

Research Article

The Comparative Study in Maya Angelou's Poem: “Phenomenal Woman” and Langston Hughes's Poem “The Mother to Son”

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Abstract

Men and women should receive the same treatment because they are human beings. Why discrimination to women? Through this comparative study, men should understand that a woman is as important as a man. Discrimination against women is a male's attitude. A woman is oppressed by men for being a woman and a black is oppressed by white for being black. Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes in their poems present strong impact of black who can stand for their rights and be at least, as equal as all human beings.

Keywords: Literature, Literary, Analysis, Comparative, Phenomenal Woman, Mother to Son, Poetry, Discrimination.

Introduction

This article is entitled “The Comparative Study in Maya Angelou's Poem “Phenomenal Woman” and Langston Hughes's Poem “Mother to Son”, and as my main preoccupation is to read, understand and depict the resemblance acts and the differences aspects of discrimination in the poems under study and come up with some solutions more likely minimize the rate of discrimination against women. The topic suggests, it is a study of comparing both poems. The analysis focuses on the description of the formal organization and on the discussion of semantic organization of each poem.

Comparing Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou's poetry. Both poems shed light on the true feelings of African Americans everywhere and they show that these people are tired of being treated differently to white. There are some also concepts to revisit in this work for the purpose of: literature as arts, literary analysis, literary interpretation, literary appreciation, poetry and, poetry analysis. Comparison analysis, formal organization, semantic organization, subject matter, theme, and tone of the poems.

Choice

The choice of the topic could be explained by personal interest in literature, especially in African American literature, in Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes poetry. Another reason is personal interest in women's struggle for their rights. Culler (1997:37) states literature has been as “a special kind of writing which, it was argued, could civilize not just the lower classes but, also the aristocrats and the middle classes. This view of literature, as an aesthetic object that could make us “better people”, is linked a certain idea of the subject to what theorists have to call the liberal subject”. Another reason for the choice of the topic is the fact that I am a woman and I have to struggle for the common cause, to advocate women's right for the realization of women's ideal as one of the poems recommend.

The choice of Maya's poem and Langston Hughes's poem could be explained by their advocacy of women's rights. They lived at the time when white women or men discriminated black. Gender is a fundamental aspect in which responsibility is to be shared between men and women. Women's rights are part of human rights. Gender is used to refer the issue of equity. Stratton (1994) states: “gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender diverse people.” It is the vision that men and women should be treated as equal as socially, economically and in all other aspects. Every literary work gives a message; literature is a way in which human's life is taken in affirmative sense in society.

I am attracted by the way females are fighting for their rights in the society dominated by men. Writing "Phenomenal Woman" for Maya and "Mother to Son" for Langston Hughes is to tell women, to defend themselves for their own rights. Poetry is the oldest and the most important branch of literature (Summers, 2005). Shaw (1972) poetry is "the art of rhythmical composition written or spoken designed to produce pleasure through beautiful, elevated imaginative or profound thoughts. Poetry is the first literary genre often associated with oral traditional. And the first poem with oral traditional literature. So, the first poems composed by men were songs.

About Analysis

Literary analysis is part of literary criticism, which implies reading, analyzing, interpreting, evaluating or appreciating and discussing the principles of literary aesthetics. It is then the process of reading, understanding, interpreting, discussing, evaluating and demonstrating the quality and the place of a literary text by relating it to our previous experience. It consists of separating a text into parts, working out meaning, and interpreting an implicit, connected piece of discourse for a better understanding (Ngwaba, 2019). In this task the writer's intention is understood and the theme of the literary work is revealed in the course of the work".

The purpose of literary analysis is essentially to enable the reader to fully grasp a literary work as text, discourse, literature and art at the same time by rendering its relevance. So that its rationale is the underlying assumption according to which a literary work is an implicit, connoted, and hidden discourse (Ngwaba, 2019).

About Poetry and Poetry Analysis

Poetry

A concept to revisit in relation with the work is poetry. What is poetry? The first literary genre often associated with the oral genre. Ngwaba (2005: 20) refers to poetry as "poetic discourse helps recall its discourse nature just as literature itself, the social nature of communication stressing the interactive process of meanings, its contextual aspects, the issue of background knowledge, and the comprehension process as a whole" about which he wrote:

Poetry is used to civilize people. Its purpose is both to teach and to delight (Ngwaba, 2019: 15).

Shaw (1972: 292) Poetry is « the art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, designed to produce pleasure through beautiful, elevated imaginative or profound thoughts".

