

COMPARATIVE STUDY ON HOW AMERICAN WHITE & BLACK POETS SEE BLACK PEOPLE: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF POETRY

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Keywords	Abstract
Poets Semiotic Racism Perspective	<i>This research aims to compare the significance in the 21st century through Langston Hughes's and Maya Angelou's selected poems. In this research, I took two selected poems by Langston Hughes and two selected poems by Maya Angelou that focus on racism issues. Therefore, this research uses Michael Riffaterres Semiotics of poetry theory to find out the meaning and significance of the chosen poems. This research uses some opinions and history as a hypogram to portrait the ideal women in the 21st century. This research is conducted by applying a qualitative method and the data are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, lines, and stanzas. The data are divided into primary and secondary data. This research focuses on the two main problems. The first is the racism perspective comparison represented in the selected poems by Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. The result of this research shows that the significance of Langston Hughes's and Maya Angelou's poems focuses on racist perspectives of black people.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is one of the most widely measurable countries and standards of ideal state life. It is a multiracial country, populated by all races of diverse people worldwide. Nevertheless, this does not mean that America is without problems, with the state of multiple races and ethnicities worldwide allowing for a horizontal conflict between races. The case against black people in America has attracted the attention of some researchers, and they are famous for being victims of white people's discriminative acts against them (Bonner et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2023; Stockstill & Carson, 2022). White society in America found it difficult to assimilate black people, as the early arrival of blacks into America was only slavery, so the mindset of blacks as second-class citizens became an attitude toward social stratification in America (Ancy Liyana & Baisel, 2023; O'Connell et al., 2020; Ruef, 2022). Therefore, it takes a long time for black people to fight for their status as free citizens. Racial conflict has been the history of the United States until now. Prolonged, long before the above-mentioned case, the attempt to resolve the issue of race was actually made by President Abraham Lincoln, where Lincoln passed the regulation on the American Civil Rights Amendment of 1869, which states that "Forbidding the federal government or state governments to desensitize potential voters based on race, skin color, or past slave status".

In the world of literature, many authors of poetry have helped to voice opposition to the racist treatment of whites spread out in the space of 1920-1975, especially in America (Arafah & Pattu, 2022; Davis, 2018; Pucherová, 2018). They are Langston Hughes in 1921 and Maya Angelou in 1969, coming from different walks of life and races, with the work they offer to the real world that black people also need to earn their rights as fellow creatures on earth. Langston Hughes is the main character in the Harlem Renaissance, intellectual development, literature, and black arts that occurred in the 1920s in several American cities, particularly in Harlem (Jordan, 2011; Smith, 2012). As he wrote in his essay "The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain". "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too" (Hughes, 1958). Different from Hughes. Maya Angelou in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps, her experiences about the brutality of racial discrimination, but also absorbed the unshakable faith and values of traditional African-American family, community, and culture (Khalifa & Essam, 2022; Rodrigues, 2019; Ruth Neyah & Vijayakumar, 2022). As an African, she experienced firsthand racial prejudices and discrimination in Arkansas. Angelou is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. Her name has been widely known throughout the universe, and her social action is able to take a few breaths of relief.

This research will investigate the meaning and the way Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou expressed their critical thoughts in the lyrical sculpture of a beautiful poem without diminishing their emotional resistance to the violent act of racism in America at the time. They have a particular perspective can read and analyze it through their selected poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "I, Too" by Langston Hughes, then "Caged Bird" and "Harlem Hopscotch" by Maya Angelou. The selected poems above should be comprehended to find meaning and significance. Sometimes the readers find it difficult to understand the significance of a poetry because it indirectly shows its meaning. Equally important for the readers to find a tool to comprehend what beyond the text is. That is why I use the Semiotics of Poetry by Riffaterre as the basic theory to find the meaning or the significance of Langston Hughes' and Maya Angelou's selected poems and apply racism theory as the supporting theory.

METHOD

Qualitative research is used in this research to get a deeper understanding of how the racism perspective comparison is represented in Langston Hughes' and Maya Angelou's selected poems and to know the significance of the poems. This research is categorized as qualitative research because the source of the data which is analyzed in this research is taken from a textual form of literature. The research process is more demonstrated and the theoretical basis is more focused. Besides, qualitative research is based on descriptive data and does not use statistical procedures.

