

From a Motherhood and Familial Reality to A Societal Reality: Poem “Marks”, A Woman’s Cry from the Heart for Women’s Conditions, Sufferings and Recognition

Beugre Zouankouan Stephane*

University of Peleforo Gon Coulibaly - Department of English, Côte d’Ivoire

DOI: [10.36348/sijll.2021.v04i05.002](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2021.v04i05.002)

| Received: 29.03.2021 | Accepted: 08.05.2021 | Published: 12.05.2021

*Corresponding author: Beugre Zouankouan Stephane

Abstract

This paper aims to study women’s realities and conditions through motherhood realities in Linda Pastan’s poem entitled “Marks”. Indeed thanks to the microcosm of a familial and motherhood reality, the poet Linda Pastan sheds light in general to the macrocosm of familial and motherhood reality in the whole society and further to the macrocosm of women’s realities and conditions in the society. It is like a cry from the heart of a woman which calls for anyone attention about women’s conditions and sufferings in family, in society, and further in the world. In fact, thanks to an ironic style she depicts the daily life of a mother in her own family showing the difficulties she encounters by explaining the household sufferings. This ironic depiction is indeed a kind of metaphor to denounce the ingratitude or ungratefulness on the part of the other members of the family (husband, son and daughter). When transcending the familial context described by Linda Pastan, we observe obviously that this poem is topical about women’s realities and conditions, and also that the problem of women’s conditions and sufferings is universal and a world concern. On the basis of this simple but true reality and in a thorough analysis following sociocriticism, a psychoanalytic criticism, a feminism perspective and stylistics, we will study on the one hand, motherhood realities and women’s conditions and sufferings and on the other hand, we will analyze family or people or society ingratitude toward women and the need for women recognition and emancipation.

Keywords: motherhood and familial realities, a woman’s cry from the heart, women’s conditions and sufferings, societal ingratitude, women’s emancipation, value judgments, marks and opinions, household.

Copyright © 2021 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Linda Pastan [1] is an American poet who is known for writing short poems on the topics of motherhood, family, domesticity, the female experience, the fragility of life and relationships, ethics, aging, and death. It is in this context that in 1978 she wrote “Marks”, a poem about a young wife and mother. This poem describes her treatment by her husband and children. Indeed, it is even said that “Pastan wrote this poem after ten years of focusing on family life. She wrote of her emotional experiences in her poems, good

and bad. This one in particular challenges the traditional role of women in the household [2]”.

As an artist of what she herself calls “dailiness”— contemporary domestic life, the poem “Marks” is really a poem about the daily life of a mother, a wife, a housewife and a woman in her everyday relationship with her husband, her son and her daughter where the setting is the familial context.

Most of the time praised for the lucidity of her language, the freshness of her metaphors, and the consistency of her accomplishment, this poem is also a real metaphor (“this entire poem is one giant extended

¹ Linda Pastan (born May 27, 1932 in New York) is an American poet of Jewish background. From 1991–1995 she was Poet Laureate of Maryland. Her most recent collections of poetry include *Insomnia*, *Traveling Light*, and *A Dog Runs Through It*.

² <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=dec363434250e0451b4366264931f6cdf7d7bc6f>

metaphor”[3]) written in a simple language accessible to any reader because of the simplicity of the language used by the poet Pastan.

When reading this poem through an insight perspective and in a critical way, our interest has been the undertone related to women’s realities and conditions through motherhood and familial realities. This hidden reality linked to women’s sufferings in both their own family and in society has been of great importance to tackle the following topic “From a motherhood and familial reality to a societal reality: Poem “Marks”, a woman’s cry from the heart for women’s conditions, sufferings and recognition” for a close analysis.

Indeed, we have been interested in this topic because this short, simple and clear poem operates like an allegorical poem with many levels of interpretation. And our interest will be to investigate those different levels of meaning and interpretation through the central problematic of this paper which is: how does this short and simple poem develop at the same time a literal meaning and interpretation, a connotative meaning and interpretation, a metaphorical meaning and interpretation and at last, a symbolical meaning and interpretation?

This central problematic in order to be solved will revolve around four important detailed questions that will constitute the blueprint of this analysis: How this poem develops a literal meaning and interpretation which corresponds to motherhood and familial realities and women’s sufferings? How this poem develops a connotative meaning and interpretation which corresponds to familial ingratitude and societal ingratitude toward women? How this poem develops a metaphorical meaning and interpretation which corresponds to a cry from the heart of a woman for a societal recognition and for women’s emancipation? How this poem develops a symbolical meaning and interpretation which corresponds to human beings’ constant judgment of others in life through assessments and evaluations in terms of marks and opinions?

The theoretical background that will be used in reviewing this short but meaningful and senseful poem through the light of our topic will be theories such as sociocriticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminism, and stylistics and as an approach; it will be a hermeneutics analysis of the poem “Marks”.

