

Before the mirror by john updike

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Name: Course: Lecturer: Date: “ Before the Mirror” by John Updike

Introduction John Updike was an American poet, short-story writer and novelist, who was born in 1932. He wrote the poem “ Before the mirror”.

His works were ordinary and he expressed his thoughts through poems. The poem was parody, meaning it was written to help promote a greater understanding of the painting “ Girl before a Mirror” by Pablo Picasso done in 1932. The poem is described in two settings, the past and the present. Past The poem starts through the realm of flashback; it reminds the reader of the painting that hung at the museum few years ago. The first four lines when phrased form a rhetorical question. The poet goes ahead and answers the question by replying using the term “ Millions of us” (Updike 35). Through this statement, he probably reveals the number of people estimated to have seen the painting besides him.

However, he addresses his oddness of seeing and not forgetting. He further states that the number of people who can remember the Picasso painting are only a few as compared to the millions who saw it. Updike writes of how times are changing and by asking the reader to remember those days, he creates awareness that we are in a different and new era. The picture Updike is referring to is of a girl whose reflection appears on the mirror in many forms and colors. He emphasizes that times have changed by illustrating how the girl’s reflection has so many colors; this is to state that she is no longer, what she used to be. He further writes that the painting states “ enter here and abandon preconception” (Updike 35), meaning that nothing is what it seems to be.

The poet reveals that one has to be open-minded in order to understand not only the painting, but also life and people in general. He additionally uses a metaphor in line eight stating that it is a cardboard queen in a deck of giant cards to invoke the nature to define the meaning. In line 10 to 12, he writes, “ she bounced/ the erotic balls of herself back and forth/ between reflection and reality” (Updike 35). This interprets the differences of the girl’s appearance within the mirror and the outward appearance. It shows a distinction between reality and illusion. Present The second paragraph of the poem is in the present form. Updike now discovers that life in the past is better of than in the present and expresses his desire to go back to his mother’s womb.

At this moment, we discover that the poem is about the writer himself. Just as the girl was painted in many reflections and colors, the writer examines himself as well. He analyses the last four lines by describing how things fade with time.

He describes a child, how new it looks and full of innocence. The last line of the poem shows how the painting is a good illustration of the present life where people are embracing life without fully understanding it. Conclusion John Updike has used the two types of settings to clearly highlight the main agenda in the poem. The aim of using the two styles is to distinguish the present from the past and he expresses his feelings openly. The poem is a presentation of the past and the present where both reflect onto a mirror. John Updike’s poem started in the past setting, as he takes the reader back to a painting that lay in the museum but slowly in the second paragraph, he

talks of the current or of the future. The poem is meant to enlighten the reader, to show the difference between the past and the future.

Moreover, it shows how the future is taking a diverse turn, as expressed by the use of different colors. John Updike's poem dwells on the realities of life.

Works Cited Updike, John.

Americana: and other poems. New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 2001. Print.