In analyzing Langston Hughes' and Maya Angelou's poems, I start to do heuristic reading to get the poem meaning mimetically. When I did the analysis, I did the comparative method. This comparison was intended to find out the perspectives of white and black poets on the racism issues to black people in America represented by Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. They are "The Negro Speak of River", "I, Too",

"Caged Bird" and "Harlem Hopscotch". According to Michael Riffaterre in his book entitled *Semiotic of Poetry*, he stated that four aspects must be considered in understanding and interpreting poetry. Namely, heuristic and hermeneutic readings, indirect expressions, matrices, variants and models, and hypograms. (Riffaterre, 1978:3).

RESULT

Heuristic Reading of Langston Hughes' Poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

Racism and slavery that have existed since the dawn of human civilization exemplify much of the world's progress today. Though it is America's darkest hour, it does not diminish the black race's identity and tenacity to defend their rights and liabilities with equal equality with the white race. It is clear after I got the whole meaning of the poem

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in the stage of heuristic reading. I found that there is an ungrammaticality issue. It is from the statement,

"... My soul has grown deep like the rivers" (lines 4)

that meant his soul has lots of growth as deep as the river.

The model can be found at its poetic word, phrase, or sentence level. One of those three points is called a model if its existence is monumental. It means that it represents the entire meaning of the poem, and it becomes the background of the poem's creation. The model is actualized into variants. A variant is a form of spelling out the model in the stanza of a poem.

The model of this poem is a word, rivers. It becomes the model of this poem because its existence is monumental. It is also chosen because it is a poetic word that will form the matrix of the poem. This model is actualized in some variants of this poem, and these variants support the chosen model. The model rivers are explained through the existence of some words and sentences as the variants of the poem. The terms "My soul has grown deep like the rivers" are the variants that explain the model. It explains that rivers can be used as a parable to get as much learning and as deep as river flow.

Heuristic Reading of Langston Hughes' Poem "I, Too"

Social restrictions on black people were unchanged until this poem was published. The notion that black people do not have to have the same rights as American citizens still does not stop the poet from testifying about black rights equality. The whole meaning of

"I, Too..." (lines 1 and lines 18)

is that black people deserve the same treatment and equality that white people deserve as American citizens. From the explanation above, it is found that there is an ungrammaticality issue in the poem of "I, Too..." In more detail, there is a reason why black people who used the object "I, Too..." received improper treatment as a citizen, distinguished by their skin color and rendered worthy by their fellow citizens.

The model can be found at its poetic word, phrase, or sentence level. One of those three points is called a model if its existence is monumental. It means that it represents the entire meaning of the poem and becomes the background of the poem's creation. The model is actualized into variants. A variant is a form of spelling out the model in the stanza of a poem. The model of this poem is a word, "I, too". It becomes the model of this poem because its existence is monumental. It is also chosen because it is a poetic word that will form the matrix of the poem. This model is actualized in some variants of this poem, and these variants support the chosen model. Model "I, Too" is explained through the existence of some words and sentences as the variants of the poem. The terms "I, too" are the variants that define the model. It explains that I, too. As a black person, it means that "I" want the same rights and can be proud of their fellow American citizens.

Heuristic Reading of Maya Angelou's Poem 'Caged Bird'

The illustration of the "Caged Birds" is a boundary to the bird's free flight. Nothing else has any meaning about a person who cannot gain freedom and is haunted by the trauma of his past. The whole purpose of "Caged Birds" is that all people need space without outside forces and bonds, though doing so requires considerable sacrifice. From the explanation above, it is found that there is an ungrammaticality issue in the poem "Caged Birds". In more detail, in the beginning, there is a reason the caged bird is being

asked to portray how people are confined to a finite place yet still strive to secure the same claim in life despite all their troubles being ignored and underestimated.

The model of this poem is a word, a caged bird. It becomes the model of this poem because its existence is monumental. It is also chosen because it is a poetic word that will form the matrix of the poem. This model is actualized in some variants of this poem, and these variants support the chosen model. The model caged bird is explained through the existence of some words and sentences as the variants of the poem. The term,

"The caged bird sings." (lines 1, stanza six)

is the variant that defines the model. It explains that even though the space for movement is limited, the enthusiasm to keep fighting for their right remains.