Through the hermeneutic approach, it will be a critical interpretation and analysis of the content, semantic, and message of this poem. We will see how

³ <https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figures-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>

this simple [4] and short poem about everyday life of a mother is an allegorical poem [5] full of sense which deserves several meanings at different layers. In one word, we will see how this poem deserves four levels of interpretation moving from the literal and denotative one, to the connotative one, then to the metaphorical one and finally to the symbolical one.

It is important to precise in terms of theoretical background that sociocriticism is really important to show the general theme of motherhood and women’s realities, their conditions and sufferings and also the ingratitude of the whole society toward them and the non-recognition of their great contributions in the society. Psychoanalytic criticism is important to analyze the important theme of moral strength women need and in general to analyze the moral strength people need to bear, to cope with and to overcome all the “Marks”, all the value judgments, all the criticisms they go through every day in the society. Feminism is important because of the general theme of motherhood, women’s realities and conditions, and women’s sufferings and the need for emancipation and recognition because this poem is really a cry from the heart of a woman for a societal recognition and for women’s emancipation. As for stylistics, the fact to move from a literal interpretation of this poem, to a connotative interpretation, then to a metaphorical one, and finally to a symbolical one; it plays of course for the stylistic and rhetorical analysis and interpretation of the poem.

This study will revolve around four parts which are: the literal interpretation, the connotative interpretation, the metaphorical interpretation and the symbolical interpretation. The first part, the literal meaning and interpretation corresponds to: motherhood and familial realities and women’s sufferings. The second part, the connotative meaning and interpretation corresponds to: familial ingratitude and societal ingratitude toward women. The third part, the metaphorical meaning and interpretation corresponds to: a cry from the heart of a woman for societal recognition and women’s emancipation. The fourth part, the symbolical meaning and interpretation corresponds to: human beings’ constant judgment of others in life through assessments and evaluations in terms of marks and opinions.

⁴ We mean the simple language of the poem.

⁵ Allegory: symbolic work: a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning. Allegory which encompasses such forms as fable, parable, and apologue, may have meaning on two or more levels that the reader can understand only through an interpretive process. <https://www.britannica.com/art/allegory-art-andliterature>.

Motherhood, familial realities and women's sufferings

Written in twelve verses, the poem entitled "Marks" by Linda Pastan explores topics like family life, motherhood, and more precisely the realities of a woman as a mother, a wife and a housewife in the familial context. It is indeed the story of a young wife and mother who describes the treatment she receives on the part of both her husband and her children at home:

V1 My husband gives me an A
 V2 for last night's supper,
 V3 an incomplete for my ironing,
 V4 a B plus in bed.
 V5 My son says I am average,
 V6 an average mother, but if
 V7 I put my mind to it
 V8 I could improve.
 V9 My daughter believes
 V10 in Pass/Fail and tells me
 V11 I pass. Wait 'til they learn
 V12 I'm dropping out [6].

Literary speaking, the first meaning and interpretation one can have reading this poem is that it is a poem in which the speaker (poet) who is a woman and namely a mother (qualified as "an average mother") relates her familial realities and problems by mentioning her husband ("My husband"), her son ("My son"), and her daughter ("My daughter") talking about their different behaviors toward her.

The familial context is well presented through the mother-speaker, and the poetic codes ("My husband", "My son", and "My daughter") which indicate that we have a family of four persons: a wife (the mother), a husband and two children. We can even talk about a complete family about gender balance with a female child and a male child as children.

The speaker and "plaintiff" being a woman, she talks about the behaviors and namely the bad behaviors of the different members of her family toward her starting by that of her husband, then that of her son and finally that of her daughter.

Given the pressure put on this young woman, mother, wife and housewife, the main characteristic of her dissatisfaction is their different bad behaviors toward her through her motherhood and familial activities, realities and sufferings.

Thanks to the testimony given by the mother-speaker, one can observe that motherhood and familial activities and realities are not simple ones and those realities seem difficult to bear for her as a wife, then as a housewife, then as a mother and finally as a woman. Because her account of the motherhood and familial activities and realities as a plaintiff sheds light on her sufferings and gives an insight into some uncountable, unacknowledged and unavowed difficulties of housewife or housewives.

Indeed, in this poem and through the account of her everyday life, one can observe that she is the one in charge of cooking (from breakfast, to lunch, and then to diner through the poetic code "night's supper"). She is also the one in charge of the chores or household (meaning all the ordinary household tasks even the unpleasant, difficult, or awkward such as "ironing", a poetic code that she uses to indicate and symbolize this set of activities). She is also the one in charge of satisfying her husband through the poetic code "bed" (meaning pregnancy and by giving birth that is why she has two children, a boy and a girl). She is the one in charge of taking care of their offspring (a son and a daughter), a job for which or a care for which she is constantly judged in terms of "average mother"⁷ and "Pass/Fail"[8].

The metonymic process [9] and system through which we are moved from an attribute of something ("night's supper") which is used to stand for the thing itself (Cooking); then an attribute of something else ("ironing") which is used to stand for the thing itself (Chores/household); then also an attribute of something such as ("bed") which is used to stand for the thing itself (Give birth); and finally an attribute of something such as ("average mother") which is used to stand for the thing itself (Taking care of offspring); may permit to draw the following metonymic table or scheme of correspondences in order to better understand the realities, activities and sufferings of this housewife.

