



DEMOLISHING STEREOTYPES IN PAUL BEATTY'S NOVEL *THE SELLOUT* (2015)

Ridho Yosfika¹, Desvalini Anwar², An Fauzia Rozani Syafei³

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

State University of Padang

email: ridhoyosfika10@gmail.com

Abstract

The purposes of this analysis are to expose the issue about the acts of demolishing stereotypes which is done by African-American man and to know the contribution of the narrator, plot and setting in revealing the acts of demolishing stereotypes. This analysis is related to the concept of *orientalism* by Edward W. Said that is supported by the text and context based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows the actions of an African-American man who struggles to demolish the negative stereotypes that can be seen from his efforts to live as an independent person and have good behavior.

Key words: Stereotype, Demolishing, Resistance.

A. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic is a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, and language. There are many ethnics in this world. A particular ethnic usually have their own characteristics that differ them from other ethnics. For the fulfillment of life, humans will interact with other humans, a particular community with other communities and of course one ethnic group with other ethnic groups. This interaction will bring out views and descriptions of one ethnic characteristics based on other ethnic assessment. This assessment is usually only based on the ethnic experiences which assess other ethnics. For example, African-American is considered stupid by white American. This is not necessarily true; this judgment is just based on white American experiences during interaction with African-American. This experience-based assessment is then called stereotype.

Stereotype is the act of giving certain characters or traits to a person or group based on a subjective category. The term stereotype may be true and may be wrong. In other words, stereotype can be both negative and positive. The formation of these stereotypes is sometimes wrongly used by some ethnic to undermine other ethnic identities. In fact, they are often used to rule and master other ethnic groups. This is particularly and strongly seen in the era of colonization, when white Europeans ruled other ethnics and nations in the

¹ English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on June 2018

² Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang

³ Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



continent of Africa, Asia, Australia and America. The white Europeans constructed the stereotypes that undermined the identity of the ethnics they considered inferior. This condition will bring up the superiority of a group to another. The white people tend to consider themselves superior to the black people. This case is evident from how the white American committed atrocities to African-Americans in the period of slavery. The white Americans constructed the stereotypes which considered African-Americans as stupid, evil, barbaric, weak, dependent and were therefore unreliable.

From generation to generation the negative stereotypes are still attached to African-Americans. In the post-modern era, they are still considered as evil, dirty and barbaric. Thus, they are marginalized by the white society. The impacts of these stereotypes have often caused African-Americans experience problems and difficulties in their lives. They do not get full justice in their social, economic, and educational lives. Most of them are not confident with their identity. They think that being born as black is a difficulty to achieve a better life. However, not all African-American lose their confidence as some are still struggling to live better. They have the awareness that being born as black is not an obstacle to compete with others. They try to demolish all negative stereotypes about themselves.

Paul Beatty has created a literary non-fiction genre that is entirely his own. He writes his first volume of poetry entitled *Big Bank Takes Little Bank*. This was followed by another book of poetry, *Joker, Joker, Deuce* (1994). In 1993, he was awarded a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists Award. Some people argue that Beatty's novel *The Sellout* is a novel that is funny and painful at the same time. In his books, he tried to show the true reality of black American experiences in the United States. He imagines the injustice of the white American people against African-American people.

The novel *The Sellout* (2015), written by Paul Beatty, reflects the acts of demolishing stereotypes. In this analysis, demolishing stereotypes refers to the actions of an African-American man who struggles to demolish the stereotypes that are constructed by the white American on his ethnic. It is represented by the narrator, an African-American man. He is a farmer who lives in the countryside of the United States. He is marginalized by the white society. He experiences many difficulties in his life. He faces lots of negative stereotypes. Africans-Americans are considered as the actor of crime. The narrator struggles to prove that the stereotypes about him are wrong. In this analysis, demolishing stereotypes can be seen from his efforts to live as an independent person and have good behavior.

First, he is an independent person. He is working by himself. He still can continue his life without his father. He is a smart person who knows what he has to do. He has self-esteem and ability to take care of himself. He has courage in facing and solving his own problem.

Second, he has good behavior. He is a citizen who always obeys the law. He has never been involved in criminal acts. His wide knowledge enables him to understand law. He helps his neighbors who have problems in their life. He gives motivation to someone who lost self-confidence about his/her identity.