"Poetry is written to share ideas, express emotions, and create an imagery. Poets choose words for their meaning. And arrange them to create tempo known as the meter. Some poems incorporate rhyme schemes, with two or more lines that end in like-sounding words. It is a form of literary art that uses aesthetic and often rhythmic qualities of language.

About Poetry Analysis

Poetry analysis is "the process of investigating the form of a poem, content, structural semiotics, and historical in an informed way". How to analyze a poem more effectively is a really challenging activity, and a long gymnastic. First, the poem must be understood thoroughly. There are many variables to consider such as the approach to use. At this point, discourse comprehension process approach qualifies better (Ngwaba (2013: 29). The analysis of poetry is a real challenging activity, a long procedure. The first thing is to read and reread the poem eventually work out strategies, no one liking to motivate females to struggle for their rights. To portray women's struggle against discrimination and to work out some strategies to adopt for this struggle.

¹For the sake of understanding. There are many things to consider in the analysis, such as which approach to take into account. The schema focuses on two major stages: a descriptive of formal organization of the poem and a descriptive of its semantic organization.

Literary Approaches

For the purpose of this work, some approaches are used: textual feminism, Marxism, analytical and critical, psychological and discourse comprehension approach.

¹ (Poetry in Wikipedia.org<wiki<poetry July 2024).

Textual Approach

A text is applied in this work; the content of the work is in the text.

Feminist voice of Maya's poem and Langston Hughes ideas' were selected, discussed how this theory affected them. This theory treats women's problem. The study admits the matter of female from the beginning to the end.

Marxism is a movement in which the rich is dominated. Ngwaba (2017: 21) notes that "The Marxism is a sociological approach to literature that viewed works of literature or art as the products of historical forces that can be analysed by looking at the material conditions in which they were formed.

Analytical and critical are used because such a kind of this work we are dealing with the analysis and criticism of poems, all the study is reading, understanding, and evaluating the value of literary work.

Psychological approach is, a moral approach, it is very important to consider that in the analysis of a literary work or work of art, the focus is put on the moral values that the writer needs for the characters upheld in the society, this approach goes behind Freud's ideas of human, it is the application of mind set.

The discourse comprehension approach is an inclusive approach which includes the mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective orientation. Society is vitally important, and the investigation of the relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic responses to the work of art".

²For the sake of understanding. There are many things to consider in the analysis, such as which approach to take into account. The schema focuses on two major stages: a descriptive of formal organization of the poem and a descriptive of its semantic organization.

Description of Formal Organization

The formal organization consists in describing the formal structure of the poem. There are a lot of questions to answer: how many stanzas are there in the poem? How many lines are there in each stanza? What are the main sense devices used? What are the main parts of the speech used? Nouns, pronouns, adjectives etc....What tense is used between the present and the past? What kind of auxiliary verbs are used modal? What kind of poetry is that? What is the rhyme scheme? What are the most prominent sense devices used? Answers should be provided for each and all these questions about the form of the poem (Ngwaba, 2019: 10).

Description of Semantic Organization

The description of the semantic organization of the poem is the most challenging part of poetry, analysis is probably the discussion of the semantic organization. There are ten points to focus on in order to negotiate and understand meanings: paraphrasing the poem, description of the scenario, stating the subject matter, the central theme and sub-themes, discussing the feelings aroused and the effects created in the poem, the tone, and the poet's intention. Next, comes a discussion of the poet's controlled use of language or how meaning is actually conveyed, feelings aroused and effects created in the poem, a personal appreciation of the poem in terms of its literary and artistic values, and say if the poem would be of any significance thirty or fifty years from now, including personal opinions about whether or not you like it, why and why not ? and whether or not you would recommend the same poem to other people?

I. Poem

Phenomenal Woman by Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.	a
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size	a
But when I start to tell them,	b
They think I'm telling lies.	a
5I say,	c
It's in the reach of my arms,	a
The span of my hips,	d
The stride of my step,	e
The curl of my lips.	d

² (Poetry in Wikipedia.org<wiki<poetry July 2024).