⁷ That is what the boy says.

⁸ That is what the girl says.

⁹ A figure of speech in which an attribute of something is used to stand for the thing itself.

⁶ From *The Five Stages of Grief* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1978) Used with the author's permission.

ACTIVITY	Cooking	Chores/household	Give birth	Taking care of offspring
INDICATION	"night's supper"	"ironing"	"bed"	"average mother" who "Pass/Fail"
AMOUNT	1 st SET	2 nd SET	3 rd SET	4 th SET

*set: **collection considered as unit:** a collection of people or things considered together and usually having something in common

Being the one in charge of cooking, being the one in charge of the chores or household, being the one in charge of giving birth, being the one in charge of taking care of the offspring (four different sets of activities) and given the pressure put on her, we should really admit that she has so many to do because in reality she is the one in charge of everything in their home as a housewife, a wife, a mother and a woman.

And while at her own level, she realizes and is conscious that she has many to do because she is in charge of everything at home and tries her best to do them, unfortunately and contrary to the common sense, the other members of the family (her husband, son and daughter) do not care about the efforts she does every day to satisfy them, and all the different sets of activities she goes through every day.

Of course taking care of a husband (and you should sense everything), giving birth and taking care of offspring (a boy and a girl) and here also you should sense everything, then taking care of cooking (meaning everyday cooking), and at last taking care of the house, the chores and the environment (meaning all the activities involved in); all these represent many and really many things to do for only one person: a wife, a mother and a woman in her own family or in the familial context of a housewife. It is metaphorically speaking, a context of sufferings for her and a constant dissatisfaction when she refers to the different bad behaviors of the other members of her family and namely when she refers to the pressure put on her.

By induction, the motherhood, familial realities and sufferings of this woman in her family can be broadened to other families and motherhoods in which some other mothers, wives, housewives and women suffer the same realities, difficulties and conditions.

At a larger sphere, she presents through her motherhood and familial realities and sufferings, all the women's familial realities and sufferings in their own and different families and in their status of mothers, wives and housewives with their own families members. And from family to family, their realities, difficulties, conditions and sufferings become a societal reality and suffering.

When we consider that a mother, a wife, a housewife, a woman [10] at a smaller sphere suffers

¹⁰ Talking about the poet of the poem "Marks" or the speaker in the poem "Marks".

such familial realities and difficulties and when we consider that each woman in her familial context at a microcosm suffers such realities and difficulties, each microcosm helps constitute at a larger sphere a macrocosm therefore it becomes like a societal and general suffering and reality for women.

So in reality, many women are confronted to such sufferings and difficulties without ignoring the bad behavior and pressure of the other members of the same family [11], a bad behavior that we may qualify as ingratitude, therefore let us study the next point concerning the familial ingratitude and societal ingratitude toward women.

From familial ingratitude to societal ingratitude toward women

The relationship the rest of the family members have with the mother-speaker is most characterized in the context of this poem by the different value judgments they have on the mother, wife and housewife in accordance with all the activities she does at home. Those different value judgments are seen through the metaphor of grade in the poem because throughout the poem, the persona focuses on the criticisms she receives through grades, like one might receive in school. When describing her grades, she uses terms such as 'A' or 'B plus', 'incomplete', and 'improve', 'Pass/Fail'. Each of these terms are commonplace in a school setting. Pastan uses the grades a student would get in school to describe how her family measures her as a wife and a mom: "The poet adopts the grading metaphor in talking about how she is sick and tired of being evaluated at all turns[12]".

Indeed, when referring to the following different expressions or evaluation [13] and their syntax: "My husband gives me an A for last night's supper", "My husband gives me an incomplete for my ironing", "My husband gives me a B plus in bed", "My son says I am average", "My son says I am an average mother", "My son says if I put my mind to it I could improve", "My daughter believes in Pass/Fail", "My daughter tells me I pass"; we better understand this dreadful relationship of constant evaluations, value

¹¹ As it is the case in this poem with the ingratitude of her family members, an ingratitude which occasions the poet's unhappiness or dissatisfaction

¹² <http://poetry-fromthehart.blogspot.com/2011/07/marks-linda-pastan.html>

¹³ The précis of the different evaluations and assessments she goes through in the poem and in her familial context.

judgments, and criticisms through grades but also we better understand this atmosphere of constant pressure on the part of the other family members when they measure her as a wife, a mother, and a housewife.

Lines 1-4: Her husband grades her on every aspect of their home life and doesn't appreciate her, even though she tries her best. Lines 5-8: Her son thinks she is merely average and should try harder at mothering. Lines 9-11: Her daughter judges her harshly, but decides she does okay. Lines 11&12: She is no longer going to be performing these tasks for them [14].

It is clear that for all the activities she does, for all the efforts she does, and for all the contributions she has in her family, the only mercy [15] she receives is a mercy of constant value judgments, a mercy of constant assessments in terms of marks, a mercy of constant criticisms, and a mercy of constant evaluations. She is always graded or evaluated for the job she does and finally for all the jobs she does from cooking, to taking care of the chores or household and the environment, passing by giving birth, taking care of the offspring and her husband. And all these represent four (4) different big sets of activities for her alone as a housewife.

