

**THE IDEAL WOMAN AS PORTRAYED IN MAYA
ANGELOU'S "PHENOMENAL WOMAN" POEM**

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature



By:

Muh. Takbir Al Asis
12150022

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF ADAB AND CULTURAL SCIENCES
STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY SUNAN KALIJAGA
YOGYAKARTA**

2017

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The writer,



MUH. TAKBIR AL ASIS
Student No.:12150022

STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
SUNAN KALIJAGA
YOGYAKARTA



PENGESAHAN TUGAS AKHIR

Nomor : B-474/Un.02/DA/PP.00.9/08/2017

Tugas Akhir dengan judul : THE IDEAL WOMAN AS PORTRAYED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S "PHENOMENAL WOMAN" POEM

yang dipersiapkan dan disusun oleh:

Nama : MUH TAKBIR AL ASIS
Nomor Induk Mahasiswa : 12150022
Telah diujikan pada : Kamis, 27 Juli 2017
Nilai ujian Tugas Akhir : B+

dinyatakan telah diterima oleh Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

TIM UJIAN TUGAS AKHIR

Ketua Sidang

Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum
NIP. 19760405 200901 1 016

Penguji I

Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S. M.Hum.
NIP. 19771115 200501 2 002

Penguji II

Dr. Witriani, S.S. M.Hum.
NIP. 19720801 200604 2 002

Yogyakarta, 27 Juli 2017

UIN Sunan Kalijaga
Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya
DEKAN



Prof. Dr. H. Alwan Khoiri, M.A.
NIP. 19600224 198803 1 001



**KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUNAN KALIJAGA
FAKULTAS ADAB DAN ILMU BUDAYA**

Jl. Marsda Adi Sucipto Yogyakarta 55281 Telp/fak. (0274)513949
Web: <http://adab.uin-suka.ac.id> E-mail: adab@uin-suka.ac.id

NOTA DINAS

Hal : Skripsi

a.n. Muh. Takbir Al Asis

Yth

Dekan Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu

Budaya

UIN Sunan Kalijaga

Di Yogyakarta

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Setelah memeriksa, meneliti, dan memberikan arahan untuk perbaikan atas skripsi saudara:

Nama : MUH. TAKBIR AL ASIS

NIM : 12150022

Prodi : Sastra Inggris

Fakultas : Adab dan Ilmu Budaya

Judul : THE IDEAL WOMAN AS PORTRAYED IN
MAYA ANGELOU'S "PHENOMENAL WOMAN" POEM

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Atas perhatian yang diberikan saya ucapkan terima kasih

Wassalamualaikum wr. wb.

Yogyakarta, 27 July 2017

Pembimbing

Danial Hidayatullah, S.S., M.Hum.
NIP. 19810416 200901 1 006

The Ideal Woman as Portrayed in Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" Poem

ABSTRACT

By: Muh. Takbir Al Asis

This research aims to analyze the ideal woman as portrayed in Maya Agnelou's "Phenomenal Woman" Poem. This poem illustrates about the condition of a black woman who lives among the whites. It is to convey the crtits in the society that the beauty of woman does not belong to white woman, but black woman has her own beauty in her way. It applies Cleanth Brooks's New Criticism Theory. The method of this research is qualitative research. The researcher uses close reading tehnique to collect the data. This research is divided into four thematic intrinsic elements. Firstly, the ambiguity of the poem states in the "Phenomenal Woman" word, it may portrays the black woman and it also would image the white woman. Then, the paradox of the poem thematically illustrates the contradictory image of black woman which is imaged as an ugly woman and she is also imaged as an attractive woman. Further, the irony of the poem thematically shows that the phenomenal woman is not related to the pretty, cute, and white skin, but it is related to woman who changes her weakness to be strength. Last, tension of the poem is the imbalance between black woman life and whites's life.

Key Words: Black Woman, Whites, "Phenomenal Woman", New Criticism.