Heuristic Reading of Maya Angelou's Poem 'Harlem Hopscotch'

Harlem is a settlement in the borough of Manhattan, New York City, which since the 1920s has been the center of the population, the culture, and the business of America. The whole meaning of "Harlem Hopscotch" implies that the social restrictions of a black society are being treated differently as citizens. The poor supply of essential materials and their surroundings impair their freedom of movement in their own choices. For the explanation, it is found that there is an ungrammaticality issue. In the poem "Harlem Hopscotch". In more detail, there is a reason it has been used as a graphic image of black people gathering together in their lives, as the Hopscotch's insignificance of the restriction of motion further suggests that Harlem Hopscotch is lumpy, racist, and a misfit of black people there.

The model of this poem is a word, hop. It becomes the model of this poem because its existence is monumental. It is also chosen because it is a poetic word that will form the matrix of the poem. This model is actualized in some variants of this poem, and these variants support the chosen model. The model hop is explained through the existence of some words and sentences as the variants of the poem. The terms "don't stick around." are the variants that define the model. It explains that the small movements of the black people who live in Harlem in obtaining their rights to their citizens and their daily necessities are severely limited.

Comparison of Heuristic Stage

On the table below shows the comparison of Langston Hughes "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", "I, Too" poems and Maya Angelou's Caged Bird", "Harlem Hopscotch" poems in the heuristic stage. It had aim to enable the reader understood the heuristic stage.

Table 1. Comparison of Meaning Between Hughes' And Angelou's Poems

Langston Hughes	Maya Angelou
The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1921) 1. It is about the earliest days of human civilization to American bondage, confirming that black people have witnessed and participated in crucial moments in human history. 2. Whole Meaning: The description of the black people's history of slavery and the three great rivers of the world contributed to the civilization. 3. Model and Variants: The words "My soul has grown deep like the rivers" (line 1) explain that rivers can be used as a parable that we can get as much learning and as deep as river flow. 4. Intrinsic Elements of Poetry: - Themes: Identity and perseverance - Stanza: It has a thirteen-line poem.	Caged Birds (1969) 1. It is about the writer's experience who led his life like a bird in bondage to a cage and received an injustice. 2. Whole Meaning: The description of all people need freedom without outside forces and bonds, though doing so requires considerable sacrifice. 3. Model and Variants: The words "The caged bird sings." (lines 1, stanza one) explain that even though the space for movement is limited, it does not reduce the enthusiasm to keep fighting for their rights. 4. Intrinsic Elements of Poetry: - Themes: Racial, oppression, freedom/captivity, and happiness/sorrow. - Stanza: It has six-stanza.
I, too (1926) 1. It is about the suffering of racism that white people have on black people whose notes are equivalent to American citizenship 2. Whole Meaning: The description of black people deserves the same treatment and equality that white people deserve as American citizens. 3. Model and Variants: The words "I, too." (line 1 and line 18) explain that I, too, mean that they, as black people, want the same rights and can be proud of their fellow American citizens. 4. Intrinsic Elements of Poetry: - Themes: Racism - Stanza: It has five stanzas, two of which are only one-line long. So there are only Eighteen lines.	Harlem Hopscotch (1971) 1. It is about the effects of black people's lives in the circles of racism and poverty and finding repression in citizens. 2. Whole Meaning: The description of the social restrictions of a black society are being treated differently as citizens, and poor supply of essential materials and their surroundings impair their freedom of movement in their own choices. 3. Model and Variants: The words "don't sticks around." (lines 2, stanza two) explain that the small movements of the black people who live in Harlem in obtaining their rights to their citizens and their daily necessities are severely limited. 4. Intrinsic Elements of Poetry: - Themes: Racism, poverty, and empowerment. - Stanza: It has a four-stanza that is separated into three quatrains, or

	sets of four lines, and one final rhyming couplet.
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Comparison of Hermeneutic Stage

On the table below shows the comparison of Langston Hughes “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “I, Too” poems, and Maya Angelou’s “Caged Bird” and “Harlem Hopscotch” poems in the hermeneutic stage. It had aim to enable the reader understood the hermeneutic stage.

