Examineining Emotions and Identity Through Conflict: Evaluation of “My Lover is a Woman” by Pat Parker

In the last few decades, there have been great strides in the areas of equal rights for all within the United States. Such advancements brought about many changes: the desegregation of schools, gay marriage being legalized, and even the beginnings of bridging the pay-gap between men and women. These advancements are without a doubt a great accomplishment and are a great representation of how far America has come as a country. Unfortunately, as most know, this was not always the case, even as recently as the seventies. In the seventies, the United States had just made it through the Civil Rights era, where many black people had to fight and die, just to earn their equal rights. And as far as being gay, that was still something most kept secret for fear of judgement from family and peers. There was not the social acceptance like there is today, and there were certainly no laws that recognized a same-sex union or partnership. It was during this time of change and secrecy, that Pat Parker wrote a poem entitled “My Lover is a Woman”. In this poem, Parker expressed her tone and further identity through a series of external and internal conflicts she faced being a gay, African-American woman in the late 1970s. Excellent introduction.

One of the first conflicts we see the writer encounter is the opposition she faces with her family due to being gay. Parker opens the poem by writing gentle sentiments about “[her] lover, [who] is a
woman” and how wonderful she makes her feel but is quickly distracted by the taunts and unacceptance she faces from her sisters for being who she is. The author writes

never hear my sisters say

bulldaggers, queers, funny

come see us, but don’t

bring your friends (Parker 8-11)

Telling the author to not “bring [her] friends” (11) signals the sisters want to separate that lifestyle from her identity as much as possible, and having her friends around, possibly gay friends, it would only enhance it. excellent explanation here. The relationship she shares with her parents is also conflicted. The presence of her mother in the writing is repeated over and over always with the same line “Lord, what kind of child is this?” (Parker 18-89). This line gives the clear indication her mother also does not accept her lifestyle as she proclaims not to know what she even is as a person. Her father is an even sadder depiction of her relationships because he clearly is not living in the poem, but the author fears her actions will cause him to “turn in his grave” (Parker 16-59). All of these relationships combined appear to cause the author a great deal of emotional pain as she brings them up several times throughout the poem. Excellent use of chunks within the paragraph. HL on need for complete sentence intro to block quote and a comma between those lines to show that it is not all of those lines between the numbers. Great organization and content here.

A rather surprising conflict the author faces is with her lover, or rather the fact that her lover is white. One cannot deny that the author enjoys her lover a great deal. She writes of her “warmth” (3) and how she makes her “feel safe” (5), but there are also things about her that cause her to be reminded of painful past experiences. Her lovers “blonde hair” (19) reminds her of more taunts from her sisters
saying, “white folks hair stinks” (Parker 33). Her lover’s “blue” (41) eyes cause her to remember other people with similar blue eyes that recoiled from her very presence. Again, as always, the author thinks back to her family who remind of the wrongs done to black people at the hands of the white people, and she thinks of her peers who “shun [her] because [she] crossed/the line” (Parker 66-67). The author expresses that the sum of these memories caused her to doubt her relationship with her lover and she is unable to move past it. 

The last and main conflict developed within the poem is one the author faces with none other than herself. This is always shown by her stark contrast in emotions from the ones she experiences with her lover, to the dark thoughts and memories that plague her shortly thereafter. One can always note when the author is in a conflict of self mostly in part to the sharp “then-” (687) the author uses to set off her doubts. She briefly speaks of happy thoughts, but then can go on for several verses about the negative thoughts she faces. As with all the conflicts referenced above, the author does not seem to have any feelings of resolve. 

In examining all the conflicts faced by the author in the poem “My Lover is a Woman,” the reader does get a real sense of some of the issues that plagued the author and possibly many other homosexual people, as well as people of color at the time. It shows that these people are no different than anyone else in the world in the fact that they, for the most part, only seek social acceptance from family and peers. It is clear from Parkers’ emotions, developed through each conflict she faced, that is all that she truly desired. She simply wanted to enjoy her partner, her lover, free of judgement from her family and peers, and without the constant internal doubts she faced. There is no way to truly know, but this author hopes with the later progressions of the times, Pat Parker was able to find that inner peace.
Works Cited