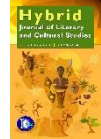




A stylistics analysis of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Equality"



Review article



Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies

Volume 2, Issue 4, 2020

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Article Information

Submitted: 2nd November 2020

Accepted: 4th December 2020

Published: 9th December 2020

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was reported by the authors

Funding: None

Additional information is available at the end of the article



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ISSN 2707-2150 (Online)

ISSN 2707-2169 (Print)

To read the paper online, please scan this QR code



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Abstract

Language is a very important tool in literature, as literature cannot be studied without language, be it written or spoken. Language is used differently by different writers; therefore, it is important to analyse how language is used to create an effect and as such, bring out meaning. Stylistics is the study of text from its literary and linguistics perspective. It studies the feature and functions of both spoken and written texts – it is a practical way of understanding the meaning of a given text. Writers have diverse ways of communicating ideas, and using literary and linguistic categories to communicate ideas in a text is simply doing a stylistic analysis of the text. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the poems, "I know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Equality" by Maya Angelou, so as to know how language brings out the stylistic effects of a writer, and contributes in generating meaning. The stylistics tool explored in this study are: graphology, syntax, semantics, lexico-semantics, phonology, morphology, foregrounding, contrast, imagery, personification, metaphor, simile etc. This study has as findings that language is the essential part of any work of arts, and the achievement of any work centers on how the artist uses language to communicate meaning.

Keywords: language, stylistics, linguistics, literary, meaning, text

How to Cite:

Sih, E. B. (2020). A stylistics analysis of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Equality". *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2(4). Retrieved from <https://royalliteglobal.com/hybrid-literary/article/view/436>



Public Interest Statement

The reason for saying certain things in a written or spoken word is fundamental, but there is much pleasure knowing how the things are being said. Studying the “how” part of a text will get one to language and its usage. Studying the language of a writer is studying his/her style, and studying style in both literary and non-literary texts is very essential as it communicates the meaning of the text. The use of language affects the interpretation of a text. Therefore, studying how Angelou manipulates language helps in conveying the stylistic effect and brings out meaning of her poem.

Introduction

Stylistics explores the linguistic and literary features of a text. There is reference to style as we have selection of certain linguistic and literary forms or features over other possible ones. Stylistics, therefore, points out those choices which a writer or speaker has made as well as the effects of the choices. It is primarily concerned with the use of language and its effects in a text. According to John Nkemngong Nkengasong in *A Stylistic Guide to Literary Appreciation*, stylistics “has to do with the study of the components and structure of language in a given text (Linguistics) and how the writer synthesises this linguistic material (Discourse) to communicate messages (Literary Appreciation) (15). When given a text, a poem for example, a stylistician will be interested in describing the form and function of language in the poem, paying attention to certain interesting things that may be accounted for in stylistics terms. The purpose of this paper is to do a stylistics analysis of the poems “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings” and “Equality” by Maya Angelou bearing in mind the linguistic and figurative categories Nkengasong examined (19). In this study, we are going to look at both literary and linguistic features in the poems and the effectiveness of these techniques employed by the poet.

Linguistic Category

To begin with, **Graphology** is a very important feature in stylistic analysis. At this level, such things as spelling, punctuation, space management, underlining, use of pictures, colouring, etc. are considered and analysed. The pattern of writing can also indicate the variety of language involved. Graphological elements are often used to achieve foregrounding in a text. Foregrounding is when you make certain elements in a text prominent so as to attract attention.

The poem’s title of the poem “**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**” is written in bold with all the first letters capitalized including the article “the”. The bold print is a graphological feature the poet uses to make the title prominent. The poem is made up

of six stanzas of 42 lines. Stanza one and two have seven lines; stanza 4 and 5 contains four lines, while stanza 3 and 6 has 8 lines. The inconsistency of the different lines in the poem may be an indication on the inequality and differences in the poets' society considering the fact that she is an African American woman. Each stanza of the poem starts with a capital letter and continues with small letters. There is no break in the sentences of the poem, but the poet did not use punctuation to separate them.

