

Stylistic Analysis of the Poem "Woman Work" by Maya Angelou

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Abstract: The woman is always the most discussed topic in almost all the countries of the world and in whole the history of the universe. Some groups talk against her and some groups fight for her rights. Even, now a day in few regions of the world woman is living in a very disgusting condition and at the same time she is enjoying the beauty, adornments and luxury of the world with equal status as the man. In Asian as well as American society woman is considered as the main component of the house and at the same time she has a responsible to run the house. This research is about the poem "Woman Work" by Maya Angelou in which the poetess has conferred the busy life of the woman in the house.

Key Words: Stylistic Analysis, Woman Work, Business, American Society

1. Introduction:

The poetess has shown the dull and rough life of a woman in American society. She has to take care of his house, children and husband. She has to mend their clothes and to feed them three times a day. She has to clean the clothes of whole the family and also she has to clean the floor of the house. She has to harvest crops, buy things from the market, press the clothes of children and look after the garden.

After this rough and tough daily routine, she has become exhausted and desire for rest. She finds relief in nature and calls all the major component of nature to help her to get out of this dull life and enjoy the nature. She calls the sunshine to shine on her, requests rain to fall the drops of water on her, pleas snowflakes to fall on her gently. She contemplates nature as her best friend; she meditates and calls the nature for relief. She call the natural objects and says, you are only whom I can call my own.

Modernization has changed the life of man and makes the life very fast. But when a person became exhausted after the hard work of whole the day, he finds relief in the leap of nature. Natural scenes get him out of all the worries of life and he feels himself the most luck person of the world. The poem "Woman Work" show such images in it where an exhausted woman demands from the natural object for a relief. Beside this, this poem deals with the mechanical life of modern man.

2. Research Questions:

- What is the condition of women in American society?
- What are the desires of women of this age?
- What is the impact of modernization on women?

3. Objectives:

- To show the nature of the job was done by women on the daily basis in America.
- To show that woman is a major component of all the society.
- To analyze the poem stylistically.

4. Methodology:

The methodology is a chain of approaches and techniques used in the research process. It proffers guidance during the research by providing principals and rules to conduct the research in a proper way. This research is a stylistics analysis of the poem "Woman Work" by Maya Angelou. The nature of this research work is analytical. The researchers have analyzed the poem both with respect to the figure of Speech and lexical point of view. The researchers have applied the methods of stylistic analysis offered by Leech and Short in their works "A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry" Longman (1969), and "Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays, and Prose" (1996) respectively.

5. Literature Review:

Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as, "The study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation".

According to Carter (1989), "style generally depends on linguistic levels. Due to these levels every text and writing are different from the others, hence every genre is different".

Haynes (1989) is of the view that, "the study of style is the study of distinctions; looking at what was said against what might have been said. Style can also be called as variety. In

various contexts, style refers to the manner of expression. Due to the multipurpose field of style, it is used according to one's field of study".

Adejare (1992) makes this clear when he said that, "Style is an ambiguous term".

Lawal (1997) however, describes the style as an "Aspect of language that deals with choices of diction, phrases, sentences and linguistic materials that are consistent and harmonious with the subject matter".

Lawal (1997) also added that "It may be reckoned in terms of the sociolinguistic contexts and it may also be reckoned or analyzed on linguistic, semantic and even semiotic terms".

According to Leech (1969), "Style is the way in which something is spoken, written or performed. It refers to the use of words, sentences, structures and speaking style".

Leech and Short (1981) is of the view that, "The word style has an uncontroversial meaning. Style depends on the context for a given purpose for which the language is being used".

Birch (1989) believes that "Both language and style cannot move beyond a limit on the supremacy of words, these words contain specific meanings which differ it from the ordinary language".

Leech and Short (1981) also said that "It is the selection of the words from a grand linguistic vocabulary".

Oloruntoba-Oju (1999) believes that "style is almost synonymous with variety; it refers in a simple way to the manner of expression, which differs according to the various contexts".

According to Freeman (1971), "Stylistics is a sub-discipline which started in the second half of the 20th century".

Short and Candlin (1989) said that "Stylistics is a linguistic approach to texts".

Carter (1988) said that "Stylistics is a bridge (link) discipline between linguistics and literature".

6. Stylistic Analysis Of The Poem:

6.1. Rhyme:

The rhyme scheme of first fourteen lines is aa, bb, cc, dd, ee, ff, gg. But there is no rhyme scheme of remaining part of the poem except line 16 and 18 where "rain" and "again" are rhymed.

