

# Stylistic analysis of the lost baby poem

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Student number: 12056010 A Stylistic Analysis of « the lost baby poem » by Lucille Clifton In this stylistic analysis of the lost baby poem written by Lucille Clifton I will deal mainly with two aspects of stylistic: derivation and parallelism features present in the poem. However I will first give a general interpretation of the poem to link more easily the stylistic features with the meaning of the poem itself. In this poem Lucille Clifton is telling the experience she had when she had an abortion.

In the title she announces directly what the poem is about.

The fact that she uses the adjective ‘ lost’ gives the impression that it has not been done on purpose or that she was not aware of what she was doing. In the first stanza she explains what happened in a harsh way, she uses very powerful words: she is talking about ‘ dropping the baby into the waters’, as if she thinks that at the time she thought about it as something she had to get rid of, something without any value running ‘ with the sewage’. Then she uses the idea of drowning and being drowned as if it was a murder.

Through all this choices of vocabulary we can guess that she regrets what she did, she is questioning herself and accusing herself.

The second stanza concerns a future that might have happened: how it would have been like if she had taken the other decision (to keep the baby). Despite the tone full of regrets she has on the first stanza, in this one she explains that at the time she was poor: ‘ no car’, ‘ disconnected gas’. Then we learn that the baby would have been given to adoption: ‘ to watch you slip like ice in strangers’ hands’.

In spite of all these circumstances we feel that she regrets her decision: she would like to be able to tell her potential baby the reasons of her decision and more. In the final stanza she's saying that she will accept any punishment and judgments: 'let the rivers pour over my head', 'let the seas take me for a spiller' because she decided of this potential baby's destiny and that she is ashamed to have taken this decision. She is willing to lose her identity as a tribute to this 'never named' baby.

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Now I'm going to deal with the parallelisms I have noticed in the poem and their relevance for the understanding and foregrounding of the poem. There is always a reason for a poet to decide to include parallelism in a poem. It creates a link between verses, stanzas or words, to emphasize an idea, make to concepts appear as similar, or other reasons. I will try to define Lucille Clifton's reasons to use parallelism here. Lexical parallelism: Down (line 1 and 2): It conveys an idea of all which is negative: hell, dust, failure.

A lot of expressions including down have this negative side: 'to feel down', 'to down'.

The first down is just before the second one (not part of another sentence), she repeats it to underline this negative dimension as if it wasn't negative enough by itself. To drown (line 5 and 6): Probably one of the most horrible deaths which exist. It is again something really negative. The author sees her abortion as a drowning.

In line 5 the fact that she uses the progressive form to conjugate the verb implies that the subject is doing the action on his own (it is nobody's fault in

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particular), whereas in line 6 she uses the passive form so the subject is no longer an actor but a victim, he is receiving the action. Drowning' has this notion of accident but ' being drawn' is being victim of a murder.

Consequently she goes more and more judgmental against herself. She is clearly accusing herself. Into winter (line 7 and 12): Winter is this cold season which is associated with depression , loneliness and the author is pointing out the fact that the baby would have been born in winter (line 7) by using the preposition ' into' instead of ' in' which would be more conventional but less powerful.

The fact that she uses ' into' makes the reader have the feeling that this baby would have been surrounded by this cold season, almost part of it.

In line 12 she uses this prepositional phrase again but this time the baby is even more concretely seen as a part of winter because she talks about it as ' naked as snow' falling ' into winter' it emphasizes the idea of cold. Seas (line 18 and 19): is also appearing twice. Life is often symbolized as water. Therefore she accepts to be judged by life because she decided of someone else's right to live.

' Sea' in Student number: 12056010 its singular form is appearing in the first stanza line 3 but here the prevalent impression is one of immensity, landscape without horizon, being lost.

Lexical groupings and semantic parallelism There are three redundant semantic fields in the poem. In the first stanza it is the semantic field of water: ' waters' (twice), ' sea', ' drowning' and ' being drawn'. As I mentioned earlier, water is often the symbol of life but it also evokes tears,

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sadness and despair. In the second stanza it is the semantic field of cold: ‘winter’, ‘ice’, ‘naked’, ‘snow’. All these lexical items give us a feeling of cold which evokes loneliness, unknown, fear.

Finally in the third stanza there is the semantic field of nature: ‘mountain’, ‘rivers’, ‘seas’. Nature has the role of judge.

It decides whether she has to be punished or not. Nature is represented as a sort of divine entity deciding of her fate because she has decided of someone else’s right to live. Again the water is represented several times with ‘rivers’ (line 17) and ‘seas’ (line 18 and 19) it gives the impression that she thinks she deserves to be drowned as her potential baby was as she says in the first stanza.

Grammatical parallelism Certain grammatical structures appear twice in the poem. Line 4 and 5 in the first stanza consist of a sentence beginning with ‘what did I know about’ followed by ‘waters rushing back’ and ‘drowning’.

Furthermore even if the complements of each sentence are different they have a close meaning. This repetition transcribes the fact that she considers herself as ignorant at this time and that line 5 sounds more nervous, it gives the feeling that she feels angry against her younger self. In line 17 and 18 of the last stanza the two verses have also the same beginning ‘let the rivers pour over my head’ and ‘let the seas take me for a spiller of seas’, again the ending is different but they both refer to a punishment.

Each verse has also the same number of syllables which does not happen frequently in this poem. Student number: 12056010 As a conclusion, parallelism in the lost baby poem by Lucille Clifton is an essential element of <https://assignbuster.com/stylistic-analysis-of-the-lost-baby-poem/>

the poem. The foregrounding resulting from it helps the reader to understand what type of reaction the author wants her readers to have by reading her poem. Here the redundancy of certain structures and lexical items conveys feelings of guilt, regret and self-anger.

It also gives more importance to certain words and ideas (like with the repeated use of the word 'down').

Finally, although the structure of the poem seems completely unconventional and not organized the concordance of the two grammatical parallelisms 'what did I know about [...]' and 'let the [...]' creates an effect of the circle being completed.

Bibliography \* Short, Mick, Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose (London: Longman, 1996). \* Macleod, Norman, 'Stylistics and the Analysis of Poetry: A Credo and an Example,' (Journal of Literary Semantics, 2009)