

Womanism Reflected in Digital Poetry

Latifah Dwi Ariyani

latifah@unsiq.ac.id

Universitas Sains Al-Qur'an, Wonosobo, Indonesia

Abstract

This article presents the study result of womanism reflected in digital poetry. This study applies qualitative research methodology. In collecting the data, the researcher compiled the digital poems related to the issue of womanism and attempted to collect the poems by searching on internet. The methods of analyzing are displaying the identified poems, explaining the displayed poems and interpreting the explained poems with womanism theory. The findings of the study show that womanism is reflected in many ways based on the expression written in the digital poems. Womanism revealed in the digital poems is the forms of confronting marginalization towards woman, promoting appreciation towards woman in domestic relationship and male-womanist voice.

Keywords: *womanism, digital poetry*

Introduction

Nowadays literary works show their existences in many forms. In last decade, a novel writers, playwrights and poets published their works in printed out papers. The process of publishing sometimes took some months or might be some years. Furthermore, as people tend to set digital era in their daily life, they prefer to publish their works on internet-base. The process of publishing digital literary works is not as complicated as when they publish their works in the form of printed out or books. The process allows writers to gain their works being published quickly even they do not have to pay off the publication. One of the digital literary works is digital poetry. Several poets can access the websites of publishing through interne. In an instant, they can input their poems and confirm the publisher to join publishing their poems related to the theme of the poetry directed by the publisher.

Digital poetry is an electronic-base literature by utilizing computers to publish poems by displaying hypertext, computerized animation, coding and holograms. The digital poems can be retrieved in electronic literature collection. (pw.org)

Many writers tried to express their feeling, emotion, and the reflection of phenomena in their surrounding by displaying poems they wrote in digital poetry website. The themes of the digital poems are varied. One of the themes focuses on woman matter. Hence, womanism can be traced in some of the digital poetry collection. In this case, some of the poems are analyzed to prove that digital poems can be as one of the tools to promote the ideology of womanism.

Literary Review

The Concept of Womanism Versus Feminism

The term ‘womanism’ is used to separate womanists from feminists. The reaction of womanist was coined by Alice Walker as she realized that feminism did not encompass the perspectives and experience of black women. Hence, Walker as an American poet, activist and author became the starting point of the black womanist movement in 1983 with her novel entitled *The Color Purple*. Feminism concept tends to pose gender equality. The goals of common feminist voice are to build, articulate and reach political, social and economical aspects in life. Feminists also struggle equality of the sexes to fight against gender stereotypes. Meanwhile, womanism is a multi-layered movement which comes into three levels of oppression in racism, sexism and classism. (stylecraze.com)

The difference between womanism and feminism is in the component of a womanist discourse. It encompasses the role of spirituality and ethics to end the interlocking oppression in the aspects of race, class and gender in which it began from African American women’s experiences. Feminism does not discuss about those components. (Tsuruta, 2012)

Feminists and womanists have similar goal. Both of them fight for women equal rights in society. Historically, feminism belongs to middle-class white women who suffer of inequality in their community. However, the black women cannot set their rights free after the feminism movements. They did not perceive the same liberty as what white women accepted from the result of the feminist movements. The term womanist refers to the black woman who were ‘committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.’ The movement was

aligned with black women without neglecting the facts of racial and social discrimination. (knowlegdenuts.com)

Feminism has a concept that women have to achieve gender equality. Feminist movements are female-centered and take a side of male role in their society. Feminism always proves that male always dominates all aspects of life. That is the reason that feminists always pose their position as the opposition of male. Feminism demands on changing patriarchal society, universal suffrage, labor rights for women, reproductive rights for women, gender equality, decrease of violence against women and equal rights of owning properties. Whereas, womanism originates from intersectionality of oppression, marginalized, discrimination faced by black women in their society. Womanism confronted with classism, sexism and racism. (differencebetween.com)

Womanist Theory

Philips (2006) explained that womanism does not refer mainly to black women only, but it also concerns to all women. However, the term of womanism was originated to refer to the new movement of black women. The basic spirit of womanism can be seen in literature. The movement extends to step outside from white feminism. Womanist theory has its core on the conception of femininity and culture of woman as important as woman's existence. The concept perspectives the idea of intersectionality.

Hogan (1995) stated that womanism has various definitions and interpretations. The broadest definition of it generates a universal ideology for all women regardless race and skin color. Womanist rejects the concept that women can be objectified sexually as pornographic objects. A womanist is committed to 'the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female'. In addition Hogan said that feminism is a component consists of wider ideology rather than womanism. A womanist such as Walker leads African-American heterosexual woman to be free as lesbians. It is reflected in Walker's story of *Coming Apart*.

