

Barbie doll marge piercy

Life



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The title of this poem immediately underscores its thematic concerns. ‘ Barbie’ is not just a toy for girls but has become a cultural icon of developed America. The doll is the archetype and symbol of the perfect American girl who has physical appeal and wealth. She is the prime example of feminine qualities and beauty. Yet as we read on, Piercy’s description of the young girl is vastly different. She seems, unlike Barbie, to have “ a great big nose and fat legs. ” The young girl, however, is entrapped by society’s definitions of beauty here exemplified by Barbie doll.

By consistently contrasting the ideal and the real, Piercy created a dark poem about a girl’s suicide because of social pressures to be Barbie-beautiful. The theme of the poem is distinct: Piercy is alluding to the impossible conditions of beauty in the modern world and how the desire for such unattainable ideals can lead to death. It also very much about subscribing to social beliefs of femininity, of what it is to be a ‘ woman,’ and not just about physical beauty.

The dark and ominous atmosphere in the poem is set by the descriptive details of the poem and the consequent mood that is set by the tone. Piercy employs a matter-of-factly way to describe the details of a fat girl and her growing up years. Yet the choice of images employed is unique and powerful for they evoke images of childhood. “ Dolls that did pee-pee and miniature GE stoves and irons and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy” evoke innocence in the playthings of childhood but these images are immediately contrasted with the girl’s “ big nose and fat legs.

” This occurs again in stanza two where the girl is described as a “ healthy” and “ intelligent” girl almost full of potential, “ abundant sexual drive and

manual dexterity. ” The positive physical image of this young pubescent girl is shattered at the end of the stanza for she needed to feel bad about herself for having a “ fat nose on thick legs. ” Such a contrasting descriptive method is one of the ways that Piercy employs to underscore the irony of the poem even more.

The sardonic tone that Piercy uses is most blatant in the final two stanzas. Here, we see a girl who has been compelled to subscribe to false social beliefs of looking like a ‘ barbie doll. ’ She needs to “ play coy,” exercise, diet, smile and wheedle. ” These are archetypal images of femininity. Here, Piercy moves beyond a description of physical beauty but one of social expectations of femininity. The girl is compelled to follow social norms of what it is to be female both physically and socially.

The opening stanza, with its images of dolls, stoves, and lipsticks also reveal the same intentions of how from a young age the girl is compelled to buy into a social definition of what a ‘ female’ is. The poem becomes much darker and Piercy’s sardonic tone and scornful attitude towards such social belief becomes much stronger in the final stanza where she employs irony powerfully. The girl is described as having taken her own life for “ she cut off her nose and her legs and offered them up.

” In the final stanza, she is described as looking pretty “ dressed in a pink and white nightie” and having a “ turned-up putty nose. ” Here, the image is one of a barbie doll. The girl has been transformed into the image she could not attain in life and could only do so in death. This is a chilling thought that Piercy is attempting to communicate to readers – women die trying to achieve impossible notions of beauty and perhaps the only way to do so is in

death. Such a reading is certainly accentuated by the final lines of the poem

“ Consummation at last. To every woman a happy ending.

” The happy ending can seemingly only be found in death. The lines in this stanza are then charged with irony and the irony evokes a sense of sadness and shock. There is no real happy ending for although she does finally for her quest for beauty and perfection is consummated she dies in the process. The poem thus echoes with how society often compels women to subscribe to expectations of what is feminine – like a Barbie doll. It also thereby reveals the very misplaced qualities that society holds with regards to women. Women are objectified as dolls and playthings.