

Bewilderment of black women and quest for authenticity in Rita Dove's poetries

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Abstract

Rita Dove is one of the illustrious poet, historian, lyricist, dancer, director, performer, singer, and civil rights activist in the realm of African-American literature. She is best known for her several objective poems. Rita Dove's poetries focus on significantly the recurring themes including racism, familial relationship and journey for an unending quest for identity. Dove has been renowned and well admired as a world class poet for her objective poems. As a child, Dove went through five years of self-imposed silence after she was raped at the age of seven, who was subsequently killed by her uncle. The loss of her voice was a result of the trauma, which made her imagine that her voice could kill. Dove started writing poetry and overcame her trauma. Her poetry thus, played an essential part in the recovery of her voice, which in turn signaled the success of the healing process. Among her volumes of poetry are beginning with *Thomas and Beulah* and ending with her final memoirs, Dove used clouds as a metaphor to represent Dove's confinement resulting from racism and depression, struggling to escape its fence. Dove's poetry can be placed in the African-American literature tradition of political protest. Their unity underscored one of Dove's central themes: the injustice of racism and how to fight it. In the course of her objective poetry, her views about Black-white relationships changed and she learned to accept different points of view. Dove's theme of identity was established from the beginning of her objective poetry, with the opening lines in *Thomas and Beulah*, and like other female poets in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she used the memoirs to re-imagine ways of writing about women's lives and identities in a male-dominated society. Her original goal was to write about the lives of Black women in America, but it evolved in her later volumes to document the ups and downs of her life.

Keywords

Racial Prejudice, Identity, Reminiscence and Yearning for Egalitarianism.

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1. Introduction

The main thrust of this research paper and the theme falls on bewilderment of women and quest for authenticity. Dove's poetries have a distinct style and stretch over time and place from Arkansas to Africa and back to the US. They take place from the beginnings of World War II and concentrate on the development of African people. The poetries of Rita Dove show the sufferings and misery, moral and spiritual degradation and humiliating experience of the black people. Her poetries depict realistically the downtrodden blacks and their abandoned colony. It is situated at a distance both from the city where the upper class white people lives. It is a colony of mud-walled cottages huddled together in two rows there live the scavengers, leather workers, washer men and others. Her poetry works reflect the real picture of the state of blacks. They also reveal their physical, psychological and sociological issues, their dirt and ugliness, superstition and ignorance, poverty and squalor, ill-treatment denial of opportunity to educate themselves. She is not only state the problem alone but really sympathizes with the weak and defenseless. The complete theme of Dove's poetry is concerned with the evil of racial discrimination. Dove's picture of the black peo-

ple is real, comprehensive and subtle; her gifts in all moods from pathos to tragedy, from the realistic to the poetic are remarkable.

2. Key Concept

Her illustrious poem *Cozy Apologia* emphasis the extra-ordinary abilities of a woman. The title of the poem implies and establishes Dove's tone of compassionate protest and provides her central theme and metaphor. It leads prospective readers to wonder what such an unnatural life as that of an incarcerated girl would be like for humans, what forms such a "fence" might take in human life, how such a life could produce song, whether freedom would be possible, and what Dove can tell, from her experience and sympathetic imagination, about the answers to these questions.

Dove identifies the bars of the obstacles as racism, sexism, and the powerlessness of the victims, whose disabling responses of "fear, guilt, and self-revulsion" merely become additional bars. Whole communities and classes of humans are thus restricted from being fully themselves. Dove shows how this imprisonment, exactly because it is so unnatural, also naturally produces the response of "song," in the form of

struggle, survival, self-affirmation, and at last freedom.

Dove naturally suggests that, humans are freely expressive. However, she illustrates many restrictions that are placed on expressive selfhood by acts of injustice committed because of self-centeredness and prejudice. When these injustices are experienced during childhood, Dove explains, persons internalize patterns of understanding that may last for life. Dove remarks on her own tendency, even as an adult, to feel rage, paranoia, and dread of futility.

Using herself as illustration, Dove shows how resignation and rage are produced by all-encompassing racist oppression, by omnipresent sexist stereotyping that diminishes the value of any female who does not meet its standards of feminine beauty, and by neglect or violence within families. Describing her sense of temporariness and homelessness (felt even in church, where the congregation often expressed the same feelings about themselves in this world), Dove tells of having fantasized that her beauty in a white woman's throwaway dress would evoke understanding and appreciation of her worth, thereby awakening her from her "black ugly dream"; instead, she experienced only frustration, humiliation, and fear that she would die. Her early chapters suggest the fairy tale of the ugly duckling; and although it seems that Angelina intuited that she was a swan, she nevertheless suffered a crippling loss of self-esteem. Her frequent suspicions that she might be a changeling made her so emotively vulnerable that, for example, she at first thought that a sexual abuser might be her real father, because his attentions gave her a sense of having a real home. Though her dream became a nightmare, again she was misplaced and displaced, and again she was imprisoned in misunderstanding, fear of death, and guilt-ridden silence. Throughout her childhood, Dove blamed herself for life's injustices.