Gillman (2006) stated that womanism encourages the culture of woman in which it is the intersection focal point opposing to classism and it emphasizes that femininity still exists. Mazama (2003) explained that womanist theory must be

understood by acknowledging the racism towards black women in the phase of feminists struggle their movements. The perception of feminism and womanism is distinguished in their historical movement. Womanists believe that the experiences of black women were not the same as white women. James (2001) stated that Womanists do not want to be considered as the extension of feminism, but rather as a theoretical framework which is separated from the notion, the concept and theory of feminism. Womanism was carved through black women experience, thought in their own space out of feminists' academia and activism.

Research Method

This research applies qualitative research. Qualitative research is purposed to reveal, comprehend and interpret social phenomena in its natural setting. By applying qualitative methodology, the researcher can collect several information and acquiring specific pictures about certain issue, case and event. (Arora and Stoner, 2009)

Qualitative research is a method to search the collective evidence which help the researcher to answer the problem statements with involving some techniques of collecting data such as interviewing, being a participant and non participant observer, field notes and focus group and many more. (provalisresearch.com)

The object of the research was some poems in digital poetry collection published in the website of familyfriendpoems.com. Some of the poems are *My Wife* by Andre Cardenas (2006), *A Good Woman* by Carol Naumann (2006), *That Someone Special* by Richard N. Cook (2007), *You, My Wife, My Treasure* by Danny Blackburn (2008) and *A Gift from God* by Dino (2011). The procedures of collecting data are selecting some digital poems related to the topic of the study about womanism, identifying the stanzas, lines and utterances of each of the poems. In analyzing procedures, the researcher explained and interpreted the displayed data based on the theory of womanism.

Findings and Discussion

This research focuses on the reflection of womanism in digital poems. The poems contain of the ideology of womanhood. The analysis of the poems can be seen as follows:

Confronting Marginalization towards Woman

Some of the digital poems reveal that women are being marginalized object by men. The marginalization is confronted in the following poem:

One you should treasure, but not as a possession,
Who needs to be loved, not treated with aggression.
Her value is more than all the world's treasures,
Not just the sum of scale's unit measures.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: Line 1-4)

The quotation above shows that woman realizes that her position is marginalized. There is a sexism revealed from the utterance 'a possession'. Woman emphasizes that she is not a thing to be possessed. The speaker of the poem gives a voice of refusing to be marginalized as she confronts the objectification by saying 'One you should treasure'. It means that a woman wants to be appreciated in good quality as human being dignity. As humankind, she rejects the notion of being violated. The stereotype of a man as dominated humankind appears in the utterance of 'aggression'. Instead of being treated with aggression, the speaker of the poem demands that a woman needs a love. The next line creates the tension of confronting towards marginalized position of a woman. The utterance of 'the world's treasure' evokes the sense of the desire of a woman to be highly appreciated since she is not a man's unit of possession.

I know her life is not her own.
I always seem so needy,
and asking her to do one more thing,
I feel so really greedy.
(Cook, *That Someone Special*, 2007: Stanza 7, Line 1-4)

The quotation above proves that a man admits that he is wrong in treated a woman as marginalized object as he wants. The utterance 'her life is not her own', means that a man as the speaker of the poem has an awareness that he has owned the life of a woman he gets married off. The next line shows the evidence that a man in his dominant position seems realizes that he objectifies a woman by saying 'I

always seem so needy'. As written in the utterance of and asking her to do more thing,' means that a man recognizes his fault of making a woman in the position of being oppressed. He confronted himself by the expression of 'I feel so really greedy', explains that a man as the speaker of the poem regrets his aggressive action to exploit his wife.

She should be built up, not torn down,
By all the words you speak, when she is around.
She needs to be hugged and not pushed away,
Especially when you are both having a really bad day.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: Line 5-8)

...
Words spoken to her in haste and anger can place her fragile heart in danger.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: Line 9)

...
Not used as a target for all your frustration,
But held close and kissed with loving admiration.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: Line 12-13)

The quotation of the poem declares a woman's inner feeling to demand on a man's smooth attitude towards her. The line 5-8 proves that a woman wants to be treated well by a man. The speaker of the poem is a wife who faces the domestic violence mentally and verbally. The utterance of 'By all the words you speak,' gives the clue that the speaker of the poem faces verbal violence. The line 9 explains that the speaker of the poem perceives that a man can break a woman's heart by doing verbal violence towards a woman. From the line, the verbal harassment can cause bad impact such as fragile heart of a woman. At line 12-13, a man is depicted as an aggressive one. A woman becomes his target when he is in frustration. The speaker of the poem resolves the last of the line by saying that a woman needs 'loving admiration' instead of being treated in coarse manner. Being a target of a man's anger is one of the way a man marginalizes a woman as a second sex and as his object of his frustration. The speaker of the poem articulates the importance of building a good relationship between a woman and a man as truest friends rather than as enemies.

