

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the writer will give a description and a further explanation to understand the achievement of the analysis. Therefore, this theoretical framework will cover the approaches, the theory, and the related studies which are important to equip the analysis with a clear description of the context. The writer will explain specifically about the concept which is going to be applied as a tool in analysing two poems “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou.

The African-American criticism is applied to help the writer in analysing the reflection of the effect of discrimination of the White Americans toward the African-Americans, as stated in the statement of the problem. Furthermore, the writer of the study also applies some elements of poetry that will be used to analyse the language of poems. However, the writer of the study also uses suggestion and comments from other sources which help in supporting the analysis in order to apply appropriate theory.

Furthermore, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is theoretical framework which consists of African-American criticism in general: race and racism and signifying and Black Vernacular English. Due to the object of the study is poetry, the analysis especially the language of poetry will be elaborated to find the meaning of the poem. The second part, is review of related

studies which consists of other studies that are related to the issue of African-Americans.

1. African-American Criticism

The racial issues that have informed African American literary history, introduce the reader to the fundamental concerns of African American race theorists today, describe the range of interests of contemporary African American literary critics, and it would be interested to pursue the African American field of literary study (Tyson 359).

The virtual exclusion of African American history and culture from American education, which began to be addressed only in the late of 1960s, reflects the virtual exclusion of African American history and culture from official versions of American history before that time. Only over the past few decades have American history books begun to include information about black Americans that had been repressed in order to maintain the cultural *hegemony*, or *dominance*, of white America (Tyson 360). As the writer mentioned above, the attitude of white Americans toward African Americans so bad especially in the era of World War I. During World War I, they cannot join together in the same community, for example: school and church. The white Americans also said little or nothing about the slave uprisings during the horrific Middle passage in their book, the increasing number of slave rebellions on the plantations, and the network of communication and resistance developed by slaves right under the

noses of the slave masters, and such accomplishments, for example, black literature, music, painting, sculpture, philosophy, and political debate.

According to Tyson that stated from Cullen and Hughes, they said that the literary style black writers choose cannot be separated from their political views on the writer's role as a member of an oppressed group. Indeed, one of the oldest issues in the black literary community concern the social role of the black writer in a racist theory (Tyson 364). The antiracist politics of early African American writers have remained relevant to the needs of black Americans over the long history of their struggle for justice. It is not surprising, therefore, that writing as a form of purely individual expression has been viewed by many African Americans as a luxury, the race could not afford while so many of its members were oppressed (364).

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., stated that the task of African-Americans theory and criticism is not to cry "special" that demands a unique approach to theory and criticism unlike any other past or contemporary school of criticism. Gates argues that instead, black theorists and critics must use the most sophisticated contemporary theories and practices to redefine the language of critical theory and to allow black language to enter academic discourse and help discourse prejudice and ethnic differences in literature (Bressler262).

African-American literature and criticism needed a theory on which to base its criticism. Throughout the first seven decades of the twentieth century, African-American writers wrote texts depicting African-Americans interact with their culture. In this body of literature, these American subaltern writers

concerned themselves mainly with issues of nationalism and the exposure of the unjust treatment of African-Americans-a suppressed, repressed, and colonized subculture-at the hands of theory white conquerors (Bressler 249). In this thesis, actually, the African-American criticism is searching for the personal identity; the bitterness of the struggle of black men and women in America to achieve political, economic, and social success, so that the writer can conclude that African-Americans want to reach their equal right as well as Americans.

Finally, African American women's poetics traditionally include a number of a recurring literary strategies. For example, black women writers frequently use a black female character as a narrator in a novel or work of short fiction or as the speaker in the poem in order to give black woman's authority as the tellers of their own stories. When third-person narration is used, the point-of view character is usually a black woman or girl. To emphasize the importance of relationships between black women, sometimes the narrative is framed as a conversation between two black women or girls (Tyson 390-400).

Then, the unique perspective of African American criticism can also offer the reader insights into literary works by white Americans writers. For example, Morrison used the word *Africanist* as "a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about people" (391).

2. Race and Racism

Racialism, refers to the belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics, just like physical characteristics, are biological properties that differentiate the races. *Racism* refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices (Tyson 360).

According to Tyson, in his book, there are systematic practices of racial discrimination can occur only when racism has become institutionalized. Institutional racism refers to the incorporation of racist policies and practices in the institutions by which a society operates, for example: education, federal, state, and so on (361). In the United States, the racial discrimination experienced generally is the institutional racism in health care that affects minority access to health care and the quality of health care received.

One area in which institutionalized racism has been very effective in discrimination against the African-Americans is the American literary canon. As many of you probably know, the Western (British, European, American) literary canon has been dominated by *Eurocentric* definition of Universalism, means literary works have been defined as great art, as *universal* – relevant to the experience of all people – and included in the canon only when they reflect European experience and conform to the style and subject matter of the European literary tradition, that is, only when they resemble those European works already deemed “great” (Tyson – Critical Theory Today: 361).

