

**THE FEMINISM OF AFRO-AMERICAN IN MAYA ANGELOU
AND ALICE WALKER'S SELECTED POEMS**



A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences of Hasanuddin University in partial fulfilments of requirements to obtain Sarjana Degree in English Department

**RAHMAT SYAMSU HIDAYAT
F21116020**

**THE FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM
HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY
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ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM

FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES

HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY







Today, August 25th, 2021, the Board of Thesis Examination has kindly approved a thesis by **RAHMAT SYAMSU HIDAYAT** (Student Number: **F21116020**) entitled:

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Makassar, August 24th, 2020

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The Thesis of **RAHMAT SYAMSU HIDAYAT** (Student Number: **F21116020**)
entitled, **THE FEMINISM OF AFRO-AMERICA IN MAYA ANGELO AND
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Undergraduate Thesis Examiners:

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2. Dr. M. Amir P., M.Hum

Second Supervisor



THESIS

**THE FEMINISM OF AFRO-AMERICA IN MAYA ANGELO AND ALICE
WALKER SELECTED POEMS**

By

RAHMAT SYAMSU HIDAYAT

Student No: F21116020

It has been examined before the Board of the Thesis Examination on Monday, August
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Approved by

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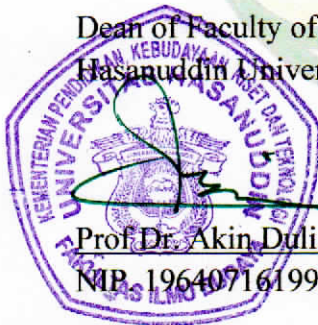
Chairman

Dra. Herawaty, M.Hum., M.A., Ph.D.
NIP. 196301031988032003

Secretary

Rezky Ramadhani, S.S, M.Litt.
NIP. 199303102018074001

Dean of Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Hasanuddin University



Prof. Dr. Akin Duli, M.A
NIP. 196407161991031010

Head of English Department

Dr. Abidin Pammu, M.A., Dipl.TESOL
NIP. 196012311986011071

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With reference to the letter of the dean of Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University No. 366/UN4.9.1/KEP/2020 regarding supervision, we hereby confirm to approve the undergraduate thesis draft by Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat (F21116020) to be examined at the English Literature Study Program of Faculty of Cultural Sciences.

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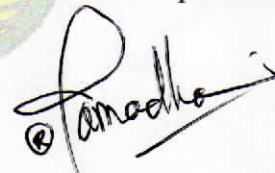
Approved by

First Supervisor



Dra. Herawaty, M.Hum.,M.A., Ph.D.
NIP. 196301031988032003

Second Supervisor



Rezky Ramadhani, S.S, M.Litt.
NIP. 199303102018074001

Approved by the Execution of Thesis Examination by

The Thesis Organizing Committees

On Behalf of Dean

Head of English Literature Study Program



Dr. Abidin Pammu, M.A., Dipl.TESOL
NIP. 196012311986011071

STATEMENT OF WORK'S ORIGINALITY

The undersigned,

Name : Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat

ID Number : F21116020

Title of Thesis : The Feminism of Afro-America in Maya Angelo and Alice Walker
Selected Poems

Departement : English Literature

Hereby, the writer declares that this thesis is written by himself. This thesis does not contain any materials which have been published by other people, and it does not cite other people's ideas expect the quotations and references

Makassar, September 1st 2021



Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat

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The writer

Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat

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ABSTRAK

Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat, *The Feminism of Afro-American in Maya Angelou and Alice Walker's Selected Poems*, (dibimbing oleh Herawaty Abbas dan Rezky Ramadhani.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi feminisme Afro-Amerika dalam puisi-puisi pilihan Maya Angelou dan Alice Walker dengan memahami makna puisi.

Data dari penelitian ini dikumpulkan dari puisi-puisi Angelou dan Walker yang telah dipilih sebelumnya, yang berjudul *A Native Person Looks Up From The Plate* dan *The Anonymous Caller*, dan juga puisi dari Maya Angelou yang berjudul *Still I Rise* dan *Our Grandmothers*. Pendekatan Feminisme adalah pendekatan yang digunakan dalam memproses data. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini juga menggunakan *Genetic Structuralism* dari Rene Wellek dan Austin Warren dalam menemukan isu-isu sosial dalam puisi-puisi tersebut.

Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa puisi-puisi pilihan karya Angelou dan Walker mencakup beberapa isu-isu yang disorot untuk perempuan Afrika-Amerika: feminisme, perbudakan, dan rasisme. Puisi-puisi tersebut menunjukkan seberapa signifikan penulis membicarakan isu feminisme yang berkembang ditengah masyarakat Afrika-Amerika pada masa itu.

Kata Kunci: Feminisme, Afro-Amerika, Isu Ras.

ABSTRACT

Rahmat Syamsu Hidayat, *The Feminism of Afro-American in Maya Angelou and Alice Walker Selected Poems*, (supervised by Dra. Herawaty Abbas and Rezky Ramadhani).

This research aims to explore Afro-American feminism in the selected poems of Maya Angelou and Alice Walker by understanding the meanings.

The data were collected from the two poems of Alice Walker, those are *A Native Person Looks up from the Plate* and *The Anonymous Caller*, also two poems of Maya Angelou, entitled *Still I Rise* and *Our GrandMothers*. Feminism approach is a predetermined approach to use in processing the data. Therefore, this research also employed Genetic Structuralism by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in order to discover the social issues contained in the selected poems.

The results of this research showed that the selected poems by Angelou and Walker include several highlighted issues for Afro-American women: feminism, slavery, and racism. Those selected poetries showed how significant the authors discussed feminism issues which occurred within Afro-American at that time.

Keywords: Feminism, Afro-American, Social Issues, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of background of the study, problem identification, scope of problem, research questions, objective of the writing, significance of writing, and sequence of the chapters.

A. Background

Feminism always become serious topic to be discussed and given big result to women independency and gender equality in society. Some countries in every part of the world still survive to achieve the better life for women. They pursue in some purposes for their prosperity and one of purposes from the movement is to against the violence towards women. Meanwhile, the types of violence are varies such as physical, sexual, and psychological or mental abuse. Furthermore, one of the deciding factors is ethnicity background. Race discrimination become something sensitive for women which influenced their existence in society.

Wright in *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution* (Maggie, 1990) explains that the history of

racial discrimination towards black women have been happening since a long time ago even in liberal and multi-cultural country such as United States. In the Civil War (1860-1865), blacks were free from slavery but whites still treat them with unequal ways because whites felt superior and they thought blacks were inferior. Donald R. Wright (2017:228) states that Southern White racism descended into evil and absurd. African-American were different. They could not live in a free society as equals of white people because their claimed racial inferiority. The stereotypes such as “wooly” hair, flat noses, thick lips, and their own smell make them subordinated in society which is dominated by white people. In spite of the condition, some of Afro-American authors in the late 1960 and early 1970 like Alice Walker and Maya Angelou presented their works to show their complements with racism issues and emerged what black women face at the time as minority. They started to spread their personal ideologies about feminism itself. They, afterwards, stressed the importance of understanding the essence of women’s struggle in fighting against patriarchal and racial society by criticizing the unfairness to women as what happened to their Blacks ancestors. All of their works are also a kind of painful process of recalling and remembering their past which was broken and dismembered in fragments, and it such an effort to show the black women seeking to survive against masculine prejudice and ethnic stereotypes at social or psychological level.

The emerging of feminism idea inside the African-Americans literary works is one of the implications which is not only caused by gender oppression towards women, but also influenced by racial issues constructed by society. These two authors use

literary works as a unique tool to record the social facts and history during a period of time. As historical document, a literary works become a reflection of a society which is represents culture and tradition. This is related to Plato's idea stated that poetry is a mirror. In the other side, Aristotle also stated a relevant thing. In his *Poetics*, he defines poetry as imitation with his statement, "Epic Poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and most-flute playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation.". The explanations of Plato and Aristotle are similar to the Mimetic Theories by Abrams (1953) which is developed by the concept of imitation. Thus, it can be concluded that the literary works and universe are associated and related to each other.

