THE USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE FOR LOVE DEPICTION IN MAYA ANGELOU'S SELECTED POEMS

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Abstract

Figurative language contributes to indirect artistic communication beautifully in enhancing the various imagination to certain expressions and feelings. One most common theme related to feelings is love, which is often depicted in a variety of ways. Maya Angelou composed her poems Touched by An Angel and When You Come to express the feeling of love in different dimensions. This study is to reveal and compare the use of figurative language in love depiction as implied in Angelou's selected love poems. The data is collected using the library research method and the analysis is done descriptively. The result reveals that both of Angelou's poems have three stages of love with different approach. The figurative language based on Kennedy's division includes the comparative and contradictive ones. Touched by An Angel contains both comparative and contradictive figurative language, whereas When You Come has only comparative one. Personification is the only figure of speech found in both poems. Simile and metaphor are in the latter poem. The contradictive figures of speech, namely hyperbole, irony, and paradox, are found in the first poem. This indicates that Angelou emphasizes on comparative figurative language consistently and contradictive figurative language occasionally for love depiction in her poems.

Keywords: *comparative study, figurative language, love depiction, Maya Angelou*

Introduction

One distinctive feature that works of literature carry to oppose other factual, scientific writings is the use of non-literal language. This kind of language performs in accordance to the writer's imagination and freedom of speech to form its own way of communication. Eagleton (2008) once proposed literature as an artistic life to express thoughts and ideas beautifully in regards of human interest. Thus, the products of literature vary in terms of exploration and interpretation that even the readers may conclude a work from a totally different perspective from that of the writers. Individuals' version of similar theme may come in various ways of expression.

Poetry is stated as one of the oldest genres in literary history that can be traced back to ancient Greek literature, which made this genre harder to define than any other genres (Klarer, 1999); furthermore, it depends on the use of expressive and connotative meanings rendered as an indirect expression when the writer showed the work as permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another (Perrine in Arp, 2010). In other words, understanding poetry requires more in-depth feeling and emotion that few people possess

and are interested in. The combination of its intrinsic elements helps to build certain atmospheres and states resulted from thorough study and consideration.

Among all three main genres of literary work, poetry contains exclusive intrinsic elements that are seldom found in other genres, aside that it is easier to identify its distinguishing format of writing. Accordingly, it contains indirect expression to communicate what the writer intends to actually say. As a result, various interpretations come to surface that make it even more exclusive. One kind of indirect expression applied in poetry is the abundant use of different kinds of figurative language. In order to gain a better understanding of the poetry, the readers need a good comprehension in figurative language. Figurative language is an alteration and distinctive way of thoughts and expressions to create a noticeable result. It contributes majorly to the attractiveness of literary works. Its main purpose is to urge readers to picture what authors express or state.

Love, in all genres of literature, is said to be the most frequently used theme for it is said to be the universal language as well as well as a complex matter Implicitly or explicitly, love is expressed in diverse ways not only to communicate the writers' imagination, but also their experiences toward it. As for the readers, their interpretation of love also comes diversely. Therefore, love emanates a certain dimension beyond space and time and continues to be perceivable from different perspectives.

One legendary poem written by a famous poet in the theme of love is *Touched by An Angel*. The date in which this poem was written is unknown, but the poem is published in 2011 in an art book entitled "Love's Exquisite Freedom". Maya Angelou composed this poem to express her experience in romantic relationship as well as in practical social standing as she was known as well as historian, activist, and playwright. It is also known that Angelou had been married twice and ended both in divorce. In her three-stanza poem, she emphasizes stages in love that reveal different dimensions. In her works, Angelou is also famous for her use of figurative language, especially metaphor and irony.

Acknowledging this phenomenon, this study focuses on the significance use of figurative language in revealing the theme of love dimension as portrayed by Maya Angelou's *Touched by An Angel.* Therefore, it aims to identify the kinds of figurative language used and the significant meanings they carry to describe love specifically.

