

WHEN THE UNSPOKEN SPEAKS: AS SEEN IN ANDRIANI MARSHANDA'S *YOU USED ME AND LETTER TO GOD* POEMS

Andreas Akun

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bina Nusantara University
Jl. Kemanggisian Ilir III, No. 45 Palmerah, Jakarta 11480, Indonesia
akun@binus.edu

Received: 11th July 2017/Revised: 04th December 2017/Accepted: 24th January 2018

How to Cite: Akun, A. (2018). When the unspoken speaks: As seen in Andriani Marshanda's *You Used me and Letter to God* poems. *Lingua Cultura*, 12(2), 135-139.
<https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i2.3710>

ABSTRACT

Repressed unresolved psychological conflicts for some people can be safely channeled into a poetical literary work as—despite its short and audio-visually framed and limited form—it could speak of bigger ideas with more freedom, and English as a medium had its own capacity to truthfully communicate the ideas. The goal of this study was to reveal the spoken and the unspoken truths behind Andriani Marshanda's poetic expressions and their visualization in The Unspoken 1: You Used Me and The Unspoken 2: Letter to God. This research focused on how English played an important role in safely channeling the ideas and how oxymoronic metaphors used in the poems speak more of the unspoken words and worlds within the poems. It used library research by employing a textual analysis of the selected poems using Macherey's concept of the spoken and unspoken. The additional data were also taken from the real life of the author found in printed and electronic media. The analysis will be focused on the revelation of the silence or unspoken that unconsciously infiltrates the spoken or expressed lines of the poems. It is concluded that the poems speak more bluntly of the persona's lack of freedom, feelings of being exploited, incongruous and dilemmatic state of mentality, and a newly perceived, happily anticipated, and more truly liberated life.

Keywords: unspoken, poems, metaphor, English, repression

INTRODUCTION

When a piece of literary work is produced, there is no doubt that a reason exists for its production. It can be the author's own direct life experience or her/his indirect encounters through others' experience, be it of sadness or happiness, the traumatic past events, unresolved conflicts from the past, or unadmitted present and future desires. In this context, a literary expression is metaphorically best thought of as a safe channel or lodging harbor for the restlessness of the soul.

Out of diverse literary expressions, poetry is a strong, compact, and effective medium for this channeling due to its brevity, poeticality, imagery, and indirectness. Poetry provides the opportunity for the creator to convey deeper, unspoken meanings especially when it is read through its metaphorical expressions (Camp, 2008). According to Sansom and Dickinson in d'Abdon (2016), poetry is a rhythmical form of words which express an imaginative emotional-intellectual experience of the author that will create a similar experience in the mind of his/her readers or listeners. When the poetry is specifically written in English, another special meaning is also at work as it is true in the two poems discussed in this paper.

The goal of this research is to disclose the spoken and the unspoken truths behind Andriani Marshanda's poems and their visualization in her controversial recently released videos entitled *The Unspoken 1: You Used Me and The Unspoken 2: Letter to God* (Marshanda, 2014). This research focuses on how English plays an important role in safely channeling the ideas and how oxymoronic metaphors are used in the poems speak more of the unspoken realities depicted in the poems. Besides the poems, the author's background, other posted poems, and testimonies are used in analyzing the spoken truths and at the same time revealing the unspoken ones.

Andriani Marshanda, born 1989, is an Indonesian young and talented actress and singer. She has been active in this entertainment world starting as an advertising model since she was the first grade of elementary school. She was mostly known as "Lala", a nice, Cinderella-like character she played in television series *Bidadari* (Angel), from 2000 until 2005.

In 2009, she was in the news a lot because of her publication of the self-recorded video on Youtube, showing her anger toward her bullying school friends and her depressed personal life that she clarified later as a part of psychological therapy for her troubled past. She was married

to Ben Kasyafani in 2011, and they have a daughter, and then turned herself into a motivator for artists by sharing her life lessons learned from the past. But early this year (2014), she was again in the news as she sued her husband for a divorce for the undeclared reason (except her claim of having irreconcilable differences of opinion between them). Her life controversy goes on up until today, especially when she published her poem videos on YouTube where she claimed to be “used” by someone and that she finally found understanding of God’s love and the true feeling of happiness. These last videos triggered controversy because she later admitted openly that her mother had “used” her after being forced by her mother to undergo mental treatment in a hospital because she has since 2009 been considered as suffering bipolar disorder (Susanto & Desideria, 2014). And moreover, she appeared in the second video without wearing hijab as to show more freedom. The conflict between Marshanda and her mother is now open to the public.