Promoting Appreciation towards Woman in Domestic Relationship

The representation of womanism can also be seen in the digital poems as there is a consciousness to elevate woman in higher dignity as humankind especially in domestic connection.

She should be admired for her boundless love,
And looked upon as a true gift from above.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: Line 10-11)

The poem above proves that a woman needs to be appreciated. The utterance of ‘her boundless love,’ shows the idea that a wife has sincere and unconditional love to her husband. Furthermore, the speaker of the poem gives a clue to a husband to see a wife as his ‘true gift from above.’ As a true gift, a position of a woman is depicted in highest level of God’s creature. Consequently, the position of a woman is equal to a man. Here, the sexism is abolished. The relationship between a man and a woman is a matter of affectionate and passionate love on behalf of spiritual and theological reason.

You should always appreciate her commitment to you,
And not take for granted what she’s given up for you!
Kiss her and love her all that you possibly can,
And don’t be embarrassed to be seen holding her hand.
Treasure each day as if it were the last,
And at the end of your life you won’t be regretting your past.
(Naumann, *A Good Woman*, 2006: 14-19)

The first line of the poem tells that being appreciated is the request of woman in making a good relationship. The word ‘commitment to you’, explains that a woman can be trusted. The speaker of the poem declares that a man usually take a woman for granted. Hence, she reminds him not to underestimate her commitment. The speaker of the poem also shows her desire of being loved by his husband in which she wants him to treat her in good ways in their domestic relation such as being harmonious as a couple. The request of a wife to a husband can be noticed in the utterances of ‘kiss her and love her ...’. The next line adds her passionate love to her husband that she wants him to hold her hands in public severe. It means that she wants equality as well as she wants to live together with a man without any friction in domestic life. The utterance of ‘Treasure each day ...’, means that a woman who takes a role as a wife wants his spouse (a man)

appreciate her. At end of the poem, the speaker gives the emphasis ‘... you won’t be regretting your past,’ means that she believes that a man who treated a woman with aggression, someday will regrets his action to abuse his wife.

She carries many burdens,
And her heart is sometimes broken
By all the thanks she never gets
And all the words unspoken.
(Cook, *That Someone Special*, 2007: Stanza 6, Line 1-4)

The poem above promotes the appreciation towards a wife. The speaker of the poem is a husband who loses his wife due to her death. In the poem above, the husband realizes that his wife helped him much. The utterance of ‘many burdens,’ explains that as his wife was alive, he hurt her. However, his wife kept quiet even when she was down. It is written in the next line which mentions the word ‘her heart is sometimes broken’. The speaker of the poem realizes that he was not a good husband who appreciates his wife. He even never said thank for all that his wife was done for him during her life.

How can I ever thank her
For all she has done for me?
I can only give her all my heart
And love her to eternity.
(Cook, *That Someone Special*, 2007: Stanza 8, Line 1-4)

The quotation of the poem above shows that a husband confirms that he neglects his wife. He realizes his mistakes towards his wife by saying ‘How can I ever thank her’. The utterance emphasizes his regrets deeply. The next line is late answer of a husband to his wife who had passed away that he admits his love. The utterance of ‘I can only give her all my heart’ seems absorbed that he finally appreciates his wife after she was dead. However, it reminds other men not to underestimate women who love them, or else, they regret the bad moments to be given to their spouse.

Male-Womanist Voice

Male-womanist voice is the term that the voice of womanism is not only sounded by women. Men, in their consciousness of elevating the dignity of woman as humankind in the effort of understanding woman’s position in their domestic relation, are also called womanists.

Hand in hand we walk together,
God's grace warms us from above.
It's him I thank each day I wake
for blessing me with all your love.
(Cardenas, *My Wife*, 2006: Stanza 1, Line 1-4)

The poem proves that the speaker of the poem is a husband who wants to treat his wife in good domestic relationship. The utterance of 'hand in hand we walk together,' shows that a man supports a woman in equal rights. A man does not want to compete the social role against the woman. The equality is admitted by a man as the speaker of the poem in the next line of 'for blessing me with all your love.' The utterance means so deep that a man needs a woman to live his life. They are not enemies, they need each other.

