



MAYA ANGELOU'S IDEAS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM REFLECTED IN SELECTED POEMS

Graha Dianti Mustantifa¹, Ely Nurmaily²
Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia^{1,2}

grahadianti777@gmail.com¹, elynurmaily@gmail.com²

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Abstract

This thesis examines the views of “*Maya Angelou's Ideas on African-American Black Women's High Self-Esteem Reflected In Selected Poems*”. In this research discuss of the problems experienced by black women in America which written from her point of view. Maya Angelou discusses the self-esteem of African-American women in the poem and discuss womanishness. The use of the Feminism theory because this theory related to the struggle process of black women in America.

This research implemented a descriptive qualitative method as it is more suitable to analyze the data. These data are in the form of qualitative research methods originally from social sciences. The purpose is to support the researchers to study social and culture. This method was implemented because the research data described to see the uniqueness of each datum, then analyzed and interpreted objectively.

The main discussion in the poem relates to the struggle of African American women out of oppression which not justify the oppression of African American women. Some points of view that Feminism tends to make women have the feeling to voicing the women's feeling so that they can struggle with the oppression experienced by women.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, high self-esteem and feminism.

INTRODUCTION

Literature can be defined as a work that has a beauty within it that comes from aspects of human life. Literary works produced by humans who have deep feelings, therefore, produce literary works born from the author's imagination (Yunara and Kardiansyah, 2016). Jones gives the opinion that literary works are born from the imagination of the author (Jones, 2010). On the other hand, the literary work is a picture that is poured out by the author to describe the world in his life (Kardiansyah, 2016). Literary works created from the author's imagination are the reality of human life and the author's expression in conveying his ideas and thoughts (Lina and Setiawan, 2017). The element of beauty contained in literary works makes readers want to read them. There are several types of literary works in this world, namely: Drama, Novels, and Poetry (Samanik and Lianasari, 2016). The idea of the poet follows as a medium to express certain perceptions, feelings, and thoughts.

Based on (Patterson, 2004) argues that black or African-American women have high self-esteem that is not inferior to white or European-American women. Factors that influence the self-esteem of black women in America stem from the support of social movements and also their families (Setri and Setiawan, 2020). With actions that show their pride in being black women. Many figures are the reason for this, one of which is Maya Angelo, a famous poet from African-American circles. Many of the literary works written by Maya Angelou are expressions of her pride as a black woman. A poem that tells a lot about the acts of discrimination experienced by black people in America but still always strives for a better life. Maya Angelo has often spoken out for equality and for the work she does on behalf of black women in America in general.

It can be seen from her background that Maya Angelo is a talented person and has several jobs such as poet, novelist, educator, actress, and film producer. Each important action by Maya Angelo as an African-American civil rights activist who represented their voice for equality as Americans. It can be seen in the work written by Maya Angelo that describes feminism, discrimination, racism, and

segregation against African-Americans. In writing her poetry, she uses a Feminism approach that reveals the discrimination, racial and segregation experienced by black women in America. Some of Maya Angelou's poems that reflect African-American women who have self-respect are *Ain't That Bad*, *Still I Rise*, and *Weekend Glory*. In accordance with the title of this research, the researchers will describe the feminism that Maya Angelou puts in her work by using a historical and biographical approach related to the history of discrimination at that time received by black African-American women. This study will suggest that black women have High Self-Esteem.

The term womanism was first put forward as a theory and understanding used to describe the struggle of black African-American women against discrimination (Nurmaily and Maulana, 2021). Womanish, which is considered a reflection of the despair experienced by black women, is used as a means of expressing objections to the exclusive rights obtained regarding feminist white women. In this case, it creates a paradigm in the community that will include values that are important to them. Womanish evolved into a greater form of political activism for black women from America's ethnic minorities (Amelia and Dintasai, 2017). According to Walker "The term "Womanism" was used Walker to describe her commitment to ending the oppression of women. A womanist loves a woman and woman culture. A womanist is concerned to assert woman identity and independence on their terms, being a womanist involves waiting to know more and in greater depth, than is good for one" (Madsen, 2000).

The definition of self-esteem comes from some of the effects of good or bad feelings about ourselves and how we evaluate ourselves as favorable or unfavorable for the future of our own lives (Gulö and Rahmawelly, 2018). The process of self-esteem relates to the types of behavior a person does in dealing with a problem (Heaverly and Woro Kasih, 2020). On the other hand, people have high self-esteem in the face of stress that arises from any problems faced, so that a person gets fewer negative health effects. People who have high self-esteem tend to experience fewer negative emotions and experience less depression. (McGill, 2017)

There are some elements in poetry that make the poetry a beautiful artwork. Those elements can not be separated from each other. (Kennedy, 1983) there are several elements in the poetry. They are tone, form, language, and sound. However, in literature imagery means to use of figurative language to represent objects, actions, and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical five senses (Cross, 2016). An image is a language used in such a way as to help us to see, hear, feel, think about, or generally understand more clearly or vividly what is being said or the impression (Suprayogi and Pranoto, 2020).

