

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN'S SPIRIT IN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S POEM

"THE MOTHER'S CHARGE": A NEW CRITICISM ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the language of poetry that portrays a woman's spirit in Charlotte Gilman's poem "The Mother's Charge". This study applies the New Criticism theory and uses the close reading method. This theory is applied because this study aims to analyze the language of poetry that consists of dictions in the form of figurative language and imagery. This study will analyze the portrayal of the woman who proposed her expression by writing poems, short stories, etc. This poem can be considered as an expression of women's feeling and experience because women could write something to express their own condition as a form of persecution. To make judgment of the meaning of the poem, the writer would elaborate the elements of poetry, and the writer would make the detailed analysis focusing on the language of poetry. In this poem, a woman has to do something to make the duties run well and finish in the right time before the other tasks are late to do. The result shows that in Gilman's poem there are many words reflecting the spirit of woman who is assumed to have two roles in her life, as a mother and a wife. The result shows that by exploring the figurative language and interpreting the imagery the condition of woman in the poem can be revealed clearly and the portrayal of woman's spirit is supported by figures of speech and imagery.

Keywords: Charge; Mother; Persecution; Role; Wife; Woman's Spirit

1. Introduction

People have various feelings to express when they have certain experience, whether in happiness, tiredness, or even madness. Those feelings might happen to every person, either a man or a woman. Man and woman have different attitude in expressing the feelings, and they also have different power in behaving their feelings. Especially, a woman, when she expresses her feelings, she sometimes involves her tears through crying, and does nothing. Talking about a woman, the context will be a woman's experience in performing her life. Moreover, in marriage, when she is becoming a mother, indeed, she will perform a "double job", as a mother and as a wife.

In this study, the writer would explain the woman who tries to propose her expression by writing poems, short stories and any other writings,. As Stanford stated that the poet conveys the feelings, experiences, pleasures, and sorrows in poetry (57). The poem can be considered as the expression of women's feeling or experience because women are able to write anything in poetry to sound their persecution. They chooses a word with "several meanings" that could be the representation of their persecution itself. Frankly, women's writing with their dictions might be the representation of their mind condition. As Griffith stated that basically, diction refers to the poet's choice of words; poets are sensitive to the subtle shades of meaning of words, to the possible double meanings of words, and to denotative and connotative meanings of words (87-88).

In this study, the writer will analyze one of woman's literary works in poetry that is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's poem. The writer wants to find out the woman's expression in one of her poems entitled "The Mother's Charge". The poem is unique and there is a message for women to always keep spirit in doing something, even though, it would be hard to do. Actually, the exact period of writing the poem was not clear. The writer assumes that the poem was written around 1900 – 1934 because she, at that time, could enjoy her second marriage with Houghton Gilman. Then, she got breast cancer and moved to California living near her first daughter from her first marriage. It is related to the poem the writer is going to analyze about Gilman's success in caring her child, so that she invited the woman in her poem to be a good mother like Gilman did.

There was no previous study on this poem with the same topic, but this topic can be found in any other works applying new historicism by Alpers on his research entitled "*Ordinary Household Chores*": *Ritual*

and Power In a 19th Century Swahili Women's Spirit Possession Cult (1984). He observed certain fundamental aspects of the historical experience of Zanzibari women at that time and, moreover, the ritual explicitly declares about the domestication of women. Another study is using feminist approach done by Treichler (1985). She tries to elaborate women's discourses through Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". The psychological diagnosis is discussed through the patriarchal discourse. Actually, the idea of woman's spirit above is related to Gilman's life. She got the idea from her experience when she was in her second marriage with Houghton Gilman. ;the background of the poet helps a lot in understanding the problem in the poem, but as the analysis is using New Criticism, the writer focuses only on the poem itself without seeing the poet's background. To make judgment of the meaning of the poem, the writer would use the elements of poetry and the writer would make the detailed focus on the language of poetry. Tyson argued that "*the text itself*" becomes the battle cry of the New Critical effort to focus our attention to the literary work as the sole source of evidence for interpreting it (136).