Theoretical Review

Writing poetry requires imagination to arrange word by word to form a message that cannot be read only by using eyes, but must be understood with feelings. Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story, or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being (Olilla and Jantas, 2006). The language used in poetry is a multidimensional language, which conveys senses, emotions, and imaginations. The figurative language, an intrinsic element of poetry, is comprehended as the standard meaning of words, or order or words, to achieve special meanings or effects (Abrams, 1999). This type of language often offers a more effective way of saying and expressing the author's intention indirectly. Conveying an implied message gives an interesting effect and it has a high artistic value. Hence, figurative language is an essential thing to consider when writing a poem.

Figurative language is the process that involves individuals to recreate the language meaning when writing a poem, a play, a story, or when having a conversation, speech, and/or lecture. Araya (2008) also mentions that someone's background contributes largely to their interpreting the world by sharing the internal cognitive, affective and social frameworks. It has a distinctive effect to say something in unusual ways. The critical fact is that the figurative language is the foundation of a literary work or the beautifying nature of literary language since it allows researchers to change and manipulate the potential of the figurative language itself, by changing the way of using words of sentences and for the style of effect used (Yeibo, 2012).

Kennedy (1995) divides figurative language into three parts: comparative, contradictory and correlative. Each part contains relevant kinds of figurative language that can be seen as follows:

1. Comparative Figurative Language

This figure of speech is used to express one thing with another by comparing its similar things in some sense. It consists of personification, metaphor, and simile.

a. ***Personification*:** Personification is a condition where an inanimate object, abstract ideas, or the aspect of nature are given human traits. As Keraf (2009:140) said, "personification is the figurative language that describes non-life things or non-human object abstraction or ideas able to act like human beings". Personification gives human characteristics to things that do not act the way it normally should. It also produces a visual connection by assigning a human trait to an inanimate object or nonhuman object which connects the readers with descriptions of non-human entities more vividly, or helps the readers to understand, or react emotionally to non-human characters.

b. ***Metaphor*:** Metaphor is a figurative term that compares two essentially unlike things without using connectors such as "*like*" or "*as*". Metaphor gives indirect or implicit comparison in which a term is figuratively replaced or identified with the literal term. So, the use of Metaphor is to help to create a visual representation for the reader by framing the topic or issue as something else.

c. ***Simile*:** Different from metaphor, simile gives direct, or explicit, comparison between two things with connectives such as "*like*", "as", or "*than*"; or by a verb such as "*appears*" or *seems*".

2. Contradictive Figurative Language

Contradictive figurative language is a figure of speech that opposes each other in order to emphasize the intention. It consists of hyperbole, irony, litotes, and paradox.

a. ***Hyperbole:*** Hyperbole is a statement that overstates or exaggerates in order to emphasize something.

b. ***Irony:*** Keraf (2009: 143) points out that "irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words". In summary, what appears as expected comes differently in reality.

c. ***Litotes:*** Litotes are usually used to make something simple to prevent arrogance by using a negative term to express a positive statement. According to Barnet, Berman and

Burto (2008: 1590), "Litotes is an understatement which an affirmation is made by means of a negation". In other words, litotes is giving the opposite meaning intentionally in order to humbling them. It conveys attention to a particular notion.

d. *Paradox:* In statements that contain paradox, the words contradict with one another; both words that contradict one another are usually antonyms. As a result, a statement or situation seems to be contradictive yet may well be true in some sense.

3. Correlative Figurative Language

Correlative Figurative Language is an expression that uses a specific character or name of a thing that states another related thing. Correlative means to connect two parts of a sentence and the relationship between the two parts has the same position or degree. Three kinds of correlative figurative language are allusion, ellipsis and synecdoche.

a. *Allusion*: Allusion is designed to call something to mind without explicitly mentioning it. In essence, it is a reference which is explicit and implicit to the events, figures, or places in real life (Keraf, 2009). The expression of allusion commonly used or the work of others to create a particular reference. So, this kind of expression is based on something that is related to one another to point out a specific thing without giving any extra details.

b. *Ellipsis:* Ellipsis is eliminating words or parts of a sentence to give an implied meaning to the reader. Ellipses is used to represent the feelings of the writer and also the readers who cannot be understood in words.

c. *Synecdoche:* Synecdoche is a statement that contains a part of something to represent the whole thing. There are two parts of synecdoche: *Pars Pro Toto* and *Totem Pro Parte. Pars Pro Toto* means that the synecdoche as a whole part while *Totem Pro Parte* is the opposite, which is only a part of whole things that stand for its part.