It uses poetry because generally speaking, poetry has the potential to contribute to human beings’ happiness as stated by Gioia (1992), “As Wallace Stevens once observed, ‘the purpose of poetry is to contribute to man’s happiness.’ Children know this essential truth when they ask to hear their favorite nursery rhymes again and again. Aesthetic pleasure needs no justification because a life without such pleasure is one not worth living.” Poetry though has long been marginalized and turned into the subculture, is undeniably powerful for human beings to better understand the power of language in expressing even the unspoken truths (Akun & Andreani, 2015).

As stated earlier, poetry is an effective medium to channel the repressed materials. Poetry is a medium in which language has been maximally selected and utilized for the purpose of exposing something unspoken and significant. The power of language in poetry has been recognized in contrast with various other ways. If advertising world exploits language to convince, and politicians rhetorically manipulate language to persuade, poetry, however, uses language to reveal the truth about real-life experience, as stated:

“Language is a power that is used in many ways. Advertising exploits language to convince us we are buying not only a product but a bit of class, or sexiness, or sophistication. Politicians hire speechwriters to play on our sense of patriotism, our fears, our compassion for others...Poems, on the other hand, use language to tell the truth, to accurately portray someone’s experience or vision; that’s the source of their power, and of their effects on the world” (Addonizio & Laux, 1997).

Poetry is capable of telling the truths lying beneath the surface of the spoken words (Davis & Fosl, 2016). It is especially through the use of metaphors, related to the psychological content of the poem such as the trauma of the past, and to some extent functioning as a healing therapy for the relentless souls, at least in natively channeling the repressed conflicts. Anker (2009) has stressed this point when he has said that language and metaphor are important not only in describing the traumatic experience but also in helping the therapeutic process of healing the psychological wounds by expressing the repressed trauma into literary text (through the creative process). So that the fractured traumatic experience and the broken or disorder mentality

can be brought back into order language and metaphors are not only essential in the experience and description of trauma, but also in the process of healing. Finding words and formulating a narrative is a way of encoding trauma within the structure of language to bring order into the fragmented and splintered experience of the condition of trauma. The role of metaphor and creative literary production in healing process is clearly associated with the very notion of metaphor itself where transfer happens.

Modell (2005) has defined metaphor as a cognitive tool that enables the transfer of meaning between dissimilar domains. The Greek term *metaphora* literally means transfer. Metaphor retains a paradoxical quality in that there are an “as-if” plays of similarity and difference and not a rigidly specified identity of meaning. As metaphor enables the transfer of meaning between dissimilar domains, transference repetition, the similarity of affective responses between the differing domains of the past and the present can be understood as a metaphoric process. Therefore, as Anker (2009) has stated in his emphasis on the role of metaphor as a healing medium through the creative process, the creative metaphoric expression may practically help to heal the troubled psyche through the transformation of metaphor, symbols, and patterns in words and visualizations.

Further, Fainsilber and Ortony (1987) have discussed at least three communicative functions of metaphor based on three hypotheses: inexpressibility, compactness, and vividness. First, the metaphor may enable someone to express something difficult or even impossible if it is expressed in the common or literal use of language. Second, metaphor makes it possible to convey a great deal of information succinctly because of its nature as a compact means of communication. Third, metaphors may help capture the vividness of phenomenal experience that they can paint a richer and more detailed picture of our subjective experience that might be expressed by literal language.

In this research, the metaphor is narrowed into what it is called the oxymoronic metaphor. It is where the image used in the metaphor is a juxtaposition of two seemingly opposite terms but as Pattillo (2007) has said that when joined, harmonize to make an ingenious point, epigram, or image, an oxymoron must seem to be contradictory but upon inspection reveal an unexpected unity. Etymologically, oxymoron comes from the word oxy which means sharp, and moros means dull, juxtaposed as to form a sharp dullness, signifying foolishness with a point. In this context, the unity, the point, means more of the troubled united image formed by two contradictory sides.

