

"the secretary chant" by marge piercy essay sample



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How would you feel if everyday from 9 to 5 you hear, fix me a cup of coffee, secretary; file these papers, secretary; schedule a meeting, secretary. This chant reminds me of the one that Cinderella’s stepmother and sisters where saying when they wanted the house clean and to prevent this young lady from attending the ball to meet her prince charming. Although that story was fictional, Marge Piercy managed to change the tune from a Cinderella’s chant to The Secretary Chant. She describes the duties and personal feelings that female secretaries are too afraid to say because they may lose their jobs for taking a stand. A stand for what, you may ask. A stand to be treated as a human being and not as a machine. As a secretary myself, I am empathic to Piercy’s feelings. Each day that I go to my job, I wonder if my employer understands how important I am to her business. Do she really understand that without a devoted secretary her business would be in total chaos?

Marge Piercy brought my feelings to life with this poem. She starts off with the line on how she has become one with her environment, one with her desk and the supplies that accentuate it. “ My hips are a desk.” “ From my ears hang chains of paper clips. Rubber bands form my hair.” The lines start to paint a physical description of what she (Piercy or secretary) feels as though she is becoming. She continues describing her appearance with the lines “ breasts are quills of mimeograph ink,” and “ feet bear casters.”

The sound in this poem creates a feeling of habit and mindlessness to the reader. “ My head is a badly organized file. My head is a switchboard.”

Please get Judge Day's assistant on the line. Alveria, I need for you to run to the courthouse and file these pleas as soon as possible. Do you remember what Mr. Frazier's number is off the top of your head? Call the P. I. and see what he has found out about our client. Do you remember if I scheduled a follow up with Ms. Smith? When you get the Judge's assistant on the line let me know. These are just a few of my experiences that relates to these lines, we only had two lines in the office, but you would think we had fifty the way the phones was ringing and all the calls I had to make at one time. You get the sense that her job is redundant and she can do it off the top of her head. The fact that she uses direct office imagery creates a sense of use that the poem conveys so well. " My hips are a desk. I am about to be delivered of a baby Xerox machine."

Piercy uses unusual metaphors, as stated in the above paragraphs, that demonstrates or conveys that this ' woman,' which is no more, is working as a machine with one purpose, and that is to get the assigned (programmed) work done, so that her employer looks good and the business is successful. A few examples of machine operations (metaphors) are " Press my finger and in my eyes appear credit and debit." " My naval is a reject button. From my mouth issue canceled reams." " Zing. Tinkle."

Lastly, Piercy's last reference to filing is not only touching on the objectification and use of a woman, but also on our human need to classify things. " File me under W because I wonce was a woman." We have a need to generalize, that can sometimes lead to the destruction of the individual and I think this is another point that could be interpreted from these lines and the poem as a whole. I say that because during the time this poem was

wrote (1970s), women didn't have options like they do now, meaning they could not chose from the list to become: a doctor, lawyer, computer engineer, etc., but they had to choose from a limited list of: house wife, teacher, telephone operator, or secretary, because that is what " society" thought women could do. Today a woman has several options, but most women in that time period was being destroyed or brainwashed to believe that that is all they could do, so if they attempted to do something out of the norm then they would not succeed. Some women at that time were submissive to their male counterparts, and whatever they said went.

Being a " Secretary" has its benefits. You learn communication skills and how to better interact with other people, you even develop friendships, because you find out you are not going through this situation alone. Marge Piercy brought out some excellent points throughout this poem, I feel like only a person who has been a position like this, can write a poem like this. And I guess since October 16 has been declared National Secretaries Day, we should be appreciative?