Methodology

This study applies quantitative library research methodology that focuses on identifying and comparing the figurative language and its meaning or effect. The object of study is Maya Angelou's selected love poems entitled *Touched by An Angel* and *When We Come.* The data is collected separately from the stanzas in both poems and divided into kinds of figurative language to later be analyzed descriptively in finding out the meaning and purpose of its usage. Lastly, the implication of the figurative language found in both poems is compared.

Findings and Discussion

1. Love Depiction in Angelou's *Touched by An Angel* and *When You Come*

Both of Angelou's *Touched by An Angel* and *When You Come* comprise of three stanzas. The first poem is composed of several verses or lines: six verses for the first stanza, seven verses for the second stanza and eight for the third stanza, while the latter poem consists

of three verses for the first stanza, five verses for the second stanza and only a verse for the last stanza. It comes in free form since it does not have any rhymes.

In order to figure out what each of the poems is about, the first analysis is conducted to find the dimension of love in each poem. The love dimension between these poems are different since the former poem talks about the stages of falling in love whereas the latter is about the past lover.

The complete poem *Touched by An Angel* can be seen as follows:

> *We, unaccustomed to courage*
> *exiles from delight*
> *live coiled in shells of loneliness*
> *until love leaves its high holy temple*
> *and comes into our sight*
> *to liberate us into life.*   *6*
>
>> *Love arrives*
>> *and in its train come ecstasies*
>> *old memories of pleasure*
>> *ancient histories of pain.*
>> *Yet if we are bold,*
>> *love strikes away the chains of fear*
>> *from our souls.*   *13*
>
> *We are weaned from our timidity*
> *In the flush of love's light*
> *we dare be brave*
> *And suddenly we see*
> *that love costs all we are*
> *and will ever be.*
> *Yet it is only love*
> *which sets us free.*   *21*

Angelou's mentioning the word "love" in a total of six times explicitly reveals the major theme of the poem that is of love: once in the first stanza, twice in the second stanza and three times in the last stanza. These numbers indicate the stages of love that comes in different dimensions.

The first stanza describes the loneliness and fear of love before the first encounter with love as the line */live coiled in shells of loneliness/* refers to isolation. The third to fifth lines of the first stanza, */until love leaves its high holy temple/*, */and comes into our sight/*, and */to liberate us into life/* introduce the speaker to love. The second stanza describes what love brings into life from the moment it comes as seen in the first line, */love arrives/.* The line */and in its train come ecstasies/* refers to the pleasant feelings that come to life. In this stanza, the poet also expresses the joy and pain that love might bring as in lines */old memories of pleasure/* and */ancient histories of pain/*. Moreover, it is implied that if being open to love as in line */Yet if we are bold/*, the fear can be overcome as seen in the final two lines: */love strikes away the chains of fear/* and */from our souls/.*

The final stanza calls the demonstration of how love alters a person by setting them free as implied in the seventh and eighth lines: */Yet it is only love/* and */which sets us free/*. The lines */We are weaned from our timidity/*, and */we dare be brave/* refers to the demonstration and what love has turned her into.

To summarize, the love dimension in *Touched by An Angel* covers three stages of love. The first stage shows how an innocent one exposed to love for the first time. Before love exists, the speaker feels empty and fearful. Then, love is introduced as delivering joy and pain as seen in the second stage. The last stage reveals that love indeed brings freedom and bravery within the speaker.