Internalized racism often results in *intra-racial racism*, which refers to discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features. Filmmaker Spike Lee also portrays intra-racial racism in *School Daze* (1988), in which students at a historically black college form two rival groups based on the relative “whiteness” and “blackness” of their physical appearances. Actually, internalized racism and intra-racial racism illustrates the devastating psychological experiences that also result (Tyson – Critical Theory Today: 362).

According to Deborah, the focus on black women’s identity in writing by the African American women is embodied in a number of recurring themes, such as: the victimization of black women as underpaid workers forced into the lowliest jobs and as victims of violence and sexual exploitation; the black women as suppressed artists; the importance of black women’s community for psychological survival, which includes the relationship of their families among grandmother, mothers, or daughters; the initiation of young black girls into the harsh realities and sexism and more sustained focus on the combined oppression of racism, sexism, and classism than we find in the work of the black male writers or white writer. Deborah observes that Black women novelists have assumed throughout their tradition a revisionist mission aimed at substituting reality for stereotype (94-95).

3. Signifying

According to Tyson quote from Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, he explained about the relationship between African-American sign ‘signification’ and the related term ‘Signifying’. Gates attempts to chart African American literary history as a history of relationships among literary texts. He argues that black texts “talk” about one another – for example, by copying, altering, or parodying one another’s literary device – the same way that black people talk about one another when they engage in the African American folk practice, called as *Signifying* (Tyson 386).

In his book, Gates’s focus is on the relationship between the African-American sign ‘Signification’ and the related term ‘Signifyin(g)’. He writes it this way in part to capture how Black Americans would pronounce it. For Gates, the standard English signs ‘Signification’ and ‘Signifying’, the same sign means different things to different communities of persons within the USA: there is a “play of differences generated by the unrelated concepts (the signified) for which they stand (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 45).” The process which Gates describes as ‘Signifyin(g)’ is closely linked to the paradigmatic axis of any utterance. “Signifyin(g) concerns itself with that ... chaos of what Saussure calls ‘associative relations,’ which we can represent as the playful puns on a word that occupy the paradigmatic axis of language and which a speaker draws on for figurative substitutions”(49).

According to Tyson that stated from Roger D. Abraham’s definition, Signifying is a black figurative mode of language use including the ability to talk

with great innuendo”; to carp, cajole, needle, and lie”; “the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point”; and it is also “the language of trickery, that set of words achieving Hamlet’s direction through indirection (Gates 232).” In this case, the writer interpreted Signifying as the indirect conversation or communication, means the things that you said, has different meaning.

According to Henry Lois Gates Jr., he stated:

The difference between two signifiers by writing the black signifier in upper case (“Signification”) and the white signifier in lower case (“signification”). He has selected to write term as “signifying.” The bracketed *g* enables him to connote the fact that this word is, more often than not, spoke by black people without the final *g* as “signifyin’(46).”

This arbitrary and idiosyncratic convention also enables him to recall the fact that whatever historical community of Afro-Americans coined that usage did so in the vernacular as spoken, in contradistinction to the literate written usages of the standard English “shadowed” term. The bracketed or aurally erased *g*, like the discourse of Black English and dialect poetry generally, stands as the trace of black difference in a remarkably sophisticated and fascinating (re)naming ritual graphically in evidence there. By replacing with a visual sign the *g* erased in the black vernacular shall, like Derrida’s neologism, serve both to avoid confusion and the reduction of these two distinct sets of homonyms to a false identity and to stand as the sign of a (black) Signifyin(*g*) difference itself. The absent *g* is a figure for the Signifyin(*g*) black difference (Gates – *The Signifying Monkey*: 46).

For Gates, the phenomenon which he terms Signifyin(g) manifests itself in African-American literature in three principal ways: as A) an explicit theme or subject matter; B) an implicit rhetorical strategy undertaken by a writer; and C) a principle of literary history (the latter two are connected, as we shall see). In the first section of this essay, Gates gives many examples of the ways in which Signifyin(g) is represented in many African American texts (most often in the form of a ritual speech act in which the protagonists of these texts repeatedly engage). In the second section, Gates uses the term to describe the intertextual relationship (one of revision from text to text) which exists between the earliest examples of African American literature and white American discourses (black writers were able to “Signify upon white racism through parody”)(94). To support his statement, Gates stated:

“In this case, Signifyin(g) takes many forms. Gates argues that black writers often repeat another’s structure by one of several means, including a fairly exact repetition of a given narrative or rhetorical structure, filled incongruously with a ludicrous or incongruent content (103).” Ralph Ellison, in contrast, was a modernist: he believed that the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainty of human experience could best be represented by ambiguous, metaphorical language, and a complex narrative with multiple layers of meaning. In *Invisible Man* (1952), Ellison “signifies upon Wright by parodying Wright’s

literary structures through repetition and difference.” (Gates- *The Signifying Monkey*:106).

4. Black Vernacular English or African-Americans Vernacular English

Black Vernacular English or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also called *Ebonics*. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Black Vernacular English, according to William Labov’s three-year National Science Foundation study released in 1985, “is a healthy, living form of language,” one which “shows the signs of people developing their own grammar” and one which apparent various linguistic signs of “separate development”. Labov’s existence research leads him to conclude that “There is evidence that, far from getting more similar to standard English, the Black English Vernacular is going its own way.” The Black Vernacular, he continues, “is reflecting a larger social picture of separated speech communities. The Black’s own grammar, which is very rich and complicated, is developing its own way. It looks as if new things are happening in Black Grammar” (Gates xix).

