

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

For a long time, the problem about racism in America seems to be never-ending. In the book, An Outline of American Literature by Peter B. High, it is said, "In 1863, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln had tried to abolish slavery. Nevertheless, their position in American society remained very bad. In this time, many blacks started to struggle for their human and social rights." (211) Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, the founder of the Rainbow/Push Coalition and a long-time crusader for civil rights explained about the black who finally realized how important the freedom is and they started to organize some movements. These movements brought black people to better condition of life:

They came to understand how deeply it depended upon their own personal commitment to do something that would bring about change.

The results of this movement were concrete: the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Act, and Affirmative Action. Because of the movements and the results of the movement, black people in America are illegal to be discriminated in hiring and promotion. They can sell house; they can vote a hold office; and they also can provide higher education. (02)

The movements to gain equality not only happened in the common situation (political and economical) but it also happened in the literary area, as High also say in his book, "In literature, many writers also appeared and began their long struggle for social justice for their people." (211)

In particular, I have chosen to analyze the works of Langston Hughes, who is an African-American writer and is one of the leaders of Harlem Renaissance. Hughes lived between 1902 until 1967 and it was the time when racism just began. High says in An Outline of American Literature, "At that time, Langston Hughes is declared as one of the most important poets who helped the black to deliver their voices through Hughes' poems. He is also an important poet who helped many other black writers to get their works published." (212)

Langston Hughes had created many works, not only in writing poetry but also in producing dramas and novels. He and his works have close relationship with racism and many people regard him as the great poet in the American history. Celia C. Daniel, an English bibliographer says in one of her articles, "... Langston Hughes was one of the dominant voices in American literature of this century and perhaps the single most influential black poet." (15)

Langston Hughes wrote many poems in his life that attack white people because of their racial hatred. (213) He conveyed a lot of messages, criticism, and attacks to the white through his poems to fight and struggle for the black so that they can get their rights and live freely in America. I will analyze four poems represent this message to the white; they are As I Grow Older, Cross, Democracy, and I, Too, Sing America.

The four poems above have similarities in subject matters: racial discrimination. These four poems also have the same background of writing, they were written in the early twentieth-century.

In this thesis, I will analyze the themes of the four poems. From the book, LITERATURE An Introduction to fiction, poetry and drama by X. J Kennedy and Dana Gioia, the meaning of theme is, “The general idea or insight the entire story reveals.” (195) After analyzing the four poems, I will come up with four themes, which are all related to racism in America.

The four themes I will analyze in my thesis are revealed through the dictions and symbols of the poems because Hughes uses interesting dictions and some symbols to describe his feeling as a black man. From Kennedy’s book, An Introduction to Poetry, the meaning of diction is, “A system of words refined from grossness of domestic use.” (65) In An Introduction to Poetry by Kennedy, it is stated that meaning of symbolism is, “A visible object or action that suggest some further meaning in addition to itself.” (261)

The dictions and symbols, which are used to reveal the themes of the four Hughes’ poems, will be related to historical facts that happened during the time when Hughes was still alive and struggled for equality for the black. In the book of Kennedy, we can find the meaning of historical approach, “Historical approach seeks to understand a literary work by investigating social, culture, an intellectual context that produce it – a context that necessarily includes the artist’s biography and milieu.” (637)

By using the dictions, symbols, and historical approach, I hope I can reveal the closest and the right analysis.

Statement of the Problem

Having mentioned the Background of the Study, I am going discuss the following problems:

1. What is the theme of the poems?
2. How is the theme revealed in each poem?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the Statement of the Problem, the purposes of the study are:

1. To know the theme of the four poems.
2. To show how each theme is revealed.

Method of Research

The method of research used in this study is library research. Firstly, I look for and read the poems I will discuss for my thesis. Secondly, I find the information from the references in the library and from the multimedia sources. I will then analyze the four poems using the references and make the conclusion.

Organization of the Thesis

I would like to divide the thesis into three chapters that are preceded by Acknowledgement. The first chapter 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. The second chapter is the Analysis to find the themes of the poems As I Grow Older, Cross, Democracy, and I, Too, Sing America. The third chapter is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendix, which consists of the original text of the poems and the biography of the author.