

Muriel Wedding finds a young female trapped in the small-town of Porpoise Spit with low self-esteem, no friends to hang around and even fewer prospects in the foreseeable future. She finds peace in her room listening to ABBA and fantasising of one day being a bride, while her father, preoccupied with his career, torments his unhappy wife and overweight, under-achieving children. All the while having an affair.

Muriel Heslop is weird. She is a different breed. That makes her uniquely her. Her choice of fashion is stellar. The only thing that's in her way is that her hometown of Porpoise Spit. Her ditching that town was the best decision she ever made. The town she once called home now is the prison that's holding her hostage. The rules they have do not allow the weirdness of Muriel to exist. Her choice of therapy? Comes all the way from Sweden in the form of ABBA. She wants to be a Dancing Queen. I want her to be a Dancing Queen. Feeling trapped definitely takes a toll on a person's spirit, especially when you don't have a voice. You can't help but side with Muriel on all her endeavours throughout the film now because you care. In one way or another, you share experiences. I recall attending school in New Zealand where I couldn't be myself. I was surrounded by people who proudly wore the labels society had given them. These were the excuses for the toxic traits they exhibited, and I remember just wanting to disappear from it all. To watch someone act a certain way to keep up with appearances was disheartening and made me feel somewhat guilty that me being me made them act that way. That mindset is so stifling so I was blessed with the opportunity to move across the Tasman. I have never looked back. That's the same as Muriel. Spreading her wings and becoming a butterfly with the landscape of Sydney serving as her backdrop.

ABBA. Need I say more? That mononymous name. The sounds of the legendary Swedish pop group is the soundtrack to Muriel's life. In fact, it is one of two things that is important to her with the other being her desire to be a bride. Valentine (2007) states that it is a "fantasy that seems exclusively female, and clearly echoes themes found within 'Cinderella'" (p. 578). The music helps her calm down from the pressures of her reality and lets her dream of escaping this world. Symptoms of Cinderella are showing – it is a universal story after all. There is a depth to ABBA's music in that even in their happiest of songs, there is a layer of deep sadness that lingers. I guess that's why Muriel finds solace in them. Happiness with a bit of sadness, what a mix. Honestly, how can you listen to ABBA and not feel like you need to hop on a plane and relax in the tropics without a care in the world? The melodies are infectious. Waterloo provides a pivotal moment for Muriel and Rhonda's promising friendship. You can even compare to how this song, arguably, launched ABBA into international stardom did the same thing for their friendship. This performance is one of

my favourite scenes from the film. The ensembles, the wigs and ABBA. My inner gay is both screaming in jubilation and jealous of this camp moment. I still find it hilarious that while the two budding friends are performing at the talent show, the camera pans to Tania and Nicole engaging in a fight because of a scandalous revelation told by the very gleeful Rhonda earlier that day. The irony of it all. A new friendship is blossoming while another relationship falters. And its all wrapped up nicely in the melodies of ABBA. That's one way of starting a friendship – with the mutual love of ABBA. The meaning of Waterloo is important to know. If you listen to the lyrics of the song, you find out that its about a woman who gives her all to a man. Quick history lesson, the title itself references the place where Napoleon met his defeat after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, hence the reference. Knowing this, you can see why the song is vital in helping Muriel realise her dream, or lack thereof. Muriel daydreams of finding love because she feels that will somehow liberate her as a person and she entertains this idea by making it almost her life's mission to find a man and marry him. I can't relate to this in any way, shape or form. The idea of becoming enslaved, a little bit dramatic, makes me that much more appreciative of the freedom being alone brings. I find immense joy in being on my own and not having to commit myself to a relationship. There is a certain kind of emancipation one truly experiences journeying through life in the singlehood. Muriel is passionate about crafting a photo album with pictures of her in wedding dresses she has accumulated over time and I'm passionate about creating a beautiful flower garden in my game, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*.

There are two weddings in the film. That of Tania, and the other being Muriel's. You see both these women having their fantasies realised and it only highlights the behaviour of their husbands-to-be. Tania's partner is busy philandering on their wedding day while Muriel's shows no interest in their union, explicitly declaring that she is just a stepping stone for his career. The lack of respect for the institution of marriage is more apparent and this dismissive attitude on the men's part only makes the ceremony are more feminine affair. The men don't have anything to do with it (Chambers, 2003, p. 95). As someone who belongs to the LGBTIQ community, marriage is still a new right for us, so seeing this being reduced to nothing but a transaction that one can 'refund' at any given moment is upsetting to say the least. We get so much hatred for wanting basic human rights like marriage that the very people who hurl these comments are the very ones that are degrading this institution that they claim to be so 'sacred'. Imagine a gay couple doing that on screen. Unheard of because homosexual lives are effectively non-existent in film making (Mackey, 2001, p. 86). The failed marriages also come into play with the toxic culture of unchecked male privilege. The

masculinities in this movie are flawed and contradictory while seemingly trying to keep a position of power. An appropriate segue in to the corrupt, unfaithful and uncaring Bill Heslop. Isn't he wonderful? The patriarchy really shines through him as he shows a particularly Australian strain of toxic masculinity (Chambers, 2003, p. 97). A walking volcano, he is. Just blurts out words that you hear but don't listen to. I feel as though he is the root of everything wrong with the Heslop family but is blinded by his ambitions that the family unit is unravelling right before him. To be honest, Bill makes my blood boil so much that I want his character erased altogether but you can't have everything. He adds texture to the film and it makes you appreciate everyone else that much more. You know that feeling during the summer when you can't escape the heat, you're sweating non-stop and grasping for any sense of cool relief but it just doesn't happen. The annoyance you quickly build is how Bill makes me feel. I have no remorse for him whatsoever, especially because of his abusive nature towards his wife, Betty.

The death of Betty caught me off guard. Seeing this mother being treated as nothing but a slave to her family with her death being the only way she sees fit for it to end. The misogyny and sexism that has kept her trapped in this circumstance only for her life to end so tragically. Tears ran down my face, I really needed to pause it to comprehend what had just happened. You could see her trying but the silence was heartbreaking. Mothers should never be reduced to the capacity that Betty was in. They are the backbone to our families. I have always reasoned my emotional intelligence with being gay because it has allowed me to act the way I feel so I am not stifled and bottling up my emotions. I instantly thought of my mother and her passing on in a similar manner truly mortified me. She lives in New Zealand so the distance makes it that more sensitive for me because she is not within easy reach. I began reminiscing about precious moments of years past like those late nights watching her make donuts in huge batches. Observing her in awe as she shaped the donuts herself using a Tongan method by grabbing the wet dough with your bare hands and acting like an ice cream scoop yourself. It truly is an art form and I find myself years later still struggling to master it. She would always doze off during the night because it took forever and I admired her strength to go to market the next day with barely any sleep. The resilience of such loving mother, how could I imagine a world in which she is not present. In the Tongan culture, there is a saying in the community, that the men may be the head of the families but the females are the neck – they are in control. Matriarchy is the norm and I feel so blessed to experience all of its loving glory.

Australian colloquialism and the nuances of our speech make for some very colourful expressions and just resonate deeply with me. Although most Australians speak English, to varying capacities, it feels like a completely different language that only we know. The casual use of profanity is hilarious to me, though my response will differ depending on where we are and whose around. Abbreviation comes naturally and those living abroad may find it lazy but I reckon its pure genius. Shortening words saves time and quickens the convo. See what I did there? Though these are regular words, the intonation Australians place on different vowels only makes the language seem more foreign than it already is. You feel like you are rapping because the rhythm at which you speak and the flow feels natural. Rhonda doesn't rap by any means but her speech may lead you to believe she does.

Through all her struggles to realise her dreams of validation were nothing but shallow, Muriel has shown so much growth. From her patriarchal fantasy of becoming a married woman to finally appreciating the smaller details of her life, her beauty from within begins to shine through. The emotional growth her mother's death became a catalyst to reignite Muriel's will to live and not end up like her mother (Bullock, 2011, p. 122). She is now confident. The power that Muriel exudes towards the films ending is something to behold. She has an epiphany that motivates her to act out of character. She makes the ultimate move that sees her walking away from the financial protection afforded by David to be with the most important person in her life, her best friend Rhonda. The strength and self-assurance that she now carries makes me feel so proud of her. I love that for her but maybe I would reconsider leaving the riches for the friend. I think I need to have an epiphany because I feel repulsed at the thought of me doing the opposite. How dare I! Muriel and Rhonda are each other's salvation. Their friendship is organic and mutually affirming. This kind of relationship, this platonic love is a much sweeter ending than if the men were involved. It's a wake up call from the 90's, you don't need men to be happy. The femininity is strong and I'm overwhelmed by it. I feel like I was saved too. Her life is now an ABBA song. She's having the time of her life, as the lyrics go. Our Dancing Queen!

## References

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