

More than Meets the Eye

Behind a finished product, there is almost always chaos and disorder behind it. This is highlighted in the poems “Ice Palace” by Margaret Atwood and “Super’s Report” by Peter Normal. The poem “Ice Palace” describes a lavish hotel, where everything is pristine, except in the places where guests do not go; “Super’s Report” tells the tale of a clean-up occurring with ominous undertones of how it happens. These poems both include the ideas of behind-the-scenes struggle in order to maintain perfection, so-called invisible workers, and false paradise.

Much like show business, “backstage [is] always carnage” (Atwood 26) in the hotel described in “Ice Palace” and in the office building discussed in “Super’s Report”. The work behind the flawlessness illustrated in both poems seems ominous, chaotic, and generally mysterious. Furthermore, while “all seems well” (Normal 7) in the workplace, the outside world is unaware of how the employees work. Everyone else sees the “dreamy views” (Normal 8) and “sugared air” (Atwood 18), but the tone of the employees’ environment implies that this truly is not the case. What is most likely blood on the floor, employees “hope [are] [just] petals” (Atwood 28) rather than the consequence of a mistake someone else made. This is very unsettling and drives the point that there is mayhem going on that others are unaware of. This could be a comment on the ignorance the public has on workers’ conditions and the ethics of businesses, only focusing on the pretty things. Altogether, conserving perfection is not a cakewalk.

What contributes to the public’s obliviousness is the “invisible hands” (Atwood 14) who do the dirty work. They have no idea that the “weeds discovered.../were gassed”

(Normal 1-2) or that “a gangsta tag was wiped” (Normal 3) while retaining the refinement required according to the higher-ups. No one sees “the bodies that were once/ attached to all those hands” (Atwood 24-25) who make everything run smoothly in the hotel or the company. While in a hotel it is uncommon to see the maids who “clean out the wad of hair/... left in the porcelain shower” (Atwood 18-19), not paying attention to the workers who are so meticulous that even “[a] vague flaw vexing an exec’s window [is] effaced” (Normal 5) in the effort of keeping everything ideal simply goes over the people’s’ heads. Society often ignores those who do the work to sustain order, whether intentionally or not, and these poems are trying to make that more clear.

Lastly, the idea of false paradise is prominent in these poems. Atwood portrays the hotel as a “demi/paradise” (Atwood 1-2), and the same can be said for the office. The office has a “fabled room immune to grime” (Normal 15) that shows that no room is quite clean ever because they simply attain the perfect sheen on the tiles or lack of dust on the shelves. The rooms will always be slightly flawed, which makes the office the half paradise that the hotel is. Though the hotel does possess the “heavenly bed, [and] the all-/you-can-eat breakfast” (Atwood 13-14), it is not quite immaculate. People’s “desires/are named and thus created,/ and then almost satisfied” (Atwood 2-4), much like the workplace that is graffitied and slightly flawed no matter what the employees do, needs and wants are almost fulfilled, but not completely to create the other-worldliness desired. The pressure to achieve this ethereal look in the settings could parallel societal pressures that people put on each other to make themselves flawless, as the people in charge are the ones pressuring employees to

keep up the standard they please. In conclusion, partial paradise is a focus in both poems and possibly a comment on society.

All in all, “Ice Palace” by Margaret Atwood and “Super’s Report” by Peter Normal depict chaos out of public view, employees who go unnoticed, and incomplete utopia. These all are under the guise of a large company or hotel that wish to achieve complete faultlessness without holding concern for how it is obtained. And although these works focus more on the setting, they may be a comment on how society and capitalism function today.