



KEEPING ON THE PATH IN FIVE POEMS BY ALICE WALKER

Ririn Rosada¹, Kurnia Ningsih²

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: ririnrosada1@gmail.com

Abstract

This article is about the analysis of five poems by Alice Walker entitled *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit* (BATPIS), *If I was President* (IIP), *To Change The World Enough* (TCTHE), *Working Class Hero* (WCH), *You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter* (YWTGOLTC) focuses on how the black woman who is represented by the speaker maintains her movement for a better life. The problem of this analysis is how far these poems exposes about the efforts of the speaker to get the position in the public area. The purpose of the analysis is to find out the way of the speaker to survive and achieve her goal. This analysis is involved the elements of poetry such as irony, imagery, tone and the speaker to reveal the issue of keeping on the path in these poems. This analysis is related to the concept of feminism by Bell Hooks. The result of this analysis shows that the speaker is able to keeping on the path for a better life .

Key words: keeping, the path, the black woman.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the postmodern era, women still strive hard to gain their rights in public area especially for the black women in America. Although, the slave era has gone, they still get discrimination in many aspect of life. For example, they get the separation in using public facilities such as education. Besides, the male domination is found in all important aspects of life. This male domination is seen as the source of social inequalities and injustice which affect the life of black women. The black women still struggle for their position in the public area. The black women have had to suffer oppression at two fronts; racially as black and sexually as a woman. They are discriminated by society even her own community. They are treated as inferior to men.

Therefore, the black women strive hard to against social pressure that they have. They attempt to get opportunity in achieving their position by showing their existence. They must be brave to stand up for a new life. They show their

¹English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on June 2019

²Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



competence toward society through their idea and their ability. In order to fight this condition women have to strive to raise awareness and increase the knowledge to maintain the movement.

Although there are many obstacles faced by the black women, they maintain their way which had taken. They keep developing their ability to show their existence. Their ways is the path to create a commitment that they must have to make a change for their life. In Macmillan Dictionary (2018) *path* is the way that someone takes to achieve something. They show their own skills and they are brave to compete in certain positions. They attempt to bring into reality each of their hope to equal in every aspect of life.

Although the black women get discrimination, there are some of the black women who managed to survive their education. It can be seen through their way of thinking. They are smart in dealing with every problem. They have the self confidence to show their existence. They are continually raising awareness to other black women to maintain women's position and dignity. They have a principle that they have to unite if they can face obstacles in front of them and they have high spirit to stand up. They encourage other black women by giving motivation.

The black women are more aware about distortion in society. They do a movement with the goal to make a change. They make a group that have a purpose to against the oppression. The movement makes a cultural change; self perception, behaviour, and the way of thinking. They change their perception that the black women are not only placed in domestic area. They keep trying to get their position by having spirit to stand up and courage to take a risk. They take action to break the border without hesitation and fear. They prove to do the hard effort totally. They struggle endlessly.

All human being are equal. They deserve to develop themselves for the better life. Therefore, the black women also have the same rights. In this study, the speaker as the black woman strives hard to get her position in the public area. This case has been discussed by many writers in literary works such as novel, short stories, and poems. One of them is Alice Walker, in her five poems entitled *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit*, *If I was President*, *To Change The World Enough*, *Working Class Hero*, *You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter*. The five poems expose the ways of the black woman who is represented by the speaker to keep her path for a better life by being confident and being independent.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this research is qualitative, content analysis, that is to analyze the text of five poems by Alice Walker entitled *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit* (BATPIS), *If I was President* (IIP), *To Change The World Enough* (IIPCTHE), *Working Class Hero* (WCH), *You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter* (YWTGOLTC). The data is collected from the quotation in the five poems. The data was analyzed by using the elements of poetry such as irony, imagery, tone

and the speaker. The irony used to reveal the problem that the speaker faces in the society. The dominant irony here is verbal irony. Imagery is used to reveal the ways of the speaker to keep her path to achieve her goal. The tone deals with the expression to express her resistance toward injustice. The dominant tone here is serious. Then, the speaker used to reveal the black woman who strive hard to maintain her way to reach position in the public area. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. The result of this analysis is the speaker in five poems by Alice Walker is able to keep on the path.

