

**POLITICIZING WOMEN’S BODIES AS SEEN IN MAYA
ANGELOU’S “PHENOMENAL WOMEN”**

A GRADUATING PAPER

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



By:

NURUNNISA
14150018

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

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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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Yogyakarta, March 21 2019

The Researcher,



NURUNNISA
Student No.: 14150018



PENGESAHAN TUGAS AKHIR

Nomor : B-725/Un.02/DA/PP.00.9/08/2019

Tugas Akhir dengan judul : POLITICIZING WOMEN'S BODIES AS SEEN IN MAYA ANGELOU'S
"PHENOMENAL WOMEN"

yang dipersiapkan dan disusun oleh:

Nama : NURUNNISA
Nomor Induk Mahasiswa : 14150018
Telah diujikan pada : Kamis, 11 Juli 2019
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

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

Penguji II

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

Yogyakarta, 11 Juli 2019

UIN Sunan Kalijaga
Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya
Plh. Dekan



Dr. Maharsi, M.Hum.
NIP. 19711031 200003 1 001



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

Jl. Marsda Adi Sucipto Yogyakarta 55281 Telp./Fax. (0274)
513949

Web: <http://adab.uin-suka.ac.id>

Email: adab@uinsuka.ac.id

NOTA DINAS

Hal: Skripsi

a.n. Nurunnisa

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 : Nurunnisa

NIM : 14150018

Prodi : Sastra Inggris

Fakultas : Adab dan Ilmu Budaya

Judul : **POLITICIZING WOMAN'S BODIES AS SEEN IN
MAYA ANGELOU'S "PHENOMENAL WOMEN"**

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Yogyakarta, 21 Maret 2019

Pembimbing

Danial Hidayatullah M.Hum.

19771115 200501 2 002

POLITICIZING WOMEN’S BODIES AS SEEN IN MAYA ANGELOU’S “PHENOMENAL WOMAN”

By: Nurunnisa

ABSTRACT

Phenomenal Woman is a poem by Maya Angelou that talks about women’s bodies. From the first read, it seems that woman in this poem is defending herself against other woman with stereotype. Yet does she really defend herself? Or in fact fall into men’s ideal in defending herself? The research analysis was conducted using Feminist Stylistic analysis approach., This research aims to elaborate how women’s bodies is politicized and becomes a discourse in a poetic texts. This research used an objective approach in the analysis the researcher want to reveal and explain the representation and the image of the character “I” in this poem. From this research, the result shows that not only text, short stories or novels can be analyzed by discourse analysis, through feminist stylistic theory moreover poem can also be seen by the discourse analysis’ point of view. Thus, there can be the result that there is politics of women’s bodies. There are three criteria that can be found to identify the poetic language style in politics of bodies such us body as site of conflict, women’s bodies as men’s ideal (patriarchal paradigm), and women’s bodies as discourse.

Keywords: *Poem, Feminist Stylistics, Phenomenal Woman, Discourse*

POLITIK TUBUH WANITA DALAM “PHENOMENAL WOMAN”

KARYA MAYA ANGELOU

Oleh: Nurunnisa

ABSTRAK

Phenomenal Woman adalah puisi karya Maya Angelou tentang tubuh wanita pada diri seorang wanita. Awal membaca, kelihatannya wanita di puisi ini membela dirinya sendiri dari wanita lain dengan stereotype. Tetapi, apakah benar dia membela dirinya sendiri? Ataukah sebenarnya dia telah terpengaruh oleh pandangan laki-laki dalam membela dirinya? Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis feminist stylistics. Melalui penggunaan analisis feminist stylistics, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan bagaimana wanita menjadi wacana dalam teks puisi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan objektif dengan teori Feminist Stylistics yang diusung oleh Sara Mills yang bertindak sebagai pisau analisis untuk mengungkapkan dan menjelaskan representasi dan gambaran yang ada pada karakter “Saya” dalam puisi ini. Dari penelitian ini, didapatkan hasil bahwa tidak hanya teks, cerita pendek atau novel yang dapat dianalisis dengan analisis wacana, tetapi puisi juga dapat dilihat dengan menggunakan kacamata analisis wacana. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat politik tubuh dalam puisi ini. Politik tubuh di sini terdiri dari tubuh sebagai konflik, tubuh perempuan yang diinginkan laki-laki (Paradigma Patriarki), dan tubuh perempuan yang dibicarakan.