10I'm a woman	f
Phenomenally.	g
Phenomenal woman,	f
That's me.	g

I walk into a room	b
15Just as cool as you please,	a
And to a man,	f
The fellows stand or	h
Fall down on their knees.	a
Then they swarm around me,	g
20A hive of honey bees.	a
I say,	c
It's the fire in my eyes,	a
And the flash of my teeth,	i
The swing in my waist,	j
25And the joy in my feet.	j
I'm a woman	f
Phenomenally.	g

Phenomenal woman,	f
That's me.	g

30Men themselves have wondered	k
What they see in me.	g
They try so much	l
But they can't touch	l
My inner mystery.	g
35When I try to show them,	b
They say they still can't see.	g
I say,	c
It's in the arch of my back,	m
The sun of my smile,	n
40The ride of my breasts,	d
The grace of my style.	n
I'm a woman	f
Phenomenally.	g
Phenomenal woman,	f
45That's me.	g

Now you understand	k
Just why my head's not bowed.	k
I don't shout or jump about	j
Or have to talk real loud.	k
50When you see me passing,	o
It ought to make you proud.	k
I say,	c
It's in the click of my heels,	a
The bend of my hair,	p
55The palm of my hand,	k
The need for my care.	p
'Cause I'm a woman	f
Phenomenally.	g
Phenomenal woman,	f
60That's me.	g

II. Poem

Mother to Son by Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
5 And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a'climbin' on,
10 And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
15 Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
20 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Comparative Analysis

Description of Formal Organization

Resemblance

The two poets used free verses in their poems. The most prominent parts of speech used in the two narrative poems are: nouns, verbs, adjectives adverbs, conjunction. The two poems contain the same various sense devices from repetition, variation, substitution, symbol, image, ellipsis, metaphor, hyperbole, irony.

In both poems the approaches used are mostly feminism approach, textual approach, psychological approach discourse comprehension.

Differences

Difference in numbers of lines and stanzas; "Phenomenal Woman" is a fairly long poem of five stanzas with certain patterns. It is a 60-line poem overall written in free verse, opening lines, are very steady in their meter. Almost that free verse poem is not restricted to a particular form. The poem begins with a couplet in the first two lines.

"Pretty women wonder where my secret lies"

"I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size". The first stanza has 13 lines rhyme as: a a b a c a d e d f g f g; the second rhymes with the fourth line.

"The mother to son" «is a twenty-line poem of one stanza. That narrative poem is its attempt to retell a story of slavery. This poem is an extended metaphor. The mother used a metaphor to a set of stairs to advise the son to keep climbing. The poem ends where it started. It describes the climbing of the stair case. The same approaches are used feminism and sociological approaches.

« Phenomenal woman »

Sense Devices

« Phenomenal woman »

The poem contains various sense devices from repetition, variation, substitution, symbol, image, ellipsis, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, imagery, irony, synecdoche.

The formal structure of phenomenal woman is mostly remarkable for its extensive use of sense devices, simple present tense verbs to justify the habit facts of the woman, the present perfect is used to express the past action, the present progressive is to express present action, adjectives. Two prominent punctuation marks are the period and comma. The speaker of "phenomenal woman" distinguishes herself from a particular type of "pretty women", whose prettiness symbolizes what's the broader of the society.

« The mother to son » of Langston Hughes is a narrative poem that contains various sense devices from repetition, variation, substitution, symbol, allusion, image, metaphor, ellipsis ».

Description of Semantic Organization

Resemblance

The resemblance in theme; in subject matter, and approaches.

Subject Matter

Both writers are both famous African American authors and poets. Their works focus on themes like identity, family, travel and racism. They were revolutionaries. They challenged the norms of society, starting with racism. They wanted to see a world where people could be treated equally, a world in which their voices would be heard. <https://yucatanmagazine.com> March 12, 2025.

Resemblance in the subject matter because the poems are monologues in suggestive mood. In general, both of them talk about female obstacles of African American that racism poses. The important happenings are dealt with in the subject matter. Thus; it is a topic discussion or study. It is what exactly a poem is talking about. According to Merriam Webster (1997): a subject matter is defined as the summary of the theory; the answer to the question, "what is the story about?"

What is Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal Woman" and Langston Hughes's poem "The Mother to Son" about? In Maya Angelou's poem the subject matter is defined as the summary of the theory; the answer to the question, "what is the story about?"

Approaches used in the poems, both poems used feminism and discourse comprehension approaches. The common in both, talk about woman; how in the future they will come back and be free. in <https://www.pl.or> «essay».

Differences

The subject matter in Maya Angelou is women problem about discrimination. Then the poet wanted to celebrate women. A woman has to be considered not only the beauty but also her intellect fact. The Phenomenal³ issue investigates is the impact of racial discrimination. The speaker explains how a woman's beauty is not defined by societal standards, but by her inner power and capacity to radiate confidence, joy, and care. The great problem in Maya Angelou's poem is to overcome racism, the inequality between men and women, the unrealistic standards imposed upon women in their society.

