

Thinking critically about writing



Your full March 31, Literary Criticism “ Poem about My Rights”, by June Jordan

June Jordan in her poem, “ Poem about my rights”, conveys the message about her strength, valor, courage, and determination. The main theme of this free verse poem is discrimination and oppression that a black woman experiences in the United States; yet, literary critics have linked this poem to Jordan’s resistance to her country’s demeaning. This essay highlights the idea that the structure and language used throughout June Jordans poem creates a very threatening and disgruntled tone, with the use of which the poetess has conveyed her message of equal rights (thesis).

The language of the poem, with the help of imagery, is belligerent enough to convey to the reader the message about how the black woman is experiencing oppression in the society she lives in. The symbolic nature of the poem highlights the importance of determination, and how women should fight against the unfair laws set by humans for humans. The tone is disgruntling, like when we read: “...who in the hell set things up/ like this” (lines 21-22). These lines depict the annoyed tone that the poetess uses to convey the black woman’s aggression toward the unfair laws of the country.

The language in the lines 21-33 show discontentment yet self-acceptance through the exemplification about how the woman accepts the law that the boys may fuck her without being blamed of rape, if they do not ejaculate inside her; and, how the rape is never identified no matter how hard she fights against it. This exemplification is harsh enough to be illustrated, but Jordan, with the help of strong structure and language, conveys it lucidly.

However, Adamson, Evans and Stein (155) have linked Jane’s tone with her intention of resistance against the violation of her country’s rights, as they state: “ Jordan reminds us throughout the poem that her “ natural” body is a

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colonized site...that the rape of an African country, an environment, an African American woman's body, are all entwined..."

The tone of the poem very well describes the oppression and guilt that the black woman is going through at the hands of the opposite gender. Jordan has used repetitive words, which shows threat, like in the line 22: " My name is my own my own my own". The repetition emphasizes that the woman is no longer going to accept the guilt. The tone of the poem changes from self-acceptance of being wrong to resistance and revenge. Resistance is shown in lines (109-110): "...I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name/ My name is my own my own my own", and revenge is depicted clearly in lines (112-114): " But I can tell you that from now on my resistance/ My simple and daily and nightly self-determination/ May very well cost you your life". This is an interesting shift of tone from self-acceptance to resistance and revenge; yet, the language of the poem remains as strapping as it was in the beginning of the poem. Jackson and Prins (595) have described Jordan's poem as a poem " that may less skillfully and self-consciously traverse uneven cultural terrain."

To conclude, the disgruntled language and structure of the poem is well-suited for the depiction of guilt, wrongness, and shame, that the black woman feels in the male dominated and race centered society. The tone is interesting, and the reader feels a threatening shift of tone from self-acceptance of being wrong to resistance and revenge in the end. Jordan has made lucid use of language and tone in this poem.

Works Cited

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