

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Maya Angelou was a famous African-American author, poet, historian, song writer, and playwright. However, she was also a dancer, stage and screen producer, director, performer, singer, and civil rights activist. She wrote many beautiful pieces such as books and collections of poems. Angelou has won many awards such as the Matrix Award (1983), which the New York Women in Communication gives to women who excel in the field of communication, The North Carolina Award in Literature (1987), which is the highest honor bestowed by the state of North Carolina to recognize residents for contribution in scholarship, research, the fine arts, and public leadership, and also the U.S. highest civilian honor. Her latest award, a Presidential Award for Freedom, was awarded by President Barack Obama in 2012. She was also selected for National Medal of Arts by President Bill Clinton as she had contributed to the arts and culture.

I found Angelou's works worth-analyzing. Her books, collections of poems and screenplays are great and she gained many recognitions in literature. Most of her works deal with the ability of a person in overcoming problems they are struggling with. The works were also meant to encourage the readers who were probably experiencing similar problems. She also wrote about feminism and racial discrimination that were experienced by African-Americans in her era.

The fact that Maya Angelou was an African American woman and a civil-right activist must have affected her works especially her poems for she herself also experienced a lot of struggles. Her parents' divorce, sexual assault, teenage pregnancy and her struggle with problems in earning her living should have led her to write several works, including the poems that I chose to analyze in my thesis, namely "Weekend Glory," "Still I Rise" and "Momma Welfare Roll."

The poems that I mentioned above strongly carry the issue about African American women who stand up for their rights and struggle against pressure from their surroundings. This issue has evoked my personal interest. In the three poems, the struggles and the ways the personas fight against them are entirely different although they similarly suffer from agonies of the pressure. In the end, all of them are able to prevail over their life difficulties since they have something important to fight off.

I found the themes of the poems are great and they carry similar issue which will be worth-analyzing. A theme is "the base that acts as a foundation for the entire literary piece" ("Theme"). On the other hand, diction is an important part of a poem because it helps to show the emotions and the image that the poet wants to express. Diction is understood as "the selection of certain words or

phrases that become peculiar to a writer” but it is not only “a writer’s choice of words,” or “the distinctive tone or tenor of an author’s writing” but also “the mood, attitude, dialect, and style of writing” (“Diction”). However, the diction that I will analyze in this thesis is limited to “a writer’s choice of words.” Based on this limitation, an analysis of diction is chosen to reveal the themes of the poems.

I decided to analyze the poems using the theory of formalism. “Formalism refers to a style of inquiry that focuses, almost exclusively, on features of the literary text itself, to the exclusion of biographical, historical, or intellectual context” (Tahir). Any extrinsic approach is not needed because using formalism alone is enough to reveal the themes of the poems through an analysis of diction, which I chose to be the topic of my thesis

Statement of the Problem

In studying the themes of the poems, the problems are formulated as follows :

1. How does an analysis of diction in the poems help to reveal the themes?
2. What are the themes of the poems ?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement above, the purposes of the study are :

1. To show how an analysis of diction in the poems helps to reveal the themes.
2. To show the themes of the poems.

Method of Research

I used library research for my thesis. I started by reading the three poems by Maya Angelou, namely “Momma Welfare Roll,” “Still I Rise,” and “Weekend Glory.” Then, I gathered some information from the Internet to support my analysis. Next, I found the theme through an analysis of diction in the three poems. Lastly, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis has three chapters, which are preceded by Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two deals with the discussion on the study of theme through analysis of diction in the poems “Momma Welfare Roll,” “Still I Rise,” and “Weekend Glory.” The last chapter, Chapter Three, is Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of the poems discussed and the biography of the author.