In spite of the number of punctuation marks we have in English, the only punctuation mark the poet makes use of in this poem is full stop. Full stop is only seen at the end of some stanzas, while other stanzas start and end without any punctuation marks. The stanzas that end without full stop shows continuation of the sentence but the poet continues with another stanza with a capital letter which is an indication that it is a new sentence. This deviation is seen at the end of stanza 3 and 5 where the caged bird quest for freedom. This is, possibly, connected with the background of the poem, which has to do with the Black American continuous quest for identity and freedom from the white masters' oppression and restriction. The omission of full stop here can be an indication that the quest still continues. That is, the caged bird (black) is still struggling for survival and space in a dominantly white society. The poet makes use of only one hyphenated word that is 'dawn bright- lawn'.

The poet separates the stanzas that talks of the free bird to that which talk of the caged bird. This may be to show the well drowned boundary between the different people present in the society. By doing this, the poet is telling us that the lifestyle and well-being of these people is like a parallel line that can never meet.

Stanza one and four focuses on the free bird and it privileges while stanza 2, 3, 5 and 6 talks on the caged bird. Stanza 2 and 5 focuses on the oppression of the "caged bird" while stanza 3 and 6 talks on the struggle for survival in the midst of oppression. The contrast between the free bird which can represent the whites in American and the caged bird, the blacks is used to show the racial distinction that exists in the American society.

On the other hand, the poem "Equality" is made up of eight stanzas of which stanza 3,4,6 and 7 are made up of 4 lines, stanza one has 8 lines, while stanza 2,5 and 8 is exceptional with 2 lines. In stanza 2, 5 and 8, there repetition of lines "Equality and I will be free". This is repeated six times in the poem. There is the use of capital letter at the beginning of each stanza. The poet makes use of 3 punctuation marks; comma, full stop and question mark. The most prominent is the comma which appears 21 times in the poem. Full stop appears 12 times while question mark appears just once. Stanzas 2, 5, and 8 have the same structure as the line is repeated. The repetition of the line "Equality, and I will be free." emphasizes that there is nothing else to fulfill, but

equality between the whites and blacks. The line starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. The only question mark is seen in stanza three line 14 “could you ever understand?” The use of the question mark indicates that the government who represents the white race asks no question about the black race or bother to recognize their existence.

Secondly, this poem can be analyzed **semantically**. Semantics is the study of the linguistic meaning of morphemes, words, phrases and sentences. Roman Jakobson is quoted by Fromkin et al (2003) as saying: that language without meaning is meaningless. Semantics is the philosophical and scientific study of meaning. It can also be said to be a branch of linguistics which is pre-occupied with the study of meaning.

In the poem “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings”, the semantic field can roughly be divided into three categories i.e. a) the poem being a poem of oppression b) freedom c) survival.

The words pertaining to giving meaning to the poem as a poem of oppression include words like ‘caged bird’, ‘clipped’, ‘tied’, ‘fearful’ ‘stalk’ and ‘narrow cage’ which refer back to the atrocities subjected upon the Black race. The words are used to show the level of discrimination between the blacks and the whites in America. Being black can be associated with being inferior and oppression awaits you. The caged bird’s “wings are clipped” (12) and “his feet are tied” (13). The verbs ‘clipped’ and ‘tied’ highlights oppression. The poem stresses on the oppression of the blacks by the whites who see themselves superior and free.

The second field she refers to is the quest for survival by the blacks. The groundbreaking spirit of the caged bird to survive gives him enough self-confidence to “open his throat to sing” (14) and finally, he is heard ‘on the distant hill.’ By singing, the bird tries to identify himself and express his emotion though in fear. Singing in fear proves the level of discrimination going on in the society the poet is portraying, such that black people cannot freely err out or give their opinions freely. She depicts how blacks will continue to survive against all odds. The oppressed must raise their voice against the conventional marginalization and claim their identities.

The third way of considering the poem’s semantic interpretation is looking at it through the lens of freedom. The free bird, which represents the white, is free to do whatsoever he wants. This is seen in the use of words like “floats’, ‘sun rays’, ‘sky’, ‘breeze’, ‘winds’ and ‘fat worms’. The freedom of the white people is described through poet’s use of natural images. ‘Winds’ and ‘breeze’ are not directed on where to blow; they are free to move to/from any direction they white. This freedom through the use of this image show how liberated a white man is in America. Also, sun and sky are above the earth. This shows the distance between the black and the white; they

are worlds apart. Their distance makes them distinct from their counterparts. They are free to whatever they want to without any restrictions. The free bird is said to dare to “claim the sky” (7) and “names the sky his own” (26). This simply indicates his level of freedom in which he wants to claim ownership over everything, including nature.