In finding the data of a woman's spirit which appears in Gilman's poem, the writer would also elaborate the elements of poetry and try to find out the hidden meaning or messages in Gilman's poem that should be revealed related to woman's spirit itself. As Buchbinder stated that the presupposition of difficulty arises from a combination of assumptions: first, that the *language* of poetry is itself difficult, and, second, that there is concealed somewhere in this difficult language a 'message' that is invisible to the naked eyes (1). In order to analyze the idea of woman's spirit in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman entitled "The Mother's Charge", the study will analyze about how the woman's spirit is presented in the poem. To answer the question, the writer is doing a close reading to the poem and trying to understand the poem. The writer, then, elaborates its unified meaning by identifying the figurative language and imagery of the poem. After doing the close reading, the writer uses descriptive interpretative method to analyze the elements above. The data that have been collected are reformed in the form of descriptive explanation. After analyzing the poem, the last part of the study would be drawn to formulate the theme. The whole analysis is finally arranged to get its organic unity.

2. Illustration of the Poem

The first stanza illustrates that the woman in the poem feels bored and tired. It indicates that this stanza is obviously showing the miserable feeling of the woman in the poem. The first stanza pictures the tiredness that is happening to the woman which makes her think to die. It can be seen in line 1, the phrase *raised her head*, is illustrating about a woman who tries to get up from the condition which makes her feel tired and bored.

The second stanza illustrates the sequences in doing the tasks that the speaker gives to the woman. The speaker tries to give from the earlier step in doing the tasks. The speaker asks the woman that she cannot just sit down because the woman has to do something, even though it is the first time for the woman.

Then, the last stanza is likely to be the climax that makes the woman die as the other mothers die. Actually, this last stanza is not clear who is proposed by the speaker whether it is a woman in the poem or the speaker herself, because when the writer is pointing to the speaker, it is impossible since the speaker uses the word *she* and if the writer is pointing to the woman in the poem it is also impossible because line 31 is explaining about the daughter that is the woman itself. So that it could be concluded that the last stanza is telling about the end of the advice and the responsibilities of doing the tasks that the woman has to do.

3. Meaning of the Poem

In finding the meaning of the poem, the writer tries to elaborate the figurative language and the imagery. The figures of speech used in the poem are overstatement, understatement, irony, personification, metaphor, symbol and pleonasm. While types of imagery found in the poem are visual imagery, tactile imagery and internal sensation.

3.1 Figurative Language

The first line of the first stanza is the personification because it talks about the parable situation of the woman. As Reaske says that personification is the process of assigning human characteristics to nonhuman objects, abstractions, or ideas. Attributing personal form to such nonhuman objects and ideas

is a standard rhetorical device in poetry (39). In this case, it parables the tiredness of the woman, that can be seen through the words *She raised her head./ With hot and glittering eye,*// which means that the woman feels tired with the jobs she has. She tries to get up by raising her head, but it will make her feel tired that can be noticed from her eyes which are *hot and glittering*.

Line 2 is categorized as an overstatement (exaggeration) which shows a simple exaggeration but exaggeration in the service of truth (Perrine, 110). As the writer explained before that it is the truth if the woman feels dizzy with the duties, and for the exaggeration is *she is going to die*. Actually, she will not feel dizzy, bored, or tired, and probably she can do the duties if the duties can be done orderly. It is because the woman cannot put the duties in order, and probably she is not patient in doing the duties, so that is why she feels to die. From the words *I know,* ' *she said,* ' ***that I am going to die*** (for the bold words are the woman said) can be interpreted as an exaggerated statement.

The next line (3) is telling about the speaker who will help the woman by giving an advice or making a list of duties in order, so that the woman does not feel tired or bored anymore. This line can be called as a personification, as the line written *come here, my daughter, while my mind is clear* (in this case, the speaker also calls the woman as her daughter, probably it can be concluded that the woman has been reputed as the daughter of the speaker because the speaker feels like that she is teaching her own daughter by giving the advice). The bold words show that the speaker has a free time, then, accidentally the speaker feels touching in her heart, and the speaker helps the woman when she has a good feeling, so that she calls the woman and tries to give her advice.

Lines 4-6 can be said as an irony. As Tyson states in the book of *Critical Theory Today: A user-Friendly Guide* that *Irony*, in its simple form, means a statement or event undermined by the context in which it occurs (139). The writer can see that the speaker never failed in those lines above, and now the writer has known that the speaker has the same position as a woman (who gives advice), but unfortunately, she has to face the other duties that she has to teach another woman to do the duties.

Now, lines 7-8 are the connotation of the woman's and her child's feeling. It is categorized as a personification, because the words *She raised her head*, and, *while her eyes rolled wild*, (line 7) are the comparison of the woman's enthusiasm in doing the duties as a mother and/or a housewife. The second words *poured these instructions on the gasping child* (line 8), the bold words are parable of the woman's child's feeling who feels dizzy because the child is not getting an adequate treatment from the mother (woman).

Lines 9-10 are the expression of an understatement. Those lines are telling about the words which are not actually describing the truth. In the book *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry*, Perrine stated that understatement, or saying less than one means, may exist in what one says or merely in how one says it (111). The writer can see the expressions in those lines are not telling the truth, but they tell about the speaker's command to the woman in order not to stay like a stone (it means do nothing). She has to do something to make the duties run well, and do something in the right time before the other duties are late to do.

Line 11 is telling about the woman who will face the problem that she cannot do the duties if the problem appears, and she never thinks what will happen next. Line 11 is the irony which means that the woman does not want the problem appear (the word **rains** in line 11 can be interpreted as a problem) itself appears because it will make the duties delay. In this case, whether the problem will come or not, the woman does not want to face it. If the problem appears, the woman cannot do the next duties as in ***Monday, unless it rains – it always pays***. And for the words *it always pays* are indicating as the following tasks which are waiting to get more attention to do. It is still related to previous words *Monday, unless it rains* – because those words indicate the parameter to do the next step which about the duties that need the 'dry' situation or silent condition.

In line 12 *To get fall sewing done on the right days* –, the word *sewing* can be the symbol of accuracy in doing something, why it can be so, because if someone sews a t-shirt or something, it will need an accuracy to make the seam of the t-shirt or etc, looked good. And in the next word after sewing, as in words *done on the right days*, can be interpreted as result of doing the duties accurately that will make the duties work well or finish on time. This line can also be said as responsibilities that the woman has to do, and the patient is the key in doing the duties work well.

Line 13 is telling about the tool of cleaning the house that can be categorized as a personification. In this line, the speaker is mentioning all the tools to indicate the cleanness of the house. As in *A carpet-sweeper and a little broom*, it means that the tools are the idea of the cleanness which is expressed by the speaker. All the tools that appear in line 13 are the idea of the speaker in presenting the process of cleaning the house.

The next line (14) is also the personification. It can be indicated from the words *Save dishes* –, that means the words are the identification of how to maintain the work well because from that expression, the writer interpretes that to save the dishes is an accurate task. What the writer means is the selection of dishes. And for the next words *wash the summer dining-room*, is about the orderliness in doing the next job. So that line 14 is about how the woman does the jobs easily and accurately.

Line 15 is emphasizing the meaning in caring the children, or it can be said as a pleonasm. The woman cannot give anything bad for children because it will make the children not be able to be controlled. As in *With soda – keep the children out of doors*, it means that if the soda is given to the children, the children will be out of the house (cannot be controlled). It says so because the soda might contain the glucose that if it is given to the children, it will make the children act hyperactively. This line is also talking about the warning for the woman to give the good thing to the children.

The explanation above can also be proven from the next line (16). This line is a personification because it is the comparison of the messiness. This line is still related to the previous line (15) because it is the impact of the fault if the woman gives bad things to her children. As in *The starch is out – beeswax on all the floors*, it means the messiness is in the house. So that these lines can be interpreted as how to keep the children out still calm at home. Then *The starch is out – beeswax on all the floors* means the messiness of the house is caused by the children whom cannot be touched in order they help their mother to clean the house).

The explanations above can also be emphasized through the next two lines (17-18). These lines are about the pleonasm because they are emphasizing the meaning. While the next line (19) is the metaphor. This line is about the indirect comparison between two things that are the "home" and "a jar." As Tyson says that a metaphor is a comparison of two dissimilar objects in which the properties of one ascribed to the other (143). As in *To make home happy is to keep a jar*, it means that the home will look happy if it is like a jar. It can also be interpreted that the word "a jar" is about the thing that should be kept clean and still in good condition. It is the same as the home, if the woman keeps the home like she keeps a jar carefully or well, it will make the house look neat, good, and healthy. A jar should be clean to place the dish or water.