The second Angelou's poem, *When You Come,* which similarly consists of three stanzas, approaches love from different perspective. Look at the verses below:

> *When you come to me, unbidden,*
> *Beckoning me*
> *To long-ago rooms,*
> *Where memories lie.*   *4*
>
>   *Offering me, as to a child, an attic,*
>   *Gatherings of days too few.*
>   *Baubles of stolen kisses.*
>   *Trinkets of borrowed loves.*
>   *Trunks of secret words,*   *9*
>
> *I CRY.*   *10*

Different from *Touched by An Angel* in which Angelou mentions "love" numerous times, here it is only mentioned once, in the second stanza. It indicates that there is another approach on how to define love, which turns out to be totally dissimilar.

Overall, this poem has three stages of love divided into its three stanzas. In the first stanza, the speaker encounters an unexpected someone as seen in line */When you come to me, unbidden/* who reminds him or her about the past memories that the speaker tries to hide. The unexpected someone gives a signal (*/Beckoning me/*) to certain experiences that the speaker wish not to remember as seen in line three and four, */To long-ago rooms,/* and */Where memories lie/.* The word "lie" in this last line can be interpreted in two ways, as what it is where the memories are or as what happen to the speaker's memories, which are only full of falsehoods.

The second stanza tells about the memories that are mentioned in previous stanza, which are related to the love relationship. Such "lies" are depicted in all lines in stanza two. Each line starts with supposedly wonderful things, namely */Offering/*, */Gatherings/*, */Baubles/*, */Trinkets/*, and */Trunks/*, which seem to represent a good attention that someone will give to his or her lover. However, words such as */as to a child/*, */too few/*, */stolen/*, */borrowed/, and /secret/* bring negative meanings that describe unwanted situation. The speaker recalls how bad he or she is treated in this love relationship by being given */an attic/*, */ days too few/*, */ stolen kisses/*, */ borrowed loves/*, and */secret words/.* To finalize, the last

stanza reveals how the speaker is unable to keep from expressing the unwanted feeling, by crying. A single line and the capital letters convey how the speaker is unable to restrain his or her feeling anymore and just let it out, with no more words needed.

Hence, the three stages of past love in Angelou's *When You Come* start with the first stage in which the speaker has to meet his or her past lover who still wants to relive the memories that the speaker tries to hide. This encounter coerces the speaker to remember his or her painful experiences in the love relationship, which are full of falsehoods, as the second stage. The last stage is the outcome of reliving the memories that causes the speaker to be emotional.

All in all, although both *Touched by An Angel* and *When You Come* convey three stages of love, they tell totally different experiences about love. The former is on the happy side as feeling love for the first time, while the latter is on the unhappy one as suffering from love.

2. Figurative Language in Angelou's *Touched by An Angel* and *When You Come*

In her portrayal of stages of love in *Touched by An Angel*, Angelou applies some kinds of figurative language to bring certain effects indirectly and to beautify the poem itself. These figures of speech are comparative figurative language (personification) and contradictive one (hyperbole, paradox and irony). The summary can be seen in the table as follows:

Table 1.
Figurative Language found in Angelou's *Touched by An Angel*

Kennedy's Division	Figurative Language	Data Findings	Data Source
Comparative Figurative Language	Personification	(1) live **coiled in shells of loneliness**	stanza 1, line 3
		(2) Until **love leaves** its high holy temple	stanza 1, line 4
		(3) and comes into our sight **to liberate** us into life.	stanza 1, line 5-6
		(4) **Love arrives**	stanza 2, line 1
		(5) and **in its train** come ecstasies	stanza 2, line 2
		(6) **love strikes away** the chains of fear	stanza 2, line 6
		(7) We are **weaned** from our timidity	stanza 3, line 1
		(8) In the **flush of love's light** we dare be brave	stanza 3, line 2-3

		(9) And suddenly **we see**
		      that love costs all we are
		      and will ever be.
			stanza 3, line 4-6

		(10) Yet it is only love which **sets us**	stanza 3, line 7-8
Contradictive Figurative Language	Hyperbole	(11) until love leaves its **high holy temple**	stanza 1, line 4
	Paradox	(12) old memories of **pleasure** ancient history of **pain.**	stanza 2, line 3-4
	Irony	(13) We, unaccustomed to **courage** exiles from delight	stanza 1, line 1-2

Angelou's *Touched by An Angel* uses comparative and contradictive because the writers want to compare and emphasize love with something else as shown in Table 1 above. This can be seen in data (3) and (10) in which Angelou compares love as a hero or savior that can free us. Love is personified to help describing the first experience in love and freed her to a better life. In contradictive, data (12) emphasizes on the words "pleasure" and "pain" that are contrasted in meaning but often come side by side since it paradoxically combines two opposite forces to be together in truth.