In this study, the researcher decides to reveal the feminism issues inside the selected poems of two influential Afro-American female authors, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou. Some of their poems are going to be used as the source of data. One of the reasons to choose the works from these two authors is that both of them are concerned their literary works on women movement despite of racial issues in society and their ethnicity background whilst those two things are supposed as sensitive problems nowadays. The researcher also thinks that these works were written to empower self-awareness of women which is a crucial thing that all nowadays women should have it but it is always in the subconscious. These are the reasons why the researcher has felt motivated towards this study.

B. Identification of The Problem

After reading the selected poems written by Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, the researcher identified some problems related to the explanation of background. They are as follows;

1. The poems try to represent the inequality happened towards black women in the society.
2. Both of the authors use their works to empower women as independent human being through portrayal of courage, Black pride and survival.

C. Scope of The Problem

To guide this research to the object of writing, the researcher focuses on this writing the way on how feminism and racism become the two possessed things to influence their famous poems. Therefore, the researcher limits the study of their works by choosing:

1. Alice Walker's selected poems: *A Native Person Looks up from the Plate*, and *The Anonymous Caller*.
2. Maya Angelou's selected poems: *Still I Rise*, and *Our Grandmothers*.

From the data above, the researcher determines feminism which is elaborated poems analysis by using of poetical devices in the selected poems.

D. Research Questions

The selected poems by Alice Walker and Maya Angelou do not only deal with feminism, but also racism issue that appeared significantly. In doing the process of analyzing this research and its relation to feminism, it is important to make specification of the problems that are going to be analyzed. Furthermore, each answer

of the questions is associated within the topic of the study. The problems of this study are:

1. How do Alice Walker and Maya Angelou display feminism in their poems?
2. To what extent do the feminism of afro-american affected the selected poems?

E. Objective of The Writing

Derived from the problems above, there are purposes from this study. They are:

1. To discover how Alice Walker and Maya Angelou display feminism in their works.
2. To describe the extention of feminism of Afro-american affected the selected poems.

F. Significance of The Writing

Due to the stated problems and the objectives of this study, the researcher expects to acquire two significances, theoretically and practically. First, this research is expected to become a contribution to the understanding some of sensible and substantial issues such as feminism and racism which are represented in literary works. Practically, the research supposes to be a reference for the next similar researches, yet who will decide to use the same approach in the analysis. In any case, this writing is expected to give readers further comprehension of gender and racial phenomenon in society.

G. Sequence of the Chapter

This research is divided into five chapters, which consist of:

1. Chapter I is an introduction; consists of background, problem identification, scope of problem, research question, objective of writing, significance of writing, and sequences of chapter.
2. Chapter II is literature review or theoretical background; consists of previous study, poetry explanation, structuralism approach, feminism, and intersectionality theory.
3. Chapter III is methodology of the study while includes method of collecting data, method of analyzing data, and research procedures.
4. Chapter IV is findings and discussion that contains the analysis of each poem and elaboration of author's attitude towards feminism theory and perspective.
5. Chapter V is the result of the study that contains conclusion and suggestion of the previous analysis and a little guide for the next study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is literature review or also known as theoretical background. It consists of previous studies, poetry explanation, structuralism approach, and feminism.

A. Previous Study

The subject of these studies focuses on the analysis using structuralism approach which is significant and suggestive to be discovered. There have been some previous researchers who wrote about the related topic of feminism and racism or intend to reveal the same objects they are, Yunita (2009), Muammar H (2014), Suryanti (2015), and Zafitri (2014).

Yunita writes *Zero to Hero in Black American People Reflected in Langston Hughes' Selected Poems* (2009). The thesis talks about the struggle to fix the racism and discrimination issues in United States but more specified in the meaning of “zero” which is related to the situation of that period. This thesis also focused with the connection between the poems and the prominent figures in the present times.

The next thesis, *Racism in Claude McKay's Selected Poems*, is written by Muammar H in 2014. In this thesis, he aims to reveal the racism issues inside five selected poems by Claude McKay with structuralism approach. By this thesis, the researcher analyzes several intrinsic aspects such as denotative and connotative meanings, figurative language, and imagery. At the end, the writer emphasizes that the issues in the poems of Claude McKay is racial discrimination of the Blacks.

One of the theses that also related to this subject is written by Suryanti titled *Feminism in Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career* (2015). This thesis concerns in the feminism issues which is presented by female characters inside is reflected the image of woman in the third-wave feminism. Same as the thesis mentioned before, this thesis also uses Structuralism approach, particularly Genetic Structuralism approach and applies *Female Eunuch*, a radical feminist theory by Germaine Greer.