This poem uses a grading metaphor to illustrate how the speaker is constantly being evaluated by her family members. The speaker performs household duties, as well as spousal and parental activities, and receives little gratitude. It is unclear exactly whether the speaker wants freedom from having to perform these chores or if he simply wants to be appreciated. The lack of rhyme or rhythm in the poem expresses freedom in the writing. The speaker is going to either quit doing her "assignments" or leave her family altogether to escape their critiquing [16].

Her real value, the real appreciation of her importance and her important role, her very unavoidable contribution and place in this family are not well appreciated or are not well valued because people (meaning her own family members) are always judging her, marking her or grading her as if the great job she does is valuable in terms of marks or as if the great job she accomplishes can be evaluated with marks like in a context of a game or a joke.

However, the last few lines of the poem could be seen to symbolize more than just her dropping out. It

¹⁴ <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=f0da4ec77296d413aa1806eb3b31f4bef71eb20c>

¹⁵ something to be thankful for: a welcome event or situation that provides relief or prevents something unpleasant from happening.

¹⁶ <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=0d6df9a2dbf7a1573cfdbc5d874f9c268b346b3a>

could also say that she feels that her family needs to learn. Perhaps learn how she struggles each day and how their criticisms do not help her but hurt her [17].

It exist a kind of familial ingratitude toward her, a real non recognition of her true value and importance in this family as well as a mother, a wife, a housewife and a woman. People (meaning her family members) don't really value [18] all the responsibilities she copes with in her own family but in turn they judge her and mark her while she should normally be always appreciated, and congratulated for all the sacrifice which is taking care of the whole family, a family of four persons because she has to take care of herself also while taking care of them, the rest of the family (husband, daughter, and son).

The poem uses marks (or grades) as a metaphor. The use of grades as a metaphor in this poem makes it clear to us that as a mother she is constantly being judged on her performance. Instead of receiving thanks and praise for all that she does as a mother, she is constantly being assessed on how well she does it. All of her responsibilities as a mother are listed throughout the poem with a mark from her family to follow [19].

The descending gradation in the value of the different grades [20] or marks from A to incomplete, to B+ to average to improve to Pass/Fail shows the degrading appreciation, bad measurement, selfish judgment her own family members have toward her for all the great job she does in this family as a mother, as a wife, as a housewife and as a woman.

And this descending gradation is the visible evidence of their ingratitude toward her while the invisible evidence of their ingratitude toward her is the fact of evaluating her for jobs which are not evaluable, for jobs which should not be marked or graded. So instead of thanking her, instead of praising her for the great job she does for them, they have two kinds of ingratitude toward her, the visible ingratitude and the invisible ingratitude, the visible being the descending

¹⁷ "What Is The Theme Of The Poem Marks By Linda Pastan" on

<https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>

¹⁸ To know the real and true importance of someone or something.

¹⁹ [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)

²⁰ Another way we can see that the woman is basing her grades on a school scale is the terminology she uses. When describing her grades, she uses terms such as 'B plus', 'incomplete', and 'improve'. Each of these terms are commonplace in a school setting.

grades and the invisible being the fact of evaluating her every time for the different jobs which normally should not be evaluated, which normally are unevaluable:

My husband gives me an A
An incomplete for my ironing,
A B plus in bed.
My son says I am average,
My daughter believes
In Pass/Fail and tells me

Of course, she presents in a motherhood and familial realities the ingratitude [21] of her own family member's vis-à-vis her sufferings and difficulties but through her situation and experiences and at a larger sphere, it is the general ingratitude of the society toward women's sufferings and difficulties which is evoked. It is also the general ingratitude of the whole society toward women's status as mother, wife, and housewife for the important role they play and for the important value they have in the whole society.

When we imagine that the ingratitude she faces in her own family is the ingratitude faced by many women in their own family at different levels and areas in the world, we observe really the societal ingratitude toward women in general for the great job they play and contribution they have both in their respective families and in the society.

Stylistically speaking and namely in the form, the mother-speaker has respected a sort of equilibrium which is a quatrain for each member of her family [22], she has respected a quatrain per family member as far as each one is concerned in his bad way of behaving toward her, in his ingratitude toward her, in his different value judgments toward her.

That is why; the behavior, the reaction and the story about her husband's ingratitude ("My husband") are related in just four (4) verses from V1 to V4:

V1 My husband gives me an A
V2 for last night's supper,
V3 an incomplete for my ironing,
V4 a B plus in bed.

Also the behavior, the reaction and the story about her son's ingratitude ("My son") are related in just four (4) verses from V5 to verse V8 too:

V5 My son says I am average,
V6 An average mother, but if
V7 I put my mind to it

²¹ The ingratitude of the members of her family.

²² When she evoked her husband through the poetic code "my husband" we have four verses before she evoked in the fifth verse her son through the poetic code "my son" and when she evoked her son, we also have four verses before she evoked her daughter, at the ninth verse.

