

Rooming Houses Are Old Women

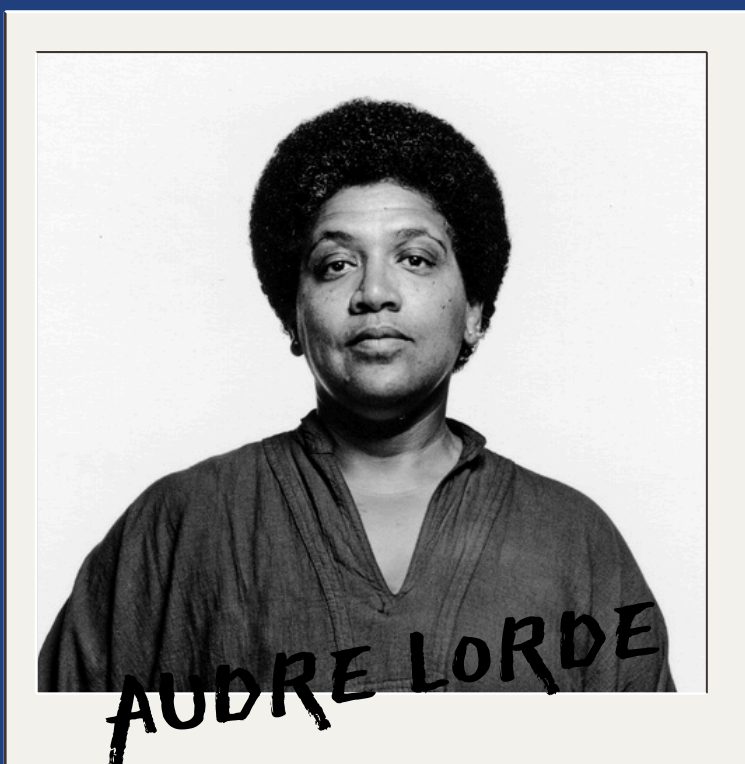
AUDRE LORDE



Background Information

Who is Audre Lorde?

She was an American "writer, womanist, radical feminist, professor, and civil rights activist."



Was she an old woman?

No. She died from liver cancer six years after being diagnosed with breast cancer and died on November 17, 1992, at age 58.

What is a rooming house?

Rooming houses are multi-tenant houses or dwellings with multiple rooms rented out individually, with tenants sharing often sharing spaces like bathrooms or the kitchen.

Rooming Houses are Old Women

AUDRE LORDE

To Welfare and insult from the slow shuffle
from dayswork to shopping bags
heavy with leftovers.

Rooming houses are old women
rocking dark windows into their whens
waiting incomplete circles

rocking

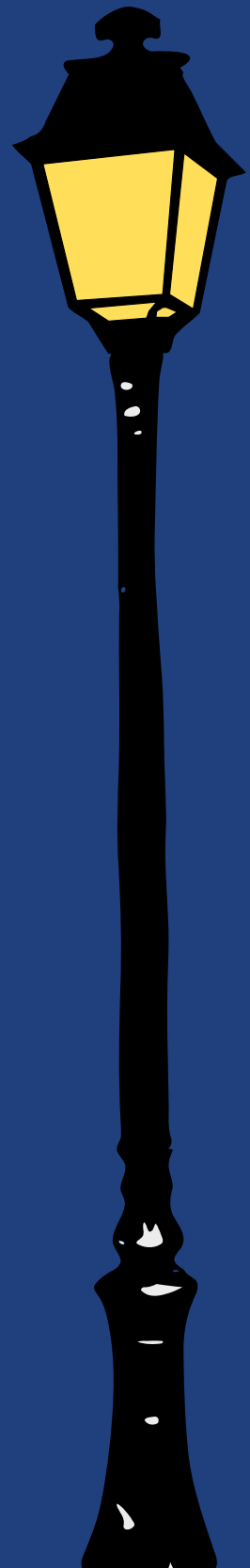
rent office to stoop to
community bathrooms to gas rings and
under-bed boxes of once useful garbage
city issued with a twice monthly check
and the young men next door
with their loud midnight parties
and fishy rings left in the bathtub
no longer arouse them

from midnight to mealtime no stops inbetween
light breaking to pass through jumbled up windows
and who was it who married the widow
that Buzzie's son messed with?



Rooming houses
are old women waiting
searching
through darkening windows
the end or beginning of agony
old women seen through half-a-jar doors
hoping
they are not waiting
but being
the entrance to somewhere
unknown and desired
but not new.

Poetry Prompt



How does the poem portray the development
of the speaker's attitude towards (the
subject)?

My Assertion

Through the use of diction, comparative devices, and imagery, the speaker parallels the life of old black women to a rooming house in an effort to express the silent suffering and social inequalities these women face.



