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Symbolism and Irony in *I Got Flowers Today*: Tragic Domestic Love Cycle

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Abstract: This study attempts to analyze Paulette Kelly's poem *I Got Flowers Today* focusing on the tragic cycle of love and domestic violence as revealed through symbolism and irony. Domestic violence in the poem is portrayed as a continuous cycle involving verbal abuse, physical violence, emotional manipulation, economic dependence, and psychological fear rather than a sudden act. This study examines three main questions: the causes of domestic violence in Paulette Kelly's *I Got Flowers Today*, the use of symbolism and irony to portray abusive relationship patterns, and the effects of violence on the victim. The research applies a qualitative descriptive approach through text-based analysis. The primary data source is the poem *I Got Flowers Today*, while secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and theories related to New Criticism, symbolism, irony, and domestic violence. The analysis is conducted through close reading by applying Cleanth Brooks' theory of symbolism and irony, supported by Laurence Perrine's concept of poetry. The findings reveal that flowers function as a central symbol representing false love, emotional manipulation, and ultimately death, while irony appears through the contrast between romantic gestures and acts of violence. The poem also depicts the severe emotional, psychological, physical, and social effects of domestic violence on the victim, which ultimately lead to the loss of freedom and life. This study concludes that *I Got Flowers Today* is not only a literary work but also a powerful social criticism that raises awareness of domestic violence and challenges the romanticization of abuse in society.

Keyword: Domestic Violence, Symbolism, Irony, Poetry, New Criticism

INTRODUCTION

In societies, violence within intimate relationships is often hidden behind closed doors, dismissed as a private matter rather than addressed as a serious social issue. Despite growing awareness, domestic violence continues to thrive in silence, shaped by cultural norms, gender inequality, and emotional manipulation. As a result, victims are frequently trapped in cycles of harm that remain invisible to the public eye. In my view, literature has a unique power to break this silence. By presenting the emotional and psychological realities of abuse, literary works not only reflecting the lived experiences of victims but also challenge societal complicity. One

such work is Paulette Kelly's *I Got Flowers Today*, a poignant poem that transcends mere artistic expression to become a powerful voice for victims (Zahra & Prasetyo, 2020a).

Domestic violence is not just a personal problem, but a serious issue in society that shows complicated problems in culture, emotions, and systems. Many believe that literature can help people understand these problems better because it shows real human experiences and feelings. The poem "I Got Flowers Today" by Paulette Kelly is not only a work of art, but also a strong message that makes readers think about the reality of abuse. This kind of literary work is important because it helps people understand what victims go through and encourages conversations that can lead to more awareness, support, and positive change.

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue, affecting one in three women worldwide, according to (UN Women, 2022). In the United States, Nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV). This equates to over 10 million victims annually, with many cases involving a complex interplay of love, control, and harm. American cultural narratives, often romanticized in media, can inadvertently normalize abusive dynamics by equating gestures like giving flowers with reconciliation, even after acts of violence.

Literature and society share a dynamic, reciprocal relationship, where each influences the other in profound ways. In one hand, literature serves as a mirror, reflecting the social, cultural, and psychological realities of its time. In line with this, (Wellek & Warren, 1949) emphasize in Theory of Literature, literature is deeply rooted in the society it reflects, often critiquing and reshaping societal norms through its narratives. Paulette Kelly's "I Got Flowers Today" captures the silent yet pervasive issue of domestic violence, illustrating how abuse is often cloaked in gestures of love. (Brooks, 1947) also highlights in *The Well Wrought Urn* that the use of literary devices like irony and symbolism enables texts to reveal profound truths about human conditions.

Literature has long served as a medium to critique such societal issues, as can be seen in Kelly's "I Got Flowers Today" vividly captures the paradox of love and violence, where flowers symbols of affection ironically mark acts of harm. This ironic juxtaposition, deeply symbolic, reflects the real life dynamics of abusive relationships, resonating strongly with both global and American contexts. By analyzing Kelly's use of symbolism and irony, this study aims to illuminate the psychological and emotional toll of domestic violence, fostering greater understanding of a universal yet deeply personal issue.

"Today" transcends the boundaries of personal expression to become a powerful tool for advocacy. It has been used in domestic violence awareness campaigns, workshops, and educational programs to evoke empathy and encourage conversations about abuse. The poem's evocative use of symbolism and irony not only fosters a deeper understanding of the victim's perspective but also challenges readers to question societal complicity in normalizing abusive relationships.

The theme of domestic violence has been a crucial in literature and pop culture, serving as both a reflection of societal issues and a medium for advocacy. Other literary works such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker explore the devastating effects of abusive relationships. These texts reveal the psychological trauma and systemic inequalities that perpetuate cycles of violence, emphasizing the complexity and pervasiveness of the issue. Much like Paulette Kelly's poignant poem *I Got Flowers Today* (Kelly, 1992), which starkly captures the silent suffering of abuse victims.

In pop culture, the theme is similarly explored in films and music. Movies such as *It Ends with Us* and *The Invisible Man* depict women navigating and escaping abusive relationships, portraying the courage required to break free while also highlighting societal failures in addressing domestic violence (Baldoni, 2024; Whannell, 2020). In music, songs like *Praying* by Kesha and *Your Power* by Billie Eilish present powerful narratives about abuse,

using emotional depth and symbolism to engage audiences and raise awareness (Eilish, 2021; Kesha, 2017)

These examples, like Kelly's poem, share a common purpose: to give voice to victims and shed light on a deeply ingrained societal issue. Kelly's "I Got Flowers Today" stands out for its simplicity and emotional resonance, using the universal symbolism of flowers to underscore the tragic juxtaposition of love and violence. This connection between literary and pop cultural representations demonstrates the widespread relevance of the topic and reinforces the role of art in fostering awareness and prompting change.

The primary object of analysis for this study is Paulette Kelly's poem "I Got Flowers Today," a compelling piece of literature that vividly portrays the tragic cycle of love and domestic violence. The poem uses simple yet evocative language, making it accessible while deeply resonating with readers. Structured as a first person narrative, the speaker recounts receiving flowers on several occasions after acts of love, apologies for abuse, and ultimately, as a funeral offering. This repetition highlights the irony and symbolism central to the poem: flowers, traditionally symbols of love and affection, become haunting reminders of harm and loss. (Kelly, 1992)

What makes "I Got Flowers Today" particularly compelling is its ability to condense a complex, deeply emotional issue into a brief yet impactful piece. The poem's use of irony juxtaposing the beauty of flowers with the ugliness of abuse draws attention to the emotional manipulation that often traps victims in abusive relationships. Moreover, the symbolism in the poem reflects universal dynamics of domestic violence, where love and violence coexist in a cycle that is difficult to escape. Several studies have also examined domestic violence using different theoretical perspectives. For example, a study by (Dobash & Dobash, 1979) explores domestic violence through a sociological lens, focusing on how gender roles and power imbalances within patriarchal systems contribute to abuse. Their research reveals that many victims stay in abusive relationships not only because of emotional attachment but also due to social expectations, economic dependence, and fear of social stigma (Zahra & Prasetyo, 2020).

One example is the study by Lee & Zhang (2013) in their study titled "The Hidden Language of Affection: Symbolic Gestures in Abusive Intimate Relationships," that examines the emotional impact of symbolic gestures within abusive dynamics. They emphasize how commonly romantic symbols such as flowers can be weaponized as tools of psychological manipulation. Their findings reinforce the symbolic reading of Kelly's poem, illustrating how victims may feel disoriented when acts of violence are masked by seemingly affectionate behavior (Williams, 1947).

Similarly, (Martínez & Cohen, 2016), through their research "Narrative Therapy and Literary Reflection: Healing Trauma Through Poetic Expression," explore the role of literature and narrative therapy in the trauma recovery process of abuse survivors. They argue that literary works which mirror the emotional realities of victims can assist in emotional healing and help survivors articulate their pain. This aligns with the therapeutic power of *I Got Flowers Today*, which conveys unspoken trauma in a brief yet impactful poetic form (Kelly, 1992).

By engaging with both literary and social science research, this study puts *I Got Flowers Today* as a meaningful intersection of art and advocacy. The poem not only conveys emotional truths through literary devices but also resonates with ongoing academic conversations about abuse, trauma, and cultural complicity. This study examines the poem's literary devices, particularly symbolism and irony, to reveal how they contribute to its emotional impact and thematic depth. By exploring these elements, the analysis aims to demonstrate how literature can illuminate societal issues, foster empathy, and provoke critical reflection (Martínez & Cohen, 2022b).