Kata Kunci: *Puisi, Feminist Stylistics, Phenomenal Woman, Wacana*

MOTTO

” ان مع العسر يسرا ”

(Asy-Syarh:6)

“Be kind and respectful. Always.

Be thankful to people who are kind and respectful to you. Always.”

(Unknown)

“You like because and you love despite. (You like someone because of all of their qualities & you love someone despite some of their qualities).” #SetItUp

DEDICATION

I dedicate this graduating paper for

My beloved first Parents Ibu Siti Umi Hanifah, and Ayah Sugiyarto,

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My beloved third Parents Ibu Siti Islamiyati, and Bapak Mahfud,

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My dearest Brothers Ahmad Hanifuddin and Fauqi Rabbani and all of my big

family

And

My Future Husband

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is not only an imitation but also a form of a creative work. The creativity can be explored by human experiences. In fact, literature is a media used to express human's life. Therefore, literary work is about human life. The appearance of literature is built based on the existence of human expressions. Taylor proposed that, "Literature, like other arts, is essentially an imaginative act, that is, an act of the writer's imagination in selecting, ordering and interpreting life-experience" (1981:1). Thus, literature in general can be defined as a reflection of human life that describes feelings, thoughts, imaginations, and views of human being.

In creating literary works, such as prose, poetry, and drama, poets use language as a medium. Literary work is always fiction. The examples of literary fictions are prose, novels, short stories, and drama. Fiction "is any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that actually happened" (Abrams, 2009:116). Fiction can be divided into two types, prose and poetry. Poetry is a literary work regulated by certain norms and rules which are different from drama and prose. Some examples of literary poetry are poem, epic, and lyric.

Poetry can be defined as a kind of writing form. In poetry, the use of language is arranged to get aesthetic quality. The emphasis of aesthetic language, the use of repetition and certain rhyme are some differences that distinguish poetry from other literary works, for instance drama or prose. According to Culler, aesthetic means that literature as an aesthetic object. The features of literature add the organization of level-linguistic, a comparison of the practical context to utterances. The fictional relationship with the world can be united together under the title of the common aesthetic language function. The aesthetic is historically named for the theory of arts and involved a debate about whether beauty was the property of being objective of artwork or subjective responses of viewers, and about relationship between the beauty of true and good (1997: 32). Immanuel Kant via Jonathan Culler said that according to the principle theorist of Western aesthetic modern, aesthetics is an effort to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual worlds, between the world powers, the quantity and world concept (1997). An object of aesthetics, such as a painting of a literary work with a combination of sensual form (color, sound) and spiritual content (idea), describes the possibility of the unity of materials and spirituals. Hence, the literary work is an aesthetic object with other communicative functions originally grouped or suspended, which involves readers to consider the links between form and content.

This paper examines the relationship between feminism and language in Maya Angelou's poem. The process of defining both feminism and stylistics is not an easy task because they have various types, and critics and analysts have

different views about them. Mills believes that ‘feminist’ and ‘stylistics’ are complex and may have different meanings for readers, and states that “feminist stylistic analysis is concerned not only to describe sexism in a text, but also to analyze the way that point of view, agency, metaphor, or transitivity are unexpectedly closely related to matters of gender, to discover whether women’s writing practices can be described, and so on” (1995:1). Thus, Mills’ description clarifies that in feminist stylistics, the focus is on the linguistic devices and the sphere which surrounds the text to find out how the female writers express women’s issues in their writings. This view paves the way for researchers to study texts at various levels to tackle a certain topic.

