**Introduction:**

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, however, if faced with courage, need not be lived again." These words, powerful and true, reached the nation the day Maya Angelou delivered her inauguration poem for Bill Clinton. They reflected her vision for the nation to pursue “peace, racial and religious harmony, and social justice” for all of the people of the nation ("Maya angelou," 2012). Despite the fact that our nation has come a long way since the days of Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, these ideals are still challenged daily and it is important for us to continually strive for them.

How did Maya Angelou address the rhetorical situation of inequality by promoting themes of peace and equality for all with her inaugural poem, “On the Pulse of the Morning?” In analyzing Maya Angelou’s poem, I will examine the critical questions that help with using the fantasy theme approach and show how these findings support my assessment that she was successful in creating a rhetorical vision of peace and equality to the nation.

**Description:**

My artifact is the poem that Maya Angelou wrote and recited for the inauguration of Bill Clinton on January 20, 1993. Maya Angelou was the first to present a poem at an inauguration since Robert Frost’s poem during John F. Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961.

Based on Maya Angelou’s biography, the writing and reciting of this poem was one source of her fame in the early 1990’s as she was asked by Bill Clinton to write and recite the poem. This makes it a significant artifact for us to analyze ("Maya angelou," 2012).

Though Maya Angelou is presenting this poem for Bill Clinton’s inauguration, her poem responds to the rhetorical situation of inequality. Lloyd Bitzer describes “rhetorical situations” as social problems that humans attempt to resolve through rhetoric.

**Method of Analysis:**

In analyzing this poem, I will use the fantasy theme analysis approach. Ernest Bormann developed this approach as a method that focuses on how narratives evolve, progress and wane (their life span). This approach is similar to a story in the way includes characters, plot and scene setting. The fantasy theme analysis method goes further in understanding how people use these stories to see the world in similar ways. The stories become part a group’s stories. People also use these stories to move from being individuals to having an identity in a group.

The fantasy theme approach takes the characters, plot and scene settings and asks specific questions that paint the rhetorical vision. A rhetorical vision becomes the taken-for-granted description of how things should be. This affects how people perceive and interpret their reality. The questions that are asked examine the characters, such as identifying heroes and villains. They examine the context and setting, nature and the function of action, emotional appeals, the relationship between the text and the audience and the delivery of the message. These questions help us to analyze critically and see how stories function rhetorically.

The fantasy theme analysis approach includes fantasy types; stock situations that are told over and over. It also includes a sanctioning agent which is a person, common belief in God, or an ideal that legitimizes the story. In analyzing Maya Angelou’s poem, the fantasy theme approach will help us extract these characteristics to determine the themes that Maya Angelou presented to our nation and how these themes influenced the rhetorical vision of the message.

I found this method to be useful for this artifact because Maya Angelou’s poem is rich in themes. The language that she uses helps to serve the purpose of helping people see the world in a similar way. In this case, her message to the nation paints a picture that encourages people to see the nation as a whole; a group based on equality, rather than individuals on separate levels. It also promotes peace to the nation as a whole which I will elaborate below in my report of findings.

**Report of Findings/Analysis:**

In order to analyze this poem with the fantasy theme analysis, it is important to examine the characters and how those characters are used within the context of Angelou’s poem. We start out with the “A Rock, A River, A Tree.” Although they are inanimate objects, we can see how Angelou personifies them to symbolize the time that has passed and the constant nature of these elements. The “rock cries,” the “river sings,” the “tree speaks to humankind.” They are the “characters” that stay constant throughout the poem while the times change and the generations pass. In a sense they can be deemed as the heroes of the poem because they host the “species long since departed” and offer solace as they encourage you to “plant yourself beside me, here beside the river.”

We can also see how the rock, the river and the tree create a setting within nature. When she presents the past, present and future, they all occur within this scene of nature. For instance, the they host the dinosaurs, they currents of debris have washed upon the shore, they label the people “a descendent of some passed on traveler.” All of these create the setting within which the characters play their role.

With these symbolic characters, we also see the sanctioning agent that is present throughout the poem. The “rock cries out,” “the songs the Creator gave to me,” “I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree, I am yours – your Passages have been paid for.” These references give the audience a sense of a higher being as they refer to God. Again, the sanctioning agent is the authority that legitimizes the story – a person, a common belief in God, or an ideal like justice and democracy. With the nation as her audience, it may be hard to say that God is a common belief among its entire audience. This would negate her ability to help individuals identify as a group. But the way in which she words her poem can give the audience a sense of higher calling, as opposed to saying that it is only God.

Another sanctioning agent we can look at throughout the poem is the ideals of equality and peace. Angelou creates a sense of group identity as she calls for harmony among the people. She refers the “Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew, the African and Native American, the Sioux, the Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek, the Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Shiekh, the Gay the Straight, the Preacher, the privileged, the homeless, the Teacher. They hear. They all hear the speaking of the tree.” Her inclusion of the broad variety of the audience, bring people from feeling that they are individual to feeling that they are a whole. In creating this group image, she supports her calling for peace and equality, because it becomes the group’s rhetorical vision. It is important to establish the sense of group so you can then focus on the vision of the group.

We can see how adversity and greed play the role of “villain” in this story and the context within which they are played. We see this when she says “your armed struggles for profit have left collars of waste upon my shore, currents of debris upon my breast.” She refers to the injustice that the Native Americans faced when they were forced off of their land: “You, who gave me my first name, you Pawnee, Apache and Seneca, you Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of other seekers – desperate for gain, starving for gold. She refers to slavery “You, the Turk, the Swede, the German the Scot…, you the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought, sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare.” By recognizing the adversities that have been faced, she furthers her ability of creating a sense of group. In examining the relationship between text and audience, we can see how her poem creates a sense of community and cohesion. As she calls to the different groups of people and asks them to unite in her mission for peace and harmony.

Another characteristic described in the fantasy theme analysis is the fantasy types. These are the stock situations that are told over and over; characters, scenes and events. In her poem she states, “Give birth again to the dream.” The audience would recognize these powerful words that were once spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., making this an event that has been told over and over. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech is one that is passed down from generation to generation. Other stock situations that she uses are the history of the Native Americans and the slaves. These are issues that are a part of history and bring about the rhetorical situation that she is discussing. She reiterates the rhetorical vision that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. brought up so many years ago (Slater, 2012).

We can also see the progression of the story that is told from the time of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the time that Maya Angelou presented her poem. At the time of Dr. King’s speech, the rhetorical vision was equality for all but it focused mainly on the rights of African Americans and women. At that time, they wanted to fight segregation and fight for the rights of those main groups. As we see in Angelou’s poem, this expands to a broader group now. Society had fought segregation and at the time she delivered the speech, African Americans and women were no longer separated and had rights, such as voting. She recognized the new adversity that people faced within a larger spectrum as she calls out to the “Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew, the African and Native American, the Sioux, the Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek, the Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Shiekh, the Gay the Straight, the Preacher, the privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.” Although many laws have changed and the basis of the rhetorical situation may have changed since Dr. King’s time, the rhetorical vision of equality and peace has not changed and Angelou recognized that. Although the story evolved from the time of Dr. King, inequality still exists as a rhetorical situation. The narratives have changed to reach to the broader group who still fights for full equality, but because it still exists, the stories have not waned.

Emotional appeal is used throughout her poem to dominate the drama. She offers comfort from the river “come rest here by my side.” Despite the greed that left waste upon the river “it sings on and on.” The tree “speaks to humankind. Come to me, here beside the River. Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.” All that have faced adversity are invited to sit beside the river. “I am the Tree planted by the river, which will not be moved.” The “wrenching pain” of history cannot be undone, but she encourages the nation to “lift up your eyes upon the day breaking for you.” The emotional appeal here gives hope to the audience. Those that have needed to seek refuge. Those that have face the villain of adversity. The language and the metaphors she uses support the emotional appeals.

