

DICTION ANALYSIS IN CHARLOTTE PUDDIFOOT'S POEM *AFTER THE ABORTION*

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the use of diction in the poem *After The Abortion* by Charlotte Puddifoot. The poem deals with matters of abortion experienced by women. The process of aborting a pregnancy intentionally is a mechanism to make a fetus in the uterus unable to develop or stay. In a simple concept abortion is a killing. The research method is a descriptive qualitative method with close reading technique to collect data. Data were classified into four general types of diction: abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative. The finding shows the use of abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative are prevalent throughout the poem, with concrete diction being the majority. Each line of the poem is carefully structured with effective diction to send the author's message to the reader. Abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative dictions are used to create imagery and vivid pictures of the procedures. The poem carries a heavy lesson of physical and long-term emotional damages caused by abortion.

Keywords: *Diction; Poem; Abortion; emotional damages*

1. Introduction

The concern in abortion has been discussed for a long time as part of legal and illegal issues. Abortion is the act of killing a fetus in the uterus of a woman. The process of aborting a pregnancy intentionally is a mechanism to make a fetus in the uterus unable to develop or stay. Abortion is not permitted without a specific reason, such as an emergency of health. Abortion might affect a woman physically and mentally, and such an experience will not be easily forgotten (Syailendra, 2019).

According to new statistic from 2010-2014, about 56 million induced abortion occurred across the world every year. The global level of abortion is estimated 35 per 1000 married woman and 26 per 1000 unmarried woman in the same period (Zareba, et al., 2020). From a more recent data, around 73 million induced abortions take place worldwide each year, six out of 10 (61%) of all unintended pregnancies, and 3 out of 10 (29%) of all pregnancies. Many of these are undeniably happen in Indonesia, too. Similar to some other countries, abortion is illegal in Indonesia. Yet, Indonesian women frequently seek out illegal techniques offered by inexperienced practitioners, including consuming dangerous drugs and doing damaging abortive massage (WHO in Zareba, et al., 2020).

The legalization of abortion is still up for a debate to this time. Some argue that restricting women of access to abortion has negative impact on women's health (Roeder,

2021), as many of them compel to risk their lives and health by seeking out unsafe procedures. In addition to this, giving women safe abortion access increases their chances of better life. Upadhyay, Biggs & Foster (2015), wrote that ensuring women to have safe abortion help them to maintain a positive outlook about their futures and to achieve their long-life goals.

However, while some women are relieved and moving on about life, some lingering in guilty feeling and eventually succumbed to depression or in a worse scenario, suicide (Reardon, 2018). One way to deal with grief on the journey to physical and psychological healing is by writing. Many people prefer writing to talking as writing allows them to be completely honest and vulnerable about themselves. Therefore, the topic of abortion is not only found in medical or academic journals, but also in literature such as in poetry.

One poem that specifically talks about mother is a poem entitled "The Mother " by Gwendolyn Brook. She is the first black African American poetess to win the Pulitzer Prize on May 1, 1959.

2. Literature Review

Poetry can be defined as a literary work which uses words as a delivery tool to create an imagination. Literature work in the form of poetry can be analyzed from many points of view. The points of view can be the structure and elements of poetry, types, or history that have poetic elements (Putri, Puspitasari, & Permana, 2019). The main difference between poetry and fiction is fiction, such as prose, describes imaginary events and people as a result of authors' imagination; whereas poetry is a work that uses aesthetic and often rhythmic of the language. Poetry often deals with rhymes and meter.

Over the years, various genres of poetry have developed, for examples odes, ballads, war poetry, romantic poetry etc. However, all these genres have commons features: in poetry, words are usually arranged in such a way to form sounds, imagery and ideas that are sometimes difficult to bring out directly. For this reason, language of poetry is often ambiguous and abstract.

The choice of words or diction, is one feature that distinguishes one poem from another. Diction is a literary device that explains why authors choose to write a specific word in their poems. In general, diction is simply the choices of words used by an author in his/her work. It is the style of writing in which authors use a particular kind, or form, of diction to reflect their visions for their readers. Some authors use techniques such as diction to elicit imagery, tone and emotion in order to deliver the poem's lessons and ideas. The consistent use of diction helps readers to fully immerse themselves in the author's world. Each author carefully chooses the exact words to convey their feelings and contents of their minds with the expression of their souls (Pradopo, 2010:54). Therefore, "Your diction, the exact words you choose and the settings in which you use them, means a great deal to the success of your writing" (Glaser, 1999; Nordquist, 2018). This means that diction is one of the most important factors of success as a poet. Using words just because they are big and sounds complicated in writing is a bad idea. Words must be used based on their exactness, appropriateness and accuracy because unless the message reaches across, the writing will leave no impact on the readers.

Diction also reflects the ability of the writer. Keraf (2007:24), states that diction is the ability to distinguish shades of meaning and the capability to find the right form of words and meaning for a particular situation that matches the value of readers. The use of diction depends on the subject, occasions, the purpose of the author and the intended audience.

People write because they are trying to convey certain messages to readers. Therefore, a word selection is very crucial to express the message effectively.

Poets write poem with various purposes in mind. Some want readers be entertained, moved, persuaded, others want them to be frightened, alerted and alarmed. Diction is an extremely powerful literary device because it develops the tone, the atmosphere and characterization of the writing (Prudchenko, 2022). Other than that, diction also determines other features of a work's style. In many circumstances, especially in poems with strict aesthetic requirements, the poet must select words with a set number of syllables and that rhyme with other precise phrases (Liden, 2022). The use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme and onomatopoeia are examples of diction features that form poetic devices; for example, the tongue twister *She sells seashells by the seashore* sounds melodic because of its diction; compared to writing it by *The girl sells shells by the beach*. Barron (2019), writes that there are 27 words to describe diction, as listed below.

abstract	general and conceptual
ambiguous	lack of obvious meaning, open to more interpretation
antique	old language and rarely used
cacophonous	producing a harsh and unpleasant mix of sound
concrete	tangible, specific
convoluted	complicated and hard to follow
denotative	contain literal meaning from the dictionary
didactic	academic, intended to teach
elevated	words that are complex and create a superior tone
euphemistic	substitute of impolite words
euphonious	words with pleasant sound
emotional	words that express emotion
figurative	creates an image or another idea
idiomatic	figurative meanings natural to native speakers
jargon	specific to a profession
moralistic	words to impose morals
ordinary	everyday words, commonly used
passionate	words that carry strong conviction
pedantic	scholastic, intended to lecture

plain	obvious words
poetic	lyrical, melodious, imaginative
pretentious	patronizing, arrogant
scholarly	words that are specifically used in a certain study or field
sharp	harsh, targeted
simple	short, easy
vivid	full of life, vibrant
vulgar	offensive, indecent

Table 1. 27 categories of diction

However, these descriptions are generally classified into four main categories: abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative (Ayuni, 2019). Abstract diction occurs when the poetess wants to express and describe something intangible that cannot be perceived by our five senses. For example,

*But make allowance for their **doubting** too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in **lies**,
Or being **hated** don't give way to **hating**,*

Concrete diction is used to describe something that can be perceived by our five senses, for example:

*Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build'em up with **worn-out tools**;*

Denotation is a literal meaning of a word which can be referenced to the dictionary, while connotation is another meaning attributed to the word; for example, *blue* has denotation of the color blue and the connotation of feeling sad or unhappy. Connotation has both positive and negative nuances to it. For instance, would you rather be childish or childlike? *Childish* has a tendency of leaning more to the negative connotation of someone who behaves silly and immature, while *childlike* has a positive connotation of having good qualities like a child.

Language is a symbol that we can use to express ideas, things, and emotions. As a language is simply a representative, any given statement can be interpreted in multiple ways. Occasionally, the distinction is merely between literal and figurative forms. Therefore, poets can utilize denotation and connotation to communicate the exact intent to the reader.

