

Film and Television Reviews

Barbie. Dir. Greta Gerwig. Screenplay by Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach. Perf. Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling, and America Ferrera. Warner Bros., 2023.

Barbie may hold a special place in the hearts of those of us who grew up with her, and just like the doll, the blockbuster *Barbie* is for everyone. The film, a bona fide cultural phenomenon, begins in Barbie Land, where everything is perfect for Margot Robbie's Stereotypical Barbie. Because every woman is Barbie, we can do anything, and we have all the power. This all changes, however, when Robbie's Barbie starts fixating on her imperfections and experiencing thoughts of death, something familiar to everyone. These dark thoughts lead Robbie's Barbie on a journey to the real world that brings her face-to-face with a new patriarchal problem: Kendom. Underneath all the pink and plastic, the *Barbie* movie provides a complicated look at feminism that many will appreciate.

While I, a younger millennial, geeked out about seeing a childhood toy come to life, I was not sure how my father, a baby boomer, would react. To my surprise, he enjoyed the film as much as I did. He did not grow up playing with Barbie dolls, so he did not understand the nostalgia, but he enjoyed the story and how it was neither woke nor anti-male like he feared it would be. He did think Gloria's (America Ferrera) monologue was a bit much, but he recognized that her words were not directed toward him, and he was able to understand her feelings. His resonance aligns with director Greta Gerwig's goals, stated in an interview with the *New York Times* promoting the film:

I was crying. Then I looked around, and everyone was crying – even the men were tearing up. I suddenly thought that this tightrope she's explaining is something that is present for women in the way that she's describing it, but it's also present for everybody. Everybody is afraid they're going to put a foot wrong and it's all going to come crashing down, and in that moment of doing that monologue, she was giving people permission to step off that tightrope. I don't think I realized until then that's what that moment was for. (Buchanan)

Gerwig also said she hopes *Barbie* is “an invitation for everybody to be part of the party and let go of the things that aren’t necessarily serving us as either women or men,” (Buchanan).

After seeing *Barbie*, my father and I had a conversation about the topics of the film which reminded me of bell hooks’ scholarship on feminism. In her book, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, hooks discusses the need to educate people on feminism by creating examples that everyone can access. Initially, *Barbie* juxtaposes the real world and Barbie Land to show how different these two worlds are, one ruled by the patriarchy and the other by “Barbiarchy,” but by the end of the film, this juxtaposition ends up highlighting the similarities between the two worlds. Barbie Land reflects the real world, just with the dominant gender swapped. By creating this “Barbiarchy,” *Barbie* becomes an accessible example of feminism by putting men in Ken’s shoes while giving women a feel for what it’d be like if we were to live in Barbie Land. To use Ken’s own words, “it is not fun, is it?”

While the film did not spend much time talking about why the Kens created Kendom, nor does it offer a solution to gender disparities, it does make the audience reimagine feminism as not just something women struggle with, but something men struggle with too (hooks, 2000). In the end, *Barbie* is an inspirational comedy that reminds us that we all have struggles, but that we also have value, and we are all “Kenough.”

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The Glory. Dir. Ahn Gil-ho. Screenplay by Kim Eun-sook. Perf. Song Hye-Kyo, Lee Do-hyun, Lim Ji-yeon, and Park Sung-hoon. Hwa and Dam Pictures, 2022.

The Netflix series *The Glory* is based on a true crime that happened in 2006 in the city of Cheong Ju, South Korea (Rath). Yet the show's entire plot has been fictionalized by screenwriter Kim Eun-sook. In an interview, Kim states she drew from a conversation she had with her daughter about school bullying and violence, which are hot button issues in South Korea (Rath). Affected by the #MeToo movement that started in the United States, South Koreans started to openly discuss and fight back against social injustice such as sexual harassment, assault, school violence, and political corruption, all issues that Koreans had a cultural tendency to hide from the public. For this reason, *The Glory* garnered the attention of Korean viewers who are deeply concerned about the topic of school violence.

International audiences who are sensitive to social injustice also paid keen attention to the show. According to a review in *New York Times*, “[As of May 7th, 2023,] *The Glory*...is now Netflix's fifth most popular non-English television offering ever...it reached the top-10 non-English TV list in 91 countries for 13 weeks” (Jin et al.). Don Kang, Netflix's vice president of content for Korea, explains why audiences are invested in this drama: “*The Glory* is a great example of a story that resonates authentically with local audiences, but also depicts themes of human psychology and social issues which audiences everywhere can relate to” (Jin et al.). The psychological and social issues that *The Glory* portrays are school violence, anger, and justice, themes that resonate with younger generations.