If Dove's girlhood odyssey through deathlike psychological depths took her into an underworld (sometimes literal as well as figurative) of race, gender, and family disempowerment, it was in these same areas that she was empowered to seek self-affirmation. The black community of Stamps, although oppressed, gave her a rich culture of language, story, song, religious vision, and faith and brought her together with individuals whose unselfishness and wisdom ensured her survival and growth. Although she was damaged by family experiences of abandonment, neglect, and violence, her family life with Momma, Uncle Worney, and Bilacer in Stamps and with her mother in San Francisco also provided the love that sustained her quest. Although her mother and grandmothers sometimes acted in ways that reinforced Angelina's confusion and ambivalence toward life, these same women, and Beula, provided not only daily support but also the role models of competent and effective womanhood that Dove celebrated in her poem and emulated in her life.

Dove recounted an encounter with a West African woman who recognized her, on the basis of her appearance, as a member of the Bambara group of West Africa. These and other experiences in Ghana demonstrated Dove's maturity, as

a mother able to let go of her adult son, as a woman no longer dependent upon a man, and as an American able to perceive the roots of her identity and how they affected her personality.

Dove learned about herself and about racism throughout her life. She revived her passion for African-American culture while associating with other African Americans for the first time since moving to Ghana. She compared her experiences of American racism with Germany's history of racial prejudice and military aggression. The verbal violence of the folk tales shared during her luncheon with her German hosts and Israeli friend was as significant to Dove as physical violence, to the point that she became ill. Dove's first-hand experience with fascism, as well as the racist sensibilities of the German family she visited, help shape and broaden her constantly changing vision regarding racial prejudice.

Dove, as a woman, demonstrated the formation of her own cultural identity throughout her narratives. Dove presented herself as a role model for African-American women by reconstructing the Black woman's image throughout her objective poetry, and has used her many roles, incarnations, and identities to connect the layers of oppression with her personal history. Dove's themes of the individual's strength and ability to overcome appeared throughout Dove's objective poetry as well.

Dove's original goal was to write about the lives of Black women in America, but her goal evolved in her later volumes to document the ups and downs of her own life. Dove's objective poetry had the same structure: a historical overview of the places she was living in at the time and how she coped within the context of a larger white society, as well as the ways that her story played out within that context.

Black women autobiographers like Dove have debunked the stereotypes of African-American mothers of "breeder and matriarch" and have presented them as having more creative and satisfying roles. Dove's objective poetry presented Black women differently from their literary portrayals up to that time. The prompt poemistic idea is maintained that no Black women in the world of Dove's books are losers and that Dove was the third generation of intelligent and resourceful women who overcame the obstacles of racism and oppression. Her books described one Black woman's attempts to create and maintain a healthy self-esteem. Dove's experiences as a working-class single mother challenged traditional and Western viewpoints of women and family life, including the nuclear family structure. Dove described societal forces that eventually expanded to the white family, and that Dove's strategies of economic survival and experiences of family structure enabled Black families to survive economically

3. Conclusion

Dove's observations about race, gender, and class made the book more than a simple travel narrative. As a Black American, she travels around the world put her in contact with many nationalities and classes, expanded her experiences beyond her familiar circle of community and family, and complicated

her understandings of race relations. Dove's time in Africa made her more aware of her African roots. Lupton insisted, however, that although Dove journeys to many places in the book, the most important journey she described is a voyage into the self.

Rita Dove's poems speak of everyday life and situations which readers have experienced or can appreciate because they can picture someone in similar circumstances. Dove's effectiveness as a poet is based on her ability to tell stories well. The story of her girlhood is composed of many vignettes; her memory when writing them was so vivid and complete that she fills her reader's imagination with sensory details, images, character sketches, poignant remarks, revealing conversations, typical gatherings and goings-on..

Dove's artistry graces her telling with a lyrical style that often transforms her prose into a song whether sorrow song or praise song of her faith in the beauty and resilience of the human spirit. The subject matter of Rita Dove's poems are more genuineness and the straight forwardness. She inscribes about subject whom she has seen and experiences and which are important to her. By expansion, they are issues which apply to women, African-Americans, and to all people who are concerned about civil rights and equality (which means all members of the human race). Her work offers a fresh provisions for thought to people from various backgrounds. The uncompromised quality is her greatest potency and it made her as a world class poet.

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