V8 I could improve.

And finally the behavior, the reaction and the story about her daughter's ingratitude ("My daughter") are related also in just four (4) verses from V9 to verse V12 likewise in the case of the two first members of the family:

V9 My daughter believes
V10 In Pass/Fail and tells me
V11 I pass. Wait 'til they learn
V12 I'm dropping out.

Such a balance in the number of verses (4 – 4 – 4) by family member is done or respected by the poet-speaker (the mother) to show that they have the same ingratitude toward her or in other words to show that it is the same amount and quality of ingratitude that they manifest toward her. The other interesting remark or observation is that each quatrain begins by a capital letter through the word "My" and end up by a full stop (.) at the fourth line: ("My husband gives ... a B plus in bed.", "My son says ... I could improve.", "My daughter believes ... I'm dropping out.") So in conclusion we can have the following scheme:

Husband's ingratitude = 4
Son's ingratitude = 4
Daughter's ingratitude = 4

By induction, the ingratitude of her family members can be broadened to other families and motherhoods in which some women suffer the same ingratitude on the part of the members of their respective families (meaning each mother suffers ingratitude on the part of the members of her own family). So in the different families all around the world:

EACH Husband's ingratitude = 4 = toward the MOTHER
EACH Son's ingratitude = 4 = toward the MOTHER
EACH Daughter's ingratitude = 4 = toward the MOTHER

At a larger sphere, she presents through her motherhood frustrations and familial ingratitude, all the women's familial ingratitude and frustrations in their own and different families and in their status as mothers, wives and housewives with their own family members. And from family to family, the ingratitude toward mothers, wives, housewives and women becomes a societal ingratitude toward women in general.

When we consider that a mother, a wife, a housewife, and a woman [23] at a smaller sphere is victim of such familial ingratitude and when we consider that each woman in her family at a microcosm is victim of such ingratitude, each microcosm of ingratitude helps constitute at a larger sphere a

²³ Talking about the poet of the poem "Marks" or the speaker in the poem "Marks".

macrocosm of ingratitude therefore ingratitude toward women becomes like a societal and general ingratitude toward women.

So in reality, many women are confronted to such ingratitude and frustration on the part of the other members of the same family [24] that is why this poem entitled "Marks" is indeed a cry from the heart of a woman for a societal recognition, and for women's emancipation in the society. Because we should celebrate women every day, congratulate them and praise them for all their sacrifice and contributions in both their respective families and in the society instead of evaluating them and manifesting ingratitude toward them, a bad behavior which constitutes a real frustration.

A cry from the heart for societal recognition, and women's emancipation

On the assumption that "this entire poem is one giant extended metaphor [25]", we can say that the metaphorical value of this poem resides in fact in what the poem itself represents as a message with its content and namely through the confession or testimony done by the mother-speaker-poet about what is going on in her family with her family members (husband, son, and daughter). Because the way the poem ends with the two last verses, an "ending with a dramatic statement that leaves the reader with multiple options for the outcome"[26], one can realize that the mother-speaker-poet is disappointed by the bad behavior and ingratitude and also wickedness of her family members. And many ideas in the poem reveal her feelings of disappointment at the end namely with the two last verses.

This aspect changes the overall tone of this poem into one of melancholy. The simple but fundamental fact to say "Wait 'til they learn / I'm dropping out" at the end of the poem, at the end of exposing her reality, her sufferings and conditions and her everyday situation or at the end of presenting the bad behavior and ingratitude of her family members; means that this poem is indeed a real cry from the heart of this woman.

So the metaphorical meaning or interpretation of this poem is that this poem corresponds exactly to a real cry from the heart of this mother-speaker or better "the giant extended metaphor of this entire poem" is

that it is a real cry from the heart of this mother-speaker or of this mother, wife, housewife and woman.

To create the metaphor the poem uses school jargon. Besides the grading systems, the speaker uses other school related language and ends the poem with "I'm dropping out" (line 12). This phrase brings to light the mother's irritation with the grading system in which she is constantly judged with. The way the system is forced upon her relates to the way schools force the compliance with a grading system on students. Just as a rebellious student who drops out of school, the concluding phrase suggests that she will no longer be subjected to the judgment of her family. The metaphor uses the familiar idea of grading systems to help the reader to visualize and think of how we feel about what motherhood entails [27].

As a message addressed to the whole society, this poem paints and presents in a simple but blunt way the woman condition in a familial context. This poem is therefore a cry from the heart of a woman for a societal recognition and for women's emancipation because this poem calls out for a change of the mother, wife, housewife and woman conditions in their familial context but also in the society in which they live.

The poem begins on a slightly happy note, a good grade she has received. Once we get into the second and third grades, we can easily see the decline of the happiness in the poem. As the poem progresses, the reader begins to realize that the persona of the poem is miserable and sad in her life [28].

The poem really calls for a change of the conditions or situations of the mother, wife, housewife and woman and calls for the need for women's emancipation thanks to the verse 11 and the verse 12: "Wait 'til they learn / I'm dropping out" because those last two lines are meant to be a turning point in the tone of the poem. In the end, we see that she has every reason to take whatever action is necessary to take back her life simply when "I imagine the speaker living a hard life, not with reference to physical labor, but in dealing with a high level of emotional stress. Any mother would be simply devastated if her husband constantly put her down, and her children said she was simply an "average" mom [29]".

²⁴ As it is the case in this poem with the ingratitude of her family members, an ingratitude which occasions the poet's unhappiness or dissatisfaction.

²⁵ <https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figures-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>

²⁶ "What Is The Theme Of The Poem Marks By Linda Pastan" on

<https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>

²⁷ [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)

²⁸ "What Is The Theme Of The Poem Marks By Linda Pastan" on

<https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>

²⁹ FIGURES OF SPEECH: AN ANALYSIS OF "MARKS" BY LINDA PASTAN

The cry from the heart of this mother-speaker is of great importance because what she says at the end of this poem calls out to any consciousness all around the world and in the society due to the fact that her decision “to drop out” derives from an experience, a long experience and also a familial experience meaning a real experience which is indeed an everyday experience with siblings and husband. That is why such ending with a dramatic statement that leaves the reader with multiple options for the outcome can be problematic for it is opened to two possible outcomes.

I see the ending as two possible outcomes. One possibility is that she commits suicide. She would not only drop out of being a wife and mother, but also out of life. Given the double meaning of the title “Marks”, this outcome is entirely plausible. If the title not only stood for grades, but also physical marks, the poem would serve as a kind of suicide note. However, I believe in the second option. I believe that the poem’s persona simply left her husband and children; with valid reason. After living many years with a family that still grades her actions and tells her that she is nothing better than average, any woman would find her breaking point. Since the children are able to speak and say the things they are saying [30].

When realizing that due to family members’ bad attitudes and ingratitude toward the mother-speaker, not valuing really her great contributions in our society and families, she is upset and her final conclusion is “Waiting ‘til they learn I’m dropping out.” We conclude that this poem metaphorically speaking is a real cry from the heart of a woman and a real call for women’s emancipation. And through such a poem we are all called to change our attitude toward our mother at home but also to change our attitude toward mothers, wives, housewives and women in general in our society because they do play a great role and have a great contribution.

We are also called to help them change their conditions, situations and even to help them emancipate or encourage them to emancipate. And in this concern, the societal recognition of women and the emancipation of women are fostered by the very last feeling of the poet with the very two last verses. This demonstrates how a verse in a poem may be powerful and meaningful in terms of content and convey a whole message. Because those two last verses translate the psychological status or state of mind or last thoughts of the mother-speaker about her conditions and it is the content of this psychological mind that we should by all

<https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figures-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>

³⁰ “What Is The Theme Of The Poem Marks By Linda Pastan” on

<https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>

the means avoid in terms of “melancholy”, “a persona miserable and sad in her life”, “a person who is about to commit suicide”, “a person who is about to drop out of being wife and mother”, “a person who is living hard life”, “a person dealing with a high level of emotional stress”, “a mother devastated”... as far as women are concerned. That is why one should remember that “Marks” was written in 1978 during the second wave of feminism. This was a time when mothers and wives were wanting more than the common domestic experience. Their discontent inspired their daughters to seek new direction [31].”

Society in general should avoid such a psychological status, such a state of mind by recognizing the great role and contribution of women in the society and by helping them emancipating because the feeling or expression “Wait ‘til they learn I’m dropping out” incorporates a plurality of sense and meaning but all in the bad way. What if all women think so? What if all women have the same psychological status due to the ingratitude of the society toward them? What if all women experience the same feeling?

In this poem as a critic may observe, “There are three different systems mentioned in the poem that are used to grade her. Her husband grades with letters, her son grades using a charting system, and her daughter uses a pass/fail method. These different systems represent the multiple standards in which she must meet [32].” The multiple systems or standards of grading used in this poem opens the way to all the systems or standards of grading but principally it opens the way to the major concept of human beings’ constant judgment of others anyway the evaluation system or the assessment methods.

Human beings’ constant judgement of others in life through assessments or evaluations in terms of marks and opinions

The symbolical value and meaning of this poem is that in life or in human society, human being is constantly judging others or making value judgments on others, human being is constantly assessing the others or evaluating the others, either in terms of marks, and either in terms of opinions. And if “There are three different systems mentioned in the poem that are used to grade her. Her husband grades with letters, her son grades using a charting system, and her daughter uses a pass/fail method. These different systems represent the

³¹ <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-lindapastan/?frame=dec363434250e0451b4366264931f6cdf7d7bc6f>

³² [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)

multiple standards in which she must meet [33].” It means that besides the grades with letters, the grades using a charting system and the grades using a pass/fail method; the society is full of standards, systems and methods of evaluation, assessment, and judgment. The poem being an extended metaphor about the value judgments other people have about some other people through the means of “marks”, the questions are “How do you feel about the portrayal of easy judgments like those portrayed in the poem?” or “Is it degrading to be judged by others?”