The mother of my children
and the air that gives m life.
My truest friend of all...
My heart my soul, my wife.
(Cardenas, *My Wife*, 2006: Stanza 4, Line 1-4)
...

A Wonderful mother and wife
The love and passion for all my life
A gift from God you truly are
A blessing from above to the luckiest man by far
(Dino, *A Gift From God*, 2011: Stanza 2, Line 1-4)

The quotation of the poems above tell that a husband cannot deny that he needs his wife to reproduce the next generation of humankind. The utterance of 'The mother of my children,' emphasizes the essential clue that without a woman there is no next descendent. The next line explains that a man needs a woman as his wife to be truest friend. It means that a man sounds the male-womanist voice in which the role of a woman is important in his life as a mother of his children and a wife.

A beautiful woman with a heart so true
The love and passion I still feel for you
Throughout the pregnancy as you carry our son
A gift from God, I'm lucky one
(Dino, *A Gift From God*, 2011: Stanza 2, Line 1-4)

The poem above proves the negation of a man towards woman's role as a wife who is able to give a birth of his children. The utterance of 'Throughout the pregnancy as you carry our son', explains that a husband really appreciates a woman in which he feels lucky that his wife is able to pregnant. The speaker of the poem also accentuates that his wife is a gift from God. It means there is a spiritual belief that a woman is created to complete a man's life.

I had walked through life with nothing
until you; until you, I knew no pleasure.
And then one day God sent you to me;
you, my wife, my treasure.

(Blackburn, *You, My Wife, My Treasure*, 2008: Stanza 1, Line 1-4)

...

She stands always at my side,
No matter what comes our way.
She comforts me with steadfast love
Each and every day.

(Cook, *That Someone Special*, 2007: Stanza 5, Line 1-4)

The poems above show that men can voice his womanism. They appreciate their wives as 'treasure from God'. The men admit that they cannot live without women. The equality to love and to be loved becomes essential thing in domestic relationship. The utterance of 'She stands always at my side', tells implicative meaning that a man need a woman by his side. The word of 'stead love' refers to the stereotype of a woman that a woman is smooth humankind whom a man needs.

Conclusion

The digital poems actually can reflect some ideas, thoughts, feeling and many expressions of social phenomena. By searching on internet the researcher can collect some poems related to the ideology of womanism easily. The notions of womanism found in the digital poems have different ones from feminism. Womanism reflected in the poems demand on the equality of a woman and a man in going through their life in togetherness. There is no dominant sexism which evokes the battle between a woman and a man. The essential message of womanism in the way it delivers a message of equality in peace way. There is no radical expression which takes a man's potion aside. Womanism reflected in the

poems mostly express the request of a man and a woman to live in harmony and complete each other. The poems which contain of womanism mostly talk about the appropriate attitude of a man towards a woman. In the efforts of spreading the mission of womanism, the speakers of the poems insert the form of humanism towards women such as confronting marginalization towards them, promoting appreciation towards women's position. Those are not only done by women in voicing womanism but also done by men. Furthermore, male-womanist can support the spirit of womanism. Male-womanists' poems help women elevate their dignity in the eye of other women and men as the opposite gender.

References

- Arora, R. & Stoner Ch. 2009. A Mixed Method Approach to Understanding Brand Personality. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 184(4), 272-283.
- Gilman, L. 2006. *Unassimilable Feminism: Reappraising Feminism, Womanist, and Mestiza Identity Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hogan, L. 1995. *From Women's Experience to Feminism Theology*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.
- James, Joy, ed. 2001. *The Black Feminist Reader (Reprinted ed.)*. Malden, Mass. (u.a.): Blackwell. ISBN 978-0631210078.
- Mazama, Ama. 2003. *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Phillips, Layli. 2006. *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Tsuruta, D. 2012. The Womanish Roots of Womanism: A Culturally-Derived and African-Centered Ideal (Concept), *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36(1), 4. Retrieved on 16th arch 2020.
- Difference Between Womanism and Feminism. knowlegdenuts.com. Retrieved on 15th March, 2020.
- Difference Between Womanism and Feminism. differencebetween.com. Retrieved on 15th March, 2020.
- Digital Poetry. pw.org. Retrieved on 15th March, 2020.
- Womanism Versus Feminism. stylecraze.com. Retrieved on 15th March, 2020.