Subject Matter of the Poem "The Mother to Son"

"The mother to son" is about the mother's hardships, it is normally what is being talked about in a speech. The poem "the mother to son" is about the hardships of a black slave woman. The humiliation and frustration that she knew in her past life in the deep south of the United States it is a difficult life because she got work hard in fields without earning anything substantial. Her past life had, in fact, has been painful and unpleasant being a slave as we can see in lines 2 and 7.

Theme

The controlling idea from, the beginning to the end in one text we have central theme and sub themes or secondary theme; a theme is discovering in a poem by focusing on what is repeated and substituted mostly or by variation of the key words. That will help us for the emphasis and thematic arrangement (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 428). A theme is the subject of the talk, a piece of writing, an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature. A theme is the message or the central idea the author wishes to stress in any story (Kay *et al.*, 2001, 256). It can also be defined as the abstract concept, the central idea in any work of art. Maya Angelou is women problem about discrimination. The poet wanted to celebrate women. A woman has to be considered not only the beauty but also her intellect fact. The phenomenal⁴ issue investigates is the impact of racial discrimination. The speaker explains how a woman's beauty is not defined by societal standards, but by her inner power and capacity to radiate confidence, joy, and care. The great problem in Maya Angelou's poem is to overcome racism, the inequality between men and women, the unrealistic standards imposed upon women in their society.

³ www.studysmarter.co.uk/phenomenal... (2024).

⁴ www.studysmarter.co.uk/phenomenal... (2024).

Theme

The main theme in Langston Hughes's poem is hardship of life. The theme is related to value of perseverance. The poem describes the difficulties that black people face in a racist society, alluding many obstacles and dangers that racism throws in their way-obstacles and dangers that white people don't have to face. This hardship of life is due to the fact that the mother has to work hard every day as a slave without being paid, so it was painful for her (hard work, perseverance, and love). The poet communicates the theme by using an extended metaphor. A theme is the message or the central idea the author wishes to stress in any story (Kay *et al.*, 2001, 256). It can also be defined as the abstract concept, the central idea in any work of art. "Phenomenal Woman" and "The Mother to Son" are the most intense poems in examination of the themes of inner situation faced by Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. Their themes reflect to their own life. Some of main theme developed in the poems are racism, feminine and women oppression, discrimination.

Tone

The tone of phenomenal woman is predominantly confident and prideful, though also defiant (different). In each of the four stanzas, the speaker enumerates, to contextualize the poem. Many approaches are used such as: textual, feminism approach, sociological and discourse comprehension one, the language variation and social factors, the poem is about more of a confident woman while woman wants man to change the way of considering women. And punctuation marks that help to find out the functions. The speaker enumerates the various ways in which her attitude and comportment communicate her sense of self-worth and attractiveness. Whereas the tone of Langston Hughes's poem is one of sternness advice and hope. A mother explains to her son that life will bring hardships obstacles that he must face and overcome. She commands him to be resilient but adopts a nurturing tone. She is also encouraging in her demand by comparing life to something familiar, a seemingly innocuous staircase, and showing him that if she can persevere, so can he. The speaker encourages her son to persevere through life and strive for goal despite obstacle. The poem's tone and attitude toward her son is cautionary yet sternly encouraging. The mother warns him that life is difficult, but she does.

Strategies

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of people based on gender. That includes granting privileges to a certain gender or marginalizing someone because of their identity or sex. In the most workplace case of my country Republic Democratic of Congo, there are more men than women in high level positions. However, law, and politics allow us to struggle against discrimination done to women, under all forms. And the authorities have to help the success of the struggle against discrimination.

Here are some ways of ending discrimination:

- ☞ Adoption of law condemns discrimination against women and assumes equality of rights,
- ☞ Sanctions of discriminators,
- ☞ Parity expunged between men and women,
- ☞ Quotas of certain great functions.

Conclusion

The poets express a prediction. The speakers feel that justice must be done among two people. The poets would like to obtain the equality among white and black women. The central theme of the poems is racism, womanhood, discrimination, struggle and painful. They have to be equal and as brothers rather than enemies. Another significant theme developed in these poems are "carpe diem" black 's obstacle in the society dominated by white men, female is discriminated, they are minimized.

The intention of the poets is to urge black to fight for liberty, equality and justice in a segregating society where black people are considered as object also a foregrounding. Both writers offer their experience for imitation and exhortation. These poems have political and social issue. I enjoy reading them because they help me to be determined in everything doing. The subject matters are sensitive. The themes of conversion which they develop are clear. The search of women consideration.

Declarations

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