

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Discrimination is “the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex” (“Discrimination”). However, in my thesis, I decide to focus on the racial discrimination which was experienced by the black people in the USA, particularly in the 1930’s. Being discriminated, black people were “losing their jobs at a business or on a farm. Often they were denied public works employment supposedly available to all needy citizens. To make matters worse, violence rose against blacks, carried out by whites competing for the same jobs. Losing their job means they cannot buy any food. Some charities refused to provide for the needy blacks” (“Black Americans 1929-1941”). As a result, black people were in a hard time to fulfil their daily needs.

To express the hard time of discrimination, many black poets dared to speak their thoughts and feelings through their poems. One of the black poets was Margaret Walker. “During her lifetime, she had the unique opportunity to be mentored by W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright. She was affiliated with several important writing groups and worked for the Federal Writers' Project. Walker worked on this project with such prominent writers as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks. She developed a close friendship with Richard Wright and joined his South Side Writers Group” (“Margaret Walker”). She was not only “best known for writing on the African-American experience through poetry but also fiction” (“Margaret Walker Biography”).

Walker had won Yale Younger Poets Award for *For My People* and Houghton Mifflin Literary Award for *Jubilee*. *For My People* contains poems in long ballads, sonnets, and free verses focusing on the blacks’ racial discrimination issue, while *Jubilee* is a historical novel about her family’s experience during the racial discrimination. Most of Walker’s works focus on her hope to be free from racial discrimination. I find that her poems are interesting to be analysed because they deal with the racial discrimination she experienced and the struggle of the blacks to get freedom. Among her many poems, I decide to analyse “For My People,” “The Struggle Staggers Us,” and “We Have Been Believers.”

I would like to reveal the theme of those three poems through analysing the dictions of the poems. Theme is “defined as a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work that may be stated directly or indirectly” (“Theme”), while diction is “style of speaking or writing determined by the choice of words by a speaker or a writer” (“Diction”). In analysing the poems, I choose formalism

approach. Formalism is “a style of inquiry that focuses, almost exclusively, on features of the literary text itself, to the exclusion of biographical, historical, or intellectual contexts” (“What Is Literary Theory?”).

Statement of the Problem

The statements of the problems are :

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

Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

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

Method of Research

The method I use is library research. First, I read three poems by Margaret Walker as the primary texts. Then, I start analysing the theme of each poem and show how the theme is revealed by the dictions. To support my analysis, I gather some resources and references from the Internet. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

Organization of the Thesis

I divide my thesis into three chapters, preceded by Abstract, and Table of Contents. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the Theme Analysis of Three of Margaret Walker's Poems. Chapter Three is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which contain Margaret Walker's poems and the Biography of Margaret Walker.