In her poetry, Marshanda uses English because it is a universal means of communication, with the possibility of reaching perhaps the widest audience. Most of all, modern English is the most egalitarian language where for example in the use of the pronoun, it does not need to differentiate to whom to speak to; the elders, royals, youngsters, labors, employers, intimates, etc. The pronoun “you” for instance can be safely used for all of these social groups in any moods of communication: anger or peace, sadness or happiness, doubt or certainty, hopefulness or hopelessness, etc. Further, the use of English by non-native speakers of English generally indicates social prestige, indirectly revealing self-esteem, intelligence, capability, education, class, and so on.

The researcher chooses the unspoken speaks because Macherey (2006) has emphasized the importance of paying more attention to the unspoken parts of a literary work because the work with its spoken (or written) expression is

never complete and self-sufficient. The completeness of the work only matters when both the spoken and the unspoken elements of the work have been taken into consideration. The unspoken can be silences or absences, something unconsciously unsaid or something missing. The spoken or the speech of a literary work comes from the silence that always accompanies it. Macherey (2006) has said that the moment of absence finds the speech of the work. Silences shape all the speech. It is obvious that there is no speech or spoken part of the work without the silence or the unspoken part.

Interestingly, this unspoken is by Macherey (2006)—borrowing Freud—named the unconscious, and it is really important to investigate it as he said that this is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say. Speech eventually has nothing more to tell that people investigate the silence for it is the silence that is doing the speaking.

METHODS

This is library research by employing a textual analysis of the selected poems using Macherey's concept of the spoken and unspoken. The data are taken from two written poems and their visualization through official videos. The poems are composed by Marshanda herself entitled *You Used Me and Letter to God*. Additional data are also taken from the real life of the author found in printed and electronic media. The analysis will be focused on the revelation of the silence or unspoken that unconsciously infiltrates the spoken or expressed lines of the poems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The use of English, instead of Indonesian, for the author is something special. Besides her fondness of English in her blog writings and other poetic writings, the English medium signifies her aim for a wider audience globally—though with the possibility of limiting the number of audiences nationally—so that her voice can be heard by more people. These people are presumably with more critical understanding both nationally and internationally because their understanding of English has classified them into such social groups. Specifically, however, the use of English is more political as it gives the author more liberated medium of expression in connection with the content of her writings.

This can be traced in the use of the pronoun “you” in both poems. In the first poem, *You Used Me*; the author can safely address her anger, disappointment, and condemnation to the target “you” as free as she wishes because as an egalitarian language, the modern English provides this possibility. The anger shown in the poem is addressed to someone close to the persona's life. It can be her mother, her father, husband, or siblings. The use of English nowadays does not differentiate to whom the persona is speaking. She can socially and psychologically speak bluntly and show anger even to her own mother (based on the author's own confession in a TV talk show that it is the mother who has ‘used’ her) which is almost impossible to be done in Indonesian. English has given her space to speak with more freedom and more understanding.

The first poem is actually speaking of thing the persona does not do so far about her repressed conflicts as indicated by the basic title *The Unspoken*. This unspoken

has finally been spoken through this poem, revealing the fact that the persona has long been used or exploited by the ‘you’. This unspoken has been strongly expressed through the use of metaphors in the poems, describing who the persona and the exploiter are. The persona describes herself as “silent stupid doll” placed in the exploiter's “small fake stage”. Further, she also describes herself as an “easy target” and “a fool” to show her disappointment, condemnation, and anger. On the other hand, the exploiter is metaphorically depicted as the false/fake angel or true/evil monster or loser, and when combined will form a strong oxymoronic and dilemmatic metaphor “angelic monster” or “monstrous angel”, none of which is easy or unproblematic to deal with. This oxymoronic metaphor has rightly represented the deep psychological conflicts suffered by the persona because the two images exist in the same person very dear to her. This is verified by the lines in the poem such as,

*You used me
Oh, you used me
As a silent stupid doll
You put me on your small fake stage
(lines 1-4) (Marshanda, 2014).*