C. DISCUSSION

This study analyses of five poems; *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit* (BATPIS), *If I was President* (IIP), *To Change The World Enough* (IIPCTHE), *Working Class Hero* (WCH), *You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter* (YWTGOLTC). In this analysis, keeping on the path refers to the ways of the black woman who is represented by the speaker to maintain her movement for a better life. The keeping on the path can be seen through two ways; being confident and being independent.

1. Being Confident

The black woman who is represented by the speaker maintains her path to achieve her goal. The speaker has strong principle to maintain black women's position. She gives motivation and builds awareness of the black women to maintain their dignity. She takes action to break the limit without hesitation, fear and brave to take a risk.

The first is the black woman has strong principles. It can be seen from the following quotation:

*/did you understand this?
If my spirit was poor, how could I enter heaven?"
Was I depressed?
Understanding editing,
I see how a comma, removed or inserted
with careful plan,
can change everything./*(BATPIS, line 1-7)

Through irony, the quotation above shows that the speaker is not easily influenced by others. She has the capability to recognize what happened in her environment. She knows that there is something wrong in the society. The line */ undestanding editing, I see how a comma, removed or inserted with careful, can change everything/* shows she is able to find out what is done by society. She realizes that the society had manipulated the rules, but she could not be fooled by anyone. This condition shows that she is a smart woman. The tone is anger. She states that she is capable to take a part in social life. She has strong principles in determining the direction of her life. With her strong principles, she strives hard to achieve her goal.

Furthermore, she builds awareness of the black women to maintain their dignity in social life. This can be seen through the following quotation:

*/We experience your fear as the least pardonable of
humiliations; in the past
it has sent us scurrying off
daunted and ashamed
into the shadows.
Now,
the world ending
the only one all of us have known
we seek the same
fresh light/(TCTWE, line 4-13)*

Through imagery, these lines mean that she wants to change her life. She motivates the black women to keep fighting and keep trying to get new life. The line */ now, the world ending /* shows that she stands up for the new life. She struggles hard to get her life to be better. The tone is serious. She shows that she has commitment to raising her life. She has awareness to keep struggling. She builds awareness of the black women to get the same position as the other in the public area. She tries to demolish the stereotype of the black women are uncivilized and irrational. She motivates the black women to keep fighting and keep trying to get a better life. She also raises the spirit of the black women to maintain their commitment. From these lines, she shows that she tries to build dignity of the black women.

She also maintains the identity of the black women. It can be seen in this following quotation:

*/Upfront, upright.
Speaking what to you is true.
A person rich in Mothers.
Beloved.
And: honoring what is black in you./(YWTGOLTC, stanza 11)
(YWTGOLTC, stanza 11)*

Through imagery, the stanza above shows that the speaker is proud to be a black woman. She dares to show her identity in society. She also shows to the black women have to be more aware about their identity. Therefore, she builds the awareness of the black women to have the pride of being black. She tries to raise the dignity of the black women in social life. She shows that the black women deserve to be respected in social life. She emphasizes that their identity cannot be thrown out away from themselves. The line */And : honoring what is black in you/* shows the black women have to respect themselves and they must be proud to be black to maintain their dignity. She tries to make the other to be more aware of mutual respect herself.