In this paper, the researcher analyzes a poem by Maya Angelou entitled “Phenomenal Women”. The poem is presented as follows:

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
 I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
 But when I start to tell them,
 They think I'm telling lies.
 I say,
 It's in the reach of my arms
 The span of my hips,
 The stride of my step,
 The curl of my lips.
 I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.

When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.

I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

Now you understand
 Just why my head's not bowed.
 I don't shout or jump about
 Or have to talk real loud.
 When you see me passing
 It ought to make you proud.
 I say,
 It's in the click of my heels,
 The bend of my hair,
 the palm of my hand,
 The need of my care,
 'Cause I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

The poem “Phenomenal Woman” focuses on displaying self-image through linguistic devices. According to Roy F. Baumeister and Debra G. Hutton, self-presentation is a behavior that attempts to convey some information or some images of oneself to other people. It denotes a class of motivations in human behavior. These motivations are parts of stable dispositions of individuals, but they depend on situational factors to elicit them (1987:71). By this definition, Angelou or the female speaker in the poem talks about herself and tries to show who she is. The medium through which Angelou presents herself or women in general is language. Angelou’s role is first, as a woman, and secondly, as a black

feminist writer. According to Bomarito and Hunter, she triumphs over formidable social obstacles and her struggle to achieve a sense of identity and self-acceptance. Such themes tie Angelou's writing closely to the concerns of the feminist movement (2005: 65).

"Phenomenal Woman" presents a beautiful image. Exploring and proving these aims need a close examination of the language of the selected texts which can be conducted through application of the tenets of feminist stylistics and pragmatics, including the pronouns, the speech act, and implications.

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, linguistic resources can be used to present oneself as a particular kind of person: to project an attitude or stance; to affect the flow of talks and ideas. Thus, these can involve gender in myriad of ways. Tone and pitch of voice, patterns of intonation (or "tunes"), choice of vocabularies, even pronunciations, and grammatical patterns can signal gendered aspects of speaker's self-presentation. They can also signal the speaker's accommodation to, or enforcement of, the gender of others interacting in a situation (2003: 60). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's view clearly shows that the language used represents the personality of the speaker; for instance, people who are hesitant or suffering from psychological disorders cannot talk fluently and those who are in power speak authoritatively. Gendered language or genderlect is not the concern of this paper; therefore, the focus is on the linguistic features to uncover the implied meanings not to decide on the femininity of her language as interpreted by Lakoff who characterizes women's language as hesitant,

ingratiating and weak (1975). According to Weatherall, Lakoff's explanation of this style was that "women are socialized to hedge meaning, in order to avoid offending men" (2002: 57). In contrary to Lakoff's view, Angelou's language is adamantly strong and obvious. She raised her voice and publically expressed who she was, surely as a woman and not as Maya Angelou.

In this research, the researcher focuses on the representation of woman through discourse by using feminist stylistics theory. The discourse itself refers to Maya Angelou's poem. As Mills says feminist stylistics only focuses on the linguistic devices and the sphere which surrounds the text to find out how the female writers express woman's issues in their writing.

This research is interesting because this poem contains gender issue like women's rights and is different from other research. Besides that, from the first read, it seems that woman in this poem is defending herself against other woman with stereotype. Yet does she really defend herself? Or in fact fall into men's ideal in defending herself? Therefore, this research is different from other research. This research aims to elaborate how women become discourse in a poetic text. The features include pronouns, lexis, sentence, and the contexts contained in the texts. According to Mills' theory, analysis can be undertaken at the level of word, sentence, and discourse (1995). The same approach can be applied here to achieve the purpose of the paper and that not only texts, short stories or novels can be analyzed by discourse analysis, but the poem can also be examined through discourse analysis.

1.2 Research Question

The question formulated for the research is how women are represented through discourse in “Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

According to the formulated question, the objective of this researcher is to understand the representation of women through discourse in “Phenomenal Woman”.

1.4 Significances of the Study

The researcher believes that there has not been enough attention given by English Department students of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga to language-oriented or text-centered approach in analyzing and understanding poems. Thus, the researcher aims to apply feminist stylistic approach in analyzing and comprehending “Phenomenal Woman”. This research is significant in practical bases for understanding about feminist stylistics, especially English Department students of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, who have a concern on the study of feminist stylistics. Based on this reason, the research may stimulate some researchers to conduct researches on poem text style.

1.5 Literature Review

After searching for some researches with same material theory, the researcher found some prior researches that are relevant to this research. The first research is a paper in Theory and Practice in Language Studies by Bassey Garvey Ufot from Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria entitled Feminist Stylistic: A Lexico-Grammatical Study of the Female Sentence in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Hume-Sotomi's *the General's Wife*. This paper is a stylistic study of the major aspects of lexis and grammar which exemplify the dialectics of genderlectal linguistics in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Hume-Sotomi's *the General's Wife*. Both texts are separate in period and culture by about a hundred and seventy eight years as well as the sub-genre in which the former being explicitly fictional whereas the latter belongs to the genre of fiction. Employing the postulations of feminine stylisticians, such as Virginia Woolf, Sara Mills, Deidre Burton as well as those of French feminists such as Jacques Lacan, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, supported by Halliday's scale and category grammar as its theoretical basis, the study appraised the major lexical and grammatical components of the 'female sentence' or 'écriture feminine'. In doing this, the research attempted to discover whether it was indeed the case that women's writing was stylistically unique or just a deviation from men's writing considered as the norm. Based on the evidence in both texts, it can be concluded affirmatively that 'écriture feminine' was at once unique and androgynous.

The second is a paper in International Journal of English Language Teaching by Prof. Dr. Abbas Deygan Darweesh and Hussein Huwail Ghayadh from University of Babylon, College of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English Thiqr Directorate of Education, Teachers Training Institute entitled Investigating Feminist Tendency in Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" in Terms of Sara Mill's Model: A Feminist Stylistics Study. This paper purports to explore the relationship between linguistic structures and socially construed meanings in a narrative text. A stylistic analysis was conducted to unravel the design agilities of Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale". It investigated her stylistic traits whereby much of the time her words seemed to cloak or obscure what really happened. By adopting Sara Mill's model, the researcher attempted to reveal the ideology and power relations that underpinned a literary text from different levels (according to the model): word, phrase, and discourse. The evidence seemed to be strong that the model, however, had identifiable functions which contributed to the effective meaning of the novel. On this basis, it may be inferred that those elements triggered and played significant roles in passing the intention of the writer across.

The last is a graduating paper by Muh Takbir Al Asis (2017) from UIN Sunan Kalijaga entitled "The Ideal Women as Portrayed in Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" Poem". His aim is to describe the ideal women portrayed in Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" Poem. This poem illustrates the condition of a black woman who lives among the whites, and expresses societal critics that beauty standard should not be based on white woman appearances and

black woman is beautiful on her own way. The research applied Clean the Brooks's New Criticism Theory with qualitative research method and close reading technique to collect the data. Data were divided into four thematic intrinsic elements, namely ambiguity of the poem stated in the "Phenomenal Woman" word, paradox of the poem thematically illustrating the contradictory image of black woman, the irony of the poem thematically showing the phenomenal woman, and lastly, the poem's imbalanced tension between black woman's life and white's life.