METHOD

This study uses a text analysis approach combined with New Criticism, specifically drawing on Cleanth Brooks' concepts of symbolism and irony, to analyze Paulette Kelly's poem "*I Got Flowers Today*". The text analysis approach focuses on closely examining the language, structure, and literary devices within the poem to uncover its deeper meanings, without relying on external factors such as the author's background or historical context. The researcher **does** analysis on the symbolic use of flowers in the poem as representations of both love and harm, and the ironic juxtaposition of gestures of affection with acts of violence. This reflects the dissonance between societal ideals of romantic love and the harsh realities of abusive relationships (Lee & Zhang, 2013).

Investigating how the repetition of receiving flowers marks critical moments in the cycle of abuse, symbolizing the interplay of hope, despair, and ultimate tragedy. Exploring how the poem's language, structure, and imagery work together to critique societal norms that perpetuate abuse and to highlight the emotional struggles of victims. By using Cleanth Brooks' theoretical lens, this study aims to demonstrate how "*I Got Flowers Today*" achieves a powerful emotional and thematic impact through its use of symbolism and irony. This approach highlights the poem's literary depth and its role as a medium for raising awareness and challenging societal norms surrounding domestic violence (Andrews et al., 2024).

The data of this study are collected from the primary source : Paulette Kelly's poem "*I Got Flowers Today*." The data collection process involves notetaking and categorizing literary elements that support the analysis of symbolism and irony. Secondary data such as books, journal articles, and credible online sources related to New Criticism, symbolism, irony, and domestic violence in literature are also used to strengthen the theoretical foundation and interpretation of the poem. (Zahra & Prasetyo, 2020)

The collected data are analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method based on the principles of New Criticism. The researcher applies close reading to examine how Paulette Kelly's use of diction, imagery, and repetition contributes to the poem's symbolic and ironic layers. Each element is interpreted in relation to Cleanth Brooks' concepts of unity, tension, and paradox, ensuring that the analysis focuses on the text itself rather than external contexts. Through this approach, the study demonstrates how symbolism and irony interact to express the theme of love intertwined with domestic violence, leading to a holistic understanding of the poem's meaning and emotional impact (Maity, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Causes of Domestic Violence in the Poem

Domestic violence in *I Got Flowers Today* is presented through the speaker's personal narration. Each stanza reveals different forms of abuse that together show the causes of violence in the relationship. By examining the stanzas and specific lines, the root causes can be clearly identified.

Verbal Abuse

One of the main causes of domestic violence presented in *I Got Flowers Today* is verbal abuse. This reflects how domestic violence often develops in stages, beginning with emotional and psychological abuse before escalating into physical violence. This reflects how domestic violence often develops in stages, beginning with emotional and psychological abuse before escalating into physical violence (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007).

Verbal abuse appears in Stanza 2, lines 1–2:

*"We had our first argument last night,
And he said a lot of cruel things that really hurt."*

These lines show that violence begins with verbal aggression. The phrase “*cruel things*” indicates intentional emotional harm. This is not a normal argument but both verbal and psychological abuse. The speaker admits that the words “*really hurt*,” showing deep emotional pain (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015).

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979) in their book *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, verbal abuse is one of the earliest forms of domestic violence. They explain that abusive men often use insults, humiliation, and harsh language to weaken their partner’s self-esteem before using physical force. This stanza reflects that theory clearly because the emotional attack appears before physical violence.

Physical Violence as Power Domination

Physical violence in domestic relationships is closely connected to unequal power relations. This aligns with feminist theories of domestic violence, particularly those proposed by Dobash and Dobash, who argue that violence against women is rooted in power imbalance and patriarchal control rather than momentary loss of temper.

This form of violence is clearly illustrated in in Stanza 3, lines 1–2:

*“Last night he threw me into a wall
And started to choke me.”*

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979), physical violence in domestic abuse functions as a method of enforcing obedience and fear. The abuser uses bodily harm to demonstrate authority and to remind the victim of her vulnerability. The stanza reflects this theory clearly, as the speaker is physically overpowered and placed in a position of helplessness.