We see the plot as a progression in Maya Angelou’s poem, as she refers to the past and moves on to the present and future. The quote at the beginning of this paper referred to history and how we are unable to change it, but we can avoid living it again. With her reference to the villains in the story, she moves on to the hope that we have for the future. She encourages the audience to “give birth to the dream again” and “Lift up your eyes upon the day breaking for you.” “Lift up your hearts,” and “you may have the courage to look up and out upon me, the Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.” This is where she paints the rhetorical vision in the story. This is where she projects the ideals she wants for the group.

In examining the delivery of Angelou’s poem, we can see the emotional appeal the drama that is used in order to arouse emotion from the nation. The words she uses are powerful and the way in which she delivers them further emphasizes her ideals of peace and inequality. Her reference to the adversity that was faced are dramatic and create an appeal for the audience. She confidently encourages the audience to “lift up your eyes upon this day breaking for you.” Her delivery is acknowledges the past, but her confident presentation creates a sense of unity and hope. ("Maya angelou 1993," 2010). If based solely on her delivery, her presence had the power to arouse the emotions of the nation. One critic said “Her presence was so powerful and momentous.. She made a statement that I was personally longing to see and hear (Streitfeld, 1993).

Although Maya Angelou paints a clear picture of peace and equality, I feel that her work did not resonate with the nation as with her past works, or as Barbara Jordan did in her impeachment speech. Analyzing her work with the fantasy theme, she was well on her way to creating a rhetorical vision for the group she created that day with the nation, however critics were split on their opinion of her poem. In an article from the *Washington Post,* critic David Lehman stated “I would have to say it’s not very memorable.” Other critics stated it was “eloquent and passionate” (Streitfeld, 1993).

I do feel though that she was successful in illustrating how a narrative evolves in a group and how although the rhetorical situation may change and shift, the rhetorical vision that she had coincided with the narratives from the past to now.

**Conclusion:**

In analyzing Maya Angelou’s inaugural poem we can see her strive to promote peace and equality just as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did. One of the main criteria for the fantasy them analysis is to look at how narratives evolve and what their life span in. I think this is a significant part of our society, because although our rhetorical situation may not be exactly the same as it was in the past, we still deal with the same social problems. Maya Angelou illustrates the ideals that have been constant through the times and uses her story to encourage the nation to not view themselves as an individual but as a group. We can see through her story how as a group, the nation, we have shifted from equality for the right to vote and to abolish segregation to the equality among all of us.

How did Maya Angelou address the rhetorical situation of inequality by promoting themes of peace and equality for all with her inaugural poem, “On the Pulse of the Morning?” Maya Angelou’s story of characters, setting, plot and ultimately the way she showed how narratives evolve within the group addressed the rhetorical situation on inequality. Her use of heroes and villains gave us an idea of the history we have faced. Her plot, that included past, present and future, showed us the history of our rhetorical situation and made an emotional appeal to the hope we have in correcting this social issue of inequality.

Her inclusion of all people gave the audience a sense of moving from the idea of being an individual to being part of a group that shares the same rhetorical vision of peace and inequality.

Though her speech was not deemed as one of the memorable by all of the critics, through the fantasy analysis method, I feel that she was able to affectively create a sense of group and show how the rhetorical vision of the nation has evolved, but remains the same.

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, however, if faced with courage, need not be lived again." This quote is a reminder to us that although we cannot change what has happened to us as a group in the past, we can make the choice to strive for a better future, that it “need not be lived again.” Maya Angelou’s story reminds us of where we have been, the adversity we have faced as a group and the constant heroes that have remained in our life. These heroes give us hope and courage to obtain peace and equality. I feel that this is part of our nation’s narrative that we will continue to see.