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The Politicization of Love in American Poet Laureates Inaugural Poems :A Case Study of Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou

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Abstract:

Black females have always played an important role in literature. Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou are two of the most pivotal literary figures whose art has contributed to the liberty and independence of black women all over the world. They have employed their literature in order to discuss social problems, and this is the reason why their poetry can be regarded as political poetry. This research intends to analyze the theme of love and the way it is politicized in some poems by Gorman and Angelou. In fact, this study inspects the amalgamation of love and a black feminist politics since the examination of the penetration of love into politics reveals that black feminism's politicization of love exceeds the problems of identity politics, primarily intersectionality. In order to achieve this goal, hooks has been selected as this paper's main theoretician owing to her preoccupation with the intersectionality of race, capitalism, and gender, and what she has labeled as these three features' aptitude to cause and extend women's suppression and class dominion.

Key Words: Maya Angelou, Amanda Gorman, bell hooks, Intersectionality, Politicization of Love.

1. Background of the Study:

Society is like a model for the writers and poets. In other words, the literary figures mostly intend to depict the reality of their society through a literary work, which authenticates the close relationship between literature and society. As Gunn (1970) has declared, literature resembles a mirror which acts “as an index to or assessment of our modern cultural and religious distress” (Gunn. 1970).

Accordingly, through the examination of a text or a poem, the investigators will know about the lookouts of that work’s creator. Amanda Gorman (born 1998) and Maya Angelou (1928-2014) as the subjects of analysis in this study are amongst the most famous poets who have benefitted from their literature in order to reflect upon social problems; this is why their poetry can be observed as political poetry. (ibid)

Political poetry is in fact linked with activism, objection, and social preoccupation due to referring to societal, political, or existing events and

dilemmas. One of the most important themes in these two poets' productions is the theme of love. As a matter of fact, love is the most general topic in poetry because it is the most fundamental sentiment in the world. Love also plays a significant role in politics as it can be employed to demonstrate social inequalities, and how it is often entrenched in grander societal structures. (ibid)

For Angelou, America was a golden (not gold) place. It tempts and apparently beautiful, but the corruption destroyed that beauty. American lands that grew crops and had gold, but was not used. Symbolically, looks mislead many in America and they lazily were waiting the apple to fall from the tree. The sorrowful and often satirical expression of a black in a white-dominated Angelou's "victimization" was held in stable state with her heroic world. (Muhammad Ridha, 2012)

Among the different approaches that can be adopted in analyzing the literary text is the formal approach. The formal approach has been gained popularity on the part of the readers because it supplies them with the ability to analyze and to read with pleasure any given literary work depending on the deep rooted and essential values of that work. (Abdul Razzaq, 2022)

2. Literature Review:

This part is divided to three sections. In the first section, the review of literature related to bell hooks is presented; the second section will be about Amanda Gorman, and finally, the third section will be about some studies concerning Maya Angelou.

2.1. On Bell Hooks:

Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984) is a key book by Hooks in which she has offered a completely novel account of feminism. According to her, feminism does not only imply endeavoring to achieve equal rights for women, but it is a movement that attempts to discharge sexist oppression and manipulation without taking no notice of other systems of suppression, including "racism, classism, imperialism and others" which are highly interconnected (Hooks. 1984).

In Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics (2000), Hooks has criticized the normal description of feminism which was merely limited to white Bourgeois women. Consequently, feminism for Hooks embraces more than only the dilemmas of white women by including all those who are subjugated, distinguished, and suppressed. In a word, Hooks was searching for a movement which could terminate sexist domination. Therefore, the movement is indisputably not about being against men, but about the problem of sexism. This issue means that all of us, woman and man have been mingled from the very beginning to accept sexist way of thinking and acting (Hooks, 2000).

