

Student's name

Professor's name

Course

Date

Analysis of Rhetorical devices in Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave

In the 15th century, with the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, many Africans were sold as slaves to the Americas and other extensive parts of Europe. Slavery is known to have both mental and physical consequences on its victims and the perpetrators as well. Frederick Douglass, a slave during these difficult times, was born into slavery due to his mother having a slave status. In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Frederick provides an in-depth account of his experience both as a slave and during post-slavery periods to suggest the inhuman treatment that Africans faced during this time. The book offers his journey through slavery to appeal to the compassion of his readers. His journey begins in the Great House Farm, and his experiences help in shaping him as an individual throughout the book. The choice of rhetorical devices is vital in depicting issues in a livelier manner during writing. Also, rhetorical devices are important in ensuring the pathos has been evoked in the author's audience. The effective use of rhetorical devices ensures that an argument being made has been more compelling through the use of such language than it would otherwise be without its practical use. Through the evocation of the readers' emotions, rhetorical devices substantiate arguments to make them more relatable. Frederick Douglass uses figurative language, including

similes and antithesis, to convey the negative impact that slavery had on both the slaves and the slave masters alike.

Douglas uses similes during his writing to emphasize what he was feeling and expose the cruelty that he faced as a slave. For example, he says of escaping slavery, that he was “like the one who escaped at the den of hungry lions.” (Douglass 44). In this part, Frederick Douglass likens his living experience under slavery to living in a den of hungry lions. In this case, the hungry lions are the masters who would treat them with cruelty through subjection to physical torture and mental suffering. This simile is vital in evoking emotions from the reader, allowing such people to become more relatable to his works, thereby convincing them of the negative impact that slavery had on the slaves. After Frederick Douglass escapes from his master’s premises, he is overjoyed. However, such feelings of joy only last for a short while because he remembers that he is a black man in a country full of white people. He says, “the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey.” (Douglass 48) In this statement, Douglas likens himself to prey, and the white man he likens to the ferocious beasts of the forest. Again, this effective use of similes evokes emotion in the reader, allowing them to empathize with his situation. Typically, the ferocious beasts of the forest would tear down their prey on site. Using such a simile makes his story livelier by adding a human touch that his readers can relate to. Douglas, therefore, uses similes effectively to emphasize cruelty both on a physical and mental level as a negative impact that slavery had on the slaves.

The author also effectively uses antithesis to describe the negative impacts that slavery could have on the masters themselves. At the beginning of his slavery, the author is exposed to Sophia. Initially, Douglas is attracted to her and uses other hyperboles and metaphors to describe her angelic nature. He describes her saying, “her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her

voice of tranquil music.” (Douglass 32). This is before he is exposed to slavery by his masters. However, after some time, he now describes her saying that “that cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made of all sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon.” (Douglass 33). In this statement, the author uses antithesis to show a dramatic change in the personality, or instead what Douglas thought of Sophia and what he now thinks. The effective use of antitheses explains the negative impact that slavery had on the slave masters. This sharp contradiction in his initial perception of his master and the current view shows just how much slavery changed her personality from being a good person to being likened to a demon. Antithesis has been effectively used to establish a sharp contrast in the periods before and after slavery to indicate the negative impact on the slave masters.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, is an autobiography that is meant to discuss the experiences of slaves during the 15th and 16th centuries. However, the main point of writing this autobiography is to discuss the inhumane treatment that slavery subjected Africans to and the negative consequences on slave masters, to provide a rationale for why it is not supposed to be condoned. To this effect, Frederick Douglass uses various rhetorical devices that appeal to the pathos, logos, and ethos of his readers to substantiate his stand on the matter. Through figurative languages like similes and antithesis, Frederick Douglass emphasizes the inhumane treatment and cruelty that African slaves were subjected to during their tenure as slaves and the possible effects that slavery as a whole also had on the slave masters. The effective use of rhetorical devices is encouraged to substantiate and complement arguments made by relating with the audience emotionally. It is crucial to understand how to effectively use

rhetorical devices while writing to have the desired effect on a position that one is taking in their writing.

Work Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. Yale University Press, 2016.