In this poem, personification attributes love to certain traits that human being possess as love is abstractly felt only. In (2) and (4), love is considered as the thing that comes and goes on its own. It has its own thinking and movement to certain destination while in fact, love is an abstract feeling. Moreover, love even has the ability to fight against unwanted entity, which is fear, as seen in (6).

The hyperbolic expression as seen in (11) defines how really appreciated love initially that it is positioned in a */high holy temple/* which people pay homage to. Love is considered at having the same position as gods. Meanwhile, the irony in (13) reveals how people are far from the ability to love and to be happy from loving. This is ironic since people have feelings and thus, they should be able to express their love easily. Yet, it is love that comes to set them free.

As for the poem *When You Come,* the summary of the figurative language can be seen in the following table:

Table 2.
Figurative Language found in Angelou's *When You Come*

Kennedy's Division	Figurative Language	Data Findings	Data Source
Comparative Figurative Language	Personification	(14) Where **memories lie**.	stanza 1, line 4
	Simile	(15) Offering me, **as to a child,** an attic,	stanza 2, line 1
	Metaphor	(16) **Baubles** of **stolen kisses**.	stanza 2, line 3
		(17) **Trinkets** of **borrowed loves**.	stanza 2, line 4
		(18) **Trunks** of **secret words**,	stanza 2, line 5

Table 2 above reveals that this poem contains only comparative figurative language, namely personification, simile, and metaphor. Personification is found in the first stanza, while the other two kinds of figurative language are in the second stanza.

Data (14) shows where memories stay. However, it also signifies how the memories reveals falsehood. What happened in the past is known to be the unexpected in the present time. The simile in (15) directly compares the speaker with a child, who is offered an attic. Just like data (14), there might be two meanings of data (15). On one hand, a child might be happy to be taken to an attic, where he or she can find many things in the storage or stay in the farther or unknown place in the house. On the other hand, a child might be frightful to be in an attic since it is in the highest ground and is considered as isolated place.

Metaphor has the most number in Angelou's *When You Come.* The implicit comparisons show how */stolen kisses/* is considered as "baubles" in (16), */borrowed loves/* as "trinkets" in

(17), and */secret words/* as "trunks" in (18). This indicates how the supposedly negative things are compared to wonderful things. They are treasures kept in memories that turn out to be unexpected.

Conclusion

Angelou's *Touched by An Angel* outlines the stages of love dimension in Angelou's poem. The first stanza introduces the love and the promise it brings. The second stanza defines the effects of love that reveal not only pleasure, but also pain. Lastly, the third stanza demonstrate how love keeps its promise to be savior to set people free. Meanwhile, Angela's *When You Come* also slightly signifies three stages of love in the past. The first is how past love is reminded, then what memories of the unexpected love relationship are, and lastly, how the past love affects the speaker.

The figurative language based on Kennedy's division includes the comparative and contradictive ones. The comparative figure of speech is found in *Touched by An Angel* and *When You Come*. Personification is available in both poems, while simile and metaphor are only in the latter poem. Meanwhile the contradictive one which comprises of a hyperbole, an irony, and a paradox is only found in the first poem.

Personification has the most number (ten) in *Touched by An Angel* since Angelou attributing love to human good traits makes love the most desirable thing. Meanwhile, metaphor has the most number (three) in *When You* Come to acknowledge how the painful memories are better told in implicit comparison. Finally, the use of figurative language specifies Angelou emphasis on comparing and contrasting love with other entities in order to portray the love depiction in both *Touched by An Angel* and *When You* Come.

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