



Marge Piercy's "A Work of Artifice" and "Barbie Doll": How is the will of others imposed on the female bodily self in a patriarchal society?

Tianran Wang

Tianran Wang, United World College CSC (UWCCSC), Suzhou, 215500, China

trwang21@uwcchina.org

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to reveal the plight of women in a patriarchal social environment and the confinement of men to their minds. From this, we can extend two questions: How do Marge Piercy reveal in her poems "A Work of Artifice" and "Barbie Doll" the suppression of women in a patriarchal society and how their plight, which is, blinded by the lies of men and losing their minds is created? In this paper, I will use my own analysis and collection and integration of relevant information to answer these questions. First, I will analyze the poem's literary techniques, its themes, and the imagery mentioned in it to explain how the author uses imagery to symbolize gender issues for both men and women. And second, we will explore the issue of gender equality and feminist attention, especially the inequality in gender status and marital relations metaphorically interpreted in the poems. Through this study, we can find that Marge Piercy reveals various inequalities between men and women through these two poems, the difference in social status, the restrictions in marriage, the definition of "woman" and "wife", and the two poems also reveal the views of the onlookers and the society's view of the "ideal" woman, whether physically or physiologically, or the way women's lives are judged.

Keywords: Feminism, Marge Piercy, A Work of Artifice, Barbie Doll, poem analysis

1 Introduction

Around the 1950s, a decade of significant change in gender relations, women's minds were awakened to a growing dissatisfaction with the status quo. The mass media and popular culture of the time reinforced traditional gender roles, and the landscape expected women to be content with their roles as wives and mothers, but as the female workforce increased and patterns of sexual behavior changed significantly, women became increasingly resistant to this narrative. (Khan Academy) [1] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as women shifted their goals from domestic to professional, the gender gap in the labor force narrowed rapidly. (Walsh)[2] I believe this is one of the reasons why feminism rose so quickly during this time period. Once women realized that they were no less capable and could accomplish as much as men, they suddenly discovered the lie

of the world and did everything they could to expose it and fight for what they deserved in life.

Marge Piercy is an icon of feminist literature in 1950s-1970s, she was born into a working-class family, and she was the only one in her family to have gone to college, and received a scholarship to attend the University of Michigan as well as a master's degree from Northwestern University. Piercy was an organizer for the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (Poetry Foundation) [3], and also had constant exposure to Marxism and feminist concerns. I believe it is this constant exposure to feminism and her ability to have her own ideas about everything that has made her a feminist writer.

In recent years, the topic of "women's rights" has become increasingly popular, so it is urgent and important to provide an adequate explanation of these concepts at this time. Women are an important part of society, and if their freedom and rights are not protected, it will not only lead to dissatisfaction among women, but also to various conflicts and problems, which will directly affect the social situation. Therefore, this paper attempts to make a breakthrough by analyzing the so-called "feminism" in terms of marriage relationship and society based on the literature and past as well as contemporary society from the two poems I have chosen, so as to make the readers understand the so-called "feminism" better. The goal is to make the reader more aware of the concept of "feminism" and to make a weak contribution to the development of feminism.

2 Research question

In this essay, we will focus on the question: How is the will of others imposed on the female bodily self in a patriarchal society? To answer this question on a poetic level, we have to examine how feminist ideas and resistance to patriarchal society are embodied in the poetry, given the constant oppression of women in patriarchal society. In the following essay, the first two questions will be answered by the specifics of the two poems I have chosen. The more specific questions that correspond to each of how the poem reflects the image of women as trapped by "lies" and how women's minds are controlled and confined step by step in the poem towards a pathetic ending.

3 Literature review

Poetry is undoubtedly a branch of literature, and we can find that the major difference between poetry and other literary genres is that poetry has "imagery" around which the poet's thoughts can be expressed. Poetry is more gentle than other literary forms, but when we look deeper into these lines and columns of words, we can find sharp ideas hidden within and shining with a cold light. By examining my questions above, we can also better think about the three waves of feminism. It is worth noting that the so-called in-depth exploration and reflection on feminism in literature in this paper does not mean a single study of literature apart from the broader context of patriarchal and authoritarian social conditions, which is obviously unrealistic. What this paper seeks to express is a more focused question raised by the aforementioned reflections and research: given

the constant oppression of women in a patriarchal society, how do feminist ideas and resistance to a patriarchal society manifest themselves in poetry?

When I analyze the literary devices used in the poems, I can refer to the book "A Dictionary of Literary Devices" and get some references. There are detailed descriptions of the various literary techniques, as well as examples, so that readers can easily understand and quickly apply them.

