

Poetry explication

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



April 13, Explication of " Perfect Dress" by Marisa de los Santos De los Santos

" Perfect Dress" is a poem which describes the feelings that women have about social ideas of beauty. Although de los Santos does not explicitly call these feelings unrealistic and bad for women's self-esteem, the language choice throughout the poem makes it clear that the ideas are unrealistic, and that believing in them with one hundred percent of yourself is probably a bad idea.

The poem opens with the image of finding " in a student's journal, a blue confession / in smudged, erasable ink" (1-2). Even before we see what that confession is, a lot of detail can be found. The fact that it is " smudged" and written in " erasable ink" (2) says a good deal about the student's feelings on the topic. The confession, of course, is the student's desire to be effortlessly beautiful, and the poem makes us complicit in this confession, asking " isn't it strange / how we want it, despite all we know?" (3-4). Here the sense is one of compassion for the student, and also a vague sense of embarrassment to be caught in the same trap of wanting beauty even while knowing that it is not that easy or important, or even realistic.

The imagery used while comparing the narrator's daily life to the photos of models builds on this idea, making it clear that the photos are fantasies through descriptions of models as " cobalt-eyed, hair puddling / like cognac" (5-6), or in one case as " curved and light-drenched, more like a beach / than the beach" (7-8). Through these images, the ideal of beauty is shown to be completely unrealistic, and removed from any sort of achievable goal, while at the same time also being something that is just naturally desirable. The poem asks us who has not wanted to be beautiful, and shows us why we

want to, at the same time.

This is compared to the boring, every-day, and cheap life of the narrators reality. For instance, now her daydreams are limited to seeing a magazine " in the checkout line" (11), which nonetheless inspires in her " the old pull, flare / of the pilgrims twin flames, desire and faith (13-14). Here, the poem compares fashion magazines to religion, which inspire readers to believe in them and want what they show, even though the narrator should know better. The narrators childhood is presented similarly, how she went " from store to store" (15) buying " polyester satin, / machine-made lace, petunia- and Easter egg-colored" (16-17). The cheapness of the materials she can afford is contrasted to the fancy clothing of the models in the photos she admired, described as an " angel inside uncut marble" (21).

In the poems closing lines, the narrator at first admits that this was " silly," only to follow it up by saying " maybe" (24), and then invites us as readers to question whether maybe she " was right, that theres no limit to the ways eternity / suggests itself" (25). The poem ends with an image of the narrator stepping " with incandescent shoulders, into my perfect evening," (29), implying that even though the beauty of the models is unrealistic and cannot be achieved through normal means, it is still possible to find beauty.

Ultimately, the poem makes us question what it at first insisted we should know better about. It shows us that, even though something may seem impossibly idealistic, simply by having those ideals in the first place we can achieve them. We are more beautiful than we know, the poem tells us, even if all we can do is have naive and unrealistic dreams.

Works Cited

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De los Santos, Marisa. Perfect Dress. Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing. Ed. X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia. 12th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2013. 1080.