Stanza 1 Part 1

DICTION

repetition of "rocking"; in a rocking chair,
representation of the unstableness of their
life (financially/health-wise)

COMPARATIVE DEVICE

metaphor starts immediately; the
title is repeated for emphasis and
clarification

Rooming houses are old women
rocking dark windows into their whens
waiting incomplete circles
rocking

DICTION

"whens" could be referring to the act
of reflecting on their memories or
previous life, eg "when I used to do
this..." the act of reminiscing

IMAGERY/COMPARATIVE DEVICE

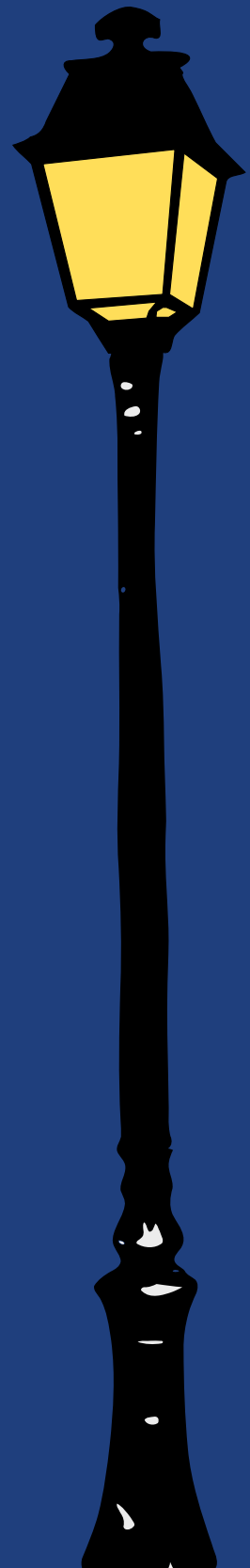
metaphor for how their life is dimming/ending;
"window to the soul" or imagery of the
environment in rooming houses (dark, hopeless)

COMPARATIVE DEVICE

metaphor; incomplete cycle of life, incomplete
cycle of rocking = aging, lacking health/symbol
of wheelchair



Stanza 1 Part 2



DICTION

"stoop to" = to lower oneself

"rent office" = where the tenants go to pay rent to the landlord of the rooming house

rent office to stoop to
community bathrooms to gas rings and
under-bed boxes of once useful garbage
city issued with a twice monthly check

DICTION (4th line)

A symbol of retirement/poverty in old age. Another social stigma; relying on the government for money. Could be seen as a drain on the system

DICTION

Gas rings are the rings of fire that are found on stoves and heaters. A symbol of poverty - cooking for oneself, or a lack of heat/electricity

COMPARATIVE DEVICE/IMAGERY/DICTION

This line is a metaphor for the women's lives, because like garbage, they are also forgotten about and abandoned by society. "Once-useful garbage" is also an oxymoron and it could actually be describing the surroundings.

Stanza 1 Part 3

DICTION

Demonstrates a startling juxtaposition between the two groups of people on the opposite sides of privilege in America

and the young men next door
with their loud midnight parties
and fishy rings left in the bathtub
no longer arouse them

DICTION

Could refer to sexual arousal or excitement in general. These old women have passed their "sexual prime" and these younger men and their parties, who might have excited them before, do not now

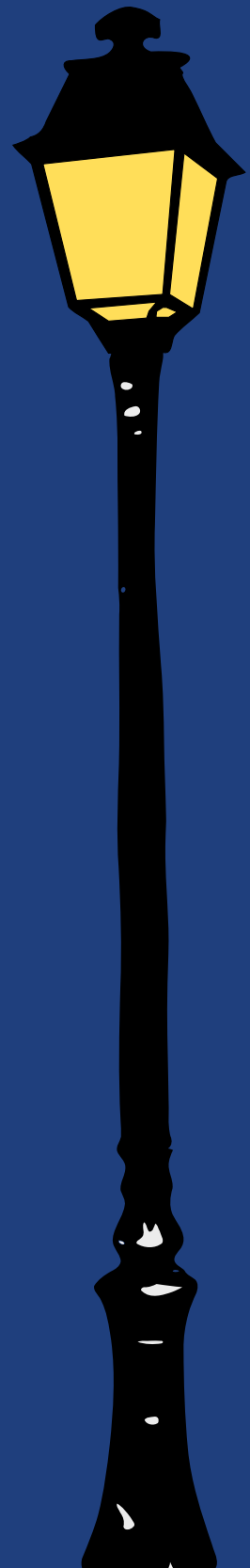
IMAGERY/DICTION

Sensory imagery helps the reader to get a grasp on the magnitude of these parties and it is oxymoronic in nature as midnight is not considered a "loud" time

DICTION

Could be read in two ways: "fishy" as in something suspicious, or "fishy rings" as gunk and dirt that the people attending these parties have left behind

Stanza 1 Part 4



DICTION/COMPARATIVE DEVICE (1st line)

Repetition of "m"

A metaphor for the monotonous life of these women, how the same day is repeated, or how death follows these women like how sleep follows them during the night

COMPARATIVE DEVICE

2nd mention of windows; they are breaking, foreshadowing the end/hardship of the women's life

from midnight to mealtime no stops inbetween
light breaking to pass through jumbled up windows
and who was it who married the widow
that Buzzie's son messed with?