"Rain on me, **rain**"

"And cool my brow **again**."

The poetess has disturbed the rhyme scheme knowingly to show that the working woman wants relief from the dull and rough daily tasks. The father of romanticism, William Wordsworth, has also used this technique in his poetry.

6.2. Rhythm:

There is no consistent rhythm throughout the poem or even throughout each stanza. In lines 1-14, the lines are relatively short of 4 to 7 syllables, every word in those lines is one syllable.

6.3. Mode:

The mode of the poem is sad, where a woman is calling nature to help her to get enjoyment. She is fully tired due to daily household works and now wants calm and soothe in her life. Last four stanzas clearly show the mode of the poem but final stanza is perfect to give the mode of the poem:

"Sun, rain, curving sky
Mountain, oceans, leaf, and stone
Star shine, moon glow
You're all that I can call my own."

6.4. Imagery:

Imagery is descriptive language that evokes a sensory (sight, smell, taste, sight, and sound) experience. In the second stanza, sunshine, rain, dewdrops are the example of Imagery.

"Shine on me, **sunshine**
Rain on me, rain
Fall softly, **dewdrops**"

In the third stanza, words and phrases: storm, blow, fiercest wind, and float are imagery.

"**Storm, blow** me from here
With your **fiercest wind**
Let me **float** across the sky"

In the fourth stanza, Snowflakes fall gently; giving cold, icy kisses are also examples of imagery.

"**Fall gently, snowflakes**
Cover me with white
Cold icy kisses and
Let me rest tonight."

In the fifth stanza, sun, rain, curving sky, mountain, oceans, leaf, stone, star shine and moon glow are the example of imagery.

"**Sun, rain, curving sky**
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone
Star shine, moon glow"

6.5. Repetition:

Just like the rhyme and rhythm techniques repetition is used only in the first 14 lines. In lines 1, 7, 9, 12, 22 and 30 there is a repetition of the word "I".

"I've got the children to tend"

"I got company to feed"

"I've got shirts to press"

"I gotta clean up this hut"

"Till I can rest again."

"You're all that I can call my own."

In lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13 and 21 there is a repetition of the word "the".

"I've got the children to tend"

"The clothes to mend"

"The floor to mop"

"The food to shop"

"Then the chicken to fry"

"The baby to dry"

"The garden to weed"

"The tots to dress"

"The can to be cut"

"Then see about the sick"

"Let me float across the sky"

In lines 5 and 13, there is a repetition of the word "then".

"Then the chicken to fry"

"Then see about the sick"

6.6. Alliteration:

Alliteration is the repetition of consonants; alliteration is also there in the poem.

In line 1, "The", "To", and "Tend" is alliteration.

"I've got **the children to tend**"

In line 5, "Then" and "The" is alliteration.

"**Then the** chicken to fry"

In line 10, "The", "Tots", and "To" is alliteration.

"**The tots to** dress"

In line 11, "Can" and "cut", "The" and "To" is alliteration.

"**The can to be cut**"

In line 13, "Then" and "The", "See" and "Sick" is alliteration.

"**Then see about the sick**"

In line 15, "Shine" and "Sunshine" is alliteration.

"**Shine** on me, **sunshine**"

In line 16, "Rain" and "Rain" is alliteration.

"**Rain** on me, **rain**"

In line 24, "With" and "White" is alliteration.

"Cover me **with white**"

In line 29, "Star" and "Shine" is alliteration.

"**Star shine**, moon glow"

In line 30, "Can" and "Call" is alliteration.

"You're all that I **can call** my own."

6.7. Personification:

Objects are personified when they are given human characteristics. In lines 17 and 18, the dewdrops cool her brow. Usually, the idea of cooling one's brow involves one person comforting another.

"Fall softly, **dewdrops**

And **cool my brow** again."

In lines 23-25, the snowflakes cover the woman with kisses; this is an act of comfort and involves another human.

"Fall gently, **snowflakes**

Cover me with white

Cold icy kisses and"

6.8. Symbolism:

When an object stands for another object it is symbolism, this poem also deals with symbolism. Rain is a symbol of purification and relief.

"**Rain** on me, **rain**"

"Sun, **rain**, curving sky"

Snowflakes are symbols of peace and rest.

"Fall gently, **snowflakes**"

Sunshine stands for blessings of nature.

