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## **Audre Lorde's *Who Said It Was Simple* Characterized as a Confessional Mode**

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### **Abstract**

The research explores the confessional aspect in Audre Lorde's poem "Who Said It Was Simple". Lorde depicts her personality under the stress of race, sex and sexuality. She discloses her own bitter experience concerning racism, sexism and sexuality in her poem to revive the retrospective truth of the Afro-Americans' life in the USA. This publicly manifestation of her personality and tribulation through the language of poetry has been regarded as the hallmark of confessional poetry.

**Keywords:** racism, sexism, retrospective truth, tribulation, confessional poetry

### **The Concept of the Confessional Poetry**

The "confessional movement" has been named as confessional poetry by M.L Rosenthal in 1959 after reviewing a book of poems written by Robert Lowell. The critic M.L. Rosenthal (1985) has used this term to describe a new poetry which, as he believes, has been therapeutic and autobiographical as "it puts the speaker himself at the center of the poem in such a way as to make his psychological vulnerability and shame an embodiment of his civilization". Any discussion of confessional poetry must begin with M.L. Rosenthal. Not only because he is the self-proclaimed originator of the label, but he is also the "most prolific critic"(Philips,1973). Confessional poetry is thought to begin with the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* in 1959. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H.Abrams(2005) defines confessional poetry as "a type of narrative and lyric verse which deals with the facts and intimate mental and physical experiences of the poet's own life". The notion of confession brings to mind certain connotations. It is usually associated with the idea of honestly confiding some secrets, issues that one may be ashamed of or matters that are very important to the person who finally decides to share them with others. Here the personal becomes the universal. Chow (1999) in "The Politics of Admittance", shows that "contemporary confession is deeply related to community and it affirms selfhood in what the larger community finds taboo and in this affirmation constitutes a new community that reaches across existing borders". The confessional poets wanted to be unique and not a part of the conventional social set up. This conflict with the society leads them to introspection.

### **Audre Lorde's Perspective**

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) is a Caribbean-American and black lesbian feminist poet and activist, born in New York City in 1934 of West Indian Parents (Tate,1983) . Like many American poets of her generation ,as Kara Provost (1995) indicates "Lorde refuses to become a passive victim and she successfully manages to connect her personal life experiences to the broader context of the cultural and political setting around her. In *Sister Outsider*(1984), Lorde explains "How black women have always been socially visible, and thus vulnerable, because of their colour and yet are ironically rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism". Lorde (1992) explains that "The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but does not mean it is identical within those differences".. In response to the culture of taboo and silence surrounding her, Lorde uses the confession to speak what is unspoken (Lorde,1984). By giving voice to subjects the larger community ignores, subjects deemed unspeakable, Lorde forges her own community, one of differences.

### **Introduction to the Poem**

Audre Lorde's *Who Said It Was Simple* published in 1978. It is a poem of eighteen lines of free verse. The poetess uses terse, declarative sentences, speaking directly to her audience, making readers aware of the black females' tribulation concerning segregation and inequality based on colour, sex and sexuality. As a black and lesbian women has adopted the issues of sexism ,racism and lesbianism, through her poem "*Who Said It Was Simple*", Lorde confesses openly and strongly her refusal and resentment for discrimination policy systemized against people accounting on their race , sex and sexuality.

## Analysis

What Lorde wants to say through the title of this poem *Who Said It Was Simple* is that being black is difficult enough, being a black woman is even more stigmatized, but to be a black, gay woman is like a minefield in a society. So the issue that Lorde fights for is very difficult and the process of purging society from concepts of racism and sexism is not simple and risky. Through her personal experience, in the outset of this poem, Lorde announces publicly that the Afro-Americans' angry and frustration is not newly born but it has an origin dated back to the history of the Afro-Americans in the Southern States prior to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. As far back as 1859, the United States was becoming increasingly polarized over the issue of slavery (Jones,1999), and the division between Northern and Southern States. She revives it through using, in the first line of the poem; the word "roots" refers to the history of the Afro-Americans in the USA in which they have suffered hatred and maltreatment by the White Americans. Servility, injustice and ignorance are the hallmark of their life under the set of the white. They have been treated as slaves .She says that the Afro-Americans' anger at the white has flourished as a result of that black history which has resulted undoubtedly in bare and disintegrated relationship between the black and the white and the black:

*There are so many roots to the tree of anger  
that sometimes the branches shatter  
before they bear.*

Lorde has drawn one of the vivid pictures of the black females' life in her poem. She is aware of and responsive to surroundings around her and describes lively the scenes of servility that the black females subject to. She portrays how the black females gather and are traded by the white

men. She says that the black females assemble in a place called Nedicks where they are hired by the National Black Feminist Organization. The NBFO hires the black females from the white men so that it can donate freedom for the black females:

*Sitting in Nedicks  
the women rally before they march  
discussing the problematic girls  
they hire to make them free.*

Lorde considers sexism, racism and lesbianism are the major restraints that impede her privately and the black females in general to be free and equal to the white. She as black and lesbian female, feels segregated in that world. She is not only secluded by her black community because of lesbianism with a white female but also secluded by the set of the white because of her race and sex. She finds herself isolated and lonely in her room she sees it as a jail, away and secluded from the external world:

*But I who am bound by my mirror  
as well as my bed  
see causes in colour  
as well as sex*

Lorde asks from her room if she could achieve and live all types of freedom, away from racism, sexism and kind of sexuality. She wants a life devoid of all kinds of discrimination, a life built on reciprocal equality and respect. Thus she realizes that simply she is defying an entire system. A system that wants to grind her into the ground, a system that wants to deny her humanity, and a system that praises almost everything she is not. This means that every day she lives is a fight:

*and sit here wondering  
which me will survive  
all these liberations.*

### **Conclusion**

The segregation based on race and sex is one of the distinctive features of the black confessional poets. Lorde has confronted racism from teachers and fellow students at an early age; and within her own home she has experienced the “colorism” of intra-racial discrimination that has favored light skin, straight hair, and thin bodies. The poem defines the sense of anger that the speaker in the poem tries to introduce in her poem. Anger refers to the feminist frustration that women of colour live at that time. The speaker in the poem tries to focus on the state of fury that black women live in a white society that impose inequality. Those women who rally, they think that they protest against those who wrong them, but there is no change. Slavery is defined as a state of oppression against those who rally but could not change their future. The speaker is a witness who sees that life is stigmatized by slavery, oppression and wrong. The speaker stresses her own identity by defining her gender and race and colour. She is proud of her identity as a black woman who witnesses the persecution of her race. The speaker becomes the witness and the witness turns to be the speaker at the same time. The speaker defines the feminist movement which calls for equality. Equality challenges discrimination. The discrimination is a tool of persecution against the black women. The speaker calls for equality. Lorde gives the reader images of the black women who are slaves in her historical memory, who are women and humans in their life. She emphasizes her blackness and sees that the value

of being a black woman is central to her identity. This background of slavery is a history of discrimination, wrong and disrespect that survive in her memory as a human being, a poet and as a lesbian feminist. She wants a life devoid of discrimination and pregnant with respect and equality in the community. For Lorde this is the meaning of feminism. She defines herself by her "bed, sex, and color". The end of the poem clarifies how she defines herself and the black women around her in society.

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## قصيدة " من قال انه كان امرا بسيطا " لآودر لورد على انها ذات اسلوب توصيف اعترافي

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### خلاصة البحث

تكشف هذه الدراسة عن مواطن الاعتراف في قصيدة "من قال انه كان امرا بسيطا" للكاتبة الامريكية، الافريقية الاصل اودر لورد، والتي تكشف فيها عن ذلك من خلال تناولها لتجربتها الشخصية المريرة التي عانت حياة التمييز بسبب عرقها وجنسها ونشاطها الجنسي لتعيد بذلك الى اذهاننا حقيقة الحياة التي كان يحياها الامريكيون من اصول افريقية في الولايات المتحدة الامريكية. ان هذا التجلي العلني لشخصية الكاتبة ولآلامها من خلال لغة الشعر يعد بمثابة سمة مميزة في الشعر الاعترافي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التمييز العنصري، التعصب الجنسي، الحقيقة المتعلقة بالماضي، المحنة، الشعر الاعترافي.

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