The person who can use or exploit the persona has the power to put her on the limited world as seen through the metaphor “small fake stage” so that she feels voiceless, brainless, and helpless, just like a silent stupid doll who can only give fun for the user without the ability to have the fun itself. This powerful image can easily play hero as well in front of the persona and the world, since the exploiter's position makes it possible, forcing the persona to feel as an easy target, leaving her with no self-defense because she is helplessly forced to tear down her armor, most tragically let the exploiter “*grab my heart and drain the life out of it*” (line 13). This is very tragic and evil because the persona's life has been robbed as signified by her lost heart (life, love, compassion, empathy). The persona even feels idiotic or thoughtless (just like a doll). Her stupidity has tragically brought her to a false or wrong internalization of self-love as she said “*I thought I was good in loving myself*” (line 8) on the fake framed stage created by the exploiter. Fortunately, the persona soon realizes the exploitation and turns herself into a fighter against the domination. All the exploitation is then ended by the persona's realization of the abuse.

*“Now I am moving on...
While i'll shine cos i'm going for the stars...
While i'll spread love
Cos of the strength of my honesty...
Now it's time to close the book...
Yes finally i've opened my eyes”
(lines 19-29) (Marshanda, 2014).*

However, the poem does not only speak of the spoken (actually, this is the speech of the unspoken fact that the author has suffered from being used) of the persona's exploitation and her realization of it with an act of getting out of the pain. Referring to Macherey's theory (2006) of the unspoken—that beyond the speech there is a silent part of the work doing the speaking—the poem actually speaks of the other side of the problem. It is beyond the strength of the persona in taking her way of escaping the exploitation. The psychological dilemma unconsciously surfaces, presumably shattering the mentality of the persona. This dilemma takes

the form of the oxymoronic metaphor “monstrous angel” or “angelic monster” to describe the “you” as the exploiter. Why? Who is this “you”? This person is like an angel in the persona’s life but a monster as well at the same time.

Based on the author’s life background as testified in her special interview with Alvin Adam, *The Real Me*, in *Just Alvin Talk Show* in 10th August 2014, the one who exploits her is her own mother. A mother is undoubtedly an “angel” and also hero to her, giving birth to her, taking care of her ever since; but she is also a “monster” in the sense that she has set the bad image of a family (broken family image, failed mother and father image since the persona’s traumatic childhood). It is shattering her supposedly unifying understanding of parental love (and hatred) and then controlling the persona’s life in such a way that it leaves her with no freedom and independence even until she is 25, including financial matters. The traumatic childhood can be traced in the author’s motivating sharing video *From Failure to Hikmah* (2013). All this unspoken dilemmatic mentality can only be understood from her uneasy use of the metaphor angel and monster in the first poem.

While in the second poem *Letter to God*, the persona shows her new enlightened feeling of true love. This love is heavenly since she claims that she finally knows God and His love through her downs in life (“*breakdowns, meltdowns, stressed-ups, and crash-downs*”, line 7). This new love has wondrously brought her to new beauty and happiness in her life. Most of all, the enlightenment is so real, and all have convinced her that she deserves love and happy life (lines 20-21). The above speech of this poem is clear, and the use of metaphor “letter” indicates that this experience is indirect and long-lasting, some sharing of feelings to God, and a letter of thankfulness.

However, the visualization of the poem is interesting when talking about the unspoken side of the work in comparison to the previous poem. The controversy of the second poem happens only because of the author’s (also the persona of the poem) appearance without wearing the hijab. The spoken emphasis of the first poem is focused on the persona’s lack of freedom, her new realization of escaping from the lack in pursuing “the world’s greatness” with honesty to herself and true love. Now, in the second poem, her emphasis is on the fact that she deserves the true love and real happy life. And this speaks of the unspoken fact that taking off the hijab is to some extent a symbol of reaching the freedom that can be seen in the following lines (Marshanda, 2014).

*“And now i can’t believe life could be this beautiful
That I can ever be this happy
I thought i am about to die
Cos i never felt this way
Not once as real as this now”*
(lines 11-15).

