

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The United States of America has their own story with segregation, which is defined as “the policy or practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups, as in schools, housing, and public or commercial facilities, especially as a form of discrimination” (“Segregation”). Segregation started in 1896, when the Supreme Court legalized the separation of the races “by its ruling in *H.A. Plessy v. J.H. Ferguson*, which held that separate but equal facilities did not violate the U.S. Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment” (“*Brown v. Board of Education*: With an Even Hand”). This rule distinctly segregated and divided white people and black people, causing black people to live in suffering as victims because they were considered inferior. The act of segregation led to the unequal practices: “railways and streetcars, public waiting rooms, restaurants, boardinghouses, theaters, and public parks were segregated; separate schools, hospitals, and other public institutions, generally of inferior quality, were

designated for blacks” (“Jim Crow Laws”). For many years, black people have tried to fight for equal rights. They use many ways to make their voice heard, one of them is through literature. Taking place in Harlem, the northern part of New York, Harlem Renaissance was “burgeoning as an intellectual movement of black people protest towards their hardship” (“Harlem Renaissance”). The Harlem Renaissance is the name to “the cultural, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s” (“The Harlem Renaissance”). Members of the movement, such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer flourished and became influential figures in shaping the black people literature. Among those figures, there were two writers that share similarities and differences worth comparing, namely Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. That is why I choose some of their works to be analyzed in my thesis.

The first author whose works I am going to analyze is Langston Hughes. Even though Harlem Renaissance had many prominent and talented writers during his era, Hughes was able to prove himself as an exceptional author, as stated that “Langston Hughes, although only twenty-four years old, he is already conspicuous in the group of Negro intellectuals who are dignifying Harlem with a genuine art life” (“Langston Hughes”). Hughes had created many works especially in writing poetry. He used free verse in his poems and some of them were combined with blues and jazz music. Hughes’ inspiration of using blues and jazz came from Harlem. His inspiration emerged from the sceneries and sounds he had seen from his surroundings, “he is spending his hours in the nightclubs of

Harlem and Washington, D.C., listening and writing, he tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street” (“Langston Hughes: The songs on Seventh Street”). Most of Hughes’ poems dealt with the harsh discrimination of black people by white people and his discontent with the law of segregation. Hughes’ poems contained spirit of equality and he wanted to persuade his people to not easily surrender to segregation. Hughes, who had white ancestors, believed that human is created equal. Hughes’ poems that I am going to analyze are “I, Too,” “I Dream a World” and “Merry-Go-Round.” I choose to analyze them because the three poems strongly show the issue of segregation when black people received unfair treatment by white people.

The second writer whose works I am going to analyze is Claude McKay. His poems published in *Harlem Shadow* collection are widely famous and are considered a great work from the Harlem Renaissance; even some critics have called it “the first great literary achievement of the Harlem Renaissance” (“African American Literature”). He was also known for using sonnet form because he wanted “his poetry to be far-reaching and understandable by other poets of his day, namely white poets” (“Claude McKay Vs Langston Hughes”). Through his poems, he blatantly expressed his hatred towards white society and his discontent against segregation, which he believed only gave suffering to black people. He also wanted to encourage black people to fight for equality. I choose McKay poems’ “America,” “The White House” and “Enslaved” to be analyzed because the three poems show that segregation is wrong. The poems show the

harsh reality, which can be seen full of grudge and hate, black people received caused by segregation,

In my thesis, I would like to analyze theme through poetic diction because both of the poets have successfully chosen proper words to describe the unfair treatment that black people had during segregation era. Diction itself refers to “Both the choice and the order of words” (“Definition of Diction”). Diction will guide the readers to grasp the theme, which is defined as “the central idea or ideas explored by a literary work” (Wiehardt). The theme will display the poets’ point of view as black people and will show that black people should not easily give up against inequality.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. What are the themes of the poems?
2. How do the dictions of the poems help in revealing the themes?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1. To show the themes of the poems.
2. To show how the dictions help in revealing the themes.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

I conduct a library research for my thesis. First, I read the poems. After that I analyze the theme of these poems through the dictions. Then, I search for a

number of references from books and Internet websites to help me with my analysis. In the end, I draw a conclusion from my analysis.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

I divide my thesis into three parts, preceded by the Acknowledgments, the Abstract, and the Table of Contents. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, The Method of Research, and The Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the Theme Analysis of Three of Langston Hughes' Poems. Chapter Three is the Theme Analysis of Three of Claude McKay's Poems. Chapter Four is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which contain Langston Hughes' and Claude McKay's poems and the Biographies of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay.