A Rhetorical Approach to Critical Reading of Literary Texts

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Abstract

From a rhetorical point of view, reading is not an isolated process of absorbing the meaning of words in a text but a creative activity in which the reader constructs meaning through the symbolic exchange with the text in a particular situation. This study elaborates on the rhetorical features of literary texts through the lens of rhetorical situation, rhetorical purpose, and Aristotle's three means of persuasion. It then illustrates how to approach a literary text rhetorically through the interpretation of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, shedding light on the development of critical reading in literary instruction. The study displays the literary text's rhetoricity and demonstrates that the rhetorical approach enables the readers to explore the persuasive mechanism of a literary text, examine the sources the writer marshals to adapt to the audience and make their judgments based on the ethical, emotional, and logical proofs. Furthermore, the rhetorical approach to literary reading provides theoretical ground for a rhetorical mode of literary instruction, which directs our focus on the readers' constructive role and creates more space for individual interpretation. In this way, a rhetorical approach to literary reading plays a significant role in developing student readers' creativity, critical thinking, and rhetorical awareness both in reading and writing.

Keywords: rhetorical features, literary text reading, critical reader

1. Introduction

1.1 Role of the Literary Text in Language Learning

The significant role of literary texts in language learning has been commonly acknowledged. With the symbolic use of language, exquisite writing strategies, and wisdom of human life, literary texts not only set examples for the appreciation of language and writing techniques but also provide learners with channels to relate to the social and cultural contexts, pick up multiple perspectives on human experiences and unknown cultures, and acquire moral values and virtues. In this sense, literature instruction exerts a shaping influence on the cultivation of learners' critical thinking and cultural awareness, finally leading to their personal growth. However, under the influence of the formalism tradition of literary instruction, which has been dedicated to the development of students' essential language skills (Makaluso, 2016), literary reading has mainly focused on the linguistic qualities of the text rather than its enlightening values on education and its relevance to our daily life. Consequently, student readers' initiative and creativity are overlooked.

1.2 Interpreting Reading

Within the formalism framework of literary instruction, literary reading was viewed as a one-way process where the meaning, stipulated by the text, flows from the text to the reader. Meanwhile, readers were viewed as passive agents who attended to the text's formal features. As a result, this model has positioned the text as "creatively superior to the reader," making the reader's creative authority invisible (Ibid, pp. 17−18).

However, the development of sociolinguistics, psychology, and new rhetoric since the end of the last century has renewed our views of reading, which is now considered as a social act, a dialectic interaction, and a two-way transaction between the reader and the text (Brent, 1989; Rosenblatt, 1995). It is recognized that the meaning does not solely reside in the words of the text but is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text in a particular situation based on both the reader and the writer's structure of beliefs and knowledge of the world. In other words, the meaning is not fixed upon the completion of the text; it becomes a reality when the reader interacts with the text and constructs his/her knowledge of it through the media of the text. Thus, reading

should be treated as a creative process rather than a passive act of receiving and deciphering. A reader's task is not only to absorb what a text says but to use the text to reshape the knowledge towards themselves and the world (Brent, 1989).

On the other hand, context or situation has been noted as a significant factor in the reading process. Reading is regarded as a "constructive, selective process over time in a particular context" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26). Literary reading is viewed as "a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element [the reader and the text], conditions the other" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 16). van Dijk (2011, p. 615) further argues that "context models of language users account for the pragmatic comprehension of discourse."

These views coincide with rhetoric's fundamental concepts, such as rhetorical situation, rhetorical negotiation for building knowledge, and audience adaption. A rhetorical approach to reading would broaden our theoretical horizon on text creation and reading interpretation and provides new perspectives to inform the literary reading pedagogy.

1.3 The Rhetorical Approach to Literary Reading

Rhetoric is the study concerned with how people use symbolic means, especially language, to influence other people's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (Liu, 2004). It is also a philosophy about how people succeed or fail to discover new levels of truth together (Booth, 1983). Within the rhetorical framework, the text is viewed as an invention through which the writer responds to a particular situation with the purpose of persuasion, such as advocating some ideas, changing people's views, or invoking actions. Correspondingly, reading is a process of re-invention in the sense that "readers use texts to supplement their experiences and create for themselves a structure of beliefs influenced by but not under the control of the texts" (Brent, 1989, p. 31).

On the other hand, rhetoric has established the rhetorical situation as a vital element in any rhetorical invention. From the rhetorical point of view, a text is a response to a particular situation, and reading is also "situated" in specific settings. The determination of meaning is influenced by the reader's goals, personal beliefs, and prior knowledge. Thus, both the text's creation and interpretation are regarded as rhetorical acts in that they are situated in particular contexts and conducted for knowledge construction.

As an epistemic art, rhetoric advances our understanding of the reading process as a rhetorical transaction between the reader and the text. The rhetorical approach to reading would reveal the text's rhetorical mechanism and emphasize the readers' intellectual efforts in meaning construction. With the support of rhetorical theories, the student reader could develop the ability of a critical reader, who does not simply understand the words of a text in isolation but explores how the text works towards the purpose of persuasion and who knows what sources they should look for to respond to a text and then decides what elements he/she should take into consideration for making a sound judgment.

1.4 Research Orientation

A rhetorical approach to the literary reading would direct our focus on the literary texts' persuasive power and readers' interpretive abilities. This study provides a rhetorical perspective for the critical reading of literary texts and sheds light on developing student readers' critical thinking and reading capacities in current literary instruction.

The current study aims to explore the rhetorical features of literary texts and illustrate how to approach a literary text rhetorically and how to reconstruct it in the light of rhetorical theories as a critical reader by taking Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* as an example. The study is directed by the following questions:

1) What is the persuasive mechanism of a literary text? How does it work to appeal to its audience and achieve its aims?

2) How can a reader interact with the text critically, reconstruct and evaluate it within the rhetorical framework?

2. Literature review

2.1 The Rhetoricity (Note 1) of the Literary Text

Rhetoric is not only concerned with means of persuasion but also perceived as a way of constructing knowledge in human affairs. Within the rhetorical framework, "knowledge is not what one has been told; it is what one believes, what one accepts as being at least provisionally true" (Brent, 1989, p. 2). In this sense, any kinds of text are rhetorical in that it is composed to clarify a belief, advance an opinion, implant values, or evaluate a situation through the symbolic use of language. These are achieved transactionally among the writer and the readers when they reach a consensus on shared beliefs (Covino & Jolliffe, 1995). Even the seemingly most informative texts are presented with the author's worldviews, through which the authors are trying to seek the readers' acceptance

of a view of reality. In other words, all texts possess the quality of rhetoricity in the sense that they are intended to induce action, change reality, or "instruct the text receivers to build relationships of various kinds" (Beaugrande, 1980, p. 13).

Literature has a natural connection with rhetoric. Literary texts are embodied with ideologies, values, symbols, the writer's worldviews, beliefs, and stance. Booth indicates that "all fiction has a rhetorical function whether or not it is overly persuasive" (as cited in Covino & Jolliffe, 1995, p. 33). In a literary work, the writer's choices of characters, language, certain writing style, and narrative devices are all rhetorical strategies he/she employs to engage the readers and achieve his/her purpose of persuasion, as Booth remarks in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that the fiction writer tries, consciously and unconsciously, to "impose his fictional world upon the reader" through available rhetorical resources (1983, p. 15). From the rhetorical point of view, the literary text is a rhetorical work the writer has done to respond to a situation in order to influence the readers and change the reality. Eagleton also urges literary criticism to engage the critical tools of rhetoric, examining how literary texts are constructed to achieve a particular effect (as cited in Covino & Jolliffe, 1995).

This paper is going to explore the literary text's rhetoricity from the lens of rhetorical theories such as rhetorical situation, rhetorical purpose, and Aristotle's three means of persuasion—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

2.2 Rhetorical Situation

The concept of rhetorical situation does not merely refer to the linguistic context or background of a discourse. Still, it involves a complex of "persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (Bitzer, 1995, p. 303). According to Bitzer (1995), any rhetorical discourse is a response to a situation of a certain kind and should be operated within the situation. The situation is the source and ground for rhetorical activities, which dictates the purpose and mode of the fitting response. Thus, rhetoric is situational.

As the product of rhetoric, a text is effective only in a particular situation, which means a text obtains its meaning and rhetorical features only when it participates in a rhetorical situation. The text would not achieve the desired effects unless it is a fitting response to a particular situation; that is, it should be produced at an opportune moment and in an appropriate measure. Thus, rhetorical situation is an essential element the writer should take into account when creating a text.

As is mentioned above, rhetorical situation is different from the context in general, which includes three constituents: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence refers to "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done" (Ibid, p. 305). An exigence is only rhetorical when it can be modified through a discourse or at least with the assistance of the discourse.

The audience does not simply equate with the readers. Audience refers to "those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and being mediators of change" (Ibid). Traditionally, the audience is considered to be the ones whom the writer wants to address and influence through the text as they are the mediator of change in the rhetorical situation. It is assumed that writers usually target a group or different groups of audience before creating a text. Nowadays, owing to the extensive access of communication, a text can reach a great variety of audiences. Modern rhetorical scholars argue that "in some situations, writers cannot know with certainty who their readers are; they work to construct an audience and try to invoke the interests, knowledge, and needs of a presumed audience" (Covino & Jolliffe, 1995, p. 14). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) introduce the concept of "universal audience" who refers to every reasonable and competent human being the rhetor (Note 2) imagines. They further suggest that by appealing to the universal audience, the rhetor convinces the readers that the argument's proposition is self-evident and true regardless of time and place (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971).

Constraints refer to a range of circumstantial factors which possess the power to constrain the decision and action needed to modify the exigence, including the value systems, norms and traditions, the audience's presumptions or prior knowledge about the subject of a text, and the rhetor's persuasive proofs, characters, styles, etc. (Bitzer, 1995). In every rhetorical practice, the rhetor has to work within the boundaries of constraints and manages to fit the discourse in a particular situation to achieve his/her intention.

A literary text is situational. First, it comes into existence as a fitting response to the situation which contains an exigence. The writer either perceives the situation to respond or selects some favorable factors in the situation to fit the response. Second, a literary text is intended for specific groups of the audience with whom the writer tries to establish knowledge, clarify a belief, share the aesthetic experience, or induce a change of reality. In some situations, the writer may project a universal audience and makes his/her work adapted to a wide range of readers.

As for a literary text, the rhetorical situation not only consists of the historical, social, and cultural contexts but also includes specific events, people involved, and relations of various factors. The concept of rhetorical situation instructs readers to investigate the context or situation of a text from multiple dimensions. When investigating a literary text's rhetorical situation, the reader should consider: What are the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the text? What forces have brought it into being? What is the prevailing reality the text is related to? What purpose does the text serve regarding the situation? Which group or groups of the audience does the writer intend to affect? What are the limitations of the audience and the writer in the situation?

2.3 Rhetorical Purpose

In the rhetorical practice, the rhetor selects, consciously or unconsciously, different resources and strategies to meet his/her rhetorical purpose, which is the focus of any rhetorical practice. A text is shaped for specific purposes. A text's rhetorical purpose refers to the intention or motive of creating the text, the expected effects, or changes the writer seeks through rhetorical means. It is also a reflection of the writer's stance and attitude.

A literary text is a response to a situation with its specific purposes, which could be delivering the writer's beliefs, values, and judgments, building knowledge, changing the readers' attitudes, inducing actions to alter the reality, or sharing aesthetic emotions. Every literary text has its rhetorical purpose. The rhetorical purpose determines how a literary text is constructed, such as choice of narrative patterns, selection of structure and styles, the invention of characters, word diction, etc. In other words, the writer's strategies and means of persuasion in crafting a text are closely related to the rhetorical purpose. When the writer creates his fictional world and tries to impose it upon the reader, he/she makes choices between different channels, topics, resources, different ways of narration, and writing styles in order to fit the readers' needs and support his/her stance, that is, to achieve the rhetorical purpose (Zhu, 2018). Burke (1966) has explained the writer's strategies of directing the audience towards his/her intention by introducing the term "terministic screen," which indicates that every set of terms or symbolic systems people use can shape a particular screen through which we perceive the world. In this way, "language directs our attention toward some factors and away from others" (Herrick, 2001, p. 227). Thus, in a literary text, the writer's linguistic choices are not neutral but reveal the writer's preference, through which the writer selects from all kinds of realities to shape the readers' perception.

Determining a literary text's rhetorical purpose is crucial for understanding the writer's choices and strategies and evaluating their effects. To analyze a text's rhetorical purpose, the reader should find out:

> What does the exigency of social and cultural context entail the purpose? What is the purpose in reference to the target audience? What responses does the writer seek from the audience and their relation to the purpose? What is the purpose implied in the tone the writer assumed, the characters, the plot, and linguistic choices the writer made? (Zhang, 2010)

2.4 Means of Persuasion

Aristotle (1991) elaborates on the three kinds of textual appeals in *Rhetoric*: *ethos* (the credibility of the writer), *pathos* (the emotions of the audience), and *logos* (system of reasoning), the three means of persuasion available to the writer.

Ethos refers to the good character, virtues, authority, expertise, and consequent credibility the rhetor demonstrates in the text (Liu, 2008). In other words, *ethos* is the good quality the writer inscribes in the text in order to convince the audience since people are likely to accept what a speaker says when the speaker is acknowledged as trustworthy. In literary works, *ethos* is regarded as the writer's projection of his/her own "real" self. Another term related to *ethos* in literary theory is "persona," which refers to the fictional characters the writer establishes in an appropriate situation (Covino & Jolliffe, 1995). However, persona is not necessarily the projection of the writer himself/herself but could be used to establish the writer's *ethos*.

Pathos is defined as the emotions, preferences, and the audience's value system (Liu, 2008). Appealing to *pathos* is the writer's strategy to affect the audience's opinions by provoking their emotions since emotions have great power to influence our judgments and ultimately move us to actions. In fact, many actions in our daily life are prompted by emotional stimulus (Corbett & Connors, 1999). A literary text always activates the audience's emotions through its narration, characters, atmosphere, or other devices, causing them to sympathize with the writer's ideas, accept the writer's propositions, or take action to change the reality.

Logos refers to reasons, logic, credible ideas, commonplaces, illuminating exemplars the audience finds convincing and persuasive (Liu, 2008). Appealing to *logos* in a text is necessary since people are more willing to accept that they are convinced by a sound argument with adequate proof. A literary text should "demonstrate the quality of cohesion and coherence," weaving strings of topics into the text's themes. Otherwise, readers would

doubt the writer's competence in writing (Kearns, 1996, p. 22).

All these three appeals interact and work together towards the rhetorical purpose. The rhetor's *ethos* is a significant factor in prompting the audience's *pathos*. *Ethos* and *pathos* together promote the circulation of *logos*. At the same time, *logos* plays a crucial role in establishing the rhetor's *ethos* and appeal of *pathos*. The rhetor may employ one of these appeals predominantly or deploy all the three means, depending on the rhetorical situation and the audience he/she is addressing.

When examining the three means of persuasion in a literary text, readers should analyze:

> What *ethos* has the writer projected through the narrator's voice, the characters, or other devices? What emotions does the writer want to provoke? What emotions does the writer want the audience to identify with? What are the premises and conclusions of the text, implicit or explicit? Is the writer's reasoning valid? (Zhang, 2010)

3. Rhetorical Interpretation of *The House on Mango Street*

This section is going to explore the rhetorical features of Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and shed light on how the text engages its readers effectively to become a famous novel around the world, thus illustrating how to approach a literary text rhetorically as a critical reader.

3.1 Rhetorical Situation of The House on Mango Street

3.1.1 Exigence

The House on Mango Street was published in 1984. The writer Sandra Cisneros was born the only daughter among seven children in a Mexican immigrant family in Chicago. The experience of the narrator Esperanza in this novel is a reflection of her life at a young age. First, in Mexican patriarchal culture, she felt depressed and trapped as a young girl surrounded by examples of all those abused and defeated women in Latino society. She desired to pursue her own values and freedom. As the only daughter among seven children in her family, she was at the same time neglected and marginalized, which is well manifested in her work *Only Daughter* (2001).

Second, she had an unstable and alienated childhood. Her family moved back and forth between Mexico and Chicago during her childhood, living in tiny houses with poor conditions. That is why she expressed in the novel that she always wanted a house in the future—"not a house on Mango Street, not a man's house, not daddy's house," but a real house on her own (Cisneros, 2012, p. 279).

Third, as a Mexican immigrant in the United States in the 1980s, she was inevitably encountering prejudices, racial discrimination, and estrangement from the mainstream American society, as she wrote in this novel: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes" (Ibid, pp. 180−181). This sense of alienation and segregation made her eager to find her sense of belongings and identity in this society. After witnessing the poverty, discrimination, and misfortunes the women around her suffered, she had the urge to find her own voice, a place in society, and pursue her dream as an independent woman through writing.

On the other hand, she was mainly growing up in Chicago, which means she was imbued with the beliefs and values of the American mainstream culture. She was ethnically a Mexican and culturally a Mexican American (Valdes, 1992). Being immersed in two cultures, she had inevitably experienced a cultural shock and crisis of identity. As a Mexican immigrant, she had not yet been recognized as an American. Meanwhile, she was also culturally and ideologically different from native Mexicans. This dilemma resulted in her endeavor to search for her own identity and sense of belonging. These all together constitute the exigence of the novel.

3.1.2 Audience

There are four categories of audience this novel is intended to affect. First, the novel is tailored to the mainstream audience of the United States. Only by winning the approval of the people from mainstream society can the writer make her voice heard. The novel is written mainly in English rather than Spanish. For ethnic immigrants, English serves as a tool to communicate with mainstream society. The choice of language is a strategy for audience adaption. Therefore, it could be observed that the writer's primary target audience is the people from the mainstream culture so that they will understand the adversity and struggles of Mexican-American women.

However, it does not mean that the writer dismisses the audience of her ethnic community. The novel is the writer's reflection on the mindset, values, and conventions ingrained in Mexican culture. The events and

characters depicted in the novel are familiar to Mexican-Americans, especially the women. Cisneros was not only writing to reveal the trials shared with every Mexican-American girl but also writing to help her ethnic group, especially to encourage the Mexican females to find themselves and fight for their freedom and space, as she remarked at the end of the novel: "I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (Cisneros, 2012, p. 281). From this point, the novel is also intended to affect the audience of the Mexican-American community.

Third, the dilemma of an immigrant, the struggle they made to be included in the immigrated country, and the poor living condition in their early immigrant years are all not unique to Mexican-American people. The sentiments of being alienated and insecure in another culture and the crisis of maintaining one's identity resonate with a wide range of ethnic minorities in the United States. In this sense, the novel also relates to all immigrants from various origins alike.