The reason behind Maya Angelou in writing poetry is that her life experience is so difficult that she has experienced discrimination as a black woman and made social conditions in her community which is very important to be discussed to find out the struggles and changes experienced by black women which are described in the following poem: *Ain't That Bad*, *Still I Rise*, and *Weekend Glory*. In this thesis, the researcher wants to know the High Self Esteem represented by the three poems by Maya Angelou. The title of this research is "Maya Angelou's Ideas about High Self-Esteem of African-American Women Reflected in several poems such as: *Ain't That Bad*, *Still I Rise*, and *Weekend Glory*?"

METHOD

This study is considered a textual analysis, the researcher will use fully the descriptive qualitative method (Adelina and Suprayogi, 2020). Thus, the researcher chooses the qualitative description research method to make the researcher can explain the problem solving based on the interpretations and descriptions (Kuswoyo and Akhyar, 2019), especially about Angelou's ideas on African American women in her selected poems. The descriptive qualitative method helps to discover the nature of the specific topic under study (Afrianto, Gulö, and Suprayogi, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing each poem the writer describes, its imagery and figurative language, and the last analyzes the Self-Esteem in every poem. So, the analysis can be described as follows:

The Analysis Figurative Language of *Ain't That Bad* by Maya Angelou

Simile

Simile and metaphor are both used to compare unlike things. However, simile is indirect comparison and metaphor is direct comparison.

*Black like the hour of the night
When your love turns and wriggles close to your side
Black as the earth which has given birth.
To Nations, and when all else is gone will abide.
Bad as the storm that leaps raging from the heavens
Bringing the welcome rain
Bad as the sun burning orange hot at midday lifting the waters again.* (Line 24-29)

In Line “*Bad as the sun burning orange hot at midday*” comparing the difficult life experienced by black people such as the very hot and hot day conditions that can be described in this line has a very deep meaning because it describes the difficulties that experienced by blacks in the dark history of American society which is full of a history of racism and slavery by Whites to Africans living there. In Line “*Black like the hour of the night*” the meaning of word *night* itself is ta sadness, thus it portrayed the deep sadness of Maya Angelo's poem inspired by her difficult life as a black woman in America. In line “*Bad as the ‘storm’ that leaps raging from the heavens*” take the words storm that it means something destructive which make the around in the mess. So, it can be represent the ugliness they experienced is said to be like lightning coming from a surge. The author can take the whistle that lightning is a picture of such a bad fate.

Analysis Imagery in The Poem *Ain't That Bad* by Maya Angelou

Visual Imagery

Visual imagery is an imagery which relates to the visual imagination and it is a kind of imagery that appears mostly in the poem because almost words represented in the poem are basically seeable (Al Falaq and Puspita, 2021). Sometimes, that seen in the mind eye which called by sight effect.

*Hearin' Stevie Wonder
Dance on, Alvin Ailey
Talk, Miss Barbara Jordan
Groove, Miss Pearlle Bailey.*

*Now ain't they bad?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they bad?
An' ain't they bad?
An' ain't they Black?
An' ain't they fine?*

In this poem Angelou makes the speaker describes and reveals the common stereotype; a vivid representation that reduces a person to a set exaggerated, usually negative, character traits and is thus a form of representation that essentialist others through the operation of power (Barker, 2004: 187) toward black.

African-American Woman's Self-Esteem in the Poem “*Ain't That Bad*” by Maya Angelou

From the analysis of Figurative Language and Imagery in the Poem “*Ain't That Bad*” by Maya Angelo above the writer concluded about the life of African-Americans whose lives are very difficult because there are many experience racism, getting bird prejudice by white people who have a higher status in the life of American society which many practices of slavery by people by white People in the past. That is what Maya Angelo wants to change through the poems she wrote. In the poem many raise the issue of the struggle of black people in America, especially to black women also have the same right to success in life.

The Analysis of Poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou

In *Still I Rise*, there are many symbols used by the speaker to understand the implicit meaning. The writer assumes that the word of "I rise" is a symbol of strength. That word indicates the strength of the speaker to remain strong and stand among the people who don't like her.

Analysis Figurative Language in the Poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou

Symbols

A symbol is a sign which refers to the object that denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object.

In this poem Maya as the speaker and poet also tries to describe her condition through figurative language. In this poem, the writer finds symbols of happiness like oil wells, gold minds and diamonds.

*'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room'*

The speaker tells us that she has oil wells in her living room. The writer indicates that the speaker uses oil wells to show her wealth. Oil is one of expensive things. The speaker uses "oil" to show the readers that she is a rich woman. She shows that she is a rich woman through the way of her walk. When she walks, she appoints her chin, bravely to look at all people, and her body is sturdy.

Analysis Imagery in the Poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou

Visual Imagery

Visual imagery is an imagery which relates to the visual imagination and it is a kind of imagery that appears mostly in the poem because almost words represented in the poem are basically seeable.

*I'm a black ocean
leaping and wide
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.* (Line 9-11)

In the eighth Line, the speaker uses visual imagery to invite the readers to imagine her life and to know who she is and how she lives. She shows her identity as a Black woman. "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, welling and swelling I bear in the tide". In this sentence, the speaker shows her identity clearly.