The Ideal Woman as Portraed in Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" **Poem**

ABSTRAK

Oleh: Muh. Takbir Al Asis

Penelitian ini menganalisis wanita ideal sebagaimana digambarkan dalam puisi Maya Angelou yang berjudul "Phenomenal Woman". Puisi ini menggambarkan kondisi wanita kulit hitam yang hidup di tengah masyarakat kulit putih. Puisi ini menyampaikan kritik di masyarakat bahwa kecantikan wanita tidak ada hanya berorientasi pada wanita kulit putih, tetapi wanita kulit hitam juga cantik dengan standarnya sendiri. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori New Criticism yang ditulis oleh Cleanth Brooks. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian kualitatif. Dalam mengumpulkan data penulis menggunakan tehnik close reading. Penelitian ini dibedakan atas empat unsur intrinsik tematik. Pertama adalah ambiguity. Ambiguity dalam puisi ini adalah pada kata "Phenomenal Woman". Kata "Phenomenal Woman" erat kaitannya dengan wanita kulit hitam, tapi disisi lain wanita kulit putih bisa juga dikatakan sebagai "Phenomenal Woman". Yang kedua adalah paradox. Paradox dalam puisi secara kontadiksi menggambarkan bahwa wanita kulit hitam adalah wanita yang dianggap jelek, tapi disisi lain dia juga digambarkan sebagai wanita yang menarik. Selanjutnya, ironi secara tematik menunjukkan bahwa "Phenomenal Woman" itu tidak berkaitan dengan wanita yang berparas cantik, bertubuh imut dan berkulit putih, tetapi setiap wanita adalah "Phenomenal Woman" dengan caranya masing-masing. Yang terakhir adalah tension. Tension dalam puisi ini menggambarkan ketidakseimbangan antara kondisi kehidupan antara wanita berkulit hitam dengan wanita berkulit putih dalam komunitas "The Whites".

Kata Kunci: Wanita Kulit Hitam, Orang-Orang Kulit Putih, Wanita Fenomenal, Teory Kritik Baru.

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MOTTO

*Allah will rise up to suitable ranks and degrees
those of you who believe and who have been
granted knowledge (2. S. Al-Mujadalah:11)*

*Ikutlah ilmu dengan menuliskannya (Ali Bin
Abi Thalib)*

*Education is the most powerful weapon which
you can use to change the world (Nelson
Mandela)*

Science is gained by diligence

DEDICATION

My graduating paper is dedicated to:

My beloved father (Almarhum)

(Father you are awesome)

My beloved mother

(Mother you are my spirit)

And my big family

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamu' alaikum Wr. Wb

Praise be to Allah SWT, the Almighty God, who has been giving me his mercy and blessing to complete my graduating paper, entitled “The Idea of Black Woman as Portrayed in Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman” Poem. The researcher also can finish this paper because of helping some awesome people. In this opportunity, I would like thank many people that help and encourage me to finish this paper. They are:

1. Prof. Drs. K.H. Yudian Wahyudi, Ph.D as Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.
2. Prof. Dr. Alwan Khairi, M.A as the Dean of Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.
3. Dr. Ubaidillah, M.Hum as the Head of English Department, Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and as my academic advisor.
4. Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum as my advisor who always help, guidance and advice me. Thanks for your time that you have given to me.
5. All the lecturers in English Department who have shared much of their knowledge. Thanks a lots for: *Almarhumah* Jiah Fauziah, M.Hum., Dr. Witriani M.Hum., Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari, MA., Ulyati RetnoSari., M.Hum, Bambang Hariyanto, MA., Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum., Arif Budiman, MA., Fuad Arif Fudiyartanto, M.Ed.

6. My beloved father (*Almarhum*), may Allah gives the best place for him and my mother who always supports, advices and prays for me. Thanks for being best parents for me.
7. All of my friends in English Literature, especially Amazing Aurora Class. Thanks for joke, guys.
8. All of my friends in JPPI Minhajul Muslim.
9. For all of people who have helped me to finish this paper that I cannot mention all.

Finally, the researcher realizes that this paper is far from perfect, but hopefully, this research can give contribution to the literature field.

Yogyakarta, 27 July 2017



Muh. Takbir Al Asis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The word literature is derived from Latin language, *litteaturae*, it means “writing” (Abrams, 2009: 177). Literature is a term used to represent written or spoken material. It is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific work, but the term is most commonly used to refer to work of creative imagination (<http://classiclit.about.com/od/literaryterms>). According to Abrams, literature has been commonly used since the eighteenth century to designate fictional and imaginative writings that include poetry, prose, fiction and drama (2009: 177).

Poetry is a part of literature. Poetry is one of creative imaginations that is structured rhythmically and meant to tell a story, or express any kinds of emotion, idea, or state of being (<http://en.bookfi.net>). Aristoteles states poetry is an imitation that comes naturally to human being from childhood (<http://en.bookfi.net>). Poetry is defined as a kind of language that is used more intensely. Poetry is a form for special attention and one that calls unusual attention to the way it is formed (Wainwright, 2000: 3).