In contrast to previous researchers, the current researcher takes "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelous. This material object, "Phenomenal Woman", was discussed by Muh. Takbir Al Asis, but he used different theory in analyzing the data. The current research used the theory of Feminist Stylistics. This theory was also used by Bassey Gerve, Prof. Dr. Abbas, and Hussein Huwail, but they studied different objects. Therefore, the current research is quite different from other research.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

In conducting the research, the researcher used feminist stylistic theory. Feminist stylistics focuses on the analysis of texts from a feminist standpoint. It points out that there are linguistic correlations of the subordination of women to men by society and it undertakes not only to reveal these correlations, but also to eliminate them. Feminists stylistics highlight a systematic manner of the self-conscious attempts by female writers to modify traditional modes of language use.

They do this by identifying the dialectical features as well as the alternative forms of expression in such texts. This approach to stylistics extends over a broad range of issues and skills in textual analysis with the feminist ethos as its underpinning ideology. Mills described it as “a form of politically motivated stylistics of which aim is to develop an awareness of the way gender is handled in texts” (1995: 1). She added that feminist stylistics goes beyond mere description of sexual discrimination in literary works, but broadens to include a study of “the ways that point of view, agency, metaphor or transitivity are unexpectedly related to matters of gender”.

Feminist stylistics achieves its goals through close linguistic scrutiny and the explication of linguistic theory to set out the rationale for feminist textual analysis. Basically, this type of stylistic study undertakes to exemplify the ways in which authors conceptualize not only their works, but also the variety of meaning reflected in a particular text. Blaine argued that feminist stylistics is the strongest successor of critical stylistics with more specific concerns of unmasking patriarchal ideologies and denaturalizing patriarchal assumptions (1990: 3).

According to Mills, the analysis can be undertaken at the level of word, sentence and discourse (1995). The same approach can be applied in this study to achieve the purpose of the research and to conclude that language is not utilized to show the gender of the writer or that the author is female, but to study significant issue of self-image.

This theoretical approach is presented as a mean of analysis. In this regard, the researcher implemented Sara Mills' theory where the analysis can be undertaken at the word, sentence and discourse level (1995).

In the level of word, this part of analysis deals with the question of gender bias at the level of individual words. The model focuses on more general and theoretical aspects of sexism and gives an account of generic usage. Furthermore, the researcher examines through the procedures of the model specific types of sexist language-use. Additionally, the model which is proposed by Mills is concerned with the way that feminist critics have dealt with sexism in language, and the effects which they claim this type of language-usage has on readers, particularly females. By examining examples of usage, such as the sex-specific pronoun use, the misuse of generics, address terms and the negative descriptions of females in a variety of texts, it is hoped to show that language-use can present and perpetuate a particular view of women (Mills, 1995: 62).

The analysis at the level of phrase/sentence concerns with the way language-use beyond the level of the word is analyzed. In other words, the way that phrases and sentences make sense in relation to their context, the history of their usage, and also the background knowledge is the concern of analysis at this level. It shall be argued that the way meaning takes place often involves the process of meaning-production. In that sense, in order to do a feminist analysis of

sentences, some archaeological work is needed to excavate the places where ideological knowledge informs meaning (Mills, 1995: 98).

The analysis at the discourse level examines the way that feminists can undertake a gendered analysis focusing on larger-scale structures at discourse level, that is, above the level of the sentence. It is the intention of this part not to focus on content as if it were a self-evident given, but to see content, the substance of texts, as something which is the negotiation of textual elements and codes and forces outside the text which influence both the way the text is constructed and the way what is written is deciphered. However, it is very much concerned with the larger structures and patterns which determine the occurrence of the individual lexical items, and it is also concerned with the effect of the items and larger structures on readers. In this way, the analysis links the word and the phrase with a larger notion of ideology through these textual patterns and structures. Besides, the way those stereotypical notions often present the language choices which are made when describing characters in fiction, and also when people describe themselves. In addition, the model considers the roles that female characters can fill and then go on to examine particular language choices in terms of the description of the fragmentation of the female body. Besides, focalization is adopted in this model because it refers to the perspective through which a narrative is presented. In literature, one can achieve this effect through first-person narration, free indirect discourse (Mills, 1995: 123).