The analysis about *The Sellout* (2015) novel that focused on demolishing stereotypes has not been found yet. However, there are two articles that have

given contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. First, the work entitled *The Delineation of Racial Agitation: A Scrutiny of Amiri Baraka's 'The Dutchman'* by Deepa K. K. (2016) and the second is *The Image of The Afro-American in Fences (1985)* by Adel M. Abdelsamie (2015).

The first analysis is from Deepa K. K. entitled *The Delineation of Racial Agitation: A Scrutiny of Amiri Baraka's 'The Dutchman'* (2016). The analysis is about the agonized and tensed life of a black man in a white dominated American society. The focus of the study is about male character named Clay, a young African-American man. He is an educated individual who cannot escape the stereotypes and power dynamics of his racist society. To live as a Black was not easy for Clay and he had to sacrifice his identity. He ignores his black identity as he assimilates himself into white culture. Clay's lack of identity can be understood metaphorically in Freudian terms as evidence of his "castration" by white society. In analyzing this play, Deepa K. K. uses the character traits, symbolism and metaphor to exhibit the legacy of racial tension in America. The result of the study shows that as a young African-American man, Clay cannot escape the stereotypes that said Blacks are dirty and secretly murderers.

The second is a journal by Adel M. Abdelsamie (2015) entitled *The Image of The Afro-American in Fences (1985)*. The aim of this analysis is to study the image of the African-American in August Wilson's *Fences* (1985), in order to show how the black people are seen in the United States of America and how they exist in a predominantly white society. The focus of the study is about male character, an African-American man, Troy Maxson. This play shows Troy's sufferings and struggles for equality in a racial society. The African-Americans are seen by the white Americans as their inferior or 'other'. It uses metaphor and symbol to help analyzing this play. The analysis deals with the concept of orientalism by Edward Said. The result of the study shows that the images of African-Americans are classified as the other or the 'leftover'.

The analysis about the acts of demolishing stereotypes in this analysis is related to the concept of 'orientalism' by Edward W. Said (1978). Orientalism is a style of thinking based on the ontological and epistemological distinctions that are constructed between East (the Orient) and West (the Occident). Edward Said demonstrates how the Western literary and cultural canon has otherized its other and how they have misrepresented the orient (1978: 11). The definitions like "West" and "East" are the constructions of the human mind. Orientalism in this definition is a legal institution of the West that has the right to make a statement about the East, impose its view on the East, describe it and even rule it. In other words, orientalism is used as a "western style to dominate, rearrange and rule the East". In this analysis, orientalism is the central to analyze how majority and minority identities are constructed. This is because the representation of different groups within any given society is controlled by groups that have greater political power. It refers to black people as *other* and white as *self*. The condition of black people tends to get unfair treatments from white, especially in term of social, economy, and education.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of novel *The Sellout* (2015) is done through text and context-based interpretation. It is done by analyzing some part of fictional devices, such as; narrator, plot and setting. Narrator and conflicts are used to reveal about the acts of demolishing stereotypes by analyzing the reaction of the narrator toward conflict. Then, setting deals with the circumstances and the atmosphere. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. These elements are analyzed based on the concept of orientalism by Edward W. Said.

C. DISCUSSION

This section reveals the acts of *demolishing stereotypes* by using the fictional devices such as narrator, plot and setting. There are two main points discussed in this section. The first is about how the narrator lives as an independent person. The second one is how the narrator has good behavior in his life.

1. Being Independent

Being independent is one of the efforts of the narrator to demolish the negative stereotypes about him. The independence of the narrator can be seen from his job, self-esteem, and courage. Because of these abilities, he can overcome all the problems that occur in his life.

