Analysis Of Imagery In “Loving From Vietnam To Zimbabwe” Essay, Research Paper

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English 1B

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Analysis of Imagery in “Loving from Vietnam to Zimbabwe”

After reading Janice Mirikitani’s poem “Loving from Vietnam to Zimbabwe” there is a profound amount of imagery used by Mirikitani that explains a reality of sex, love, and war. Mirikitani uses an interesting and unique format in the way she has written her poem. The “I” that Mirikitani uses is not referring to herself but rather another woman who is Vietnamese, or many women whom are Vietnamese. She has essentially divided her poem into two sides. One side, the left side, is where she reveals images of sex and love. On the other side, the right side, is where she reveals the imagery of war. By dividing her poem into two sides, she is able to describe two conflicting issues that are part of the woman’s life or at some point had an impact on her life and emotions. It seems as though Mirikitani is explaining images from Vietnam. These images of sex, love, and war that she has written in respect to, are not the sex and love that we know as Americans, but the sex and love that was prevalent during the Vietnam War. Mirikitani wrote this poem in 1980, so it is possible that, she has some repressed images and feelings about the war or war in general.

Mirikitani begins her poem with images of sex and love. By writing this poem, she has given a voice to many women from a country torn apart by War. It is almost as if every image she has of sex is matched with an image of war. This reveals how the woman must deal with two realities. One reality is the life of a Vietnamese woman and another reality of sleeping with the enemy. These two realities seem to be conflicting with each other and it ultimately makes the Vietnamese woman feel that her situation is unresolved. Mirikitani draws the reader into the subject matter of her poem by the use of her figurative language imagery. She describes a relationship between a Vietnamese woman and an American soldier who is of color. By defining the soldiers skin color, she metaphorically correlates his appearance as, “large/black like the shadowed belly of a leaf.”(Stanza 16, lines 3-4) By this she is defining his appearance visually so that we see him as dark as a shadow is. It also gives the feeling that this soldier is mysterious, and cold blooded.

The relationship that the woman has with the soldier is quite difficult to understand, but without reasonable doubt, these two people have engaged in sexual activities. On the sex side of her poem, which is the left side, she visually interprets her experience with the man. Mirikitani uses several extended metaphors to describe his body, “As I move into the grassy plain of your chest” (Stanza 12, lines 3-5) is an example. Not only does she use figurative language to describe the man, she also uses it to describe the physical interaction between them. For reference, stanza seven is an example of her figurative language that I am referring to. Because of their relationship, the Vietnamese woman feels troubled because there is anger within her due to what she feels the American soldiers have done to her people and their land. She is un-eased about having sex with this man because of her anger.

One way to look at their relationship is to visualize that this woman and man are in a relationship of love and that one woman’s lust for a man ultimately leads her to pain when he is killed. The woman is left in a painful and agonizing state after the man has been murdered; which gives the poem a slight twist at the ending. After she has left the images of the man’s death with us, she reveals that love is dangerous and that, “loving in this world, is the silver splinting edge.” (Stanza 20 line 1-3) Love has been painful to her and she has been maddened and angered by it.

Another way to understand their relationship is that these two characters in Mirikitani’s poem do not love each other and are with each other only for the means of sex. Mrikitani metaphorically describes the parts of the man’s body as physical places on earth, “As I reach down onto Mt. Inyangani.” She is not actually referring to Mt. Inyangani, but to the man’s private parts. The relationship between the Vietnamese woman and the black man seems cold and awkward. There is no love involved in their sex; it is merely a physical relationship that has no meaning. She shows that she does not understand what the man is saying, “As you call me strange names.” This could be because they do not speak the same language or that these names that he is using are strange and unknown to her. She uses the calling of “strange names” again at the end of her poem when they have finally engaged in sex. “I… feel you enter my harbor, kiss the lips of my soul. Call me my Strange Names.” The sex that is taking place seems so sensual and honest yet there is a continuing conflict within the woman, which ultimately makes her maddened by her situation.

On the right side of her poem, Mirikitani uses images of the Vietnam War to show another side of the woman’s life. She delivers raw images of what the American soldiers have done to her people, “You have seen them hanging in trees after American troops had finished.” (Stanza 10) She uses imagery to show how brutal war is. In much of the same way war is characterized, cold and unsympathetic, her tone on the right side of her poem has changed, it is a realization of what has gone on. She knows that it is not the soldier’s fault completely for what has happened. Yet the people they were killing were her people, people of her heritage, and the people of the same blood as her. She feels that he was “pushed” and that he had been “used,” by those “behind” him “pushing” him and pulling his trigger. She feels her anger and then goes on to describe the man’s death. By giving the recognition of, “My Lai, Bach Mai” and “Haiphong,” it is almost as if his death is in vengeance of the United States imposed attacks on these particular Vietnamese cities. It seems as if Mirikitani is identifying a cycle of killing that will continue because of war.

Although it is difficult to always get into the poets head for a better understanding of their work, we can see that at the end of the poem, there is a silence in Mirikitani’s writing as she has given the recognition to “My Lai, Bach Mai, and Haiphong.” She branches off to her last stanza, which is on the sex and love side of the poem. She uses this final stanza to give a final message of love. She evaluates love as a risk in life, it “is the dare in the teeth of the tiger.” (Stanza 20 line 4-5) She sees love as dangerous and painful. She mentions “jungle rot” (Stanza 20 line 6) and “the madness of surviving” (Stanza 20 line 8) which is an agonizing image that she puts into our heads so that we are able to feel the power of love and war. We are given this image to take into account the pain that this woman has faced. It is also the pain that many women like her have faced.

No Bibliography needed