Repetition is also one of the characteristic of Black or African-Americans to express their feeling or the way of Blacks express something indirectly through their language.

5. The Language of Poetry

According to Perrine, there are preliminary suggestions to develop the reader’s ability in understanding and appreciating poems, first, read a poem more

than once. Second, keep a dictionary. Then, read so as to hear the sounds of the words in the reader's mind. Fourth, the reader should pay attention to what the poem is saying. The last one is, try to read poems aloud (21-22). The poem is a piece of writing in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given the intensity by particular attention to diction (it involving rhyme), rhythm, and imagery. The poem is also considered as a literary work which tells about the experience by the writer itself. In analysing the poems, there are several things that the writer needs to consider, for example: the language of poetry and theme. A poet must be created the words which express their ideas and feelings. These words are needed to be precisely right on several levels: they must sound right to the listener even as they delight his ear, they must have a meaning which might have been unanticipated, but seems to be the perfectly right one, they must arrange in a relationship and placed on the page in ways that are at once easy to follow and assist the reader in understanding, they must probe the depths of human thought, emotion, and empathy, while appearing simple, self-contained, and unpretentious (PDF file).

In the language of poetry, there are many terms which have to be noticed for analysis this theory. In analysing poems, the language contributes to the meaning, purpose, or emotional force (Clough: 2009). The writer should find the meaning of the text itself by looking at the diction, figurative language, and imagery.

a. Diction

Diction, the first of these elements that make up style, means simply the writer's choice of words (Danziger and Johnson: 33). According to Perrine, there are three compositions of a word which is important in analyzing the poems: sounds, denotation, and connotation. Most of the words convey several; meanings and ideas at the same time. It is the poet's job to find words which, when used in relation to other words in the poem because it will carry the intention of thought. In this thesis, the writer would like to analyze the diction which is also part of analyzing the poems. The writer will use two terms: denotation and connotation in analyzing the diction.

a.1. Denotation

Denotation is also known as the dictionary of a word. According to Perrine, the basic part of the meaning is its denotation or denotations: the dictionary meaning or meaning of words (38). For example: the word fire, in dictionary, the flame or something burning.

a.2. Connotation

The connotation is also known as the emotional, psychological or social over tones of a word; its implications and association apart from its literal meaning (pdf file). The connotations are what it suggests beyond what it expresses: its overtones of meaning. For example: the connotation of a snake is evil or danger.

b. Figurative Language

According to Perinne, Figurative language is the language using figures of speech – is a language that cannot be taken literally. It also affords us imaginative pleasure. The imagination might be described in one sense as that faculty or ability of the mind that proceeds by sudden leaps from one point to another that goes up a stair by leaping in one jump from the bottom to the top rather than by climbing up one step at a time (Perrine 71). We have seen that the process of coming to terms with figurative language divides into two stages: the rejection of an orthodox, but unacceptable interpretation and the discovery of an orthodox, figurative interpretation (Leech 127). There are many kinds of figurative language, such as: Metaphor, simile, personification, irony, understatement, overstatement and symbol.

c. Imagery

Based on Perrine, Imagery may be defined as the representation through language of sense experience. Poetry appeals directly on the reader's senses, of course, through music and rhythm, which we actually hear when it is read aloud. But indirectly it appeals to our senses through imagery, the representation to the imagination of sense experience. Perrine also divided imagery into five, are as follow: *image*, perhaps most often suggests a mental picture, something seen in the mind's eye-and *visual imagery* is the most frequently occurring kind of imagery in poetry. Image also represent a sound; a smell; a taste; a tactile experience, such as hardness, thirts, or movement in the muscles or joints (54).

The most popular technical word is image, or in its plural form, imagery. It is also the most comprehensive, in that it means any figure of speech or piece of descriptive writing. Although the name suggests it should only be used of the words that appeal to the eye, it is regularly used of anything that can be detected by the five senses (Gill 23).

B. Review of Related Studies

There are some studies conducted in literary yield that are closely related to the discussion of African-Americans especially in analysing the poem itself. In this case, the writer of the study finds two related study which have similarity to analyse the poems. First, the writer found an analysis of Maya Angelou's poems: "Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal woman" using feminism. This thesis is written by Gatot Hendy Febriyanto. In his thesis, he wants to show the idea of black feminism and ask the black women to rise and has high confidence. The similarity of the writer of the study's analysis to his analysis is also related to the African-Americans and asked them to rise to get their freedom. On the other hand, the writer also find another related of the study related to the African-American criticism, such as Black Vernacular English written by Dewi Sasanti. She focuses on African-Americans also.

The differences between this study and the previous one lies on the concern of discussion. This study concerns on the analysis of the text by looking at several points of the language of poetry such as: figurative language and imagery to find out the reflection of discrimination of the white Americans toward

the African-Americans. This study concerns on analysis of the text entitled “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”.