Ain't I a Woman (1981) is regarded as an essential book of black feminism which investigates the effect of sexism on black women throughout slavery, the deflation of black women, black male sexism, racism amid feminists, and the black woman's participation in feminism; in this book, hooks struggles to go beyond racist and sexist molds. Moreover, *Ain't I a Woman* intensely criticizes the racism that is characteristic in the thought of many middle-class white feminists who are unsuccessful to refer to issues of race and class.

2.2. On Amanda Gorman:

Ritika Manathara (2021) has referred to the inauguration of President Biden in January 2021 and how everyone was surprised at the expressiveness and position of Amanda Gorman as the first ever

National Youth Poet Laureate. In fact, though her success as a poet and speaker has made her really famous, she is regarded as a devoted activist in her words and in her actions. Her poetry is mostly concerned with social problems and often contains a call for action for universal and discrete transformations. The power of poetry for this young poet is that it can influence a huge audience about multifaceted issues in just a few lines.

According to Support (2021), Gorman is a young American poet and activist who is chiefly famous for her influential poems about subjugation, feminism, race, and relegation. Gorman is in fact a stimulus since she has defeated her speech and auditory processing problems. Gorman has bravely transported her “*The Hill We Climb*” poem that revolves around such issues as optimism, harmony, healing, and resilience for America. She has also made a constructive reform that reinvigorated others to take advantage of chances and go after their dreams in spite of the challenges that they may encounter. This confident change benefits ambitious poets, incapacitated people, people of color, and young women, as well as youths in order to make their dreams a reality.

Altunkan (2022) also states that Amanda is a young woman who addresses millions of people and defines herself as a writer and a dreamer. She is shown on paintings and artistic works in different regions of America. Stirred by Malala Yousafzai, she has turned into a youth representative for the United Nations in 2013. Furthermore, she was the inaugural Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate. Her first poetry book, “*The One for Whom Food Is Not Enough*”, was published in 2015. Then, Amanda registered at Harvard University in 2016, whereas her twin sister Gabrielle chose film studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2017, Amanda became the inaugural National Youth Poet Laureate. She toured the country and read her new works.

“The ability to make choices is what distinguishes a free person from a slave, or this is what we like to think”. (Hassan, 2022)

2.3. On Maya Angelou:

Ghani and Naz (2007) in their study have concentrated on Angelou’s poetry in order to analyze the theme of resistance in the background of postcolonialism. They believe that this poet’s poetry is an enunciation of the procedure of brawl for national, racial, and lingual identity as she discusses the contradiction of black and white, femininity and masculinity, minor and major, self and other, inferiority and superiority, and orient and occident. The analysis of her poetry actually leads to understanding the way she criticizes the supremacy and relegation (Ghani & Naz, 2007).

In another article, Widjayanti (2019) states that seven of Angelou’s poems have been chosen by him based on humanity subjects in her works, particularly on discernment and racism. The analysis is done through semiotic theory and sociology of literature, and the findings show that her poetry comprises ethical principles that can build an equal value of human being and unity between all human beings with any skin color.

According to Sahar, Brennin kmeyer, and O’Connell (1997), Angelou’s performance of her poem “*On the Pulse of Morning*” at the inauguration of Clinton in 1993 has been compared with other poetry and prose performances. Such features as her pause frequency, pause location, pause duration, phrase length, speech rate, articulation rate, and percentage of pause time all exclusively describe her

performance. Printed sorts of her inaugural poem were also examined, and it was found that discrepancies in spelling, punctuation, spacing, and line and stanza breaks, accompanied by additions, omissions, and sequence changes of words and phrases were prevalent.

Fernandes (2017) refers to feminism as a movement by which women are after their rights in financial, education, occupation, politic, social, and other fields. In her poems, Angelou has been concerned with such themes as the struggle of women to achieve self-confidence and a voice to demand for what they truly deserve. The results in this article show that Angelou intends to say that in order for the voice of women to be heard, they must be more educated. Moreover, Angelou means to say that women must get equality in occupation and wages which is a very important step towards their real liberty.