Carter says that poetry is to serve as an escape from the self, poetry is not turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it should not express the personality, but escape from personality (Carter, 2006: 23). Poetry could remain untouched by the prevalent materialism all around it (Carter, 2006: 27). Poem

existed as self-evident, it was considered as an object in itself, out off from both author and the world around it (Carter, 2006: 27). Poetry is composed by actual human being and tracts of it are very closely about them, but of course the speaker can never be the actual writer who is a person with an address (Wainwright, 2009: 51). Therefore, poem must be stand alone without the influence from the extern of poem itself.

Poetry is an ancient work which influences all conditions of people. People like to read or listen to poetry because it gives pleasure and they are enjoyable to it. In all ages, poetry regards as something central to exist because it has unique value to the fully realized life. Poetry takes all aspect of life as its domain. Its primary concern is not in beauty, philosophical truth, or persuasion, but experience (<http://en.bookfi.net>). All kind of experiences as a whole concerned of poetry; beautiful or ugly, strange or common, noble or ignoble, and actual or imagery. In real life, death or pain and suffering are not pleasurable, but in poetry they may be (<http://en.bookfi.net>). All of pleasurable and problems that are found in poetry or other work are influenced by the character of human language (Wainwright, 2004: 5). Therefore, poetry as an ancient work has the unique style to exist all kind of poet's experience.

From the explanation above, the researcher can define that poetry is a part of literature that is used to express the poet's ideas, imaginations and emotions. A poem is a part of the functioning and the gesturing of the words that are used every day (Wainwright, 2004: 7). A poem is a media to communicate the poet's thought and feelings. Poem is an experience, not a discussion of an

experience. Poem is seen as an object of extraordinary, as a silent object that is not equal to words printed on a page. Poem as unchanging objects represents an organized entity, not a meaning. To convey the meaning, poems cannot be perfectly translated or summarized, it is different from the other literature.

The “Phenomenal Woman” is one of poems that is created to express the social circumstance when its poet lives. This poem illustrates how the social condition of a black woman among the whites. This poem conveys a message of the survival for black woman, African-American person, to rise up her poverty, prejudice and lost of power (Nongkhlaw, 2010: 7). It can be shown in the line “Just as cool as you please”. In this line, the black woman tries to explain that she is strong woman like as the whites. She always tries to fight her due as black woman in order to get the equality with the whites in society. It explores deeply of the strategies for survival that the African-American woman uses to emancipate herself for being “Caged”. The black woman reflects herself like as bird in a caged, she has limitation to get her freedom. This poem is written to denounce and change the discrimination suffered by black woman and black people. Therefore, the researcher aims to analyze “Phenomenal Woman” poem, to show the reader that actually black woman as phenomenal as white woman. Black woman has the occasion same as white woman to out from her limitation.

The “Phenomenal Woman” poem is composed in sixty lines and it consists of four stanzas. In every last line of each stanza, the speaker concludes by saying that she is a woman phenomenally. The speaker may say that she is phenomenal because she is very influential woman, on the other side, word

“phenomenal” may have dual meanings for woman. The first, woman is illustrated as huge body and the second, it is portrayed as a towering personality. Thus the speaker describes woman as huge in both physique and personality (<http://beamingnotes.com/2013/10/22/summary-analysis-phenomenal-woman-maya-angelou>).

According to *Oxford dictionary*, phenomenal means very great or impressive (1983: 320). It can define that phenomenal woman is a woman who is very great and impressive personality. The “Phenomenal Woman” poem generally conveys a sense of extreme self-assurance (Bloom, 2009: 5). The black woman is illustrated as too big negro girl, with happy black hair, broad feet and get space between her teeth (Bloom, 2009: 136). Cox says in his book *Black Americans of Achievement* that “Phenomenal Woman” poem describes about black experience, the human condition, and the human beings feel (2006: 78).

“Phenomenal Woman” poem describes about how the black woman has to be confident to live among the whites. A black woman awares that she is not perfect physically, it illustrates in the first line, “I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size”, it defines that a black woman is not beautiful and good appearance, even like the model’s zise body. Confidently, she wants to change herself to be woman phenomenally. She argues that true woman is not about beautiful face, but who has strong character and good attitude. She tries to break the stereotype in the society that white woman is assumed as the pretty woman. Blcak woman wants to show that she is beautiful woman in her own standard.

