

Pyokyeong Son

IB English Literature SL

Ms. Suzanne Seddon

November 22st, 2018

A Literary Commentary of Lynn Powell, *Acceptance Speech*

A mother cooking in the kitchen, while the children and the father wait for their meal at the dining table, is a common scene in a traditionally asian household, where gender roles are clearly defined and enforced. However, in this poem, *Acceptance speech*, Lynn Powell, though the sarcastic and humorous character of the persona—presumably the wife—conveys her discontent at this unfair situation, through an entertaining metaphor that lasts throughout the poem.

The persona, through the beginning stanzas, establish a concealed metaphor between cooking dinner and an honorable award acceptance speech. The title, “Acceptance Speech,” and the alliteration in “The radio’s replaying [...]” and “the gratitude of the glamorous,” (1,2) draws in the attention of the readers to clearly and sarcastically emphasize the metaphor of the “speech,” that initially intentionally misleads the reader. The unusually exaggerated repetition of “every-” in “everyone thanking everybody for making everything,” (3) raises the suspicion of the readers, hinting at an underlying analogy, while also being ironic, as in reality no-one is thanking *herself* for her cooking. There is an interplay of metaphorical and literal descriptions in the lines: “I want to shush the faucet, dry my hands, join in right here / at the cluttered podium of the sink,” (5-6) as the “faucet” in the kitchen and her “drying hands,” are all both real images, while the “podium” of the sink indicates a sarcastic metaphor, comparing the honorable podium in a speech, to the symbol of the unrequited reward of cooking for the family—a dirty kitchen sink.

As the persona continues to incorporate cliché lines of a real acceptance speech: “and thank / my mother, [...] / my children [...],” (7-9) she indirectly expresses her discontent at the unhelpful attitude of her family members. The enjambment extending between the stanzas “and thank / my mother,” (6-7) directs attention at the latter line that sarcastically expresses

gratitude for her uncooperative family members. This dissatisfaction is directed towards “[her] children, for putting back the growl in hunger,” (8)—who, ironically, would more likely be unhelpfully complaining for the meal, sitting the dinner table; and “[her] husband, *primo uomo* of dinner, for not begrudging me this starring role,” (9) described mockingly as the “first man” to the dinner table, eagerly waiting for the food, negligent in her cooking and “begrudging [his wife] this starring role” (10) of cooking alone. The contrast between her metaphorical “starring role” and the reality of the “cluttered podium” of the sink, additionally adds to the mocking tone and character of the persona.

The built-up tension of the continuous analogy of her “acceptance speech” is culminated then released with a humorous line that is visually and structurally independent. The enjambment in the line “this starring role—,” being followed by an em-dash, is used to increase the tense atmosphere predicating the punchline: “without all of them, I know this soup / would not be here tonight.” (11-12) The alliteration “without [...] / would not [...]” and the rhythm in the line break “I know this soup / would not be here,” additionally eases the flow of the line to increase its jocularity—especially with the simplicity of the recipe, the “soup.” The stanza is then concluded immediately, to allow for the release of suspense from the previous lines.

The unnecessarily detailed descriptions of cooking utensils and ingredients only increase the humor in the metaphor, only later to be contrasted with the her reality of negligence, to emphasize the sadness of her unrequited hard work. The personification of the tomatoes who “opened up their hearts;” the “[spices] who dashed in the nick of time;” and the “marrow bone,” who are the “blood-brother of the broth;” (16, 18-19, 14-15) paints comical images of the steps in her cooking. This image is further enhanced though her witty choice of words—the “sorority” of the corn, or the “self-effacious” limas (17, 16). This exaggerated expression of gratitude continues also to the “salt” and the “knife,” (20, 21) increasing the hilarity of the extensive joke.

Absent, however, is her discontent attitude towards the family, which is conveyed indirectly through its deliberate omission. As she mentions the salt—“you know who you are”—, and the knife “who revealed the ripe beneath the rind,” (21, 22) the reader’s attention is alternately directed at the family members that she actually ironically refers to—“you

know how you are”—that failed to help her. The repetition of the harsh “s,” “r,” and “-th” sounds in the lines “special thanks, as always, to the salt,” “revealed the ripe beneath the rind,” and “truth underneath the dirty peel,” (20, 22, 23) respectively, expresses her frustration—the truth underneath her words—while also contrasting with her actual words that express thankfulness towards the food ingredients to raise the sarcastic tone. Her statement to the celery and parsnip that she “knows exactly how they feel,” (27) is juxtaposed with the family who evidently does not, and “[has] forgotten” (24) her efforts. This sarcastic response culminates—and somewhat is more directly conveyed—in the concluding lines of the poem, in the intermingling of sarcasm and metaphor, as she mentions that “the heat is on” (29) in both her imaginary crowd and the boiling soup, including a tone of sad disappointment—her true emotions.

While a tone of humor and an extensive metaphor permeates the poem, the persona’s frustration continues to only increase. The family lacks appreciation of her cooking—which, of course, can be a pleasure, cooking for her beloved family members, but is indeed also a laborious task. The persona, therefore, turns to sarcasm in order to express this frustration, but reveals, in the end, her disappointment, concluding amongst the lack of appreciation from her children and husband, “basking” in the absent, sad, “blue applause.”

*Word Count: 958*