

Wooden Jesus

Temple of the Dog

“Televangelists” are TV preachers who often have large followings and often make a great deal of money from their followers’ donations and purchases. Since the 1980’s, a number of famous American televangelists have been involved in scandals related to their personal lives and business enterprises. In this song, the speaker uses the device of addressing a “wooden Jesus” sold by such a televangelist to comment on psychological, religious, and ethical issues.

Wooden Jesus, where are you from?
Korea, Canada, or maybe Taiwan?¹
I didn't know it was the Holy Land
But I believed from the minute the check left my hand
5 And I pray

Can I be saved?
I spend all my money on a future grave
Wooden Jesus, I'll cut you in
On twenty percent of my future sin

10 Porcelain Mary², her majesties pure
Looking for virgin territory
Coat hanger halos that don't come cheap
From television shepherds with living room sheep
And I pray

15 Can I be saved?
I spend all my money on a future grave
Wooden Jesus, I'll cut you in
On twenty percent of my future sin

Wooden Jesus, where are you from?
20 Korea, Canada, or maybe Taiwan?
I didn't know it was the Holy Land
But I believed from the minute the check left my hand

Can I be saved?
I spend all my money on a future grave

¹ Korea, Canada, and Taiwan are places where such a product was likely to have been manufactured when the song was written.

² A porcelain figurine of the Virgin Mary, Jesus’ mother, is another product that a televangelist might sell.

25 Wooden Jesus, I'll cut you in
 On twenty percent of my future sin
 I'll cut you in, I'll cut you in

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. What rhetorical device does the speaker employ to initiate his or her exploration of these issues and questions? What is the point of questioning the wooden Jesus' place of origin?
2. What do the speaker's comments and questions suggest about the mental state and motives of some followers of televangelists? Consider such phrases as "believed from the minute the check left my hand" (line 4) and "I spend all my money on a future grave" (line 7).
3. In the context of religious worship and forgiveness for sins, what might the speaker mean by "cut you in on twenty percent of my future sin"? In what ways is this diction (word choice) both surprising and appropriate as an expression of the songwriter's message?
4. What double meaning might "virgin territory" (line 11) have? Consider the commercial goals of a televangelist's business. What does the song imply about the motives of televangelists? Find details that support your interpretation.
5. What does the description "coat hanger halos" (line 12) suggest, and why aren't they cheap? Who are the "shepherds" and "sheep" (line 13), and what does this description imply about each of them?