3. Research Method

This research is written using descriptive and qualitative research method. It is a very common procedure used in conducting research in disciplines such as languages, social sciences and psychology. The purpose is to characterize a phenomenon and its characteristics. It is more interested in what happens than how or why it happens. As a

result, data are frequently collected through observation and survey methods. The data may be collected qualitatively, but often, presented quantitatively in forms of table, graph or statistics. Qualitative research on the other hand, is more comprehensive and frequently entails a large gathering of data from multiple sources in order to acquire a better knowledge (Nassaji, 2015). Data in such research are collected and analyzed qualitatively, usually conducted to identify recurring patterns, repeated themes and to describe and interpret these categories.

The primary data source of this research is a poem written by an American poetess by the name Charlotte Puddifoot (2017). The central theme of this poem revolves around abortion. One comment left by a reader under the poem has the best description of it as it is described as “*navigated a delicate topic with delightful anger*”.

Research procedures were conducted by completing the following steps. First, the researchers made a close reading to appreciate the nuances of the poem. During this step, the title of the poem was analysed to find out how it resonated to the meaning of the poem. Second, the researchers reread the poem to examine each word and their significance in the lines. This step included looking up meaning of unknown words in the dictionary. Third, the researchers analyzed the diction used in *After the Abortion* poem to see where each diction fell under abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative categories. Lastly, the researchers provided a description of dictions that could be found in ‘After the Abortion’ poetry, determined how each diction was related to each category.

4. Results and Discussion

In accordance with the four main categories of dictions, the findings from the data source are displayed as follows.

Line	Diction	Categories
1	sluice	concrete
2	tissue	connotative
	broken bouquet	connotative
	limb buds	concrete
3	carmine carnage	concrete
	simplistic statistic	connotative
4	mausoleum-white	concrete
5	stirruped legs	concrete
6	crimson slurry	concrete
7	death-pimped	connotative
11	inconvenient blip	connotative
14	sickening sea	abstract

	vertiginous	abstract
16	abhorrence	abstract
17	complacency	abstract
18	club-clotted towns	denotative
19	squeak a soulless sound	connotative

Table 2. Diction found in *After the Abortion*

4.1 Abstract

The finding shows that abstract diction is used in several lines.

a sickening sea engulfed me; vertiginous waves [stanza 3]

Today I cannot elude my abhorrence; [stanza 4]

it overshadows me, obliterates former complacency. [stanza 4]

Four lines above show examples of abstract diction. Four words describe qualities that can be attributed to something or someone, not something accessible to the five senses. In the last two stanzas, the author describes the feeling of the mother, haunted by guilt for taking life. The words 'sickening' and 'abhorrence' express the feeling of total disgust that constantly torments the mother to the point of erasing her previous self-satisfaction and feeling of triumph. Similar words like 'disgusted' and 'disgusting' do not evoke the same emotional intensity as 'sickening' and 'abhorrence'. This choice of words describes how mothers loathe themselves after the abortion.

The research shows that despite being legally permitted to save the life of a woman in 98% countries of the world (Berer, 2017), abortion still leaves a long-term emotional rammification to the mother, especially when the mother feels that the abortion is coerced. Some of them voice regret about their decision to abort. Other long-term effects include depression, feelings of loss, shame, and phobic responses to infants. For some of them, the adverse psychological effects of abortion endure over 10 years (Brown, Elkins & Larson, 1993). With abortion as a viable choice, the circumstances will never alter, but the emotional torment can last for a long time.

4.2 Concrete

The use of concrete diction can be seen in the poem.