The last one is she tries to break the limit to get position in the public area. It can be seen in this following:

*We enter now
the dreaded location
of Earth's reckoning;
no longer far*

*off
or hidden in books
that claim to disclose
revelations;
it is here.
We must walk together without fear.
There is no path without us/.*(TCTWE, line,28-38)

Through imagery, these lines reflect that she is ready to change her life. The line */we enter now/* shows that she deserves to get a position in the public area. She is brave to take a risk. She reminds the others that every human being is the same rights to get position in the public area. She deserves to be treated the same as others. The line */ We must walk together without fear. There is no path without us/* shows that she encourages the black women to work together to improve their life. She also motivates the black women to unite to get their position in the public area. She shows that she truly has strong confidence and strives hard to maintain her way to achieve her goal. She embodies her dreams and hopes with her efforts.

In short, staying confidence is the one of the way of black woman to do keeping the path to achieve a goal. The speaker has strong principles to totally struggle to keep on her path to make a change. The dominant tone here is serious. She is bravely tries to enter in public area. She persuades the black women to build solidarity and unite against the injustice. Besides, she gives awareness to the black women about their dignity and identity. She tries to maintain the black women's position In other words, she cannot easily influenced by others.

2. Being Independent

The black woman maintains her movement to get position in public area. She has critical thinking that influences every action that will be taken. She makes decision for herself. She can solve the problem that proves that she is not dependent on anyone.

The first is she has critical thinking. It can be seen in the following quotation:

*Yet all these years,
nearly thirty or something
of them
I have been running around
the country
and the world
trying to arouse justice
for these men.*(IIP stanza 13)

Through imagery, this stanza can be understood that she has to strive hard to get her justice. She does not stop to get her rights. The line */I've been running around the country /* shows that she recognizes the entire problem that exists in the world and she investigates all the problems. It proves that she is a critical person. She

takes action with full consideration. The tone is serious. She is brave to do things that are risky. The line */the world trying to arouse justice for these men.* /shows that she has responsibility toward the black women. She has a strong commitment to improve the life of the black women. This line also means that she encourages the others to take part in her struggle to demand the welfare of the black women.

She is also critical in dealing with every obstacle that exists. This can be seen in the following quotation:

*Tonsillitis
hasn't stopped me.
Migraine,
hasn't stopped me.
Lyme disease
hasn't stopped me.
And why?
Because
knowing the country
that I'm in,
as you are destined to learn
it too,
I know wrong
when I see it. (IIP stanza 14)*

Through visual imagery, this stanza reflects that the speaker dares to take a risk in her life. The line */I know wrong when I see it/* shows she understands all problems in society. She observes and tries to reveal the fact, but she gets the limits. The words */ tonsillitis, migraine, lyme disease /* describe that she gets limited to issuing ideas, speak out, and getting position, but she still keeps on her way. She survives and faces the obstacle with her courage. This stanza proves that she has a strong ambition to keep on her path and to make a change in her environment. She struggles to get her justice. The tone is serious to state that she will not stop fighting and she is confident to achieve social welfare in her life.

Furthermore, she makes a decision for herself. It can be seen in the following quotation:

*/I have had a child to raise
& classes to teach
& food to buy
and just because
I'm a poet
It doesn't mean*

I don't have to pay the mortgage or the rent. (IIP, line 68-74)

Through imagery, these lines show that she determines her own life. She has choices. She can be what she wants. She fulfils her own needs. The line */ I have had to raise and classes to teach and food to buy /* shows that she is a strong woman. She handles her life by herself. She can do double jobs; in domestic area

and public area. The tone is serious. She warns the other people to respect her and do not underestimate her. It proves that she is independent women. She has big dreams to change her life and her generation.

She solves the problem in her life. It can be seen through the following quotation:

*/That you can fix a Broken Anything :
battery, truck, stove, Door, fridge, lamp, chicken coop hinge
While teaching
The ins and outs
Of Opera Or
While singing
Lusty Italian Tenor
That Shakes The walls./*
(WCH, stanza 7, line 1-6)

Through imagery, the line above shows that the speaker has skill to enter in the public area. She learns all the work that is usually done by men. She is able to finish her works by herself. In other words, she breaks the stereotype about women is dependent. It proves that she is competent to make a change her life. She can solve the problem. She also emphasizes the black women to be more independent and to be braver to show their skill in society. She gives awareness to the black women that they have potential to compete with others. The line */ While singing Lusty Italian Tenor That Shakes The walls /* shows that the black women have to be more courageous in expressing their aspirations to breaks the limit. The aspiration makes an opportunity for the black women to achieve their position in public area.