3. Statement of the Problem:

The poetry of Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou has been analyzed by different researchers through different approaches, which shows the popularity and important role of these figures all over the world. Still, there remains a gap regarding the thorough investigation of the theme of love and the way it is politicized in some poems by Gorman and Angelou. Hence, this study will scrutinize the union of love and a black feminist politics. In fact, by examining the penetration of love into politics, the researcher claims that black feminism's politicization of love surpasses the drawbacks of identity politics, chiefly intersectionality.

4. Significance of the Study:

This study is significant since it seeks to analyze some poetry by Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou as two female literary figures through a black feminist methodology. Hence, it is attempted to find the resemblances between Gorman and Angelou as two poets who have set their poetry in an American patriarchal context with such themes as the predicaments of the black women who suffer from racial subjugation and sexual assault. bell hooks has also been chosen because of her considerable role in unveiling the truth behind women's suppression in different facets.

5. Methodology:

A feminist approach in literary works aims at developing equal civic, political, economic, and social freedoms for women. Depending on its cultural or political goals, feminism is viewed as a movement which seeks to achieve equality for women in diverse fields. bell hooks in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984) has claimed that it is a movement to throw away sexist domination (p. 57). Feminist criticism of literary works has experienced lots of vicissitudes, and it is proven that investigators of this field have considerably changed their perspectives in order to be in harmony with the social, political, and religious propensities and situations.

According to what is declared in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks has offered a new explanation of feminism. She believes that feminism does not only suggest struggling to attain equal rights for women, but it is a movement that attempts to dismiss sexist suppression and manipulation without disregarding other systems of power including "racism, classism, imperialism and others" which are highly interconnected (p. 31). hooks has rejected the usual definition of feminism which was only restricted to white Bourgeois women. Therefore, feminism for this feminist is believed

to include more than only the quandaries of white Bourgeois women by embracing all those who are oppressed, distinguished, and bottled-up.

To sum it up, Hooks (2000) has been looking for a movement which could terminate sexist domination (p. viii). Therefore, according to this definition, the movement is unquestionably not about being against men, but about the problem of sexism. As a result, it can be concluded that she suggests a revolution. This is what is essential in order to make a change. As Hooks (1984) has professed, the philosophical structures of the future feminist struggle must be based on eliminating the causes of sexism, the cultural basis and other causes of mass subjugation. No feminist improvements will be real without the abolition of these types (Hooks, 1984).

Hooks' black feminist theory can help to analyze how Gorman and Angelou have used the theme of love in order to discuss their political attitudes and ideology. This form of feminism indicates a more universal actualization of the self that can eventually bring about a global political restructuring. It not only means to alter the current procedure so that women benefit from more rights, but also intends to renovate the system with the intention of ending bias against womenfolk (Biana, 2020, p. 17).

6. Discussion:

Politics is inevitably linked with such issues as love and human feelings. Independence and equality are amongst the most important political ideas which are discussed continuously in today's world. Black people and particularly black women are also highly concerned with their equal rights; this is the reason why they try to use their art and literature in order to reflect upon their desires.

According to Max Harris (2017), lots of socialist and anti-colonial philosophers have also referred to the notion of love as a rousing political force throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, Che Guevara wrote in a 1965 letter: "At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality." Michael Hardt is another scholar who has mentioned this reference a lot in modern theoretical discussions to emphasize love's significance in politics (Harris, 2017).

Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou have also benefitted from their poetry with the intention of achieving their political goals. Their poetry represents their struggle for national and racial individuality. They address the separation of black and white, femininity and masculinity, along with humbleness and dominance. Since intersectionality helps the readers to reach a better understanding of how women are suppressed, benefiting from Hooks' notion of intersectionality will disclose that both Gorman and Angelou portray numerous interconnected problems which manipulate women.