"Shine on me, **sunshine**"

Storm stands as a symbol of inner passion for working hard.

"**Storm**, blow me from here"

Dewdrops symbolize comfort and rest.

"Fall softly, **dewdrops**"

7. Lexical Analysis

Maya Angelou in her poem "Woman Work" used different varieties of lexemes. We discuss these varieties of words with their grammatical function (Part of speech). This variety

comprises of 22 Nouns, 9 Adjectives, 15 Verbs and 5 Preposition. Their description is as following.

Noun	Adjective	Verb	Preposition
Children	Softly	Got	Till
Clothes	Fiercest	Mend	With
Floor	Gently	Mop	From
Food	Icy	Shop	On
Chicken	Cold	Fry	To
Baby	White	Dry	
Company	Again	Feed	
Garden	Here	Weed	
Shirt	Cool	Dress	
Tot		Cover	
Rest		Fall	
Tonight		Blow	
Snowflake		Rain	
Rest		Shine	
Strom		Cut	
Brow			
Dewdrops			
Rain			
Sunshine			
Clean up			
Hut			
Cane			

8. Themes:

The main idea in a talk, a piece of writing or work of art is known as the theme. Major themes in this poems are slavery, self-identity, African American culture, nature and exploitation. These themes are discussed under with special references from the poem.

8.1. Slavery:

"Woman Work" looks like a poem was written about any woman with a family to caring for. But lines 11 and 14 clearly change that impression because most women in modern America do not cut sugar cane or pick cotton. These two tasks indicate that the woman is a slave.

"The **can to be cut**"

"And the **cotton to pick**."

Masters live in luxury houses but slaves live in huts in or outsides the luxury houses of masters. The mentioning of the hut in line 12 shows that the lady is a slave.

"I gotta clean up this **hut**"

The final line of the poem also suggests the lady is a slave as she finds relief in nature and calls the nature her own.

"**You're all that I can call my own.**"

8.2. Self-Identity:

This poem is about Self-Identity where a slave is calling nature to entertain her as there is no one to give her identity. She just wants rest, line 22 and 26 support the idea that her world is shattered one.

"Till I can **rest** again."

"Let me **rest** tonight."

It is the tragedy of the life of slaves that; they can find joy only if the work was done and they can rest. She worked hard in the society of white people to prove her presence but due to hard work and crashing routine she can't rest completely.

8.3. African American Culture:

The institution of slavery is a primary component but through the poem, we come to know the African American experience in America. As "Woman Work" explores the subject of slavery, but it also shows the lifestyle of the Black people, African American, in the America. This poem also deals with the impression that White people have not accepted the rights of Black people in America. White people enjoy the life as a master and Black people worked as a slave.

8.4. Exploitation:

Exploitation means to work excessively hard for someone else's benefit. The 1st stanza clearly shows that the lady is a slave and she worked hard for her master. When she completes all the work of the day a new cycle is ready to perform again. She is performing all the tasks for others benefits but due the labor of all the day, she is exhausted and feeling sleepy.

8.5. Nature:

Last four stanzas describe the nature in a very good way. We can find the peaceful qualities of nature in the words like gentle snowflakes, curving sky, cooling dewdrops, the sunshine, mountains, stars, and rain. The last stanza is a perfect example of nature in the poem.

"**Sun, rain, curving sky**

Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone

Star shine, moon glow"

These images give the poem a natural touch and show that even in this modern mechanical life man prefer nature to get calm.

9. Conclusion:

This poem is unique in the sense that it gives the details of a real state of a working woman. Firstly, the busy life of a woman has been shown and then the desires of that lady to enjoy the life through natural images have been shown. In the mechanical age, where man is busy whole the day just to make progress nature is the only source to give peace, rest and calm in life. This poem is also unique in a sense that there is no exaggeration is used, just a simple event has been shown. When the diction of the poem is a topic then it is very appropriate and quite relevant to the themes of the poem. Use of disturbed rhyme scheme is also a good quality of this poem. The purpose of this technique is to show that every living thing wants change in life, just like the working lady in the poem.

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Appendix:

Woman Work

I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
The baby to dry
I got company to feed

The garden to weed
I've got shirts to press
The tots to dress
The can to be cut
I gotta clean up this hut
Then see about the sick
And the cotton to pick.

Shine on me, sunshine
Rain on me, rain
Fall softly, dewdrops
And cool my brow again.

Storm, blow me from here
With your fiercest wind
Let me float across the sky
Til I can rest again.

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