The poem “Equality” focuses on the quest for recognition and equality between the black and the white race. There are indicators in the poem that shows that the poem is about racism in America. Words and phrases within this poem strongly depict its meaning. The pronoun “You” in the poem is so assumed to be white authority and the “We” is easily realized to be the African American race. Lines like “Take the blinders from your vision, Take the padding from your ears, And confess you’ve heard me crying, And admit you’ve seen my tears.” helps to prove the poems meaning.

The poet is saying that white authority claim not to see and hear the treatment of African Americans. She is not asking if white authority is blind or deaf— she is telling them that they are, and that they need to change. She talks on her situational suffering and how she yearns to be free. Freedom can only be achieved if she is free of pain and distress. This is what shows that it has direct ties to the history of race, such as a slave wanting to be treated equally, and not given freedom by the slave owner.

A **Lexico-semantic** analysis calls for the explication of word meanings in any text. Specifically, issues relating to lexical relations, dimensions of meaning (denotative, connotative, literal, figurative, idiomatic, etc) should be focused on. Again, at this level, attention should be paid on how a writer or speaker uses different types of words like abstract, concrete, simple, difficult, specific, general, and so on, to create meanings in a text. If we understand the nature of words and their patterns of combination in a text, we will be able to do a meaningful lexico-semantic analysis of the text.

Although, a brief look at the poem “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” would suggest that the reader might not have difficulty in understanding the message in it, it is important that the poem employs some words and expressions that demand a careful analysis for their meanings to be properly decoded. This is because such words are not usual collocations – a situation which creates some stylistic effects. Such unusual collocations include the ‘words’ in ‘the caged bird’ and ‘free bird’. They bring about prominently metaphoric meanings that draw the reader closer to the import of the poet’s message. It is not unlikely that the poet does this to show the inequality between the white and the black American.

The use of caged and free birds doesn’t mean the poet is talking about birds. Bird can be a symbolic representation of people. The poet is addressing different groups of people; the freed and the caged. Bearing in mind that a writer does not write

in a vacuum but he/she is being influenced by the his/her society, one can say without any doubt that, Maya Angelou, a black American, is a representative of that society, and hence she brings out the ills in the society, so as to see it change. The use of the pronoun “he” is an indication that the poem is not about birds but about humans.

Phonology refers to how sound is organized to mean. Sound patterning functions linguistically in poetry to project a poet’s purpose or concern in a work” (Aboh. 2008: 67-8). Poetry has fashions and different forms of sound patterning. This is an example of alliteration and the poet’s deliberate selections. The sound effect created by such selection gives the reader a deeper sense of what the poet is trying to convey. There are some phonological features in the poem which facilitate a degree of musicality in it. The use of repetition, alliteration and consonance are obvious phonological features which assist in placing emphasis on the resolution of the bold poetic persona not to allow anything discourage her from achieving freedom.

Alliteration	Assonance	Consonance
<u>worms</u> <u>wait</u> ing	Trill/ still/ hill /l/	Caged/ Bird /d/
<u>Seldom</u> / <u>see</u>	Heard, bird /ɜ:/	Fat / Bright /t/
<u>shadow</u> <u>shouts</u>	Free /Breeze /i:/	Dawn /lawn /n/
<u>Soft</u> / <u>sigh</u> ing	Dip/Win /l/	Dips /wings /z/
	Open/ Throat /əʊ/	Names /his /s/
	Free / leap /i:/	But/ bird /b/
	Caged /Grave /e/	fearful/ trill /l/
	Dawn Lawn /ɜ:/	His/bars /s/

The dominant consonance in the poem is the /s/ sound which appears ten times in the poem. The /d/ sound appears 6 times /t/ one time, /n/ once and /l/once. Moreover, it is organize to show; unity, emphasis and musical effect in the poem. For alliteration and consonance, most of the repeated sounds are fricatives. Some of them are: seldom/see, shadow/ shout, which imply that the poet gives voice to serious feelings and emotions of social and political liberty. For assonance, the sound that is prominent is the /i:/. The use of the long monophthongs may have been used to emphasize the long suffering of the caged bird and his persistent attempt to make his voice heard. The use of short monophthongs and diphthongs may be used to demonstrate that the oppression and restriction of the caged bird may only last for a short while. The poet does not make use of triphthongs. In the poem Equality, we see the use of alliteration, consonance, rhyme and assonance as highlighted below:

Alliteration	Consonance	Assonance	Rhyme
trim / time.	trim /time /m/	see /dimly /i:/	Dimly/boldly/faintly
my / message	fly /from /f/	You /you /u:/	Change/range
Ways/ wanton	Man/ man /n/	be free /i:/	Last/ past
Man/ man,		Man/ man /æ/	Ears/ tears
fly /from			

Consonance unlike the other sound devices is not prominent. It appears thrice in the poem in the words ‘trim-time, ‘man-man’ and ‘fly-from’. The most prominent assonance is the vowel sound /l/ which is seen in words like ‘which’, ‘will’ ‘trim’, ‘in’, ‘marking’ blinders’ and ‘vision’. The repeated rhyme, vowels, and consonants in Angelou’s “Equality” bring the same message directed to the readers or listeners. The use of rhyme in some stanzas tries to draw the listeners’ attention on the poet’s voice. The words ‘dimly and boldly’, ‘range and change’ and ‘ears and tears’ shows the poet’s courage to face the opinion of the white race towards hers as a black in America. It also shows the poet’s attempt to voice the oppressive treatment given to one race by the other which causes pain as attention is never paid. The repetition of the line “Equality and I will be free” in three stanzas clearly reveals that freedom and equality are the things the poet struggles to achieve.

One important level of linguistic analysis is the **Syntactic** level. At this level, just like any other level of language description, significant statements of meaning can be made based on the observation of the choices that a writer/speaker has made, and, of course the genre of literature or the peculiarities of the text involved. Language is a structural unit as its elements exist and function in a hierarchical order. Such units or elements include morpheme, word, group (phrase), clause and sentence. The morpheme is the smallest unit while the sentence is the highest or the largest. In order to do a stylistic analysis at the syntactic level, you should be familiar with the group (or phrase), the clause and the sentence, among other relevant syntactic elements.

Amongst the four sentence types, the poet makes use of three, leaving out the complex sentence in the poem “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings”. The predominant sentence type is the compound which is being coordinated by conjunctions like, ‘for’, ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘so’. This can be because the poet is capturing and comparing two distinct groups of people.

Simple	Compound	Compound-complex
The free bird thinks of another breeze	The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard...	The free bird leaps on the back of the win and floats downstream till the current ends...

The poet uses very simple words, phrases and sentences which do not complicate reading. This may be because of the people she is addressing may not understand. The poet's target is both the oppressed and the oppressors. The length of the sentences may indicate that the poet intends to draw uninterrupted attention of the reader. The sentences carry openness and importance of the poet's thoughts. There is Cohesion in the structural patterns of the poem through the use of the coordinating conjunctions, 'but', 'and', 'for' and 'so' as we have in the following lines:

His wings are clipped and his feet tied
 But a bird that stalk down his narrow cage
 So he opens his throat to sing
 For the caged bird sings for freedom
 and the fat worms waiting on a dawn- bright lawn
 and he names the sky his own.

There is also the use of subordinators like 'till' (until) as shown in the following line:
 ... till the current ends

The poet uses the conjunctions to compare the free and the caged birds. This shows the contrastive lifestyle between the blacks and the whites. The coordinator 'but' is used at the beginning of stanza two and five to indicate the differences between the different groups mentioned. The free birds are characterized with so much freedom while the caged bird with restrictions. The use of these devices makes reading very easy for the reader since ideas are well coordinated, and as such, it leads to easy understanding of the poet's message. In the poem "Equality", the poet makes use of all the sentence types as seen in the table below:

Simple	Compound	Complex	Compound-Complex
We have lived a painful history	we know the shameful past, but I keep on marching forward,	You declare you see me dimly... though I stand before you boldly(4)	You do own to hear me faintly... while my drums beat out the message and the rhythms never change. (6-8)
Take the blinders from your vision,	take the padding from your ears, and confess you've heard me crying,		You announce my ways are wanton, that I fly from man to man, but if I'm just a shadow to you
Hear the tempo so compelling,	Yes, my drums are beating nightly, and the rhythms never change.		
hear the blood throb in my veins.			