This means that she never experiences a real beautiful life and true happiness. It is because as the first poem has shown that she is exploited or used in such a way that she has no freedom at all. It includes her decision once to wear hijab as a part of her coping with the troubled mentality, later in her attempt to be a motivArtist (motivator artist, with business consequences as well). But now she has come to the point of reaching a liberated life through her understanding of God’s will in testing her with hard times, as she finally says in the following lines (Marshanda, 2014).

*“But it is You
Trying to let me know, that
I DESERVE LOVE
I DESERVE A HAPPY LIFE
And this has finally become REAL”*
(lines 18-22).

These lines speak another unspoken fact that with the family (mother, father, husband, sister, brother, etc.) so far there is no happy life. Therefore, it is logical for instance if in the author’s real life she sues her husband for a divorce, leaving her family/mother for independent life and business because she has no freedom to be her true self there. The taking off the hijab in the video and later in her real life is for the time being the unspoken sign of this reality. It indicates that she is honest with herself and especially in her reaching of ‘the world’s greatness’ or ‘going for the stars’ with a new enlightened and more liberated life just for her own self.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been proven that poetic expressions can help someone to channel her repressed trauma and dilemma into a piece of literary work. And to a certain degree, this channeling is actually an act of healing the hurt soul and coping with life pressures. English for a non-native speaker of English is a useful means of communicating this unspoken material because of its egalitarian nature. Moreover, metaphorical expressions have also strengthened the possibility of expressing a more complicated mentality state as a dilemma between love and hatred as expressed in oxymoronic metaphors of angelic monster or monstrous angel.

The article has also shown that beyond the spoken speech of the poems about exploitation and efforts to escape from it. The deeper unspoken meanings also surface such as the fact that the persona has faced the difficult psychological dilemma of the mother-daughter relationship, or a truly liberated life can only be reached when one has got enlightened honesty to oneself even though this can be considered controversial by others such as the author’s taking off the hijab. Overall, it is true that poems, as stressed by Addonizio and Laux (1997), have used language to tell the truth, to accurately portray someone’s experience or vision. The one Marshanda is doing up to his moment in telling her truth of aspiring for a more liberated life.

REFERENCES

- Addonizio, K., & Laux, D. (1997). *The poet’s companion: A guide to the pleasures of writing poetry*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Akun., & Andreani, W. (2015). Pluralism and Hybridity in instant poems: Taxonomizing Indonesian students’ degree of nationalism through their creative process. *Journal of Literature, Language & Culture (COES&RJ-JLLC)*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Anker, J. (2009). Metaphors of pain: The use of metaphors in trauma narrative with reference to fugitive pieces. *Literator*, 30(2), 49-68.
- Camp, E. Showing, telling, and seeing metaphor and “poetic” language. *The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication*, 3, 1-24.

- Davis, M., & Fosl, P. S. (2016). Lies like the truth: On Plato's 'Lesser Hippias'. *Congent Arts & Humanities*, 3(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2015.1133079>.
- D'Abdon, R. (2016). Teaching spoken word poetry as a tool for decolonizing and africanizing the South African curricula and implementing "literocracy". *Scrutiny* 2, 21(2), 44-62. doi: 10.1080/18125441.2016.1192676.
- Fainsilber, L., & Ortony, A. (1987). Metaphorical uses of language in the expression of emotions. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 2(4), 239-250.
- Gioia, D. (1992). *Can poetry matter?* Retrieved on July 24th, 2014 from <http://www.danagioia.net/essays/ecpm.htm>.
- Macherey, P. (2006). *A theory of literary production*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Marshanda, A. (2014). *The Unspoken – Episode #1 – You Used Me*. (Video) The Unspoken. Jakarta, Indonesia. 3mins.
- Marshanda, A. (2014). *The Unspoken – Episode #2 – Letter to God by Marshanda*. (Video) The Unspoken. Jakarta, Indonesia. 3mins.
- Modell, A. H. (2005). Emotional memory, metaphor, and meaning. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 25(4), 555-568.
- Pattillo, J. L. (2007). Oxymoron: A contradiction that isn't. *The Vocabula Review*, 9(5).
- Susanto, G. A., & Desideri, B. (2014, 18 August). *Misteri Marshanda dan bipolar disorder*. Retrieved from <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/2092728/misteri-marshanda-dan-bipolar-disorder>.