The poem further reveals the escalation of violence, showing how abuse becomes increasingly dangerous over time. This progression is evident in Stanza 4, lines 1–2:

*“Last night he beat me
And threatened to kill me.”*

In this stanza, violence reaches a more extreme and alarming level. The act of beating indicates repeated and sustained physical harm, while the threat to kill introduces intense psychological terror. This combination of physical assault and death threats demonstrates that domestic violence is systematic and continuous rather than accidental. The abuser not only harms the victim’s body but also instills constant fear to maintain control.

Overall, the physical violence depicted in these stanzas confirms Dobash and Dobash’s argument that domestic abuse is rooted in domination rather than spontaneous anger. The poem illustrates how physical force and psychological threats work together to silence the victim and sustain the abuser’s authority.

Emotional Manipulation through Apology

The poem demonstrates that emotional manipulation follows every act of violence, forming a repetitive cycle of abuse and reconciliation. By placing the same line at the end of several stanzas, the poet emphasizes that apologies are not signs of genuine remorse but part of a systematic strategy to maintain control. This emotional tactic makes the victim believe that the abuser has changed, which weakens her ability to leave the relationship. Emotional manipulation, therefore, becomes one of the strongest forces that traps the victim in an abusive situation.

This manipulation is symbolized through the repeated line in Stanza 1, 2, 3, and 4, line 3:

“Because he sent me flowers today.”

The repetition of this sentence in Stanzas 1, 2, 3, and 4 highlights a clear pattern: violence is always followed by apology. The flowers function as a symbolic tool of manipulation, representing false affection and temporary kindness. Rather than correcting his behavior, the abuser uses gifts to erase the memory of violence and to control the victim's emotions. The repeated use of the word "today" also suggests immediacy, showing how quickly abuse is covered up by superficial gestures of regret.

The victim believes the apology appears in Stanza 2, lines 4-5:

*"I know he must be sorry
Because he sent me flowers today."*

According to Lee and Zhang (2013) in their article *Emotional Dependence and Intimate Partner Violence* (Journal of Family Violence), victims often stay in abusive relationships because of emotional dependence and hope for change. They explain that abusers use apologies and gifts to rebuild trust temporarily. This theory matches the poem because the victim believes the flowers mean true regret, even though the violence continues

Economic Dependence

According to M. H. Abrams (1992), literature reflects human experience by presenting characters' emotions, thoughts, and internal conflicts through language. Meaning in a literary work can be understood by examining how a character's inner state is revealed through expression rather than explicit explanation. In this poem, the victim's fear of economic survival represents an internal conflict that influences her actions and decisions. The speaker's hesitation to leave the abuser is shaped by anxiety about responsibility, stability, and the future.

This condition is clearly shown in Stanza 5, lines 1-3. This condition is clearly shown in Stanza 5, lines 1-3:

*"If I leave him, what will I do?
How will I take care of the kids?
What about money?"*

These lines express the victim's financial fear through a series of rhetorical questions. The repetition of questions highlights uncertainty and helplessness, showing that the victim feels she has no control over her future. The mention of children increases the emotional burden, while the concern about money reveals economic dependence as a central obstacle. Rather than focusing on escaping violence, the victim prioritizes survival and responsibility, which reflects how economic insecurity suppresses resistance.

Overall, economic dependence in *I Got Flowers Today* demonstrates that domestic violence is sustained not only through physical or emotional abuse, but also through internalized fear and responsibility. Through the victim's thoughts and emotional expressions, the poem reveals how financial insecurity becomes a powerful force that prevents escape and maintains the cycle of abuse.

Fear and Emotional Conflict

In the poem, emotional conflict is presented through the speaker's honest and direct admission of her feelings. Rather than expressing anger or resistance, the victim acknowledges her fear while simultaneously admitting her dependence. This contradiction shows that domestic violence affects the victim's psychological state, creating confusion, paralysis, and emotional entrapment. The coexistence of fear and attachment reflects the complexity of abusive relationships, where love and danger exist side by side.

This emotional conflict is clearly shown in Stanza 5, lines 4-5:

"I'm afraid of him,

But I depend on him.”