Line 20 is about the symbol. The symbol which appears in this line is coming from the word "star" as the symbol, of beauty or ideal. As in *And save the prettiest pieces for the star*, it means that the woman has to keep something beautifully to make the house look comfortable to stay. From the explanation, it can be seen that this line is still related to the previous line, beside keeping house like a jar, the woman also keeps something beautifully to make the house more comfortable to stay, so that the children will feel comfortable to stay at home.

The next lines (21-22) are indicating as a metaphor. In this line is still related to the previous lines (19-20), there are two comparisons that are blue with dark and silk with best. That means the speaker wants to give the advice for woman to choose the color for the house because it can give impact to the feeling which means that the blue color is the representation of the sadness or dark, and the silk is the representation of the soft-heart (good person). And those explanations are put in the middle (it probably the color for living-room, for the room it is important to choose the right color because that place is the center to everyone to get gathering with family, so that it is impossible if the color is dark).

Line 24 tells about the time itself, in this line is the categorization of the symbol, and in this line is also the connection of the previous line (23) that is the word "windows" is a symbol of mirror (it can be concluded when the woman tries to clean the window, it is commonly known that the window is a transparent, so that if the woman who cleans up the window but the window is still dirty, that window will not reflect or hide the woman who stands up in front of the window, and the other people will not see the woman's characteristic whether she has a bad characteristic or not). Then, in this line, the speaker

wants to give the time when she has to clean the window because it impliedly will make the woman always think positively.

Then, the next tasks, beside the woman does the mother's and the housewife's tasks, she is also concerning to everyone who will come to her house. Line (25) is interpreted about how the woman keeps the house safe. This line is categorized as a symbol. The flour is a sign for anyone who might come to the house and the words "ceilings leak" is a symbol of the characteristic of people who might come to the house. It is said so because the flour is like dust, and when the flour itself is spread out on the floor, if there is someone who passes the floor, there will leave the sign on the floor. For the words "ceilings leak" it is a symbol of characteristic because it is like people's heart that is becoming bad (as the writer mentioned before that the room can be imagined as a people, if there is leak in the ceilings of the room, it can be concluded that the person is bad). In this case, the woman has to pay attention to someone who might come to her house because it can also be the safety-way for the children. As in line 26 says *It's better than onion – keep the boys at home*, in this line is like the woman is better keeping the boys at home, because the words "the boys" itself is a symbol of streng.

Then, in lines 27-28 are expressing about the symbol. In this line, the speaker wants to emphasize her purpose in giving the advice for the woman by seeing the word "Gardening is good," it can be a symbol of perfect order (it is said so because the gardening is about doing something in order, it can be imagined if there is a plant whether it is a vegetable, or fruit plant, it will grow in the right time or season, so it can be seen from that plant which does not want to grow if it is not the season for plant to grow, it is like an order). And the next line (28) is a symbol of result of happiness. As in the words *They bloom in spring – and smile, smile always, dear –*, it can be seen through the word "spring" as a symbol of new life. If all of those words are combined, they are said that the result of the woman applying her life, she will get a result in the right time (spring).

The last line of the second stanza (29) is expressing a pleonasm. In this line the speaker wants to make the woman become stronger, and does not give up with the duties.. It seems to emphasize the meaning that the woman has to be brave and always keeps on with the duties. Moreover, the speaker has also a hope for the woman that all the speaker's advices can make the woman feel easy in doing the tasks. As in *I hope I've made it clear.*

The last stanza is about the pleonasm. It in this case, the speaker emphasizes the meaning of the rules of life which means that there will be an end and a start. So that the woman has to face her duties, tasks, or daily activities by herself because it is impossible if the speaker is always around the woman, it will not teach anything to the woman and probably it will make the woman cannot stand by herself. As in *Her daughter died in turn, and made one more.*

3.2 The Imagery

Line 1 of the first stanza is categorized as tactile imagery. This imagery is related with hot or cold sensation; in the same condition if we feel the blast in autumn, or the frozen of temperature in winter. The use of the word "hot" is describing about the situation at that time that is telling about the hardness of the woman in doing the tasks. It can be imagined that hot is a picture of hardness or tiredness. It can be said so because the writer imagines when he feels hot, the situation is not good for doing anything.