African-American Women's Self-Esteem in The Poem "*Still I Rise*" by Maya Angelou

From the analysis of Figurative Language and Imagery in the Poem "*Still I Rise*" the writer concluded that it has been explained that black woman can achieve success with effort and perseverance in striving. In the second poem Maya Angelo also describes the rise of black people from a low position in the life of American society to have equal rights. Many symbols of success are written in this poem. The symbol that is reflected in this poem, for example, is the Oil Well which symbolizes prosperity because oil has a high price and is a very important source of energy in this world.

The Analysis of the Poem *Weekend Glory* by Maya Angelou

"Weekend Glory" displays African-American woman's capability to be grateful for her life no matter of her condition she has faced. Through this poem, the speaker tries to show her point of view about the lifestyle of white people which she considers artificial and ungrateful.

Figurative Language in the Poem *Weekend Glory* by Maya Angelou

Metaphor

Metaphor is the use of a word or group of words not with its true meaning, but as a painting based on similarities or comparisons.

*"My life ain't heaven /
but it sure ain't hell /
I'm not on top /*

- but I call it swell” (lines 44-47)

Through the metaphor on these lines, the speaker attempts to compare her life with heaven and hell. The phrases “*My life ain't heaven*” (line 44) and “*but it sure ain't hell*” (line 45) shows that the speaker does not have a perfect life, but her life is as good as she wants to be. She reveals that she does not live in order to satisfy the others, which is the right way to live.

My life ain't heaven
but it sure ain't hell.
I'm not on top
but I call it swell
if I'm able to work
and get paid right
and have the luck to be Black on a Saturday night (Line 42-48)

The symbol of Positive Thinking and Self-Esteem for not giving up in difficult conditions and remaining enthusiastic is depicted in Line 42-43 in the poem's quote explaining that life in this world, no matter how difficult it is, even though you have to keep the spirit. Even though in reality this life is not like in heaven which is full of happiness and also this world is not like in hell which is full of suffering. In this world is a struggle that we will experience difficulties and we will also get happiness if we keep trying to achieve what we hope for.

Analysis Imagery in the poem Weekend Glory

Visual Imagery

Visual imagery is an imagery which relates to the visual imagination and it is a kind of imagery that appears mostly in the poem because almost words represented in the poem are basically seeable.

“**Weekend Glory**” consists of fifty-one lines divided into eight Lines. However, each Line does not have the same number of lines. Each Line tells about the chronology of white people's lifestyle compared to the speaker's way of life.

“Some dighty folks /
don't know the facts, /
posin' and preenin' /
and putting' on acts, /
stretchin' their necks /
and strainin' their backs” (lines 1-6)

In the first Line of this poem, the speaker displays her pride and power that she has a better life rather than the one who oppressed and discriminated her.

African-American Woman's Self-Esteem in The Poem *Weekend Glory* by Maya Angelou

From the analysis of Figurative Language and Imagery in the Poem “*Weekend Glory*” the writer conclude that Maya Angelo compares her life with a surge and hell, it explains the difficulties and happiness that can still be found in her life. The difficulty that is intended is the difficulty in his unsuccessful period that still receives bad treatment and discrimination by white people. Previously, Maya Angelo became a famous person, she used to be a servant and other rough jobs, but she has the belief that her life, although not as happy in heaven, is not as full of suffering as in hell. Maya Angelo believes that every difficulty but it must be happy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded several main points that answer the two research questions of this study. The researchers also concluded some additional points related to the findings. The Woman Self-Esteem which are in three poems written by Maya Angelo that have been completed (Fithratullah, 2021).

In the first poem, "*Ain't That Bad*", the poem refers to an expression that provides information about the difficult lives experienced by Maya Angelo and black women in America, but they can struggle and be successful. In the above analysis as the author connects Maya Angelo's condition in the real world through Autobiography and expression in poetry. In the poem many information about the issue of the struggle of black people in America, especially so that black women also have the same right to success in life. Many motivations are conveyed in Maya Angelo's poetry which reflects Maya Angelo's struggle to become a very famous Poet and become a Director in the Film world in America. The self-confidence or Self-Esteem shown by Maya Angelo is reflected in one of her poems entitled: "Isn't That Bad" in the poem describes that black women have a great energy, desire, and resemblance to white women.

In the second poem "*Still I Rise*" it has been explained that black women can achieve success with effort and perseverance in fighting. In her second poem Maya Angelo also describes the rise of blacks from a low position in American society to having equal rights. Many symbols of success are written in this poem. The symbol reflected in this poem is such as the Oil Well which symbolizes prosperity because oil has a high price and is a very important source of energy in this world. Angelo, a successful and wealthy black woman, caused whites to recognize her and him and walk upright despite being surrounded by whites.

The last Poetry "*Weekend Glory*" the writer concludes that Maya Angelo compares her life to waves and hell, this explains the difficulties and happiness that can still be found in her life. The difficulty in question was the difficulty in his time of failure that still received bad treatment and discrimination by white people.

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