



Meena Alexander's Poetic Devices

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Poetic devices that create rhythm are repetition, anapest, dactyl, couplet, internal rhyme, end rhyme. Rhythm is the flow of sound produced when certain beats are stressed or accented and others unstressed. The organization of the stressed syllables into a pattern is called meter. Repeating words, phrases, or lines in poetry is used to create a rhythm. The device of repetition is used to emphasize particular idea, to express strong feelings of joy, and speed of the action. Sometimes the words and sounds are repeated merely for the pleasure for the reader.

Alexander does not exploit the device of repetition for just pleasure or onomatopoeic effect. The repetition of certain words in "Text from the Middle Earth" aggravates the intensity of feelings. The "weeping and weeping" of the breathless child in a pitiless light emphasizes the distress and loss of hope (28). Grandmother's hair which are "Winding and Winding like a Memory" (29) and "each stroke telling, telling my name" (30) highlight the memories of grandmother and poet's name which is marker of her identity. The repetition of the word "watched" asserts grandmother's haunting existence in the garden of childhood and agony of misplaced childhood garden. The repetition of tall towers, twin towers is mixed with the device of alliteration. It evokes the strong sense of pride of USA, which has been destroyed to dust on 9/11, and conveys the vanity of American pride in "Invisible City", "Tall towers, twin towers, I used to see / A bloody seam of sense drops free" (9-10).

In Alexander's poetry two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable which is known as Anapest is used. In the poem "Green Parasol" Alexander uses anapest for rhythmic effect: "In soft mist, in flowering sunlight, / at the rim of stone gates, raise a / green parasol under a green tree" (39-41).

Alexander in the poem "Raw Silk" portrays her grandmother coaxing mulberries is explained beautifully:

Birds stalk clouds, clouds hang cold,
on a hill of gold, stick insects clamor.
...
from monsoon soil, clouds ran riot,
silk worms coiled under the skin of leaves,
berries dripped free (7-18)

Alexander uses one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables called dactyl and couplet which constitutes a pair of rhymed lines that may or may not constitute a separate stanza in a poem.

Rhyme is the effect caused by matching sounds at the end of words. It is used as a method of indicating the end of lines and stanzas and also providing a pattern for organizing a poem. Rhyme usually places emphasis on specific words in a poem. Internal rhyme is the rhyming of a word in one line with another word in close proximity to it, either within the same line or within one nearby.

A rhyme that occurs when two words at the end of lines rhyme. Alexander exploits ending rhymes but not deliberately but on the contrary, they come in the course of expression spontaneously. Poetic Devices that enhances a poem's meaning are simile, metaphor, symbol, imagery, and apostrophe.

Simile uses like or as to draw two objects or images into a relationship. Very often, these two objects or images seem to have nothing in common, yet a successful simile will encourage use to see what Aristotle called the *similarity of dissimilars*. Often the similar qualities that these two unlike things possess will use sight, sound, touch, etc.

The poem 'My Brazen Days' underscores the new, modern, and ground-breaking attitude of the poet about love and lover. For her, love and marriage is encroachment on the liberty of women and therefore compares the lover with poacher in a simile and the simile of "sleep" is used to express her profound love for her dearly loved in the poem "veined words", "I want to be held / under your lids like sleep" (13-14). The poem "The Cry" uses simile to express the feeling of lamentation, loneliness and frustration, "I lie as if I were dead / not knowing where / the cry of a child must lead me" (15-17). The rain is a life giving principle but when it pours like anything, it can be disastrous calamity. The association of ravaged mother with the rain emphasizes mother both as life giving principle as well as the mother in its all fierceness like Kali and Durga in 'Stained Words', "We are weals / in the dare measure of grain / our ravaged mother pours like rain" (18-20). In the poem, "Torn Grass" poet has used the simile of blood flowing in her veins. It is the ancestral blood and connects her to the past and homeland (19).

The comparison of love and desire with heat, shimmering sense, and surcharge of love puts forward the mixing of more vehicles for one tenor in the poem "Aftermath," "Sometimes I watch in a as if in heat / a shimmering sense, a surcharge of love vivifying / desire through a time ever more about to be" (25-27).

The poem "Childhood" exploits simile of stone to indicate the coldness, indifference, lifelessness, hardness, unkindness. Stones are lifeless and tombs are made of stones where children are laid, "perfectly cold like stone" (8).

