



The Porcelain Doll

Sharon Kelley

She wakes every day
 To go and pay homage in the shrine of the demigods
 Marching in an army of painted Cleopatras
 Each standing in line for her share of illusion
 This isn't the Eden they were promised
 But no more than a brothel
 These porcelain dolls are ever so fragile
 From baubles and beads that weight them down
 Fumes of fermented rosewater cloud the air
 Making everyone jaded in this curious wonderland
 The looking glass lied to them all
 Its surface was fogged and dusty

Sharon pointed out that since we were discussing feminism and gender roles, her goal in writing this poem was to present her views on being a teenage female in a patriarchal culture. In this sense, she is echoing Gee's point that she participates in a type of Discourse (Gee's spelling) in the life of a high school.

Each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities. . . . The conflicts are real and cannot simply be wished away. They are the sight of very real struggle and resistance. Such conflicts also exist for many women between their ways of being in a world as women of certain types and the dominant Discourses of male-based public institutions. (Gee ix)

Perhaps it is also worth noting that patriarchal discourses are not only evidenced in the social sphere of the school, but in the curriculum as well. My philosophy students have noted, on several occasions, that we read mostly male philosophers. As many feminist philosophers suggest, this may influence the interpretation of subject matter, and it may have a lasting effect influence on the student's ego-integrity and identity.

The first two lines set the basis of the poem: that it is about a girl who goes to high school every day. The "shrine of the demigods" is an analogy for the patriarchal environment of the school. This is the case, Sharon explained, because there are many males students (popular (athlete types etc.) that many girls are attracted to. Sharon sees this as a kind of social worship as people would worship a deity.

The "army of painted Cleopatras," as Sharon sees it, is the female population of the high school. She calls them Cleopatras because Cleopatra (who Sharon pointed out was Greek, not Egyptian) was an idolized woman; beautiful, sexual, cunning, and powerful. In this sense, girls paint themselves with makeup and adorn themselves with clothes to live up to an ideal, and to exercise social dominance. The reference to "army" is illustrating their degree of conformity; they seek uniformity in their appearance and in their behavior. The second line in the couplet is meant to convey that girls in high school are generally insecure; they follow trends like cattle to the feed, and are often spoon fed manufactured notions of femininity.

Couplet three directly describes the social life inside a high school. Although some may describe it as a "garden of Eden" it is far from that according to Sharon. The so-called "best years of your life" are consumed by hormonal changes and a world where guys mostly look on girls as objects of desire, not people.

Couplet four is meant to convey female fragility. According to Sharon, teenage girls may look confident and secure from the outside, but are in turmoil in the inside. They are in constant battle with the ravages of inherited traditions and the demands of market driven trends. Hence, so many girls crumble under the

impossible standards of what society tells them they are supposed to look like. Therefore, they collapse under the exhausting grind of maintaining an image of what kind of beauty is acceptable.

Couplet five refers to the everyday life of a teenage girl and how it seems impossible not to drown in it. Rosewater (perfume) in this line is used to loosely represent cosmetics and ideals of beauty. Sharon stated that people, especially girls, get so caught up in living up to these standards that they become suffocated by it.

The first line in couplet six is referring to a mirror. It is supposed to symbolize a girl's self perception. Sharon believes that females her age hardly ever see themselves for who they truly are; they only see a superficial projection of how they think other people perceive them. They can't see their real reflection because their perspective is tainted by the media and society (e.g. the fog and dust on the mirror's surface.)

Poetry is a sufficient means by which a student can understand and express philosophical positions in ethics. From the beginning of this experiment, I have endeavored to answer what I observed was a crisis in learning and thinking in my classroom: the inadequacy of the essay as a sole means of expression and assessment. Consequently, I believe that what this project has shown is that students can express, eloquently, and precisely, their philosophical problems and viewpoints. It was also my intent to illustrate that the content of the student poetry is salient evidence of the relevance of their arguments to the authors we read, and that both observations of student and author are concomitant with concerns in access to knowledge. As evidenced in this paper, there is an overwhelming connection between the power of figurative language as a means of self expression, and its pedagogical utility in teaching philosophy within the context described. Students learned that the essay has its cognitive limitations, and that metaphor and simile are meaningful (if not more effective) ways of expressing the complexity of thought that philosophy requires. My hope is that the reader is now convinced of the value of philosophical expression through poetry, and will consider experimenting with this art form to enliven the quality of their writing, and the climate of learning and teaching in their classroom

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