Beside the theses mentioned above, Zavitri also wrote *Poetical Devices in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems* in 2012. Related to this project, the thesis also took several poems by Maya Angelou as the samples. Furthermore, it concerns to analyze the figurative language used in the poems which is emphasize the theme conveyed in the selected poems.

By studying the related theses above, the researcher got an idea to represent this research entitled *The Feminism of Afro-American in Maya Angelou and Alice Walker's selected Poems*. The gap of this research is that analysis using Genetic Structuralism approach in the selected poems. Therefore, the researcher compares the feminism issues shown in the selected poems of the two authors as a reflection of women movement in African-Americans.

B. Theoretical Background

Literary becomes one of great achievement of culture development that helps to express life as seen in the reality. By its social function, it has a major impact on the development of society by shaped civilizations, changed political systems, controlled the economy state, and even exposed injustice. Literature give us a detailed preview of

society and at the same time allowing us to connect on basic levels of desire and emotion. Based on Wellek's theory (Wellek & Warren: 1990), the literature represents the life and life consists of social reality. Through literary works, the creativity of the author used to portray his ideas, feelings, and experience about the social reality. The works also used to criticize the inequity which is happened around the author's life at the time in history.

However, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. It introduces to new worlds of experience. Based on Taylor (1981:1) literature, "like the other arts, is essentially and imaginative act of the writer's imagination in selecting, ordering, and interpreting life-experience."

Also, in *Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren, "literature is a creative activity, an artwork that must always have a structure and an aesthetic purpose, a total coherence and effect" (1955:219). According to the statement above, in general, literature can be determined as a reflection of human life that captures the social condition, historical facts, ideologies, beliefs, perceptions, perspectives and imaginations which can be presented based on personal judgement.

Based on the genres, literary works is divided into three genres. One of the genres called as Poetry and which is become the object of this study.

1. Poetry

Besides novel and drama, one of the most popular forms of literary works is poetry which is commonly created by using of word choice. It comes etymologically from the Greek word 'poiesis' which means 'a making, forming, creating (in words),

or the art of poetry, or a poem'. As quoted in Oxford Dictionaries, it is a literary work in which the expression of feelings and idea is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm. It is related to how Wordsworth defines that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." One of the greater American poets, (Emily Dickinson), in *Highlight of American Literature* stated: If I read a book and it makes my body so cold and no fire can even warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry (Bode, 1995:90).

Poetry interests people by the language packages which is consisting of selected words to help it shows the aesthetic values and also the meanings. The composition of appropriate words inside poetry helps the reader to interpret the purpose of the author by creating it. Furthermore, based on Abrams' framework (1953), the works become author's way to communicate their ideas and experiences and it called as Expressive Theories.

In the way to help the understanding meaning in poetry interpretation, the authors use several poetical devices inside their works.

a. Denotation and Connotation

Denotation is generally defined as literal or dictionary meaning of a word in contrast of connotation or associated meanings. Beyond its denotation, a word may also have connotation. Connotation is described as the suggestive meaning from associative meaning of a word, thus it developed by its associations in history and the circumstance

in which it has been used. For example, by denotation, the word of 'black' refers to one of dark tones in system of colour. Besides, it also relates to African-American society, gloominess, or sorrow as its connotative meanings. (Bulger, Allison. "Connotation." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC.)

b. Imagery

Imagery may be defined as the representation of five sense experience through language by visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory. The author uses it when attempt to describe something so that, thus it appeals to our sense of sight, hearing, touch or taste. Moreover, imagery is built on other literary devices as the author uses comparisons to appeal our senses, such as simile or metaphor. (Florman, Ben. "Imagery." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC.)

c. Figurative Language

As a stylistic tool of the author to amplify their works aesthetically, figurative language makes a work sounds pleasing. By its meaning, this device is similar to connotation in which deviates from their conventionally accepted definition to convey more heightened effect.

d. Rhyme

This one device is most commonly associated with poetry by the general public. Words that have different beginning sounds but whose endings sound alike, including the final vowel sound and everything following it, are considered as rhyme. Rhyme is used in poetry, as well as in songwriting, not just because it's pleasant to hear, but

because the repetition of sounds (especially when it's consistent) lends a sense of rhythm and order to the language.