Clearly, the analysis of staying independent expose the struggle totally of the black woman to show her independent in social life. She is critical in taking action with full consideration. She is able to make decision. Moreover, she is able to solve her problem. She has skill to fulfil her own need. The dominant tone is serious. She fights to keep her path.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The five poems by Alice Walker entitled *Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit* (BATPIS), *If I was President* (IIP), *To Change The World Enough* (TCTHE), *Working Class Hero* (WCH), *You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter* (YWTGOLTC) reflect the issue of keeping on the path. Keeping on the path in this analysis refers to the ways of the black woman who is represented by the speaker to maintain her movement for a better life. It is revealed through text-based and context-based interpretation by focusing on elements of poetry such as irony, imagery, tone, and the speaker. The dominant tone here is serious. She states that she keeps on her path. The ways to keep the path are done through staying confidence and staying independence. This is a common situation that often happened in a real life. People can keep their path if they have awareness and strong principles. They can get out from the difficult situation by centralize their mind to keep moving forward and not only seeing that difficulty as a reason to surrender.

Note:This article is written based on the Ririn Rosada's thesis under the supervision of advisor Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berg, J, Barbara. 1976. *The Remembered Gate : Origins of Americans Feminism*. University of New York.
- Duster, Michelle. 2018. *Michelle Obama is proof that black women can become more than their wildest dreams*. Huffpost. Retrieved on August, 25th 2018. <https://news.yahoo.com/michelle-obama-proof-black-women-201924949.html>
- Dreserova, Jana. 2006. *Canary Petunias in Bloom: Black Feminism in Poetry of Alice Walker and Rita Dove*. Masaryk University. <https://is.muni.cz/th/jesni/Diplomka.pdf>
- Dunning K. Stefania. 2017. *American Literature*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia. Retrieved on March, 27th 2019. <http://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-756>
- Daniels, C. Wess. 2012. *To Change The World Enough*. Gathering in Light. Retrieved on April, 13th 2019. <http://gatheringinlight.com/2012/04/02/to-change-the-world-enough-by-alice-walker/>
- Escudero. Maite. 2000. *Race, Gender, and Performance in Grace Nichols's The Fat Black Woman's Poems*. Journal of International Women's Studies: Vol.1 Issue 2. Bridgewater State University.
- Guerin, Wilfred, et.all. 2005. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, 5th edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hooks, Bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. United State. South End Press.
- Kriszner, G. Laurier, et.all. 2004. *Fiction: Reading, Reaction, Writing, 5th edition*. College Reader.
- Madden, Frank. 2001. *Exploring Literature: Writing and Arguing about Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and The Essay*. London: Longman Inc.
- Moore. Lucinda. 2003. *Growing Up Maya Angelou*. Smithsonian Magazine. Retrieved on March, 27th 2019. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/growing-up-maya-angelou-79582387/>
- O'Brien, Jhon. 1973. *Interviews Black Writers*. New York: Liveright.

- ____. “Definition of Keeping”. 2018. Merriam Webster. Retrieved on August, 20th 2018.
- ____. “Definition of Path”. 2018. Macmilan Dictionary. Retrieved on August, 20th 2018.
- ____. “Definition of achieve”. 2019. Macmilan Dictionary. Retrieved on April, 13th 2019.
- ____. “Definition of Goal”. 2018. Merriam Webster. Retrieved on April, 13th 2019.
- ____. Poem Hunter. 2018. *Alice Walker: Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit, If I was President, Working Class Hero, You Want To Grow Old Like The Carter*. Retrieved on June, 7th 2018. <https://www.poemhunter.com/alice-walker/>.