The matter of identity loss has influenced the lives of many people all over the world; however, black women have been suffering more. Barbara Christian (1989) defines intersectionality as the attempt of black women in order to express themselves instead of being expressed. In fact,

As poor, woman, and black, the Afro-American woman had to generate her own definition in order to survive. If defined as black, her woman nature was often denied; if defined as woman, her blackness was often ignored; if defined as working class, her gender and race were muted. (p. 161)

These two poets' love poetry signifies their connection with a world that is highly mysterious and domineering; however, they struggle not to be overcome. Furthermore, in their poetry, Gorman and

Angelou both use such themes as hope, love, and valor so as to transfer optimism to their readers. Both Gorman and Angelou have had a tough childhood. For instance, Gorman as the youngest inaugural poet in the United States who was brought up in Los Angeles was diagnosed with a hearing sickness at an early age; then, she decided to use poetry as a means to defeat her problem.

“Making Mountains as We Run” (2018) is the title of a poem which she performed at Harvard University and discusses Gorman's personal experiences regarding discernment, gender, and race. This poem Lawrence S. Bacow as Harvard University’s twenty-ninth president:

Yet before these accolades and degrees,
He grew up in Pontiac, Michigan.
The son of two refugees
who immigrated to America:
Two fighters who came here looking shoreward,
Two survivors dreaming higher, looking forward
At the new opportunities their son could seize.

Gorman’s poetry shows that in a multiethnic world, all human beings are having an association with each other which is more multipart if they come from diverse backgrounds. This idea is present throughout Angelo’s poetry as well. Using intersectionality thus can be an attempt to examine the multiethnic, multi-layered world of people with idiosyncratic experiences.

Gorman also depicts African-American people as having undergone lots of problems like identity disintegration. Her poems in fact exhibit the difficulties of people who struggle to establish a stable identity after all ferocious and desensitizing experiences. Using intersectionality as an investigative device, Gorman emphasizes the fundamental role that a fixed sense of identity plays in an individual's life.

At the commencement of the presidency of Clinton in 1993, Angelou’s opening poem, “*On the Pulse of Morning*” caused her poetic voice to enter the national field and the national awareness (Bloom, 2009, pp. 121-122). In “*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” (1970), Angelou discusses the significance of her poetry in the expansion of her feelings, and also refers to the liberating discourse in her own poems.

In “*The Couple*” which was published in 1975, Angelou mixes her attitudes regarding freedom with her poetic method in order to criticize the gender or class features as wrong characteristics which are regarded as important points in one's identity development; to do so, she starts with concepts of femininity: “Discard the fear and what/ was she? Of rag and bones/ a mimicry of woman’s/ fairy-ness/ Archaic at its birth” (Bloom, 2009) states that:

Many of Angelou’s poems are introspective pieces that render the personal experiences of their speakers. While such pieces often do not convey overt liberation ideology and, in fact, frequently reveal the despair, loss, and hardship of their speakers, taken as group, it is clear that Angelou represents interiority and personal experience in a manner that provides a community of healing, the type of community Shakespeare provided for her as described in *Caged Bird*. Such pieces depict the woman used for sexual intimacy who is left behind when each man returns to his wife. (p. 127)

“Caged Bird” is another important poem by Angelou in which she discusses racial domination, independence, imprisonment, contentment, and grief. These themes are shown by Angelou’s representation of two birds, one free and one in a cage. The caged bird stands for all the black people who are oppressed by powerful human beings. Black men, women, and children see “through...bars” whereas the free bird flies freely in the sky.

However, discernment against black women due to their race, sex, and class is most obvious in the poetry of Gorman and Angelou who are told normally that because they are black and a female, they have no right to individuality. This overlying of discernment is clearly marked by intersectionality.

7. Conclusion:

This article meant to analyze some poetic pieces of Amanda Gorman and Maya Angelou in order to investigate the way they have employed such themes as love to discuss their political ideology. To achieve this goal, the viewpoints of bell hooks were used and it was found that these two literary figures’ poetry specifies a more collective realization of the self that can sooner or later lead to an international political reformation. It not only modifies the existing situation so that women take advantage of more rights, but also aims to refurbish the system with the purpose of culmination of the partiality against females.

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