These lines explicitly reveal the victim’s internal struggle. The word “afraid” indicates awareness of danger and recognition of abuse, while the phrase “depend on him” shows emotional and psychological attachment. The conjunction “but” emphasizes contradiction, highlighting the tension between fear and reliance. This conflict explains why the victim remains in the relationship despite understanding the risk.

According to Herman (1992) in *Trauma and Recovery*, victims of prolonged abuse often develop fear-based attachment and learned helplessness. Continuous exposure to violence conditions victims to perceive escape as difficult or dangerous. Fear becomes normalized, and dependence replaces resistance. This theory explains the victim’s emotional state in the poem, as she remains attached to the abuser even while recognizing the threat he poses.

Symbolism

In *I Got Flowers Today*, the image of flowers functions as a central symbol that represents false love and emotional manipulation rather than genuine affection. The poem deliberately uses flowers to contrast romantic expectations with the reality of abuse, revealing how affectionate gestures are used to conceal violence and regain control over the victim. Through repetition, the symbol of flowers emphasizes the cyclical nature of abuse, in which apology and affection repeatedly follow acts of violence.

This symbolic pattern is clearly shown in in Stanza 1 to Stanza 6, line 1 :

“ I got flowers today”

According to Carl Jung (1964) in *Man and His Symbols*, symbols carry deeper psychological meanings formed by human experience. In this poem, flowers become a psychological symbol of fake remorse. They are no longer romantic but representing control and deception. The repeated use of flowers shows how the victim is emotionally trapped by false apologies.

In the final part of *I Got Flowers Today*, the meaning of flowers undergoes a significant transformation. Previously associated with false love and manipulation, flowers in the last stanza symbolize death and finality. This shift in meaning emphasizes the tragic consequence of repeated abuse that has been ignored and normalized. By presenting flowers in the context of the victim’s funeral, the poem reveals the ultimate outcome of the cycle of domestic violence.

This symbolic meaning is clearly expressed in Stanza 6, lines 1–3.

*“Today was a special day,
It was the day of my funeral.”*

According to Jung (1964), symbols can evolve based on context. This final appearance of flowers shows the tragic result of abuse. The symbol reaches its climax here and delivers the strongest message to readers.

Irony

One stanza that most clearly represents this situational irony appears in Stanza 3, where severe physical violence is directly followed by the giving of flowers:

*“I got flowers today!
It wasn’t our anniversary or any other special day;
Last night he threw me into a wall and then started choking me;
It seemed unreal, a nightmare, but you wake up from nightmares;
And I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over*

*but I know he is sorry.
Because he sent me flowers today.”*

This situation is ironic because flowers are usually given on happy occasions. However, in the poem, they are given after violence. This creates situational irony. Readers expect love, but they see pain instead. This contrast shocks readers and exposes the abuser’s hypocrisy.

According to Abrams (1999) in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, situational irony happens when there is a contradiction between expectation and reality. In this poem, the expectation of romance is broken by the reality of abuse.

The final stanza of *I Got Flowers Today* presents tragic irony by revealing the ultimate consequence of repeated abuse. Throughout the poem, flowers function as false apologies that temporarily cover violence, but in the ending, this pattern reaches a devastating conclusion. The reader expects reconciliation or change, yet instead encounters death. This reversal between expectation and outcome creates tragic irony, as the symbol of affection appears at the moment of the victim’s funeral. The ending exposes the painful truth that forgiveness and hope, when placed in an abusive relationship, can lead to irreversible loss and fatal consequences. This tragic irony is clearly presented in Stanza 6 :

*”I got flowers today.
Today was a special day
it was the day of my funeral;
Last night he killed me;
If only I would have gathered the courage and strength to leave him;
I could have received help from the Women’s Shelter, but I didn’t ask for their help;
So I got flowers today for the last time.”*

This Stanza shows tragic and irony. The abuser finally gives flowers sincerely, but the victim is already dead. The apology comes too late. Readers realize that all previous forgiveness has led to fatal consequences. This ending creates strong emotional shock and emphasizes the danger of ignoring domestic violence. According to Cleanth Brooks (1947) in *The Well Wrought Urn*, irony is central to poetry because it reveals deeper truth through contradiction. The tragic irony in the final stanza forces readers to understand the seriousness of abuse.