Another would-be life slips down a hospital sluice - [stanza 1]

a mangled tangle of tissue, a broken bouquet of limb buds. [stanza 1]

Carmine carnage reduced to simplistic statistic. [stanza 1]

and a crimson slurry seeps from between splayed thighs. [stanza 2]

These examples show how concrete diction is used in the poem. The diction is used to vividly describe how something horrendous is done so casually. The word 'sluice' means a 'channel where liquid can flow through'. These choices of concrete words create imagery for the reader to visualize the process of the abortion. Parts of the baby's body are destroyed, 'mangled tangle' into small pieces until they transformed into a bright red bloody liquid which can be flushed away casually, like excess of used water. The meaning of 'Carnage',

combined with 'carmine', which is a bright red color, further intensifies the image or abortion process in the reader's mind. It implies that abortion is not simply killing, it is slaughtering.

4.3 Denotative

Aside from abstract and concrete dictions, the poetess also uses denotative and connotative in her poem. Denotatives are found in almost all lines, where words are used for their literal meaning. For example,

Tonight people will be on the pull in club-clotted towns. [stanza 4]

The words 'club-clotted towns' carries a denotative meaning as in towns many nightclubs are present. This line tells the reader that abortion is an endless cycle. After one abortion cycle ends, another is in the making. Night clubs are one of the many starting points of the chained events. Alcohol influence tends to cloud judgement resulting in unwanted pregnancy, which often leads to abortion.

4.4 Connotative

Connotative diction is employed when the poetess tries to add more impression or association to the dictionary meaning of a word. The data show how connotative words are used in the poem.

a mangled tangle of tissue, a broken bouquet of limb buds. [stanza 1]

Carmine carnage reduced to simplistic statistic. [stanza 2]

Death-pimp doctors are gloved and gowned, loom imperious, [stanza 2]

Birth is an inconvenient blip on the social calendar. [stanza 3]

and bedsprings will squeak a soulless sound [stanza 4]

The word 'tissue' here does not mean the piece of paper, but rather the unborn baby's flesh, crumpled and destroyed during the process of the abortion. A bouquet is a bunch of flowers that are neatly arranged, often given as a present, like how a baby is considered as a beautiful present that has been longed for by many. However, the poetess uses 'a broken bouquet' to show how something precious, has now been destroyed. Line 3 of stanza 2 uses 'simplistic statistic' not to show numbers and graphs, but to describe how easy abortion is performed nowadays. Abortion is now simplified into several hospital procedures, where death is brought down by gloved and gowned doctors - 'death pimped doctors'.

'Inconvenient blip' describes a mother's feeling about pregnancy, something that hinders her from living her life. The mother does not see birth as something to be celebrated about, but a stumbling block for their carefree lives. Hence, it is better to get rid of the inconvenience than losing the chance of earning money and going on vacation. '*Squeak a soulless sound*' describes the irresponsible act of unprotected sex, often happens in night clubs or under the influence of alcohol. This line is supported by a study done by Remy et al. (2013), which suggested that out of the 240 subjects selected (mean age: 22.9±4.5 years), 57.9% were men; of the male subjects, 52.5% reported having had unprotected sex in the previous 12 months. Of the total sample, 63.33% reported having had unprotected sex. These types of individuals with this type of act are the ones who would likely to continue the abortion cycle.

5. Conclusion

The *After the Abortion* poem portrays the horror of abortion. It summarizes that the process of abortion is not a sight to behold, it is grim. The poem further explains some possible reasons why women abort their babies. Many lives are destroyed in many places every day; some doing it for career advancement, others for freedom; and many of them regret later. The author's clever use of diction captures the complexity of simple hospital procedures.

The use of abstract, concrete, denotative and connotative dictions are prevalent throughout the poem. Each line is carefully structured with effective words to send the author's message to the reader. The poem carries a heavy lesson of physical and long-term emotional damage caused by an abortion can. The poetess never expresses her agreement or disagreement about abortion explicitly, nor does she blame those who decide to go for it. However, through the poem, the poetess urges the readers to think thoroughly before deciding for an abortion. At the same time, the poetess reminds the readers to be mindful of their actions so that unwanted pregnancies may be avoided.

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