The simple sentences carry directness and seriousness of the poet's thought, whereas the compound complex and compound-complex sentences tell that the speaker in the poem is thinking on a deeper level, contemplating, and has gone into a reflective or interrogative mode.

The sentence types that are commonly used in the poem are the imperative (it gives command and tell people what to do) and the interrogative. The use of these sentence types harmonizes with the tone and the mood of the poetic persona. We have imperative sentences such as:

Hear the tempo so compelling (line 25)

hear the blood throb in my veins.(26)

Take the blinders from your vision(line 21)

take the padding from your ears (22)

... confess you've heard me crying(23)

... admit you've seen my tears(24)

We also have an interrogative sentence as following:

... but if I'm just a shadow to you,
could you ever understand ? (14)

In order to connect the sentences, the poet uses coordinators like “and” and “but” and subordinators like “though”, “while” and “that”. The most prominent is the coordinator “and” which is used in the poem eleven times. “But” appear twice in the poem while the three subordinators used appear once.

Morphology is a branch in linguistics that studies the internal morphemes (words and their semantic building blocks). In light of the various morphemes used within the poem, certain assumptions can be deduced. A number of free and bound morphemes are used. The free morphemes in the poem are telling of which action is being performed and where is it being performed; for instance dance, offend, shoot, cut etc. Bound morphemes with an addition fixed with a root for example ‘s’, ‘ed’, ‘es’, ‘ing’, etc. usually inform of the plurality of nouns, or the tense and time of action. Since the poet has mostly used morphemes which make up the simple present tense in the poem’s narrative, it shows that she as a woman is not stuck in the past; rather she is highlighting what is still going on in the American society, which may continue in the future if care is not taken.

The poet makes use of mostly prefix and suffixes

Prefix: a morpheme added to the beginning of a word to modify its meaning.

Suffix: a morpheme added at the end of a word to modify the word to modify the word’s meaning.

prefix	Suffix
Un-known	Fear-ful
	Sigh- ing
	Wait-ing
	Longed
	Clipp-ed
	Float-s/ leap-s/ sing-s/ open-s
	Free-dom

Most of the verbs used “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings” are in the simple present tense, for example, in the poem, the verb to ‘sing’ has been repeated six times. Other verbs like ‘clipped’, ‘tied’, ‘open’, ‘heard’ appears twice respectively. The poet’s simple verbs make it easy for the readers to understand the poem, as such, takes whole of

the message. Also, the poet uses adjectives to give us more understanding of the poem. Example of adjectives used are: 'free birds', 'the orange sunrays', 'fat worms', 'narrow cage', 'fearful trill', and 'distant hill'. These adjectives are used to show the social status of the oppressed and the oppressors in the American society. The adjectives used for the cage bird shows they are the least in terms of social grouping.

The poet also makes use of adverbs. These adverbs are introduced by a prepositional phrase with an adverbial modifier. The poet uses three adverbial clauses: place, concession and comparison. Adverbial clause of comparison can be seen in the line: "... But the bird that stalk... can seldom see through". This shows the comparison between the two birds; one is free and the other is caged. The adverbial clause of place is being introduced by a prepositional phrases, for example, "on the book of the win" (line 2), "in the orange sunrays" (line 6), "down the narrow cage" (line 9). These phrases are used to give directions. Adverbial clause of concession is seen in stanza three in the line: "the caged bird sings... still and its tune is heard in the distant hill" (line - 20). This points out that, the caged bird's voice is not supposed to be heard from a distant because he sings in fear, as the oppressor's intention is to silence him. Ironically, his voice is heard from the distant hill.