The Effects of Domestic Violence on the Victim

Domestic violence in *I Got Flowers Today* leads to serious emotional, psychological, and physical consequences for the victim. These impacts are clearly reflected in the speaker’s narration across several stanzas, showing how the abuse gradually damages her self-worth, creates fear and trauma, and causes physical harm. Over time, the victim becomes trapped in a cycle of dependence and helplessness, highlighting the long-term and devastating effects of continuous abuse.

Emotional Suffering and Loss of Self Worth

The emotional suffering and loss of self-worth experienced by the victim are clearly reflected in her internal response to abuse. In *I Got Flowers Today*, the poem shows that repeated violence gradually weakens the victim’s emotional resistance and alters her understanding of love. Rather than questioning the abuse, the victim interprets symbolic gestures as proof of affection and remorse. This indicates that her sense of self-worth has been damaged, as she accepts apology in place of safety and respect.

This emotional condition is explicitly shown in Stanza 2, lines 4–5, where the speaker states:

*“I know he must be sorry,
Because he sent me flowers today.”*

These lines reveal the victim's emotional dependence and vulnerability. The phrase "I know he must be sorry" shows certainty without evidence of behavioral change, while the reason given "Because he sent me flowers today" demonstrates how the victim equates symbolic gestures with genuine regret. This reflects emotional suffering, as the victim values the abuser's apology more than her own safety.

According to M. H. Abrams (1999), literary texts express deeper meanings through characters' emotional responses and internal thoughts. In this stanza, the victim's acceptance of apology functions as a reflection of her damaged self-worth. Her emotional voice reveals inner conflict and psychological dependence, allowing readers to understand her suffering beyond the literal events of violence (Martínez & Cohen, 2022a).

In addition, this emotional response aligns with the *cycle of violence* discussed by Dobash and Dobash (1979), where the reconciliation phase involves apology and affection that reinforce emotional attachment. The victim's acceptance of the apology indicates that her self-worth has been eroded, causing her to normalize abuse and lower her expectations of love.

Through close textual analysis, this stanza demonstrates that domestic violence not only causes physical harm but also deeply damages the victim's emotional strength and self-respect. The poem reveals how emotional suffering leads to dependence, forgiveness, and acceptance of abuse as part of love (Ma, 2023).

Fear and Psychological Trauma

Fear and psychological trauma are clearly portrayed in *I Got Flowers Today* through the victim's emotional confession. The poem shows that prolonged exposure to violence creates a deep psychological impact that controls the victim's thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Fear becomes an internal condition that limits her ability to act freely, while emotional and economic dependence strengthen her sense of powerlessness. Through simple but direct language, the poem reveals how trauma develops not only from physical harm, but from continuous fear and emotional pressure within the abusive relationship (Abrams, 1999).

This psychological condition is explicitly shown in Stanza 5, lines 4–5:

*"I'm afraid of him,
But I depend on him."*

These lines reveal a clear inner conflict. The victim is aware of the danger, as shown by the word "*afraid*," yet she remains dependent on the abuser. The conjunction "*but*" highlights contradiction, showing that fear and attachment exist simultaneously. This emotional tension reflects psychological trauma, as the victim feels trapped and unable to make independent decisions. Fear controls her behavior and creates emotional paralysis.

From a literary perspective, this trauma is conveyed through the speaker's emotional expression. As explained by (GBD 2023 Collaborators, 2025), literature reveals deeper meaning through characters' internal states and emotional responses. In this stanza, the victim's fear and dependence represent the psychological damage caused by sustained abuse, allowing readers to understand the invisible impact of domestic violence beyond physical injuries.

Physical Injury and Pain

Physical injury and pain are the most concrete and visible effects of domestic violence depicted in *I Got Flowers Today*. The repeated physical attacks illustrate how the victim's body becomes a site of continuous suffering.

This physical abuse is clearly shown in Stanza 3, lines 1–2, where the speaker states:

*"Last night he threw me into a wall
And started to choke me."*

According to Zahra and Prasetyo (2020), modern poetry that addresses domestic violence often uses direct diction and physical imagery to reveal emotional trauma and power imbalance within abusive relationships. They argue that explicit descriptions of bodily harm function to confront readers with the reality of violence and to emphasize the seriousness of abuse. This theory clearly applies to the stanza, as the poet uses straightforward language to depict physical injury and expose the unequal power relation between the abuser and the victim.

