

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Racism is the subject of my thesis. I choose to discuss race relations in the United States and how African Americans struggle to gain social recognition and legal recognition. I will focus on the effect of racism on African Americans in the US between 1930-1960. This issue is very interesting to be analyzed because it has been and it still is a major issue in the United States. Racism is unfair treatment of people, or violence against them, because they belong to a race other than their own. In this thesis I will analyze the portrayal of the protagonists. The protagonists' struggle in achieving their goal is very motivating because it reflects African Americans' experience and struggle at that time.

As for the authors, I choose two authors whom I think are compatible to be compared. The first author is Richard Wright. I choose him because although he passed away in 1960, his influence on present black American literature is still powerful. He fathered one tradition—the black protest novel—and helped establish a

new one: an exploration of naturalism using the American black as his subject (Black Boy by Richard Wright). One of the facts that his influence is very important is a memorial of Richard Wright in Natchez, Mississippi, where he grew up.

The second author is Julius Lester. He is an award winning American author of books for children and adults, and was a temporary professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He was active in the American civil rights movement, first as a folk singer at numerous civil rights activities and as part of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. From this fact, I can assume that he really knew the real situation at that time. Moreover, because my topic is about race relations in the US, he is indeed a suitable author.

I pick Black Boy by Richard Wright and And All Our Wounds Forgiven by Julius Lester for my thesis. Black Boy, by Richard Wright, was first published in 1945. This autobiographical novel was a best-seller, and it is an important 20th-century work of literature (The New York Times Company). Black Boy is perhaps his most poignant and artistically successful book. In it, the ethics of living in the Jim Crow South are analyzed to their limits; he exposes all the unresolved issues that still haunt black and white Americans (Black Boy by Richard Wright).

The second book is And All Our Wounds Forgiven by Julius Lester. It is a novel about the civil rights movement told from the points of view of the white lover of a civil rights leader, his dying widow, his colleague and the voice of himself who

is now dead. This book was one of the finalists for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

From the two novels above I found similarities and differences. The very important similarity is both protagonists are adult black males who experience discrimination in the South. Because of their strong will in achieving their goals, they become inspiring figures for other blacks. The two protagonists are portrayed as well-educated people who struggle hard for recognition. Yet, their focus on the struggle to achieve recognition is different. As a result of their different characteristics, the kind of struggle they have and the way they deal with their struggle are different, too. Because their actions are different, accordingly, the consequences of their struggle are different, too.

I will use the sociological approach to help me find what lies beneath the surface of both novels.

Sociological criticism is an approach to literature that examines social groups, relationships, and values as they are manifested in literature. Sociological approaches emphasize the nature and effect of the social forces that shape power relationships between groups or classes of people. Such readings treat literature as either a document reflecting social conditions or a product of those conditions. (Approaches To Literary Criticism)

The two novels that I want to discuss are talking about racism in US. Racism is “the belief that different races of people have different characters and abilities, and that the qualities of one race are the best (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). Through this definition, it is clear that racism is closely related with the relationship between races, which is a part of sociological study.

Related to the explanation above, the two novels that I choose both deal with the interaction of society members of different races and social behavior which happened in America in the 1960’s, when race was a harsh issue. I believe sociological approach is the best approach to use because in this thesis I will examine social groups, relationships and values which are manifested in And All Our Wounds Forgiven and Black Boy. On top of that, I will also discuss the nature and effect of the social forces that shape power relationships between African Americans and white Americans. All the problems which are experienced by the protagonists, who are African Americans, are caused by their Anglo-American society.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. How do Julius Lester and Richard Wright portray the protagonist in both of the novels?
2. How does the racism contribute to the portrayal of protagonist through sociological approach?

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1. To show how Julius Lester and Richard Wright portray the protagonist in both of the novels.
2. To show how the racism contributes to the portrayal of protagonist through sociological approach.

IV. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The method I use is library research. I begin with reading Julius Lester's And All Our Wounds Forgiven and Richard Wright's Black Boy. After that, I look for some references and materials from the Internet which can support the analysis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

I divide the thesis into four chapters. In Chapter One, I present the Introduction, which contains 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. In the second chapter, I analyze the portrayal of the protagonist in Julius Lester's And All Our Wounds Forgiven and in the third chapter I analyze the

portrayal of the protagonist in Richard Wright's Black Boy. In the last chapter, I draw the Conclusion of the analysis. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices.