

Critical review and literary analysis of the plastic pink flamingo



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In the Spring 1999 *The American Scholar* essay “The Plastic Pink Flamingo: A Natural History”, Jennifer Price writes about the popularity of the flamingo lawn decorations in the United States. However, she’s not just analyzing the spread of this lawn decoration, rather Price’s intent in writing this essay was to mock American culture and its materialistic values. The aspect she mocks is how Americans always do flashy and weird things to stay with current trends or show off their wealth and prosperity. She also calls out America as being carefree, emotionless, and hypocritical. The popularity of the flamingo lawn decoration was an example of this characteristic of American culture in the early 1900’s. Price conveys her idea through this flamingo as an example. She expresses her thoughts through tone and word choice, other popular examples, and by creating implicit messages with use of background stories and knowledge.

The first way that Price communicates her satire is through her tone and word choice. She uses large words with powerful meaning that stand out against the rest of the words to create satire through sarcasm. She uses words such as “extravagance” and “flamboyance” to describe the flamingo lawn decorations. These words are obviously exaggerated, and it creates a sarcastic and mocking tone. One of Price’s heaviest uses of sarcasm is the addition of the sentence “But no matter” after Price describes how Americans wiped out the native flamingo population in the United States. This is obvious sarcasm because nobody believes that the extinction of a population is unimportant, except for the American population that Price regards as careless and hypocritical in this matter. Price’s use of sarcasm and satire is obvious so the audience is able to understand Price’s critique of

the United States. The sarcasm helps to support Price's idea because her tone makes fun of the flamingo, which she portrays as nothing special. This then mocks America because the people had made this unimportant flamingo into something popular, cool, and trendy.

Furthermore, throughout the essay, Price makes references and uses examples of American culture in order to further express her viewpoint. Her first use of this is when she establishes how " vacationing Americans had been flocking to Florida and returning home with flamingo souvenirs." This creates an example of Americans themselves and paints the image that people had been getting flamingoes for years just because it was the cool thing to do. Readers can use this example of vacationers and personally relate to it and understand the point that Price is trying to make in their own lives. Later, Price also uses Elvis as an example and how he bought a pink Cadillac. This example builds the idea that pink is a color associated with wealth and success because a celebrity had used it. This connotation of pink and prosperity helps supports Price's idea that Americans bought the flamingoes to fit in. Another reason Price uses the example of Elvis is to establish credibility with the audience and help them understand the concept better. Most modern Americans know of Elvis and his fame, so readers are able to connect with the fame that Elvis had.

In the final paragraph of her essay, Price adds more onto her point in that when American culture makes a trend of something, Americans often forget the history of an object or symbol. In essence, she calls Americans

hypocrites. Price manages to create this idea because she explains the

history of the flamingo as a symbol in other cultures by saying " Early
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Christians associated it with the red phoenix. In ancient Egypt, it symbolized the sun god Ra.” These statements of history accuse American culture with cultural appropriation, and this idea regards Americans as careless. Readers can understand that Americans are clueless because Price had already mentioned the extinction of flamingoes in America, then uses these stories as a way of portraying Americans as cruel because they slaughtered then later used an important symbol to past cultures. In other ways, Price uses the stories as a way of forcing the readers to feel compassion for the cultures who are being erased.

In her essay, Price continuously asserts that Americans in modern culture do many things to stay with the current trends and fit in with prosperity and popularity. Price expresses her idea in many unspoken fashions. She uses a sarcastic tone, created by word choice and sentence structure. She also uses popular examples that the reader can relate to on a personal level. Price also criticizes the American culture as hypocritical through the use of implicit messages created by stories.