Overall, this stanza demonstrates that physical injury and pain are central effects of domestic violence in *I Got Flowers Today*. The poem uses direct physical imagery to reveal the destructive impact of abuse and to emphasize that the victim's body is constantly at risk within the cycle of violence.

Social Isolation and Shame

Social isolation and shame are common psychological effects experienced by victims of domestic violence. Victims often feel embarrassed about their situation and choose to hide their suffering from others. This shame leads them to withdraw from social interactions and avoid seeking help.

This condition is reflected in the poem *I Got Flowers Today*, particularly in Stanza 4, lines 3–4, which state:

“This time I was so badly beaten,
I couldn't hide the cuts and bruises.”

These lines show that the victim usually conceals her injuries to protect her partner and avoid social judgment. According to Martinez, R. & Cohen, S. (2016), *Social Isolation, Shame, and Help-Seeking Barriers among Victims of Intimate Partner Violence.*, victims of domestic violence often experience social withdrawal due to feelings of shame, fear of blame, and concern about negative social reactions. They explain that isolation strengthens the abuser's control and reduces the victim's access to external support systems. This theory clearly explains the victim's behavior in the poem, where shame and fear cause her to remain silent and socially disconnected, worsening the cycle of abuse.

Loss of Freedom and Life

Loss of freedom and life represents the most severe and tragic consequence of domestic violence depicted in the poem. After enduring repeated cycles of abuse, apology, fear, and emotional dependence, the victim gradually loses autonomy over her own life. This ultimate loss is explicitly illustrated in Stanza 6, lines 1–4 of *I Got Flowers Today*:

*“I got flowers today.
Today was a special day,
It was the day of my funeral.
Last night he killed me.”*

These lines signify that the cycle of violence has reached its final and irreversible stage. The flowers, which previously symbolized false affection and temporary reconciliation, now appear as funeral offerings, transforming their meaning into symbols of death and finality. This shift underscores the destructive culmination of abuse that has been repeatedly normalized and forgiven.

According to Laurence Perrine (1992) in *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry*, poetry often conveys its deepest meaning through concentration and emotional intensity, where a single line can encapsulate the overall significance of the work. In this stanza, Perrine's concept is evident, as the final line condenses the entire trajectory of abuse into a stark and tragic conclusion. The simplicity of the diction intensifies the emotional impact, forcing readers to confront the fatal consequences of domestic violence.

Furthermore, this ending can be interpreted through the concept of the cycle of violence, as proposed by Lenore E. Walker (1979), which explains how abusive relationships typically involve recurring phases of tension, violence, and reconciliation. In the poem, the repeated giving of flowers represents the reconciliation phase, which ultimately fails to prevent escalation. The final stanza reveals that the cycle does not resolve but instead culminates in death, highlighting the danger of remaining within such patterns.

In addition, from a psychological perspective, prolonged exposure to abuse may lead to what Judith Herman (1992) describes as trauma bonding and learned helplessness, where victims feel unable to escape despite recognizing the danger. This condition is reflected in the victim's earlier hesitation to leave, which ultimately contributes to the tragic outcome. Therefore, the poem not only portrays an individual tragedy but also delivers a broader social critique. It emphasizes that domestic violence, when minimized or normalized, can result in irreversible loss, stripping victims not only of their freedom and dignity but ultimately of their lives.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Paulette Kelly's *I Got Flowers Today* portrays domestic violence as a continuous cycle of abuse rather than a single incident. The causes of violence include verbal abuse, physical domination, emotional manipulation, economic dependence, and psychological fear, which keep the victim trapped in the relationship.

The effects of domestic violence are severe, covering emotional, psychological, physical, and social aspects, ultimately leading to the victim's death. This tragic ending highlights the fatal consequences of ignoring abuse.

From a literary perspective, symbolism and irony effectively strengthen the poem's message. Flowers symbolize false love and manipulation, while irony appears in the contrast between romantic gestures and acts of violence. These elements, supported by New Criticism theory, create a unified meaning within the poem. Overall, the poem serves not only as a literary work but also as a form of social criticism, raising awareness that love should never involve violence.

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