Table 2. Comparison of Significance Between Hughes’ And Angelou’s Poems

Langston Hughes	Maya Angelou
The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1921) In this poem, the writer points out a black history of civilization that has endured racism and slavery since ancient times. The portrayal also suggests that black people played an important role in the history of human civilization, especially in the great states of the world. <i>“I’ve know rivers” (line 1)</i> <i>“My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” (line 3)</i>	Caged Bird (1969) In this poem, the writer points out that history and the dark past cannot diminish one's freedom to get what is rightfully his. As we remain silent in the absence of effort and resistance, the less space we move toward gaining freedom and worthiness in living. <i>“The caged bird sings” (line 1 stanza three)</i>
I, Too (1926) In this poem, the writer points out white people's mistreatment of black people, and it is also a strong assumption that black people do not deserve to be treated the same as white people. The separation of their rights and movements was unable to diminish their love for their country and increase their enthusiasm for equal recognition. <i>“I, too” (line 1 and line 18)</i> <i>“They’ll see how beautiful I am” (lines 16)</i> <i>“And be ashamed-” (line 17)</i>	Harlem Hopscotch (!971) In this poem, the writer points out the effect of restrictions and racism obtained by black societies on the issues of which national life is a significant part. Then, too, pressures and prohibitions to determine their desires because of their racism. <i>“..since you black, don’t stick around” (line 2, stanza two)</i>

DISCUSSION

This discusses the main problems served in the research questions of this research. It discusses the analysis comparison of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou's selected poems by applying the Semiotic Theory in Riffaterre's perspective through the comparative method. This study starts from the analysis of Langston Hughes's selected poems titled “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, “I, Too” and Maya Angelou selected poems titled “Caged Bird”, “Harlem Hopscotch” in the first stage of reading, heuristic reading and model and variants are also found. The hypogram and the matrix of the selected poems of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou are also found in the second reading stage.

Eventually, the significance of those poems is reached through the second stage of hermeneutic reading.

In the hermeneutic reading, the meaning found in this poems. In “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” poem, Hughes describes the famous rivers as the longest in the world. The river lies on different continents. The Euphrates, the Congo, and the Nile belong to the African continent, while the Mississippi belongs to the Americas. The river is a symbol. He had close ties to the history of African-American slavery. Hughes used the river metaphor to comment on black history at the time (Elaref & Ahmed, 2024; Jordan, 2011; Sliti, 2019). It makes sense if there are some depictions of slavery in the poem. In “I, Too” poem, The discussion tells us about how white people dominate black people and how white people maintain their position by discriminating against black people. Hughes has given his insight about white people who think they have better social quality than black people (Al-Ramahi et al., 2021; Dohal, 2023). They regard black people as enslaved people, not as citizens of America, because of the color of their skin. We can see this segregation through how white people treat black people when they want to have their meal, sending them into the kitchen (Arafah & Pattu, 2022). In “Caged Bird”, The poem describes the opposing experiences between two birds: one bird can live in nature as it pleases, while a different caged bird suffers in captivity. The latter bird sings both to cope with its circumstances and to express its longing for freedom. We can find that Angelou paints a critical portrait of oppression using the extended metaphor of these two birds (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2022; Ismail & C., 2021). She illuminates the privilege and entitlement of the unoppressed and conveys the simultaneous experience of suffering and emotional resilience. The poem uses the bird metaphor to capture how oppression imposes overt physical limitations on the oppressed and how those limitations emotionally and psychologically impact the oppressed. As an extended metaphor used to convey the pain of the oppression faced by black people throughout and before the history of the United States of America, aspects of the poem can be read as directly related to that particular experience. And, “Harlem Hopscotch” is a poem that compares the game Hopscotch and the life of African-Americans in Harlem. It reveals that it was created to symbolize the back-and-forth struggle between white people and black people fiscally and socially legally, which is illustrated in the formatting and style of the poem and the historical context behind the words on the poem (Robertson et al., 2013). Now, the game hopscotch was all about hopping. Life in Harlem was about hopping around in a limited space without crossing lines. That was the rule of the game, but in life, if both feet are grounded, it is winning. Life in Harlem was about hopping around in a limited space without crossing lines. Finally, Angelou says if both feet are on the ground, then you are lost.

CONCLUSION

Based on the previous discussion, the poems are concluded in two units of significance. They are in the heuristic and hermeneutic stages. In the poems by Langston Hughes titled “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “I, Too”, the focused on the history of black people in civilization and the equality of black people that they should earn equally in national life. On the other hand, the poems of Maya Angelou titled “Caged Bird” and “Harlem Hopscotch” focused on the mistreatment of black people under the confines of their social life and equality of their rights. Therefore, the poems discussed racism in America from 1921 to 1970. Both authors share a side to defend the rights that black people should have for their own as American citizens. In American society in 21st century, white people were still bad and separated from black people. Sometimes, in this modern age, I still find racism against black people occurring in America. The problem can rise to a severe conclusion where there is a lack of awareness, tolerance, and mutual respect toward one another. All humans have the same rights and equality without distinctions such as different skin color or physical form.

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