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

This paper used qualitative research design because the subject of the research was a text. According to Creswell (2009: 1), qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the human or social class whether individual or groups, then making interpretation of them. The study also offers a section with the interpretation of word-by-word analysis based style. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to apply research. This means that this study is assumed as a research object “something which stands free from what is often called an “extrinsic” relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world” (Abrams, 2009: 63).

1.7.2 Data Sources

According to Hornby, data are facts or information used in deciding or discussing something (2009: 294). In this research, the source of data was taken from the poem “Phenomenal Woman” written by Maya Angelou. The units of the data were word, sentence and discourse, where verses of this poem were explored in this research.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

In data collection technique, the researcher used close reading. According to Creswell, close reading is detailed analysis of the complex inter-relationship and ambiguities of verbal and figurative components within a work (2009: 217). That means, the researcher must observe the details and be clear in the poem's verses. First, the researcher performed the poem close reading. Second, the researcher took the data in the poem language styles (word, phrase/sentence and discourse level). Last, the researcher categorized the data based on feminist stylistics features.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis method. According to Kothari, descriptive analysis concerns with the characteristics of a particular individual or of group (2004: 5). It also concerns with specific predications, with narration of fact and characteristics of individual, group, or situation. With this method, several steps were carried out to analyze the data presented as follows:

1. Finding how feminist stylistic features in the poem are used by reading the poem intensively. Reading poem intensively means reading by repeating the poem and focusing on the language rather than the content. Some of the examples are the learning of new vocabularies, grammars and expressions, translating the passage (sometimes called careful reading), or being involved in looking intensively (inside) the poem.

2. Determining and interpreting the data based on the categories of feminist stylistic features. Data were determined based on categories of feminist stylistic features with word level, lexical, and discourse analysis. Thus, the data were interpreted based on the categories of stylistic features by seeing the determination of categories already mentioned before (word, phrase /sentence, and discourse analysis).
3. Drawing the conclusion of all analysis results in the research.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research provides three chapters. The first chapter consists of background of the study, research question, objectives of the study, significances of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, methods of the study (type of research, data source, data collection technique, and data analysis technique), and paper organization. The second chapter is mostly about analysis and discussion, while the last one is the conclusion.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

3.1 Conclusion

This chapter elaborates the position of woman that is represented through discourse in “Phenomenal Woman”. The poem is written by a civil rights activist and a poet Maya Angelou (an African-American). This poem is one of four poems in her collection called “Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women”. “Phenomenal Woman” is free verse poems (do not have rhyme schemes). In “Phenomenal Woman” poem, it is against the concept of traditional beauty and tells readers how beautiful she is and makes her very proud of it. Women represented through discourse is seen from politics of bodies. The politics of bodies is how body is politicized by using body as a subject. There are three criteria found to identify the poetic language style in politics of bodies, such as bodies as sites of conflict, women’s bodies as men’s ideal (patriarchal paradigm), and women’s bodies as discourse.

The bodies as sites of conflict is how body becomes a conflict that means a female as deviant or individual. Deviant means abnormal. It is conflict between abnormal and normal. In “Phenomenal Woman”, it is illustrated that there is a difference between I and Them in looking at a woman's body.

The women's bodies as men's ideal (patriarchal paradigm) is how women have seen their rights in social life, but they are still confined to physical obsession and beauty concept which is very limited. The beauty standards are formed because of the patriarchal system that women must be physically perfect, in the sense of white, slim, young, sexy, and wearing make-up. Women's bodies as discourse is how body is portrayed or described. When the body is portrayed or described, the body also becomes a problem. The human bodies, especially women's, is very often compared and described by men in general or even other women. Regarding women's bodies, the women themselves think about how people talk about their bodies. As a result, women always change to be as attractive as possible. However, there are also some women who change their body shape to be very attractive because of its weirdness. Therefore, most women still want their bodies to be considered good by men, by other women, or even by themselves. From the explanation above it can be concluded that the beauty standard of women is subjective. It means that everybody has their own beauty standard; thus, it cannot be generalized. The representation of women through discourse in "Phenomenal Woman" is also mentioned in Surah At-Tiin verse 4:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

"We have certainly created man in the best of stature" (Q.S At-Tin:4).

From the verse above, the word "man" refers to creature. The correlation between the representations of women in this verse is among God's creatures on

the surface of this earth, man and woman are created by God in the best and the most perfect form. According to Ibnu Arabi in *tafsir* book called Al-Qurthubi, there is no creation of God which is the most perfect, but for a creature named human where God has created it in an alive, knowledgeable, capable of doing, having desire, being able to speak, being able to listen and see, and be able to take care of his affairs and punish (2009: 368-369).

3.2 Suggestion

This research is still far from perfect. There have been some limitations of data sources and literature review. The researcher hopes the next research in the same field will be able to conduct a better study. It is suggested that the next researchers should find new discoveries about the poem Phenomenal Woman by Maya Angelou using other theories, such as the theory of semiotics and patriarchal hegemon.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Details

Nurunnisa

Sleman, December 24th 1995

Unmarried

Famele

Moslem

Rt 01/Rw 019 Cemoroharjo Candibinangun Pakem
Sleman Yogyakarta

+6285640170977

alhumairah2432@gmail.com

Employment History

- Pondok Pesantren MA Ali Maksum and MTs Ali Maksum. Ngaji Teacher, July 2014 to 2017

Teaching Experience

- Pondok Pesantren MtsAli Maksum. English Instructor, August – November 2016
- Pondok Pesantren Pangeran Diponegoro. English Instructor, November – December 2016
- SD N Kraguman 2 Jogonalan, Klaten. English Instructor, July – August 2017
- Pondok Pesantren Pangeran Diponegoro. English Instructor, January - May 2018
- English Café. English Instrucor, July-August 2019
- SD Muhammadiyah Pakem Sleman. TEMATIK Instructor, September-December 2019.
- Pondok Pesantren MAS Ali Maksum. English Instructor, December 2018- current
- Pondok Pesantren MAS Ali Maksum. English Literature, Maret 2019 - current

Organization Experience

- Treasure in Pengajian Yayasan Pondok Pesantren Ali Maksum, 2016 – 2017
- Treasure in ECC (English Conversation Club) in Departement English Literature Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta 2016-current
- ECC (English Conversation Club) in Departement English Literature Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015 - current
- A participant in Himpunan Mahasiswa Sastra Inggris Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2014-current

Computer Skills

- Ms. Word
- Ms. Power Point
- Email
- Internet
- Ms. Excel

Education History

- 2001-2002, TKIT YAA BUNAYYA
- 2002-2008, Elementary School/SDIT HIDAYATULLAH
- 2008-2011 Junior High School/SMP ANAK SOLEH
- 2011-2014 Senior High School/ MAS ALI MAKSUM
- 2014- 2019 Department English Literature in Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga

Seminar and Event

- A participant of Somewhere Over The Rainbow : Indonesia and America's Attitudes Towards and Sexuality, October, 01st 2016 at FIB UGM
- A participant of ECC Mini Conference, April 08th 2016 at FAIB UIN Yogyakarta.
- A participant of beim seminar Au Pair Programm (der beste Wegnach Europa), May 21th 2016 at Solo
- A participant of workshop on Creating Socially Engaging Learning Experiences and Materials, February 15th 2018.
- A commite in Indonesia Mengajar Goes to Communities Talk show with ECC Jogja, 2016 at FAIB UIN Yogyakarta.
- A commite in Pekan Budaya Faculty of Adab and cultural sciences Islamic State University Sunan Kalijaga, 2014

Qualifications

- Have good management and leadership skills
- Fluent in Indonesian

Interests and Achievements

- relating people, reading, and traveling
- First winner of Kec Wanareja Badminton 2009