As far as nouns are concern, the poet makes abundant use of concrete nouns. She uses concrete nouns like: birds, wings, cage, bars, hills, tree, worms, sky, lawn and stream to paint a clear picture of what she is saying. The concrete nouns are predominantly written in simple present tense. There is also the use of abstract nouns like 'freedom', 'fear', 'breeze', 'wind' and 'dreams'. These nouns are used to show the state of mind of the birds. The poet makes effective use of part of speech to convey the meaning of her poem.

Apart from identifying the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, what is extremely noteworthy in "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" is the excessive use of subject and possessive pronouns. Third person narration is used (he) which signifies the poet's attempt at depicting the different actions of the birds. The fact that 'he' is used twice in the poem may be to show that that poem is talking about two groups of people. The possessive pronoun 'his' is also used twelfth times in the poem: 'his bars of rage', 'his wings are clipped' and 'his feet are tied'. This pronoun is used to show the possession of both the free and the caged birds. In addition, the poet uses both active and passive voice. Though active voice is predominant as the subject of the verb refers to the person performing the action, we have a number of passive voices like:

- His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
- His tune is heard on the distant hill....

The passive verbs in the aforementioned lines are: “clipped” and “tied” and “heard” which show that there is standstill in the situation. Here, we see that the subject is the receiver of the action. The action here is more important than the actor.

In the poem “Equality” the poet makes use of common noun, pronoun, preposition, verb, adverb, and adjective. Amongst the part of speech, the most prominent is the pronoun, followed by common noun and verb. In the poem, the pronouns used are you, own, your, me, I, my, and we. The pronouns “you” and “I” appear 10 times each in the poem. This may relate to the black and white race in America and the ways they live. The use of adjective, adverb, preposition, and conjunction is the minority in the poem. Adjective such as in ‘trim in rank and marking time’ has been used in the poem. There is also the use of preposition, such as in ‘but I keep on marching forward’. The conjunction in the poem is to link one line to the other, such as in ‘and you keep on coming last’.

The speaker describes the challenges both she and the black community face, associating herself with her people with a “we.” She conveys the message that we are insulted in this society for merely existing. Also, Angelou addresses the “you” audience by calling them to action by using words like ‘Listen’, ‘See’, ‘Confess’, ‘Admit’ and ‘Hear’. Through the use of these words, the speaker proves that the black race is there to stay, and it is time for you to listen for the white race to listen to them.

Foregrounding

Foregrounding refers to the concept of making certain features prominent in a text. Some linguistic features can be made prominent for special effects against the background features in a text. Scholars have examined the term as used in the literary enterprise as being for purely aesthetic exploitation of language which has the aim of making what is familiar unfamiliar in order to attract attention. The concept of deviation is closely related to that of foregrounding in that what is foregrounded is made to deviate from the familiar pattern. According to Wales (1989: 182), foregrounding can be achieved in a variety of ways usually grouped into two main types: deviation and repetition, that is, “paradigmatic” and “syntagmatic foregrounding.” Wales explains further that deviations are violations of linguistic norms, e.g. grammatical/semantic norms, strange metaphors, similes or collocations that are deployed to achieve special effects in a text, especially poetry, amount to foregrounding.

- Repetition is also said to be a kind of deviation as it flouts the “normal rules of usage by over-frequency” (Wales,1989: 182). Repetition of

sounds or syntactic patterns has the tendency to strike the readers as uncommon and thereby engage their attention.

- Deviation, which is a linguistic phenomenon, has an important psychological effect on readers. If a part of writing is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable, or perceptually prominent. This is called *foregrounding*.

The term ‘foregrounding’, according to Short (1996: 11) is borrowed from art criticism. It implies that nothing in a work of art is insignificant, but the fact is that the matter in the foreground is more important than the rest. Foregrounding is thus produced as a result of deviation from linguistic norms of various kinds.

Repetition

The poet makes use of repetition. The possessive pronoun “his” is repeated in the poem twelve times. The coordinating conjunction “and” is repeated 10 times, the verb to “sing” is repeated 6 times, ‘free bird’ and the ‘free bird’ is repeated twice. The lines: “his wings are clipped” (line 12) and “his feet are tied” (line 13) are repeated in line 29 of the poem.

