens behind closed doors while society chooses to look the other way.

I just read a book that left me wondering, not about what women are still subjected to, but what we can do to help change the old ways of thinking about the role of a woman in different cultures.

Silent Girl by Tricia Dower is a powerful collection of short stories that takes on us a roller coaster ride into the lives of fictional women inspired by the women in eight Shakespearean plays. Dower explores

issues that include: gender politics, inter-racial relationships, forced marriages, incest, domestic violence, and sexual slavery. Each can be found in *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Pericles*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus*, and *Twelfth Night*. Dower took Shakespearean characters and imagined what that character's modern day story would be like.

Through research, Dower found real-time examples of these issues in the cultures of twentieth and twenty-first-century Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, and the United States. Dower's characters range from pre-pubescent to grandmotherly. Each of the characters deals with patriarchal value systems, subtle and not so subtle abuse, and social isolation on some level in just about every story.

Each story in this robust collection is haunting in its own right. Dower has successfully woven a web of thought-provoking stories that cry out for someone—anyone—to help abolish oppression of all classifications. After reading this collection, you can't help but question whether women's lives have changed at all.

Dower does a great job touching on the inner conflicts—as well as the cultural conflicts of both genders—that lead to oppression, abuse, and social isolation. Sides of the issues touched upon. While there is not much blatant psychological exploration, there is a great deal of opportunity for reflection on the "why" of these social problems. *Silent Girl* is a good starting point for deftly exploring what it will really take, as a society, to impact the oppression in this world.

Silent Girl is a recent publication. I recommend picking up a copy for two reasons. One, it's well written and tells some incredible stories. Two, it's thought-provoking and does more than just create awareness of issues we may not be exposed to in our own little tidy individual universes.

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