This is one of reasons why the researcher wants to analyze this poem, is to show intrinsically what the essence of phenomenal woman from this poem.

The researcher wants to analyze the “Phenomenal Woman” poem by Maya Angelou using new criticism theory. The researcher chooses this poem because the researcher thinks that it is interesting to show how the phenomenal woman portrayed in this poem. From the Islamic perspective, Nabi Muhammad Saw. Said in his hadith:

وَعَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ صَخْرٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ : قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ : إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَى أَجْسَامِكُمْ وَلَا إِلَى صُورِكُمْ ، وَلَكِنْ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ

Translation:

“Verily Allah does not look at your phisical appereance and your wealth but He looks to your heart and to your deeds” (Shahih Muslim Book 45, Hadith 42).

The hadith explains that Allah does not look people from their personality, but Allah is seing their heart. It depicts that phenomenal woman is not belongs to the white woman. People assume that white woman is pretty, good appearance, and attractive. In islamic view, phenomenal woman is the woman who has good attitude, good morality and good relation in her society. In “phenomenal woman” poem depicts that phenomenal woman is the woman who has good confidence, good morals and inner beauty. Therefore, having pretty face, good body, and good appearance, these all nothing for Allah. Good woman is looked by her heart.

It is interesting to analyze “Phenomenal Woman” and how the poem reflects feeling and condition of the woman around environment. This poem becomes an important object to analyze, to show the reader explicitly about how the true phenomenal woman is described in the poem. Therefore, the researcher considers that the poem is an important work to analyze using new criticism theory.

There are several Angelou’s poems that talk about the black woman. One of the poem is “Still I Rise”. “Still I Rise” is same with “Phenomenal Woman”, both of them tell about the black woman who lives among the whites. In “Still I Rise”, the word “you” is used in which refers to the whites. This poem also uses some symbols to show black woman’s identity. The words are *sassiness*, *haughtiness*, and *sexiness*. *Sassiness* means fashionable, interesting and confident. *Haughtiness* means that a black woman is same with the whites, even she is better than the whites. *Sexiness* is interesting and attractive. Meanwhile, “Phenomenal Woman” poem also images that woman is confident, interesting and brave. In “Phenomenal Woman”, woman images herself by using her physical body. She is always proud with her body. She has high confident. The word *reach*, *span*, *stride*, *curl*, *fire*, and *flash* as symbol to make elegant and beautiful in her body.

In doing the analysis, the researcher focuses on analyzing the “Phenomenal Woman” poem because the poem shows that eventhough someone does not have a beautiful face, there is an inner beauty that makes someone being phenomenal. For the researcher, firstly, this poem illustrates the

phenomenal woman in interesting side, but it still needs interpretation to know its essence deeply in order to get the proper meaning. It is important to analyze because not all of the man can understand its deeper meaning. Therefore, close reading is needed in order to get the thematic meaning clearly. Secondly, the researcher as a man thinks that this poem is important to analyze because it tells about the struggle of black woman to get her own right among the society. It also to tell other women about the confidence. Black woman tries to break the stereotype of beauty in the society which is assumed that beauty belongs to white women. Black woman depicts that she has other standards of beauty belongs to her own way. The point is, the black woman hopes there is no clash again between black woman and the whites in the society. She wants to live together in equality. Therefore, the researcher considers to analyze the “Phenomenal Woman” focuses on the intrinsic elements of poem by using the new criticism approach.

1.2 Research Question

In this research, the researcher focuses on “How does this poem portray phenomenal woman?”

1.3 Objective of Study

In accordance with the problem above, the objective of this research is “To know how the woman is portrayed phenomenally in this poem.”

1.4 Significances of Study

Theoretically, this research can be used as the reference to understand the content of “Phenomenal Woman” poem and how the new criticism theory is applied in the research. Practically, this research can be used for lecturers, students or researchers for some intention. For students, this research is important as the reference for whom are interested in analyzing about poem using new criticism theory. For lecturers, this research can be a material in teaching. For researchers, this research can help them in doing their research.

1.5 Literature Review

The researcher finds three the critical works of Maya Angelou’s Phenomenal Woman poem. The first, an undergraduate thesis written by Dian Bania Persada Sembering, a student of Sumatra Utara University entitled “An Analysis of Feminism in Maya Angelou’s Selected Poems”. In his analysis, the writer uses descriptive method analysis. This thesis focuses of describing the feminism in seven poem of Maya Angelou. Based on his analysis, he has found that the women which are described in Angelou’s poems have big struggle to get their own right and to oppose patriarchy culture.