Line 11 can also be interpreted as cold through the word "rains", that means if the condition is freezing, it is impossible to do anything at, it implicitly talks about an obstacle for the woman to do the tasks.

Line 13 is a visual imagery. This imagery is related to the sight effect of the sense which leads to an object that can be seen. In our imagination, the object occurs as the picture which is the same as our remembrance. In this line, the words *A carpet-sweeper and a little broom* are identified as a visual imagery because those objects can lead the woman to her remembrance of cleaning up the house.

Line 20 is also a visual imagery. This line is telling about the star which can visually be seen as the prettiest pieces. It means that the star leads the woman to a lot of happiness (it can be seen from the words "prettiest pieces").

Then, the next case is about the representation of the woman's feeling. Line 28 is the category of the internal sensation. This imagery is telling about any feelings such as; hungry, thirsty, drunk, and queasy, etc. It is like in line 28 that can be seen obviously from the use of the word "smile" that has a meaning happy situation.

4. The Portrayal of the Woman's Spirit in the Poem

This part will discuss about the portrayal woman's spirit appeared in the poem. From the first stanza, the speaker comes and gives a help for a woman because the speaker feels pity to the woman who looks so tired and bored, and the worst, is the woman *is going to die*, so that the speaker instructs the woman to make a list for her daily duties.

In the second stanza, the writer looks deeply at how the woman fights for her positions that is becoming a mother as well as a wife in one condition. The fighting of the woman seen when she tries to get up, get down and get up again. Time goes by, the woman always looks keeping the spirit in performing the two positions, as a mother and all at once, as a wife by always getting up, even though it's hard to do, and it even ever made her get down more than once.

The speaker implicitly explains that there will be a certain time for the woman to do the tasks. Sometimes she has to do the mother's tasks and sometimes the wife's. The earth is round and always rotates and the spirit of the woman should stand still. She must perform her life well in order to give examples to the new generation, every task must be done completely without any hesitation and complain. From the above explanation about the portrayal of the woman's spirit, the theme of the poem can be formulated that *"someone should not give up with the reality which might be faced"*.

"The Mother's Charge" can be interpreted as a woman who is in charge with her duties as a mother about how to perform the life well. A mother should take care of her children in all conditions, good and bad; and the spirit must always be strong to make the condition of her home comfortable and the family love each other. She has also great roles in developing her children's behavior. That is why, mother should take a role in any conditions.

5. Conclusion

As the result of the analysis, the writer would like to draw the conclusion to get the findings of the analysis. The meaning of the poem is clearly supported by the use of figurative language and imagery. In this case, the meaning is implicitly elaborated by analysing the deep sense of the woman's spirit knotted in the poem. The use of figurative language and imagery is indicating the implied meaning should be interpreted through the supporting expression written in the poem.

In this part, the writer finds several facts about the woman's spirit by identifying and analysing the language. Firstly, from exploring the figurative language, the writer can take the conclusion that this poem uses so many symbols. After giving deep analysis about the symbols in the poem, actually, it implies about how the spirit can appear in the woman's mind such as refreshing her mind, thinking positively, hard working, and managing time. It can be seen from those explanations that the spirit appears when the woman does something good, or beneficial in her life (like caring the children and the house with heart). Secondly, from the imagery, most of the imagery are talking about the suffering and the obstacles that the woman faces, so that, the spirit is needed to face the obstacle to make the woman is in stable condition in completing the responsibilities.

The portrayal of woman's spirit in the poem can be seen by exploring the figurative language and imagery knotted in the poem. This part is describing and pointing the words which are reflected to the woman's spirit. Actually, the writer can see that the woman does not only keep spirit when she does the responsibilities, but she also has to keep the spirit to have positive act in her life, so that she will get the positive results, too. Moreover, theme of the poem can be formulated after analyzing figures of speech and imageries for picturing the woman's spirit from this poem which can be inferred through the expression of the woman's performance in conducting the duties and fulfilling the responsibilities well. As the writer mentioned, the theme is *"people should not give up with the reality which they might face."* Then, if the writer related to the woman's spirit that she has to keep spirit always to make her life orderly. Spirit also makes the woman can do all the responsibilities well.

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