A rhyme is a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words. Rhyming is particularly common in many types of poetry, especially at the ends of lines, and is a requirement in formal verse. The most familiar and widely-used form of rhyming is perfect rhyme, in which the stressed syllables of the words, along with all subsequent syllables, share identical sounds, as in "pencil" and "stencil." Perfect rhyme is so common, in fact, that the word "rhyme" is often used simply to refer to perfect rhymes. However, there are actually a variety of other types of rhymes, such as imperfect rhyme or slant rhyme, which also involve the repetition of similar sounds but in ways that are not quite as precise as perfect rhyme (Bergman, Bennet. "Rhyme." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC,).

2. Genetic Structuralism

Genetic structuralism is an approach which appears to complete the earlier one, pure structuralism. The emerging of this approach was a reaction to the rigidity of classic structuralism which is concern to intrinsic aspects merely and disregarded the extrinsic aspects outside the works such as cultural-historical background and the author's background. It believes that a work is a structure, particularly a dynamic structure which is continuously influence by the social background of the time. The use of "genetic" word means that literary work has its genetic and story in process of social life. The pioneer of this theory is Hippolyte Taine. "Taine believes that literary work is not only an imaginative fact and personal imagination, but also a reflection of culture

record, a shape of certain mind when literary work was created". (Endraswara, 2003:56)

The theory also was developed by Lucien Goldmann. He stated that the set of the theory is related to human facts which were as meaningful structure and become an important aspect (Goldmann, 1980). All activity of human being is a response from individual or collective subject in certain situation representing creation to modify situations in order to fit in the aspiration. It puts literature text as social institution which can change and involve social conflicts. To sustain the Genetic Structuralism, he sets the important aspects that connect to each other: human facts, collective subjects and world view.

Genetic Structuralism can be used to analyze a literary work by three formulated steps. First, the researcher needs to analyze the intrinsic elements of the work as the basic data. Second, the researcher also needs to analyze the author's background. The personality, style, ideology and norms around an author may influence the work. The last, analyze the socio-cultural and historical background at the place where the work was created by the author.

3. Feminism

The uses of 'feminism' term have developed successfully and become something common in public (Burket, 2007). It correlates with several meanings such as female movement, women's ideology, woman's liberation in social, economy and political field. Some writers refer the term to a historical and political movement in the United States and Europe, for example: woman's suffragettes or legislation and political

approval. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Wilhelmina Drucker are some of influential figures behind the movement. Others also refer the 'feminism' term to the belief that there is unfairness happen towards women as the gender phenomenon in social construction. According to feminist, oppression become a foremost problem which faced by women from their unequal relationship with men and the fundamental goal of this movement is to uplift the life women thereupon.

This movement was born as a reaction of the belief that women have experienced oppression, subordination, and marginalization in society over hundred years. In patriarchal society, women have been socialized to become the victims of that male dominating ideology. As the result, the effect of their experiences and inequality has impacted the social institution, politic system, economy, family and religion. Thus, feminism purposed to change the ideology of women to become aware that they were oppressed by using the concept of patriarchy and gender to examining the oppression towards women.

Gender, a social construction in patriarchal society, invokes binary of women and men in multiple ways such as image, position and role, which put women in underestimation inferiority. Tong (2009:72-73) supported the statement, "Patriarchal society uses rigid gender role to ensure that women are passive (affectionate, obedient, responsive and sympathetic, cheerful, kind, friendly) and men are active (strong, aggressive, curious, ambitious, full of plans, responsible, competitive)".

By the statement, gender concept is used in the critic of feminist for questioning their existence in society. Ritzer (1991:248) explained three aspects in gender concept

used by feminist: gender difference, gender inequality and gender oppression. In gender difference aspect, the main issue is that women's life is different from men. For example, the examination of womanhood and femininity values as the reason why men and women experience the social life differently. Then, the gender inequality aspects identify that women's location in most situations is not only different but also less privileged and unequal than men. Next aspect is gender oppression which is stated that women are oppressed and actively restrained, subordinated, molded, used and abused by men.