The second is an undergraduate thesis written by Gatot Henda Febiyanto, a student of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, entitled “The Idea of Black Feminism in Maya Angelou’s Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman”. The writer analyzes the idea of black feminism based on the review on black feminism in the U.S. In his thesis, he analyzes what “Still I Rise” and “Phenomenal Woman” talk about. Then, how “Still I Rise” and “Phenomenal Woman” portray the idea

of black feminism. The result of his analysis, he has found that there is clash among black women versus white people, black women versus men and black women versus white women.

The last is an undergraduate thesis written by Aftiyari Nurin Nisak, a student of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, entitled “Love as Represented in John Donne’s “Love’s Alchemy”. In her thesis, the writer analyzes the poem intrinsically through New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks. The writer concerns to show the representation of love in that poem. Based on her research, she has found the representation of human coupled love. This poem is about the miracle of human coupled love.

This research is different from three literature reviews above. This research only focuses to show how the phenomenal woman is portrayed in Maya Angelou “Phenomenal Woman” poem. This research uses New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks to analyze the poem intrinsically. While the three prior researches, the first focuses on analyzing how the feminism described in seven poems of Angelou. The second research focuses on how the idea of black woman talks about. The last research focuses on analyzing the intrinsic elements of John Donne’s “Love’s Alchemy” poem. The research purposes to show how love is represented in the poem. Even though the three of analysis above have the same object or the same theory, in this research, the researcher will analyze the phenomenal woman through New Criticism theory as a tool to analyze the intrinsic elements of its work.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

In doing the research, the researcher will analyze the poem intrinsically. The researcher uses an objective approach as the method to analyze the intrinsic elements of the poem. Objective approach is a method of approach which concerns to the work itself. According to Abrams objective approach is a method of approach which deals to its work itself as something stands free from the extrinsic elements of poem, related to poet, to the audience and the environment of its poets (2009: 63). Therefore, this analysis focuses to the intrinsic elements of the poem.

In analyzing “Phenomenal Woman” poem By Maya Angelou, the researcher uses New Criticism theory as tool to analyze. New criticism is the theory that its proper concern is not with the external circumstances or effect or historical position of its work, but with detailed consideration of the work itself as independent entity (Abrams, 2009: 216). Abrams also adds that the distinctive procedure for a New Critic is explication, or close reading: the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and ambiguities of verbal and figurative components within a work (2009: 217).

New criticism is the theory emphasized on closing reading, particularly of poetry to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. New criticism theorist considering that analyzing the poet or any work outside the text is irrelevant. Analyzing the work from the background of its poet is irrelevant because it would ruin the purity of

the text (Riskian Hendra Ardianto, 2006: 13). Therefore, understanding the meaning of text is necessary in this theory.

According to Carter, poetry has to be the central concerns, it can stand as self-evident and unique entity without influence from the external world (2006: 27). Every element in a poem has relation to another element to coherence of the whole. A poem is considered as an object in itself, untouched from both the author and the world around it (Carter, 2006: 27).

In doing this analysis, the researcher uses new criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks as the tool to analyze the intrinsic elements of the poem such as paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. In this theory, the first basic element that Brooks emphasizes is paradox. Brooks says that the language of poetry is the language of paradox. Paradox is the language of sophistry, hard, bright and witty. Paradox is hardly the language of the soul (1947: 3). Paradox is the appropriate and inevitable to poetry, the poet requires a language purged of every trace of paradox. The poet utters can be approached only in term of paradox (Brooks, 1947: 3).

Brooks also emphasizes irony as an important element in analyzing the poem. Irony is a statement or a situation to reveal a reality different from what appears to be true. Abrams says that the term irony remains the basic sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case, in order to achieve special rhetorical or artistic meaning (2009: 165).

Ambiguity is used in this theory. Ambiguity is multiple meaning of language. Ambiguity is rich simultaneous interpretation of words, phrases,

actions or situations which can be supported by the context of a work. Ambiguity is the rich or meaningful in sense, in order to achieve the finest effects of the poem (Brooks, 1947: 115). It is used to identify a deliberate poetic device; the usage of a single word or expression to signify two or more distinct references, or to express two or more various attitudes or feelings (Abrams, 2009: 12).

