

ANALYSING ARGUMENT

The #MeToo movement sparked Iris Winston's opinion piece published in the Ottawa Citizen (9 March 2018) entitled "Count me out of the #MeToo movement." In a ridiculing tone, she contends that women should avoid "[walking] into an obvious trap" rather than joining the #MeToo movement. This prompted Carole Dagenais's responding opinion piece the following day in the same newspaper, asserting in an incredulous tone that the male "oppressors" should be berated for their actions rather than female "victims. This is reinforced in Tara Jacoby's illustration in The Village Voice that demands viewers see through a lens with an amplified focus in considering the male perpetrator.

The colloquial title's, "count me out" is a distinct challenge to supporters of the "MeToo" movement, with the "# suggesting the audience are trending rather than staunch advocates, thereby trivialising the issue. The derogatory use of the term "political correctness" in the opening sentence sharpens the focus on an audience Winston believes to have been caught up in the populous view, furthered by the insinuation of conformity in the descriptions of the "#MeTooChorus" and dismissive "yet another woman." Winston ridicules the women who claim to be victims, implied through her sarcastic use of inverted commas around the word, "courageous" which is facetiously compared to "delicate flowers", juxtaposed against the latter use of "courageous" in a more literal context. The derisive use of "surely" and claiming that they women should "at least be prepared" conveys a disbelief that women would not "speak out at the time of an incident," connoting that they are cowardly. The tone becomes increasingly more bold, shifting to become sardonic with pejorative adjectives such as "fragile" and "foolish" representing the women.

Winston establishes women as the blame-group through profiling them as "revenge seekers" whilst simultaneously victimising men as "too easy to be attacked and destroyed." Advising "all men would be wise to take precautions" is designed to arouse anxiety, whilst the subsequent acknowledgements, "that is not to deny true horrors," and "the accounts may be accurate" enables Winston to establish a reasoned tone, thus positioning her audience to be more receptive to a purportedly rational author. Demeaning language such as the suggestion that "the rest" of the stories are not "accurate" and "could equally well be fiction or false memory", juxtaposed by Winston's own personal anecdote impugns the MeToo movement claims. Having laid a foundation of supposition designed to belittle, Winston presents her own backstory of confrontation that evinces that the solution she has provided of not "[walking] into an obvious trap" is valid. "Rather than appearing cold, her reflection of her own position, "as a 16-year-old" demonstrates her own vulnerability and aligns herself with female sympathies.

Dagenais's structure is reminiscent of Winston's, initially inviting and then progressing into abject disgust. Both deploy colloquialisms commencing in their respective titles, "count me out" and "what next?" and employ em-dashes designed to provide a pause and consequently conversational rhythm for the audience. Winston further stimulates this flow by beginning a sentence with "and". Dagenais begins passive-aggressively, with "I was surprised" and "I guess" however, her tone shifts to become increasingly angst ridden as she refers to "Winston's ridiculous assertion." Likewise, Winston begins dismissing women as "too fragile" which transitions into "revenge seekers". Whilst both pieces are largely comprised of supposition, Winston utilises the first-hand evidence of her husband's anecdote, mentioning his role as an "educational administrator" to add weight to her argument through credibility. Both authors pose hypothetical scenarios created through sustained rhetorical questions. These questions create imagery such as "the casting couch" thus heightening emotions and inclining the audience to visualise the scenario, subsequently oppugning the opposition's claims. Winston intensifies this doubt by the accumulation of loaded language including "alleged" impair their judgement" and "active imaginations.

Comparatively to Winston catastrophising that “a guiding hand on the elbow could be interpreted as attack,” Dagenais wields a slippery-slope logical fallacy. She hyperbolises that “next week you’ll have an “article” explaining how slavery in the American south really could have been avoided if black people had just made themselves less available to their enslavers,” with the sarcasm of the “article” in inverted commas duplicating Winston’s attack on “courageous” women.

Selective nouns enable Dagenais to cajole readers. The initial recognition of “Iris Winston” creates a presence, yet this rapidly moves to the generic noun, “This writer” to isolate Winston and condemn her beliefs. This then culminates in the impersonal collective noun, “patriarchy” with negative connotations that more broadly lay blame as well as dehumanising “this writer” and “the patriarchy” to the audience. Dagenais’s comparison to slavery escalated by the question “will nothing ever change?” demands a call to arms by the disillusioned audience, antithetical to Winston’s wish to maintain the status quo. Both Winston and Dagenais disparage their opposition through ridicule; denigrating women joining the MeToo movement and Winston herself respectively. Short, sharp sentences highlight the incredulity of both authors, with Dagenais’s “what a joke”, insisting that Winston’s argument should not be taken seriously, and Winston arguing that “this is not assault” and “defence is possible”. Referring to “Winston’s ridiculous assertions” subverts Winston in a way that parallels the undermining effect of calling the women’s claims “ridiculously broad”. Through postulating that Winston has been “brainwashed” by the “patriarchy” Dagenais discredits her, hence reducing her validity, echoing the manner in which Winston discredits women in the #MeToo Movement.

Jacoby’s “Me Too” regarding men rather than women demands a different interpretation from the audience, drawing attention to the male perpetrator, similar to Dagenais casting aspersions upon men. Conversely Winston vilifies women. The boldness red colour on the hands immediately stands out, proposing that their culpability is what they should be defined by. The bloodiness is perhaps an intertextual reference to Lady Macbeth being unable to get blood off her hands, emphasising the perpetrator’s guilt. This blunt statement made by colours replicates the effect of the forthright titles of “Count me out of the #MeToo movement” and the derogatory question, “What next? Justifying slavery?” outlining the stance the authors will be taking and initiating a bold confrontation. Through Jacoby’s vividly clear-cut colours, Dagenais’s presentation of opinion as a fact, such as maintaining that Winston’s opinion is “il-informed” and Winston’s obstinate phrasing of “it is simply” and “of course”, all three writers form black-and-white perspectives that suggest either the audience agrees with them, or the audience is incorrect. The elevated angle depicting a man looking down places him in a position of power, enhanced by his pinstriped pants and white collared shirt, engendering disgust in the audience akin to that evoked in the articles. Although the word #MeToo is usually joined together, the division of the man’s hands portrays the words separately, with the omitted # and the unidentifiable nature of the man signifying the movement as more than a single assailant or trend. The separation makes the men think of “me” as an individual word, therefore accentuating the responsibility of each and every man.

Ultimately, Winston and Dagenais assume radically different positions, with Winston rebuking “fragile women” and Dagenais reprimanding “the patriarchy.” Likewise, Jacoby admonishes men, but seeks to create a different impact, encouraging men to hold themselves to account and take responsibility to their actions, whereas Dagenais mainly seeks to assert that men should be blamed rather than women.