Figurative Category

Figures of speech are immensely important and deliver richness to a poetic piece, enabling a poet to convey details indirectly, enhancing contrast or similarity, and facilitating understanding and poetic pleasure, where one thing can be understood and decoded with reference to another. Angelou adorns her poem “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings” with the following figures of speech:

Contrast

The poet makes use of contrast between the free and the caged birds. These birds serve as a metaphor for the free and enslaved people in America. Angelou, being a black in America may have witnessed the treatment and privileges given to the different groups in her society, as such, she feel that it may be good to represent it the way she sees it so that some changes can occur. The blacks in the American society experience racism, and are restricted from doing certain things with the implementation of the Jim Crow laws.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole can be seen in the lines: “And dares to claim the sky” / “And he names the sky his own”. There is hyperbolic expression in the above lines which is used to emphasize the freedom of the free birds. The sky may stand for the highest height of freedom. The free bird with excessive pride claims the ownership and activity of the sky.

Personification

Angelou uses personification in the lines: “the free bird leaps”/“And trade winds through sighing tress”/ “His shadow shouts on nightmare scream” / “The free bird thinks of another breeze”. Human qualities are being attributed to inanimate things. For example, sighing is human feature attributed to the trees. Shadow cannot shout. Also, the skills to think is a human attribute which has been given to the free bird. The reason for using personification can be to make her voice heard clearly. In the closing analysis, the poet aims at depicting the thought of the people through the personification so that they could give their ear to hear her voice for freedom and emancipation.

Imagery

Images are used by writers to show and not to tell. Writers use such image to paint a picture in the mind of the readers. In Angelou’s “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”, the poet uses concrete, abstract and auditory images. The concrete imagery involves the device that enhances knowledge and remembrance. By creating visual images, the poet wants us to see the realities of societies because the words she uses will create a life-like picture in the mind of the readers. There is also the use of hearing images like in ‘sing’, ‘sighing’, ‘shout’, ‘tune’ and ‘scream’ . This device plays an important role of creating a profound effect on the listeners since it echoes in the ears of readers.

Metaphor

In the poem “Equality” the poet uses metaphor when she says “through glass which will not shine” and “But If I’m just a shadow to you”. This metaphor is used to refer to the blacks as the marginalized class. The metaphorical expressions refer to black people as the ignored group in the country. The word glass refers to black people. Nevertheless, the shining quality that the blacks are to own is absent here since the white do not see anything good or shining from the blacks. Moreover, they are the ones who never give the advantage to the country. The blacks are also compared to shadows show the level of their marginalization.

Paradox

The paradoxes of light and dark Angelou uses are meant to signify the constant battle of being seen. The darkness resembles the cage society has put her in, along with anyone who doesn't fit into the terribly specific criteria of good enough. The light, contrastingly, is the greatness created by the oppressed individuals that consistently shines brightly. This clash represents the fight of acknowledgment in a society that is merely trying to protect the shine.

Imagery

In “Equality”, the poet makes use of visual and auditory senses. This can be seen in the line:

Take the blinders from your vision,
take the padding from your ears,
and confess you've heard me crying,
and admit you've seen my tears.

These images are all in efforts to convince the listener to open his/her mind to understand the message the poet wants to pass across. In order to be considered as an equal, the listener must confirm the speaker's existence: to look at her clearly and to hear what she has to say.

Conclusion

To conclude, one can say that Maya Angelou in the poems “I know Why The Caged Bird Sings” and “Equality has successfully used language to communicate her ideas.

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Appendix (Poems)

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

The free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wings
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with fearful trill
of the things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou

Equality

You declare you see me dimly
through a glass which will not shine,
though I stand before you boldly,
trim in rank and marking time.
You do own to hear me faintly
as a whisper out of range,
while my drums beat out the message
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

You announce my ways are wanton,
that I fly from man to man,
but if I'm just a shadow to you,
could you ever understand ?

We have lived a painful history,
we know the shameful past,
but I keep on marching forward,
and you keep on coming last.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,
take the padding from your ears,
and confess you've heard me crying,
and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,
hear the blood throb in my veins.
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.
Maya Angelou