The first effort of the narrator to prove that he is an independent person is by having a job. In addition, he works by himself instead of working for someone else. The following quotation proves this argument:

“So I chose to specialize in the plant life that had the most cultural relevance to me—watermelon and weed. At best I’m a subsistence farmer, but three or four times a year, I’ll hitch a horse to the wagon and clomp through Dickens, hawking my wares, Mongo Santamaría’s “Watermelon Man” blasting from the boom box.” (p. 34)

This quotation shows that the narrator works as a farmer. Although only working as a farmer, the narrator is able to fulfill all of his needs. He does not spread his hands to anyone else. He can continue his life without depending on others. From the phrase *at best I'm subsistence farmer* shows that a job as a farmer has sufficient for him to run his life. He has self-esteem when he says, *So I chose to specialize in the plant life*. He is confident in confessing his job as a farmer. The

phrase *hawking my wares*, Mongo Santamaria's "*Watermelon Man*" *blasting from the boom box* shows his courage to sell his watermelon. In addition, he has courage to promote and hawk his wares around the neighborhood. The white people never thought about this, because so far they assume black people do not have that ability. The conflict of this quotation is when he demolishes the negative stereotypes about him which said that he does not have ability to be independent. He proves that he is an independent person and also has self-esteem and courage.

The second effort of the narrator to be independent is build self-esteem. With this self-esteem he is able to challenge himself in facing the difficult situation that occurs on his life. It can be seen in the following quotation:

"The incessant magic tricks that produced dollar pieces out of thin air and the open-house mind games that made you think that the view from the second-floor Tudor-style miracle in the hills, if not the world, would soon be yours are designed to fool us into believing that without daddies and the fatherly guidance they provide, the rest of our lives will be futile Mickey Mouseless I-told-ya-so existences." (p. 24)

From this quotation it shows that the narrator is not too sad about his father's death. He is not afraid that if he does not have a father his life will fall apart. From this case it shows that the narrator has self-esteem and faith in him. He is confident of the potential that he has. Thus, he is able to live alone without depending on others. This self-esteem makes the narrator believes that he can live independently without depending on his father. In this analysis, there is an internal conflict inside the narrator's self. He has to convince himself that he is able to continue his life without his father. He fights and challenges himself to face the difficult situation that happened when his father gone.

The last effort to be independent person is the narrator has courage in facing problems. It can be seen from the following quotation:

But I didn't cry. I thought his death was a trick. Another one of his elaborate schemes to educate me on the plight of the black race and to inspire me to make something of myself, I half expected him to get up, brush himself off, and say, "See, nigger, if this could happen

to the world's smartest black man.” (p. 24)

This quotation explains that the narrator is not afraid or sad when his father dies. In fact, in the sentence *to educate me on his plight of the black race and to inspire me to make something of myself*, he considers that his father's death is a lesson for him, so he can live better. The narrator thinks that this case is one of the impetuses for him to be stronger and not to cry for his father's departure. He has the positive thinking in facing every situation. He was confident and dare to prove that his life would be all right without his father. The setting in this quotation refers to the condition of the narrator who life without his father. This condition is the unexpected situation that he has to face and fix. He face this situation with his courage that he can solve that problem without afraid of the situation will be happened in the future.

Briefly, the narrator has shown that he is an independent person. He has proven that he can live on his own ability without the need for help from others. Thus, he successfully demolishes the negative stereotypes about African-American identity that cannot live without the help of others. This self-reliance does not just appear. There was a struggle he did. By having a job he is able to fulfill the needs of his life. With his self-esteem and courage he is able to overcome the problems that coming in his life. The setting in this analysis refers to the tensed atmosphere and unexpected situation that he has to face and fix. The conflict mostly comes from external, which caused he has to work harder. These external conflicts make him use his skills and ability to demolish the negative stereotypes about him.

2. Having Good Behavior

Having good behavior is another effort of the narrator to demolish the negative stereotypes about him. There is a stereotype that considered them as evil. In this analysis, the good behavior of the narrator is seen from his obedience to the law, and his generosity in helping people.

First, the narrator is the citizen who obeys the rules that apply in the United States. He has never been involved in a criminal act. It can be seen from the following quotation:

“This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I've never stolen anything. Never cheated on my taxes or at cards. Never snuck into the movies or failed to give back the extra change to a drugstore cashier indifferent to the ways of mercantilism and minimum-wage expectations. I've never

burgled a house. Held up a liquor store.” (p. 1)

This quotation shows that the narrator never does anything that breaks the law. The sentence *This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man* shows that other people hardly believe in black people’s statement. African-American people are always stereotyped as evil. If they try to say that they are not evil, people hardly believe about this statement. This is the reason why the narrator struggles to prove that he is a good person who obeys the law. In this analysis, there is an external conflict between him and the American society. American society does not believe that the narrator never commits the criminal acts. He faces it by showing his good behavior that he never conducted the murder and stolen other’s properties.