Fourth, this novel relates to every ordinary human being. Cultural shock does not happen on the boundaries between countries. It happens to anyone who enters into another unfamiliar culture and alienated environment. On the other hand, the primal needs of pursuing freedom, belonging, and identity are the primary concerns for all human beings. The novel itself has multiple themes. It could not be defined only as coming-of-age literature, or feminist literature, or ethnic minority literature. All readers can ascribe meanings to it in differential, subjective ways (Cruz, 2001). Therefore, this novel doesn't confine itself to a specific group of audience but also has implications for people of all ages and nations. The writer has indicated in an interview that "there is also such as Mango Street anywhere else. When strangers go there, they will feel a strange atmosphere. This novel is inextricably linked with any space and region" (Zhu, 2018, pp. 2–3). Cisneros was writing with the universal audience in mind that she did not write exclusively for one group of audience but for everyone, which guarantees the novel's success worldwide.

3.1.3 Constraints

When a writer enters into a rhetorical situation, he/she inevitably encounters a set of constraints. Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* has successfully appealed to the audience, winning readers from all around the world. The writer herself had fulfilled her values and achieved a kind of success by making her voice heard through this novel, which has received a remarkable reputation in the United States. The writer became famous and was rewarded as one of the outstanding writers in Chicano literature through this novel. To some extent, she had also completed her self-discovering passage, and her voice was finally recognized by American mainstream culture.

However, despite the writer's personal achievement, there are still constraints from the audience, the text, and the writer herself. First, the audience has limitations. Not all Latino women can follow Cisneros's path to realize their own values and change their destiny because of language barriers, limited opportunity to get an education, and dependent economic status even though the novel may kindle the hope for some audience, especially the ones who have shared a similar experience with the writer. Second, the patriarchal mindset and the discriminatory mentality are so deep-rooted that they cannot be changed by a novel alone, although it may draw concerns on the reality and adversity of the Mexican-American community to some extent. It is still a long way to go for the Mexican American community to realize their identification and freedom, which demands an everlasting endeavor from all walks of life and the whole nation.

3.2 Rhetorical Purpose of The House on Mango Street

From the analysis of the rhetorical situation of *The House on Mango Street*, we can infer that the novel is constructed with four primary purposes: (1) Personally, the writer means to change her reality, discover her own identity, pursue her own values, and finally get acknowledged by the mainstream society through writing this novel. (2) The novel is created to show Mexican-Americans' living dilemma and draw concerns on the living conditions and psychological space of the marginalized people, especially Mexican-American women. (3) The novel is intended to criticize patriarchal structures, the discriminatory mentality, and exclusionary practices in their culture and society. (4) The writer also attempts to help her ethnic group and other marginal people. Through the narration of the growing up, the self-discovering experience of a young Mexican-American girl, the writer encourages her Chicano community to discover their own identities, search for self-esteem and find solutions to their sufferings.

Correspondingly, the novel is structured and composed for these rhetorical purposes. First, the stories are narrated by a young girl named Esperanza from the first-person point of view as a memoir of her struggles in the harsh reality and self-discovering process. This narrative pattern serves the writer's rhetorical purpose of revealing her community's struggles and criticizing the social hostility and discrimination. A young girl's voice creates a distance from the adults' world. Thus, it enables the narrator to question the social, moral, and cultural

conventions taken for granted in their community and reveal the problems and evils in the adults' world in an objective way. At the same time, a girl's perspective facilitates the writer to describe the lives of the older women around her who are abused, oppressed, and defeated in such a patriarchal society.

Second, the characters and the events described in the novel serve the rhetorical purpose. There are three categories of characters in the novel: (1) The female characters. They either stimulated the protagonist or inspired the protagonist, Esperanza. The first group is the women who were mistreated by the men in their community and held back from pursuing their ambitions. These characters include Rosa Vargas in "There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn't Know What to Do," Ruthie in "Edna's Ruthie," Rafaela in "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays," Minerva in "Minerva Writes Poems," and Sally in "What Sally Said," "Red Clowns," and "Linoleum Roses" (Cisneros, 2012). Their experiences reflect Mexican women's adversities and sufferings in their society. Esperanza gathered strength from their tragedies and then determined to reject her Chicano community to search for a new identity so that she could step out of the vicious circle of Mexican women. The second group is the ones who inspired her, such as her mother, Alicia, and Ruthie. Her mother said she could have been somebody but was held back by women's servitude role in this community. She urged her to "go to school and study hard" upon the reminiscence of her past. (Ibid, p. 259) Alicia was the protagonist's role model. She once left Mango street to receive a college education because she didn't want to spend her whole life behind a rolling pin like her mother. Esperanza admired her friend for she had the chance to leave Mango Street. Ruthie was the one who cultivated her interest in literature (Ibid). Esperanza's awakening embodies the writer's purpose of enlightening the Mexican women to fight for their freedom and self-realization.

(2) The male characters. They are depicted as weak, helpless, and pitiful, such as her father, who could not provide a stable and good life for the family, and Geraldo, a male immigrant worker, who died because of neglect from the hospital, as the novel indicates (Ibid).

(3) Representative white people. They are the outsider of their community, as the white girl Cathy in *Cathy Queen of Cats*. She showed her contempt for the immigrants even though she was also from a low-income family (Ibid).

Third, the novel is full of symbols and metaphors created to embody the writer's rhetorical purpose. (1) The name Esperanza, taken from her horse-like grandmother who was forced to marry and "couldn't be all the things she wanted to be" (Ibid, p. 160), means "too many letters," "sadness," and "waiting" in Spanish (Ibid, p. 159). This name signifies her ethnic identity and similar destiny with the women of her community she rejected. However, on the other hand, the name means "hope" in English. It symbolizes her determination to seek a new identity outside her community through English writing, as the girl further put it: "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Ibid, p. 160). (2) The two houses are symbols. One of them, the house on Mango Street, represents the reality the narrator rejects and a hopeless, oppressed world she wanted to escape. And the other house, her dream house, alluding to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (2004), projects a promised place where she can live a secured life and thrive, which embodies her pursuit of independence, a sense of belonging, and identity. (3) The four skinny trees symbolize a talisman of survival in a hostile environment, which taught and encouraged the girl to grow and discover herself, to be herself despite the ill environment (Valdes, 1992). (4) Other symbols like "balloon," "Mango Street," "three sisters" are all designed to serve the writer's purposes.

3.3 Means of Persuasion in The House on Mango Street

For appealing of *ethos*, the dominant use of English is tactful. Dominant English language does not only serve as a strategy for audience adaption. What is more, it is an effective way to establish the writer's credentials as an American writer since mastering English, as the way to communicate with mainstream society, is an indicator of the formal education an immigrant has received in the United States. To some extent, English is the avenue for people who eager to leave their minority community and access mainstream American society. Using English as the dominant language, the writer establishes the *ethos* as an educated, independent woman and the protagonist Esperanza obtains her reliability as a competent narrator (Betz, 2012). However, Cisneros did not write exclusively in English. Limited Spanish is used when the narrator quotes other characters from her Mexican community or refers to Mexican traditions, which conforms to the ethnic identity of the narrator and other characters, making the narration trustworthy(*ethos*) and sensible(*logos*). Furthermore, the acknowledgment of the ethnic origin avoids the negation from the audience both inside and outside of the writer's ethical group.

The form of the novel as a memoir of Esperanza, which tends to be regarded as the projection of the writer's early life, creates a verisimilar account of the stories. By setting Esperanza as the narrator rather than the writer

herself, Cisneros has created a distance from judgment, conveying a sense of objectivity and avoiding "placing herself in a vulnerable position" (*ethos*) (Ibid, p. 29). Simultaneously, an ordinary Mexican-American girl's narrative voice situates the readers in the context, evoking sympathy and understanding from the audience (*pathos*).

The novel's poetic vignette style is attractive and appealing, arousing the audience's aesthetic feelings towards the novel (*pathos*). It also conveys the writer's femininity as a competent feminist writer on the one hand and "allows the writer and her narrator to avoid being perceived as broken English speakers" on the other hand(*ethos*) (Ibid, p. 31).