The last basic element is tension. Tension is proposed as a term to be made by extension and intension. The intension of a word is the set of abstract attributes which must be possessed by any object to which the word can be literally applied, and the extension of a word is the class of concrete objects to which the word applies (Abrams, 2009: 363).

1.7 Method of Research

This section provides of type of research, data sources, method of collecting data, and method of analyzing data. Each of them will be explained belows:

1.7.1 Type of research

Type of this research uses qualitative research. According to Creswell in his book *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approach*, a qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problem (2009:1). The process of research consist of emerging question and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general

themes, and making the interpretation of the meaning of the data (Cresswell, 2009:1).

1.7.2 Data sources

The data sources in this research is the text of “Phenomenal Woman” poem by Maya Angelou as primary data. The data unit are word or phoneme such as *I, phenomenal, woman, -ly, -s/es, and -ed.*

1.7.3 Methods of collecting data

The researcher applies the library and internet researches in collect the data. The researcher tries to understand the poem. After understanding the poem, the researcher tries to find out the data and makes list of them based on the structural devices of the poem, which are ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension.

1.7.4 Methods of analyzing data

In this research, the researcher uses qualitative method to analyze the data. Firstly, the researcher close reads the main source of data, “Phenomenal Woman” poem. Then, the researcher explains and analyzes the classified data like the ambiguity, paradox, irony and the tension of the poem. The last step, the researcher interprets the data and makes the unity of them to make conclusion.

1.8 Paper Organization

This paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction. It provides Background of study, Research question, Objective of study, Significance of study, Literature review, Theoretical approach, Methods

of research and Paper organization. The second chapter is analysis. This chapter consists of the analysis the intrinsic elements of the poem through new criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks as its tool to analyze the data. The last chapter is conclusion and suggestion.



CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

3.1 Conclusion

The “Phenomenal Woman” poem is written by Maya Angelou . It is divided into four stanzas and sixty lines. It portrays about the condition of black woman who lives in the community of the whites. This poem tries to send message for the black woman, generally for the readers, to appraise themselves although their physical appearance is imperfect like as the whites. The phenomenal woman is not directly related to the pretty face, but who has strong character and to be confident with her imperfect physical body, she is phenomenal woman.

In this poem, the researcher analyzes the poem using new criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks. This analysis focused on intrinsic elements of the poem. Those intrinsic elements including ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension. The ambiguity itself is found in the “Phenomenal Woman” word. It may be related to black woman. The black woman to be phenomenal because of her strength, confidence and fashion. It also may be related to white woman. White woman can be phenomenal because of her pretty, cute and good physical body. In this poem, the paradox is used thematically. The thematic paradox of the poem is “beautifully ugly”. This poem illustrates the contradictory image of black woman which is imaged as an ugly woman. Meanwhile, she is also portrayed as attractive woman. Then, the irony also using thematically in this poem. This poem shows that the phenomenal

woman is not related to the pretty, cute, and white woman, but it is related to woman who changes her weakness to be strength. The last, the tension of the poem is shown in the condition of black woman life. There is the contradiction between black woman life and the whites.

3.2 Suggestion

The “Phenomenal Woman” poem has been analyzed based on new criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks. The researcher realizes that the research still limited because only analyzing the four thematic intrinsic elements of the poem, they are: ambiguity, paradox, irony, and tension. The researcher hopes for the next writer to analyze this poem by using another method. It will be more interesting if the next writer analyzing this poem by using expressive method. It is attractive to know the background of life of its poet.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



Name : Muh. Takbir Al Asis
Date of Birth : Poli-Polia, 28 February 1994
Gender : Male
Religion : Islam
Phone Number : 0853-9707-0418
E-mail : takbir.alaziz@gmail.com
Address : Jl. H. Silondae, Tangguma RT 02/RW 01, Taosu, Poli-Polia, Kolaka Timur-Sulawesi Tenggara 93573.

FORMAL EDUCATION:

2000-2006 : SD Negeri 2 (Elementary School) Poli-Polia, South East Sulawesi.
2006-2009 : MTS Attaufiq Padaelo (Junior High School) Barru, South Sulawesi.
2009-2012 : MA Al-Mawaddah Warrahmah (Senior High School) Kolaka, South East Sulawesi.
2012-2017 : English Department, Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

NON FORMAL EDUCATION:

2014-2017 : JPPI Minhajul Muslim (Islamic Boarding School) Yogyakarta.