The reason that I chose Marge Piercy is that she was a feminist, and because of her feminist influence, from my personal point of view, she was more sensitive to the inequality between men and women than any other writer of her generation. This is why the feminist ideas expressed in her poetry are stronger, and her advocacy of equality between men and women in marriage and social relations is more obvious. Her language is very literary, often using irony or satire, and her novel imagery is also a characteristic of her poetry.

In addition to Marge Piercy, other feminist writers of her time include Caryl Churchill, who has devoted herself to theatrical innovation, focusing on issues of violence, political and sexual oppression, and expressing the desires and aspirations of oppressed women (Britannica) [4]. Her classic work "Top Girl" depicts the lives of six female characters from different centuries. They all have their own stories and are victims of patriarchy and resist it with different strategies. Although their resistance is generally successful, they remain dissatisfied with themselves, which extends to the question of the effectiveness of the feminist movement. (Djundjung and Yong)[5] Meanwhile, Margaret Drabble is a prominent feminist writer (Britannica) [6] and, of course, Doris Lessing, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007 (Britannica).[7] By reading their work, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how feminist writers think about writing, including which writing methods they usually tend to use. This will help me a lot in analyzing Piercy's poetry later. Sarah De Mul is fighting for equal rights for women in education, politics, careers, and marriage. (De Mul) [8] And Anne Tyler, who focuses on feminism as a re-examination of motherhood (Britannica)[9], among a series of excellent feminist writers.

There are many authors who have studied Marge Piercy's work, for example: M. Keith Booker argues that the strong political commitment embodied in Piercy's work is not unique among hysterical novels, but her overtly feminist stance is relatively unusual in a genre traditionally populated by male writers and male concerns. In both her fictional works, "A Work of Artifice" and "Barbie Doll", considerable energy emerges from a mix of different social discourses and genres. (Booker) [10]

The second author is Sam McBean, whose essay *Feminism and Futurity: Revisiting Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time* considers the future of feminism through Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. This essay aims to critically reconstruct the novel through contemporary feminist theories about time and futurity. Relating the past to the future, it is more concerned with a linear relationship. (McBean) [11]

For Karen F. Stein, Marge Piercy's utopian novels highlight the gender inequalities in most societies—social, economic, political, reproductive, and so on. It is in this cynical atmosphere that Marge Piercy writes contemporary utopian fiction as a feminist in an atmosphere where there is a greater tendency "today" to divide men and women into two distinct groups rather than one and the same. (Stein) [12]

In reading those papers and articles, it is clear that most authors are able to acknowledge Piercy as a feminist, which has facilitated my subsequent analysis of her poetry, allowing me to see the content of the poems more thoroughly-clearly from a feminist perspective, and the somewhat nebulous symbols and imagery more clearly. And the irony of her words would have been more obvious to me. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that most authors focus on Marge Piercy's fiction and how this influenced the future of feminism, but not many pay attention to Piercy's powerful poetry and its content, i.e., analyzing Marge Piercy's poetry through its literary qualities and her language. In other words, the area of Marge Piercy's feminist expression through the literary aspects of her poetry and her language has received little attention. This essay aims to answer the question "how are feminist ideas and resistance to patriarchal society embodied in poetry" by analyzing the language and the feminist expressions behind it.

4 Research Methods

In this paper, we will focus on two poems by Marge Piercy, one poem is "The Work of Artifice" and the other poem is "Barbie Doll". We will use the method of primary research, which is defined as the act of using the resources of a library, either in print or online, to find information which satisfies a need or answers a question. (IGI-Global) [13] And in this paper this means reading Piercy's poems as primary texts for analysis and secondary literature for supporting ideas.

To achieve my research goal, I will take the following steps: 1. read the poems; 2. search for literature on poetic techniques and analyze these two poems through these learned techniques, paying particular attention to rhetorical devices; 3. formulate my own opinion, and then analyze the poems through reading secondary literature, as well as using the librarian research method. The students will then read secondary literature and use the methods of library research to support their opinions. 4. draw conclusions.

Analysis for "A Work of Artifice"

- 1 The bonsai tree
- 2 in the attractive pot
- 3 could have grown eighty feet tall
- 4 on the side of a mountain
- 5 till split by lightning.
- 6 But a gardener
- 7 carefully pruned it.
- 8 It is nine inches high.
- 9 Every day as he
- 10 whittles back the branches
- 11 the gardener croons,
- 12 It is your nature
- 13 to be small and cozy,
- 14 domestic and weak;
- 15 how lucky, little tree,

16 to have a pot to grow in.
 17 With living creatures
 18 one must begin very early
 19 to dwarf their growth:
 20 the bound feet,
 21 the crippled brain,
 22 the hair in curlers,
 23 the hands you
 24 love to touch.

The format used in this poem is free verse, which means it does not use consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any musical pattern. It thus tends to follow the rhythm of natural speech. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)[14] What we should pay attention to is that Marge Piercy's choice of this special format of a poem. This format can give us a feeling of random, just like normal talking, with no constraint. It seems to me that this genre of her poetry echoes the theme of the poem, and the poet embodies the idea of women breaking the constraint and gain free in the form of poetry.

At the beginning of the poem, from line 1 to line 8, the poet wrote: "The charming bonsai tree on the side of the mountain may grow to eighty feet high until it is split by lightning. But the gardener pruned it carefully. It was nine inches high." What we need to notice here is that there are so many plants in nature to choose from, why did the poet choose the bonsai tree alone as the imagery in the poem? The tree itself is vibrant, its height can reach the sky, but if it becomes a bonsai tree, it means that the tree loses its freedom, and even its growth is meaningless - because the gardener will carefully prune it to its original "nine inches". Both wild trees and bonsai trees are subject to blows and injuries, the only difference being that wild trees are struck by lightning, while bonsai trees are pruned by the gardener. The tree struck by lightning is the end of its life after its own reckless growth and carelessness, but the bonsai tree does not even have the opportunity to grow, its life length will always remain at nine inches, she has not even felt the birds standing on its treetops, the night wind of the forest will blow the leaves rustling. In this passage, we can see through these phrases what the poet really wants to express: women are confined indoors and do not have any chance to go out and live independently. (Pratap)[15] They unconsciously and openly accept their limitations, just like a bonsai tree that is regularly pruned and can only grow to a limited height in a limited space. At the same time, we should also take note of the image of the bonsai tree itself, a miniature, ornamental plant species that does not require a lot of human and financial resources to take care of, thus revealing women's unrequited dedication to the family and their tragic fate of being trapped in the house as a "flower vase" for the rest of their lives.

Then the in poet from line 9 to line 16, writes about how the gardener tell the bonsai tree they born to be weak. From these words we can see that the gardener's "brainwashing" of the potted tree is in fact a male brainwashing of his wife. He gently but cruelly tells them that they should be trapped in this small world, and how lucky they are to have someone to provide them with a warm shelter, which is a great blessing for them, who are incapable of survival! It is clear from these words that the patriarchal society has very naturally assigned roles to everyone, with men as gardeners and women as

potted trees. Women have been "domesticated" and are used to following men's orders and believing their words. In the same way that a tree can grow very large, but because it is regularly pruned, a bonsai tree cannot imagine itself becoming a huge tree, in the same way that girls, whose wings are clipped and whose minds are confined, cannot imagine that they can, or can get an independent life, instead of being dependent on men.

From the last paragraph which is from line 18 to line 24 of this poem, we can find that the author's sarcastic intention is already obvious. For a creature, it is better to change the confinement of its mind the sooner the better. The gardener is satisfied with what he has done, but ignores the infinite possibilities of the bonsai tree, which could have stood on the cliff face in the wind, let it whistle by, and then linger and kiss the clouds above a thousand miles; similarly, men are satisfied with what they have done, but never consider the infinite possibilities of women. Their feet are lame, their brains are crippled, so they are not able to think or leave the world of lies that men have woven for them. From the beginning, men keep feeding the women with absurd ideas, preventing them from peeking into the real world and thus trying to fly out of the high walls. Isn't it all the more sad that the poem does not show the pain and struggle of women, but rather that they are submissive and obedient, or that they are defenseless and don't even think that this is the wrong way to treat them?

Analysis for "Barbie Doll"

1 This girlchild was born as usual
 2 and presented dolls that did pee-pee
 3 and miniature GE stoves and irons
 4 and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
 5 Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
 6 You have a great big nose and fat legs.
 7 She was healthy, tested intelligent,
 8 possessed strong arms and back,
 9 abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
 10 She went to and fro apologizing.
 11 Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.
 12 She was advised to play coy,
 13 exhorted to come on hearty,
 14 exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
 15 Her good nature wore out
 16 like a fan belt.
 17 So she cut off her nose and her legs
 and offered them up.
 18 In the casket displayed on satin she lay
 19 with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
 20 a turned-up putty nose,
 21 dressed in a pink and white nightie.
 22 Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.
 23 Consummation at last.
 24 To every woman a happy ending.

The poem still takes the form of free verse, and its rhetorical devices include alliteration, where a sentence continues without interruption at the end of the poem (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)[16]. The poet uses this same genre of poetry to once again fit the theme and emphasize the freedom that women deserve. At the same time, the use of alliteration can give the poem a compelling lyrical effect. (Bude) [17]

From line 1 to line 5, we can see that when a girl is born into the world, the world's criticism and "nurturing" of her has already begun. Whether it's a pee-able doll, a toy iron, or lipstick, all of them contain the society's expectation for women's image - they can be skilled with children, they can do the housework well, iron the suits for their husbands, and they have to look like a woman with sweet-colored lipstick.