DICTION

Can either be read as a piece of gossip to consolidate the women, or a representation of how their memory is fading

DICTION

The term "widow" is used instead of the woman's name, showing how her identity and worn is based off men (her husband and Buzzie's son). A reminder of "a woman's place"

Stanza 2

DICTION

Welfare is government provided food, housing, and clothing for low-to-moderate income citizens, demonstrating the reality of the financial situation of these women

DICTION

"insult" = emphasizes the demeaning attitude that society has towards elders
"slow shuffle" = a stereotypical movement associated with the elderly, demonstrates their ill bodily conditions

To Welfare and insult from the slow shuffle
from daywork to shopping bags
heavy with leftovers.

Reinforces the women's vulnerability; slow, in need of assistance, weak

} DICTION

IMAGERY



Tactile imagery with the word "heavy"; reinforces the older women's aging bodies

Reference to older black women taking on housework-centered jobs for wealthier white families; doing their housework, grocery shopping, etc
"leftovers" = gifts from the families

Stanza 3 Part 1

COMPARATIVE DEVICES

Repetition of the title once again for emphasis and reinforced understanding. Parallel to beginning of poem

Rooming houses
are old women waiting

searching

through darkening windows
the end or beginning of agony

DICTION

Searching for youth, equality, financial stability, respect, everything that society has stripped away from these women

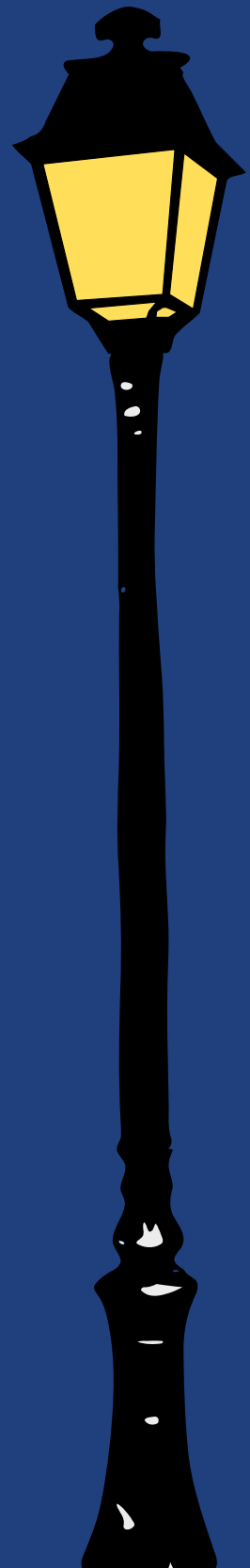
COMPARATIVE DEVICES/IMAGERY

Windows are darkening - either their life is coming to an end or night is falling in the rooming house

DICTION

Agony is either mental or physical pain; realizing their declining state, physical pain with aging, the beginning of the stigmas surrounding older black women and the painful realization of it

Stanza 3 Part 2



COMPARATIVE DEVICES

Many interpretations: door to life closing, lack of privacy in rooming houses, society doesn't want the women to be seen

old women seen through half-a-jar doors

hoping →

they are not waiting

but being

the entrance to somewhere

unknown and desired

but not new.

DICTION

"hoping": marks the beginning of a positive tone, volta

"not waiting": juxtaposition to previous stance

DICTION

This is an allusion to heaven. The "entrance" would be the pearly gates. It can be assumed that these older black women would have been very religious

Guided Analysis

Through the use of diction, comparative devices, and imagery, the speaker parallels the life of old black women to a rooming house in an effort to express the silent suffering and social inequalities these women face.

DICTION

- "the end or beginning of agony" to describe their mental and physical suffering
- "from daywork to shopping bags heavy with leftovers" even in retirement these women have to work to provide for themselves

COMPARATIVE DEVICES

- metaphor: comparing the women to rooming houses in the fact that they are undesirable, poor, forgotten by society
- "under-bed boxes of once useful garbage" metaphor for the women's lives and how society sees them

IMAGERY

- the window is slowly dimming throughout the poem to show the hope lost; pathetic fallacy
- "loud midnight parties" this is sensory imagery which shows how this is not a place that one would want to be in retirement, with loud neighbours next door. A further demonstration of poverty and lack of money



Thank You For Listening