Aside from this philosophical undertone, here the judgment of the mother is made through grades or marks as the title of the poem recalls it. And this title is suitable to the poem through the presence of different marks (A - incomplete- B plus- average-) and the presence of opinion (Pass/Fail) evaluating, assessing, judging the work of the mother and the value and contribution of the mother in this family.

By an evaluation which symbolically moves from good (“A”) to bad (“fail”), we realize through those different marks and judgments that in the real life or in society, human beings are always judging, evaluating, assessing the others through their opinions and even sometimes with marks. Or better in a balanced view, in the real life and in our society we are always judging, evaluating, assessing and even marking each other for the job we do, for the role we play, for the value we have or may have, for something important that we do or for something non important that we do. And most of the time our opinions move from “this is good” to “this is bad”, from “A” to “Fail” and most of the time passing by “average”.

So in this general atmosphere and environment of constant judgment by others, those who “put their mind to it” [34] either “could improve” [35] or either can “drop out” [36]. And we realize at last that in reality, these are the two options: Either you fail or either you succeed. When you fail it means that you have abandoned, you have dropped out. And here in our context it is the final feeling of the mother in front of all these “marks”. When you succeed it means that you have “kept on” as The Negro Mother advises her Negroes sons “to keep on” [37] in front of difficult

³³[http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)

³⁴ “but if I put my mind to it”

³⁵ “but if I put my mind to it I could improve.”

³⁶ “Wait ‘til they learn I’m dropping out.”

³⁷ An expression of courage used by The Negro Mother to teach the Negroes sons about the difficulties of life and difficulties in life. This expression is used in the poem entitled “The Negro Mother”, a poem by Langston Hughes.

times and difficulties. But here in the poem “Marks”, unfortunately it is not the final feeling of the mother, the wife, the housewife, and the woman in front of all these “marks” because she says clearly: “Wait ‘til they learn I’m dropping out.”

It means that at this high level of pressure and frustration, it is a matter of moral strength. It is a matter of psychological forces meaning the psychological dispositions of the one in charge of bearing this atmosphere and environment of constant judgment, constant evaluation, constant assessment, and constant opinions by others.

One major aspect that one may retain from this interesting poem entitled “Marks” is that on the anthropological level, this poem teaches people how human beings in general are or react and how human society functions because human beings are always judging the others in terms of opinions. Human beings are always evaluating the others in terms of marks and in terms of good / bad/ acceptable as far as those marks are concerned.

It is the way of life and human society standards are constructed this way. That is why there are always tests to assess and to differentiate people and that is why there are always exams or value judgments either to appreciate, either to depreciate someone or his contribution to society or his contribution to others. Those who have moral strength succeed by overcoming all those judgments but those who don’t have moral strength or enough moral strength do not succeed and collapse or give up forever and in our context; they “drop out”.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has been done from a microcosm (the familial sphere and context of the woman, mother, wife and housewife who is the speaker in this poem) to a macrocosm (the societal sphere of women, mothers, wives and housewives in general). And at the end of this analysis, one realizes that this poem is a real cry from the heart of a woman for a societal recognition and for women’s emancipation because of the ingratitude of family members which at a macrocosm represents also the ingratitude of the whole society toward women (meaning the ingratitude of society toward women’s great contribution, importance and place in the society).

“Out of the screams and shouts of women demanding liberation rises the clear, true voice of Linda Pastan, who, seemingly, through love and intelligence and a sure sense of her craft, has been liberated all along.” — Mona Van Duyn

“It is above all her integrity that has made Linda Pastan such a rewarding poet. Nothing is here for effect. There is no self-pity, but in this new book she has reached

down to a deeper layer and is letting the darkness in." —May Sarton [38].

It also (the poem) sheds light on women familial realities, sufferings and conditions as mothers, wives and housewives and it shows how motherhood is sometimes or most of the time difficult but in contrary suffers from non-recognition.

To sum up, one may retain that in this lyrical poem where she shares with readers her familial realities and everyday life of a mother, there are for important messages and meanings conveyed. Firstly, through this ironic style one observes the depiction of household's sufferings, motherhood realities and conditions and women's sufferings.

Secondly, this simple and ironic depiction is a metaphor to indicate or denounce the ingratitude of family members but also to denounce societal ingratitude toward women. Thirdly, taken as a whole, the poem itself is a big or extended metaphor representing or corresponding to a real cry from the heart of a woman for societal recognition and women's emancipation. Then fourthly, this poem means symbolically human beings' constant judgments of others in life and in society through assessments and evaluations in terms of marks and opinions.

The theory of Feminism therefore plays for the cry from the heart of the woman for societal recognition of women, and for women emancipation while Psychoanalysis plays for the moral strength and the need for moral strength or psychological forces to cope with all those criticisms, value judgments, prejudices, evaluations ("marks") done by the society but also it plays for the moral strength or psychological forces for overcoming all those criticisms, value judgments, prejudices, evaluations and "marks" also. The theory of Sociocriticism plays for the bad behavior the whole society deserves to women but especially to motherhood from a familial sphere to a community sphere to a societal sphere with its components of ingratitude, frustrations, wickedness and non-recognition of their great role, contributions, jobs, sacrifice and place both in family and in society.