In terms of content, there is a double meaning and two dimensions in the poem Barbie. The first level is symbolic. Barbie (the girl) eventually commits suicide amidst people's finger pointing. This is a metaphor for the destruction and brainwashing of young women by society. The second layer is the realistic meaning. Because Barbie, the toy, is precisely the social "teaching" girls tools, from early childhood on the subtle combing of the perfect female image is the same as Barbie, slender legs, delicate features, soft and delicate. With mini stove and iron and the pee-pee doll, it is also in the teaching of girls what part of the social function they are in.

For line 6 to line 9, as the girl grew a little older, as puberty set in, she showed her talent and dexterity, her healthy arms and strong legs. However, these good things are wrapped tightly with malice and ridicule by those around her because it is "not girly enough, not feminine enough" for a girl. In the traditional impression that a girl's hands should be white and small, and her arms should be long and smooth-she does not meet the criteria in the slightest; in the impression that a girl's legs should be straight and long and not strong, so that they will run away and she will just sit on a chair, lie on a bed, or walk around the house to clean-she does not meet the criteria in the slightest; in the impression that a girl does not need to be absolutely intelligent, because this will make them to distinguish the lies that come out of men's mouths and thus not be able to obey them - she does not meet the criteria in the slightest.

When she dies, at the lines from line 18 to line 24, This is the darkest part of the plot of the whole poem, not because of her death, but because the girl committed suicide under the oppression of society and the ravages of brainwashing, but the poet instead said it was a Happy Ending, which is undoubtedly a bitter irony, and likewise creates a sense of oozing thoughtfulness. This effect is achieved because the author contrasts the two sets of perspectives of the victim and the perpetrator. From God's point of view, the description of Barbie's devastation and eventual suicide, as well as the mortician with lime plaster to make a fake nose dip in line with the image of people's minds, but people think that all this is so natural, so logical, people focus on the point of horror, people are concerned about the image of the woman is in line with their minds, rather than the image of women themselves. And when Barbie's body is "fixed", people feel satisfied, "Finally, it's perfect"! To every woman a happy ending, this happy ending contains everyone but the woman herself. The poem undoubtedly describes the tragic life of a woman who was controlled by social stereotypes. She chose not to fight against this "invincible" force, and thus restrained herself by the standards and eyes of others, and her life was in constant degradation towards the end of death.

Throughout the whole poem Here we can see a certain echo of the previous poem "A Work of Artifice", in which the confinement of the female mind begins at birth. A doll that can pee - means being able to change the diapers of the child after marriage, lipstick - "the sign of womanhood", iron - a necessary tool for housewives to help their husbands put on wrinkle-free suits. From the moment a girl comes into the world, she has only one path, one that others see as laid out for her as the path a girl should take, and she has no choice but to be constantly pushed forward.

5 Conclusion

Both "Barbie" and "potted plants" are in fact victims of a patriarchal society. The potted plant subconsciously accepted the norms of the outside world, so grow short, while Barbie chose to use suicide to fight against external oppression. The potted plant is alive but lost its freedom; while "Barbie" used death to blood sacrifice the longed-for freedom. In fact, the biggest difference between them is that one does not recognize the independence of their own souls and minds, and one recognizes but is unable to fight to refute.

In general, Marge Piercy's two poems deal with the plight of women and their inability to save themselves, both from the perspective of marriage and from the perspective of others in society. In the first poem, "A Work of Artifice," the poet describes the life of a woman who is trapped by her marriage, unable to move forward, and living a life of great absurdity and lies. In the second poem, "Barbie Doll," the poet tells the story of a woman who is oppressed by a patriarchal society, sinking deeper and deeper into the mire under the patriarchal gaze, and finally ending her life tragically. These two poems by Marge Piercy are certainly full of irony. In "A Work of Artifice," the subordinate position of women in society is clearly illustrated, and their value to society is only to take care of the family and to serve their husbands. "The reader's thinking leads us to the view that women are seen as objects of lust. Although women love their husbands and consider them as all, men do not. The unequal relationship of marriage traps women in a cage and prevents them from discovering the real world outside. In "Barbie Doll", the poet conveys a different theme to the reader, that the patriarchal system of men requires women to be completely subservient to them, and she symbolically describes the potential hard rules that society sets for women. The social structure of male privilege undoubtedly forces women to give up their strengths and trample on their dignity in order to please men-even though this is not what they want. In this poem, the poor girl finally decides that she would rather die beautiful than live ugly, and this aesthetic is based on the patriarchal vision that death is better than imperfection, what a terrible inference!

Both poems were written in the last century, when history gave women good reasons to talk about their gender, to defend their rights, and to be marginalized and obscured by men's rights for various reasons. We can see that this great poet is trying to change the individual reader and the society itself through her work.

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