The last point is the narrator has the generosity in helping people. This is seen from his will to motivate people who have problems in their life. It can be seen from the following quotation:

I guess, in a sense, Hominy was my first nigger whisperer. I can’t count how many times I had to wrap a blanket around him because he was trying to commit suicide-by-gangbanger by wearing red in the blue neighborhoods, blue in the red, or shouting, “¡Yo soy el gran pinche mayate! ¡Julio César Chávez esun puto!” in the brown.”” (p. 36)

This quotation shows that the narrator has helped Hominy who decides to commit suicide. In this case, the narrator tries to calm Hominy and motivate him to continue his life. This quotation explains that the narrator is a nigger-whisperer, the one who is in charge of helping African-American people who are mentally disturbed and those who attempt suicide. From this situation it shows that the narrator has solidarity for the society.

Another quotation that shows the generosity in helping people can be seen from the following quotation:

“I picked up two kids straying near the stalls by their elbows and hoisted them into the air.
“Stay away from the fucking horses!”
“What about the orange tree, mister?”

Unable to resist the enticing smell of the satsumas and hold off until recess or the soap operas for their midday snacks, my customers were huddled under the mandarin tree, guiltily standing in piles of peeled skin, their lips wet with fructose.

“Take as many as you want,” I said.” (p. 105)

This quotation shows that the narrator gives the fruits in his garden to the children who are near his house. This situation proves that the narrator does not enjoy his own harvest by himself but he also shares it to the people around him. He has the generosity and he is willing to share with others. From the phrase *take as many as you want*, it shows that the narrator does not mind if his neighbors take as many fruits as they want. The conflict in this quotation is when he demolishes the negative stereotype who said him a bad person. He proves that he has the generosity to share his fruits with his neighbors.

In short, the narrator has proven that he is a person who has good behavior. He has proven that he is not as bad as white people think. Thus, he succeeds in demolishing the negative stereotypes about the African-American identity which is always involved in criminal acts. He has struggled to prove if that stereotype is wrong. He is a law-abiding person. He is a person who has generosity. He has concern for those around him; by helping and motivating people who have problems in their lives. The narrator is a person who likes to help others. For this analysis, the external conflict is the most happening issue for the narrator. He solves it by keep working out his skills and knowledge to demolish the negative stereotypes. The setting refers to his struggles to prove that African-American has good behavior.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The novel *The Sellout* (2015), written by Paul Beatty, reflects the acts of demolishing stereotypes. The analysis of this novel deals with the concept of orientalism by Edward W. Said. It refers to the narrator efforts to demolish the negative stereotypes about him. It can be seen from his independence side and his good behavior. The narrator is an independent and good behavior person. He is working by himself. He still can continue his life without his father. He has self-esteem and ability to take care of himself. He has courage in facing and solving his own problem. He is a citizen who always obeys the law. He has never been involved in criminal acts. He helps his neighbors who have problems in their life.

Note: This article is written based on the Ridho Yosfika's thesis under the supervision of Desvalini Anwar, S.S, M.Hum, Ph.D., 1st advisor, and Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A., 2nd advisor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdelsamie, Adel M. 2015. *The Image of Afro-American in Fences (1985)*. Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences: Vol. 3, No. 3.
- Beatty, Paul. (2015). *The Sellout*. New York: Farrar, Staruss and Giroux.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. 1995. *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Fuchs, Lawrence H. 1994. *Kaleidoskop Amerika: Ras, Etnik, dan Budaya Warga*. Pen. R. Soeroso, Ed. Wilson Nadeak. Jhid I. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- K., Deepa K. 2016. *The Delineation of Racial Agitation: A Scrutiny of Amiri Baraka's 'The Dutchman'*. Research Journal of English Language and Literature): Vol. 4. Issue 2.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart. 1997. *Postcolonial Theory: Context, Practices, Politics*. New York: Verso
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Penguin.
- The Guardian News. 2016. *Paul Beatty's Biography*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/25/paul-beatty-wins-man-booker-prize-2016>. Retrieved on 24 October 2017.