The poet employs simile to bring out the sufferings and miserable condition of poor and wretched people in the poem "Songs from this Dust":

There are children waiting at crossroads always at the cross roads there are children
Whose small palms fly like savage hornets

Whose mouths are parched and cry like dry seasons when bread and water must crawl like
swatted flies (21)

Metaphor functions the way simile does, except that the comparison is implied and sharpened by the omission of like or as. The use of the verb to be without the softening effect of like or as has the effect of creating an equality between the two objects or images. The most widely accepted definition of metaphor is by Blair, metaphor as "a figure founded entirely on the resemblance which one object bears to another. Hence it is much allied to simile, or comparison; and is indeed no other than a comparison, expressed in abridged form" (295). So according to Owen Barfield, "The most conspicuous point of contact between meaning and poetry is metaphor" (40). Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* "all metaphors are similes" (123).

The poems in the section "Blood Line" in *River and Bridge* are the poems of mother experiencing the birth of her child as the birth of new existence. The metaphor of bloodline in the poem "Bloodline" is very significant as it connects the poet to her line of blood through her daughter.

Alexander while criticizing the poverty, black money and corruption poet employs the metaphor of "air conditioned nightmare" for movies and its fantasy world, which is different from the unkempt life of struggling poor people (9). Poet has used some clichéd and dead metaphors like "Lap of Sleep" and "realm of dream" in the poem "The Travellers" (11). "Axe of displacement" is the example of clichéd metaphor referring to displacement of exiles in the poem "Paper Filled with Light" (22). The metaphor "Hell's Kitchen" refers to the plight of immigrants in the poem "Asylum" (29) while the metaphor of "no man's land" stands for the fact of unbalancing of Diasporas in the poem "No Man's Land" (31). The metaphor "balconies of childhood" refers to the lost childhood bliss in the poem "Sweet Water" (38). The mixed metaphors of magnet and the conquest are used for death in the poem "Ashtamudi Lake" (55). The comparison of earth with sister points out poet's affinity for motherland, "My sister is this earth / I am water / we will mix together" (60-62). The metaphor of "rain on the tamarind tree" (66) used for her child in the poem "Bloodline" suggests that her child is not subservient to any customs and traditions and burden of being woman. The metaphor "burnt grass" stands for the conservative thoughts of past generation. In the poem "Skin Song", we come across series of metaphors for time "Time was a drift of wing, claw, vine / petal, stalk, skin of my tongue, wrapping up / stones so sweet to suck" (71-73). "Time was a lyric did not sing" (75), "Time was the gap in the bars through which she peered / barefoot, square jawed (76). After experiencing lot of difficulties in migrated life, poet describes life as, "heart's catastrophe in an unequal way / no hand could ever script" (77-78).

The metaphors of "a knot of rubble" and "a scrap" are used to expose the devastation of twin towers in the poem "Invisible City" (10). The other metaphors referring to the fierceness of fall of twin towers are "tor of metal" and "strut of death" in the poem "Pit fire" (11). The poet calls herself, "a child of earth" to announce her rootedness in the motherland. In the poem "Petroglyph", Alexander compares earth with green and fragrant home (45). The poem includes the metaphor, "a necklace of sorrow" which unravels the absurd reality of the death of mankind caused due to war. The death metaphor like "teeth of war" used for the war like situation in the aftermath of 9/11 in the poem "Gandhi's Bicycle" (83).

The poem "I Dream of Niagara" has scores of examples of personification. There are the personifications like "lip of stone", "maid of the mist", "ghostly barbed wire" (85). The light, peace, sunlight are also personified (86). The poem "September Sunlight" personifies sun

and moon, “brother sun and sister moon” (17). The sea, sun and moon are personified in the poem “Child, Stone, Sea”:

The sea has many sleeves
One is fire, one is silk, one is torn cotton
...
The Sun’s throat is torn cotton, he
whispers to the moon’s cheek is burnt silk (13-29)

In the poem “Fifth Avenue Plaza”, we come across the personification of noon who swallows its own shadow (37). The stones are recurring images, which have life in Alexander’s poetry; they have tongue and can sing; “Now stones have tongues / sibilant scatterings / stormy grace!”(44-46). The personification of silkworms “dancing in the firmament” (36), and in the poem “Raw Silk” refers to the poet’s affinity with silk and search of self in the silk of Kerala.

Northrop Frye defines symbol as, “A word, a phrase or an image used with some kind of special reference” (71) and suggests that all words are symbols as they symbolize sounds. Symbolism is one of the remarkable device of interpretation of poetry as Freud writes in his essay, *Symbolism in Dreams*, that “Symbols are stable translations” (184). There is always relation between the symbols and unconscious and there is “a symbolic relation between dreams and the unconscious” (185). The symbols are interpreted in order to explore the unconscious and latent elements of poet’s sensibility.

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