This review contains spoilers for *The Glory*, so please proceed with caution if you are unfamiliar with the show, which depicts the abuse and sexual assault of 17-year-old high school student Moon Dong-eun without any filtration. Early in the show, five bullies – Park Yeon-jin, Jeon Jae-joon, Lee Sa-ra, Choi Hye-Jeong, and Son Myeong-oh – graphically burn Dong-eun with a curling iron in the school gym. When Dong-eun cries for help, Myeong-oh forcefully kisses her to muffle her screams. These acts will no doubt provoke shock and even disgust in some viewers, but the unfiltered depiction of school violence compels audiences to sympathize with Dong-eun because they come to fully understand the source of her trauma.

More harrowing, perhaps, adults routinely fail to protect Dong-eun, making her an even more tragic and sympathetic character. At one point, Dong-eun visits a

school nurse who tries to help the injured teenager. However, the parents of the five perpetrators are wealthy and powerful enough to cover up their children's wrongdoings and they force the school nurse to quit her job. Meanwhile, Dong-eun's homeroom teacher only cares about securing promotion and thus he stands up for five perpetrators instead of Dong-eun. Even Dong-eun's mother accepts bribes from Yeon-jin's mother and abandons her daughter. Ultimately, Dong-eun ends up alone with no possibility of help from anyone. For this reason, she drops out of school while her five assailants remain unpunished.

In the ensuing years, vengeance becomes Dong-eun's *raison d'être* (Vognar). After graduating from college, she coerces the director of an exclusive private elementary school into giving her a job as a homeroom teacher. One of her students is Ha Ye-sol, daughter of Yeon-jin and Jeon Jae-joon, who conceived the child during an adulterous affair. Dong-eun sets out to ruin Yeon-jin's glorious life, which involves revealing the truth about Ha Ye-sol's origins to Yeon-jin's husband, Ha Do-yeong. Upon completing her vendetta, Dong-eun intends to commit suicide but is stopped thanks to the timely intervention of Park Sang-im, the mother of Dong-eun's boyfriend, Joo Yeo-jeong. *The Glory* ends with Dong-eun and Yeo-jeong together and plotting further acts of vengeance.

The audio-visual catharsis provided by the show results from Kim's careful crafting of Dong-eun's scheme, which differs from the outwardly violent actions of her tormenters. While Yeon-jin and others inflicted pain in a crude and direct way, Dong-eun's revenge takes years to enact and is at once shocking yet poetic. Throughout the series, Kim refuses to fully reveal Dong-eun's plan, meaning audiences must pay close attention to the narrative. Chris Vognar interprets Dong-eun's vengeance as "intricate and perhaps even a little too subtle, featuring blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments that offer clues to Moon Dong-eun's master plan." When someone reads a poem, they tend to study the text meticulously by focusing on things like punctuation marks, blanks, and even page margins. Similarly, audiences watching *The Glory* must pay keen attention to elements such as mise-en-scène, pauses, and even the actors' breath to understand events onscreen. Kim's meticulous script creates Dong-eun's poem of revenge against her abusers.

The frequent use of long takes and close-up shots increases the viewer's catharsis. When Yeon-jin and the other perpetrators beg for mercy after realizing Dong-eun's revenge plans, the camera captures their facial expressions closely, and audiences can taste the sweet bitterness of Dong-eun's revenge. There are stark contrasts between Dong-eun and her perpetrators, reinforced through techniques

such as costume and makeup; Dong-eun (played as an adult by Song Hye-Kyo) usually wears monotone or black clothes and rarely applies makeup, accentuating her dark past and her decision to seek vengeance against those who harmed her. Dong-eun's attackers, meanwhile, often wear expensive, beautiful, and colorful clothes as well as garish makeup to show off their wealth and social status, suggesting they live their lives without any remorse or guilt for their past actions.

Thanks to a carefully crafted script, masterful cinematography, and determined mise-en-scène, audiences enjoy watching how Dong-eun brings justice. Yet the reason why viewers truly root for Dong-eun is that they may have witnessed another real-life "Dong-eun" at least once, whether in school, at a job, or in society itself. However, viewers may not have had enough courage to stand up for their Dong-eun even though they recognized the unfairness and injustice of the situation. In *The Glory*, Dong-eun attains justice through her vendetta against Yeon-jin and the other perpetrators, thus providing viewers with a sense of closure and solace.

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