For appealing to the *logos*, the seemingly separate vignettes are cohesively organized towards the theme. The novel begins with the description of the house, indicating its significance to the narrator. Then, it moves on to the images of her family group. Next, the narrative thread develops with the stories related to the narrator's awakening of her identity, logically leading to her rejection of her community and determination for a new identity. Finally, it ends with anticipated departure and literary return through writing, drawing a forceful conclusion that makes her choice not only reasonable but also imperative (Valdes, 1992).

For appealing to the *pathos*, as the stories unfold, readers learn more about the oppression, injustice, and abuses the female characters experienced in this society from the characters' confused, depressed and shameful emotions. These characters are typical of the Mexican-American women, appealing to the audience effectively. Most of them were married at a young age and then trapped in the marriage, such as Rosa Vargas, Rafaela, and Minerva. They were either abandoned or abused by their husbands. Rosa Vargas's husband left without leaving a dollar, and Rafaela was locked indoors. Minerva's husband kept leaving, and she had to raise her kids alone. She kept writing, but her value and ambition would never be recognized (Cisneros, 2012). They were all sad, confused but could not change their reality. Another example is Sally, who was constantly abused by her father. Her father kept hitting like she was not a human being (Ibid). The readers learn from her experience that girls like Sally are ignored or even abused in Mexican patriarchal society. Their basic human needs of love and security are denied by their community. And Alicia is another figure who had received a college education but returned to Mango Street because of her widow father. (Ibid) She was also held back like Minerva, Esperanza's mother, and other women on Mango Street. Their experiences, which are familiar to the Mexican audience, reflect the hard fact that the entire group of women is manipulated by men and held back from pursuing their own values. Esperanza's pathetic narration of these stories arouses the readers' sympathy and pity towards Latino women. Furthermore, the writer stimulates the Mexican women or those who have shared similar experiences to cry out for their rights and justice through these stories.

On the other hand, the fear and racial stereotype described in this novel could be easily identified and sympathized by other minority groups in the United States. For example, the helplessness of the immigrant labor Geraldo, who died in the hospital emergency room, is familiar to every immigrant. The fear and estrangement in "Those Who Don't" resonate with other literary works, such as Brent Staples's "Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space" (2001). Similarly, the allusion of "the house of one's own" could be identified with a feminist sentiment. However, the novel does not dwell on the dark side of life. It also displays the narrator's positive efforts to pursue a better future. This positive identity projected by the writer is more likely to win the readers' approval in that it evokes the emotions of hope and growth.

4. Conclusion

The rhetorical interpretation of the novel *The House on Mango Street* displays the rhetorical features of a literary text and sheds light on how rhetoric works in a literary text. As a way of knowing, rhetoric provides valuable theoretical dimensions for the critical reading of literary texts. By exploring the rhetorical features of the literary text, the reader can examine the text's persuasive mechanism, understand how it works toward specific purposes, and make judgments based on ethical, emotional, and logical proofs rather than obtain the literal meaning of the text passively. Furthermore, the rhetorical approach to literary reading has implications for literary instruction. By understanding that every text has its purpose of persuasion, the student readers can engage with it critically, evaluating its rhetorical effects and persuasive mechanism rather than merely analyze its linguistic features in the literary class. A rhetorical mode of literary instruction creates more space for individual interpretation of the literary texts with its understanding of reading as a dynamic interaction with the text. At the same time, the rhetorical mode of literary instruction equips the student readers with sources to refine their judgments and guides them to use persuasive power to improve their compositions when they take turns as a writer, which is conducive to the development of student readers' reading competence, expressive writing skill, cultural awareness, and critical thinking.

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Notes

Note 1. Rhetoricity in this paper refers to the quality of being rhetorical for a text, the rhetorical features of a text.

Note 2. Rhetor refers to the practitioner of rhetoric. In this paper, it refers to the creator of rhetorical discourse.

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