As a remembrance, one should know that stereotypes and prejudices have been the plinth of the relationship between white people and black people at the very beginning when black people were confronted to any kind of value judgments by white people. And today, any human relationship is based or accompanied by value judgments; it is the way in today's society and with today's societal system everywhere in the world. That is the reality and that is the way the society

functions. Can the poem "Marks" helps us change the paradigm [39] on which human appreciation or better our appreciation of each other (one another) is focused on namely our appreciation of women and their role in the society? It will be difficult to succeed this project. While resolving this serious problem some fail under the weight of criticisms and value judgments and also some succeed. And in our concrete case, the mother seems to give up.

REFERENCES

1. Backry, P. (1996). *Les figures de styles*. Berlin, Paris.
2. Barry, P. (1995). *Beginning theory, An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Second edition. © Peter Barry.
3. Beugré, S. (2014). *La Perception des Blancs dans la Poésie de Claude McKay et Langston Hughes*. Bouake: Université Alassane Ouattara.
4. Chadwick, C. (1971). *Symbolism*. London: Methuen.
5. Cohen, J. (1966). *Structure du Langage poétique*. Paris : Flammarion.
6. Durand, G. (2003). *L'imagination symbolique*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, Collection Quadrige Grands textes.
7. Escarpit, R. (1970). *Le littéraire et le social*. Paris: Flammarion.
8. Franklin, B. (1981). "Theme and Structure in Linda Pastan's Poetry" In: *Poet Lore*, 75(4). 234 – 241.
9. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (1982). *L'art de comprendre. Herméneutique et tradition philosophique*. :Aubier Montaigne.
10. Grondin, J. (1993). *L'universalité de l'herméneutique*. Paris, Epiméthée, P.U.F.
11. Grondin, Jean. (2006). *L'herméneutique*. PUF, "Que sais-je ?".
12. <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=dec363434250e0451b4366264931f6cdf7d7bc6f>
13. <https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figure-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>
14. <https://www.britannica.com/art/allegory-art-andliterature>.
15. <http://poetry-fromthehart.blogspot.com/2011/07/marks-linda-pastan.html>
16. <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=f0da4ec77296d413aa1806eb3b31f4bef71eb20c>

³⁸ <https://www.norton.co.uk/books/9780393044942-the-five-stages-of-grief>

³⁹ Model that forms basis of something: an example that serves as a pattern or model for something, especially one that forms the basis of a methodology or theory.

17. <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-linda-pastan/?frame=0d6df9a2dbf7a1573cfdbc5d874f9c268b346b3a>
18. <https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>
19. [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)
20. <https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figures-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>
21. <https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>
22. [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)
23. <https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>
24. <https://emmasuber.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/figures-of-speech-an-analysis-of-marks-by-linda-pastan/>
25. <https://www.cram.com/essay/What-Is-The-Theme-Of-The-Poem/PKZCH3XKGY3W>
26. <https://prezi.com/piyovrxb4aso/marks-by-lindapastan/?frame=dec363434250e0451b4366264931f6cdf7d7bc6f>
27. [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)
28. [http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20\(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.](http://mollymcpoetry.blogspot.com/2014/11/language-marks-by-linda-pastan.html#:~:text=The%20poem%20uses%20marks%20(or,how%20well%20she%20does%20it.)
29. <https://wnorton.co.uk/books/9780393044942-the-five-stages-of-grief>
30. Ingersoll, Earl (ed.), Kitchen, Judith (ed.), Rubin, Stan (ed.). (1989). "Whatever is at Hand. A Conversation with Linda Pastan" in *The Post-Confessionals: Conversations with American Poets of the Eighties*. New York: Associated University Press. pp 135 – 149.
31. Joubert, J. L. (1998). *La poésie*. Paris : Armand Colin.
32. Kayra, E. (1998). *Le langage, la poésie et la traduction poétique ou une approche scientifique de la traduction poétique* In *Meta : journal des traducteurs*, Vol.43, n° 2.
33. Kristeva, J. (1974). *La révolution du langage poétique*. Paris : Seuil.
34. Luyczynskin, P. (1965). *Poésie et Symbole*. Paris: Librairie Decom.
35. Mishkin, T. (2004). "Aspects of Eve: The Garden of Eden in the Poetry of Linda Pastan". In: Behlau, Ulrike (ed.), Reitz, Bernhard (ed.). *Jewish Women's Writing of the 1990s and Beyond*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag. 95-103.
36. Pastan, L. (1978). *The Five Stages of Grief*. (W.W. Norton & Co.).
37. Suhamy, H. (1992). *Les figures du style*. Paris, PUF.
38. Vaillant, A. (1992). *La poésie, initiation aux méthodes d'analyse des textes poétiques*. Paris: Nathan.
39. Valery, P. (1942). *Poésies*. Paris, Gallimard.
40. Zima, P. (1985). *Manuel de la Sociocritique*. Paris: Picard.