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Racial Discrimination Experienced by Black People as Reflected in Langston Hughes's Poems

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Abstract—This study aims to describe the racial discrimination from white people against black people that was formerly a slave by analyzing Langston Hughes' poems; *I, Too*, *To the Black Beloved*, *The White Ones*, and *My Beloved*. Presentation of racial discrimination can be seen from the act of prejudice, insulting, words used, and the act of suppression to the black people. These poems represent the poet's feeling of social phenomena that happened. The data were analyzed utilizing the new historicism theory, enriched by historical text, socio-cultural, and political information during slavery. This study is a qualitative descriptive method using the new historicism approach to explain the racial discrimination experienced in Langston Hughes' poems. The result showed that Langston Hughes reflects the phenomena of racial discrimination through his poems, such as slave, victim, nigger, torture, darker brother, and not beautiful in his poems. Langston Hughes in his poetry concludes that black discrimination is treated badly; they eat in the kitchen, they are not beautiful, children's happiness is tarnished, and racial discrimination is inhumane.

Index Terms—racial discrimination, black people, new historicism

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is easily known as a work that displays expression and motion as the result of human creativity in the form of art that produces high aesthetic values. The example of motion is the author's imagination that turns his thoughts and ideas into a literary work. Literature is a simple way where people can experience the world around them through imagination (Jones, 1968). It can be inferred that literature means that people talk about a work that is related to feelings, imagination, experience, and thought by authors. Similarly, in general, literature may be understood as a written piece of art produced by a certain author (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). Besides that, literary works are also the personal opinion of an author about something which is then passed through a work that also reflects the author (Hasanah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2021).

Therefore, literature is one of the phenomena that describe the reality of human life. The existence of literature is viewed as a culturally valued text reflecting human life (Sunardi, Arafah, & Salija, 2018). Literary work is a form of reflection of human life, but it does not mean that literary works reveal whether facts or truths. Literature is also called the mirror or reflection of society (Marliana, Arafah & Abbas, 2018). It cannot be denied that what is written in literary works is a reflection of real-life which can be identified by describing some of the evidence shown in the literary works produced (Arafah, Abbas, & Hikmah, 2021). It means that human life is described through a literary work in a form of fiction that is sometimes the same as the reality of human life. Everything that is presented and summarized in literary works is always related to the phenomena of human life, both personal and collective phenomena. Simply that literature indeed reflects society, both for its good values and its ills. Correctively, the function of literature reflects the ills of society to make people aware of their mistakes and correct them (Duhan, 2015). Many things can be used as lessons in human survival. One of them is a literary work because it has many benefits to the reader's life since the literary works are generally reflections of life at one period (Arafah, Abbas, & Hikmah, 2021).

In addition, literature is not only a work that comes from thoughts, experiences, and phenomena that describe human life but also function as communication. The ability of an author to produce a literary work can be seen from the language used and how the author conveys his literary works. Sell (2002) also states that literature is useful for exploring several different cultures. Therefore, there are two perspectives in literary works, namely an eye to the content and form of literary work (the "pure" side), and its social function potential, especially in language education (the "applied" side). These perspectives are brought together with the theory of literature as a form of communication. Interestingly, literature is known as a written work, but in this case, literature is a written work produced by the author aesthetically for communication (Arafah et al, 2021). The development of technology has changed the way people think

and communicate. Therefore the language used by an author means to explore the meaning that contributes to a better understanding as a means of communication (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019).

Literature that has a relation with communication makes people change the way of thinking, acting, and attitude in everyday life. Therefore, literature as a medium of communication can be a means of introducing culture, social life, and the reality of human life. The progress of literature is growing by following the technological advances. More specifically, the era of information technology has made the way of thinking people of the world (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Through social media, people can easily and quickly access, receive and broadcast information, even comment on the truth or just give an opinion about something (Arafah, Hasyim, & Kapoyos, 2021). Social media is a part of today's technological developments, making it easier for humans to access anything. Humans can enjoy literary works through social media, not only through books, television, or live streaming. Social media becomes a part of the development of technology that has given broader opportunities for many people to take a part in a wide range of social interactions without being limited by space and time (Hasjim, Arafah, Kaharuddin, Verlin, & Genisha, 2020). Specifically, the internet media content becomes more frequently visited because technology changes the human perspective to make life easier to find information, both in work, education, or just enjoying literary work (Arafah, B & Muhammad, H, 2020). It is also one of the supports or branding of a literary work through technology so that more and more people can enjoy literature easily. Branding is needed by-products, works, and destinations so that it has an identity, personality, and image. When literary works can be enjoyed easily and with the use of beautiful language, it becomes an identity for literature (Hasyim, Arafah, & Kuswarini, 2020).

It is commonly known that there are some genres in literary works, such as prose, play, and poetry. All these works are mostly the result of the imagination, feeling, expression, and thought by the authors. Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and meant to tell a story or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. Poetry is useful in achieving this artistic expression in several ways (Ollila & Jantas, 2006). In addition, the languages and words that are used in poetry are often modified to make them sound beautiful (Arafah, 2018). But apart from using beautiful language in poetry, some authors also use other ways of writing in poetry. The authors follow the linguistic and grammatical rules to make the poem sound better when it is read (Hasanah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2021). As a result, readers or people who read a literary work, especially poetry, with high motivation will also lead to achieving more information about it (Arafah et.al, 2020).

Poetry is generally judged to be slightly different from other literary works because its language usage is different from the language of other literary works. It is because an author does not only express the contents of his imagination and thoughts but also pays attention to the language used. Poetry is a kind of literary works with slight words but dense of meaning as seen in the structure of poetry in utilizing very limited words, arrays, and stanzas (Arafah, B. & Kaharuddin 2019). Furthermore, the use of language in poetry can be done with a well-organized and detailed discourse analysis that can be useful for students in understanding the number of words by the community (Ahmad, Arafah, & Kaharuddin, 2021). In the density and limitations of words used in poetry, it contains a very broad meaning. The density of meaning lies in the poetry meaning construction that uses two dimensions of meaning at once, namely meaning dimensions of denotation and connotation (Takwa, Arafah, B., Syam, J., Kaharuddin, & Kadaruddin, 2021). This makes the readers need more understanding to know the content and meaning of the poem. Sometimes most of the poetry uses figurative language, which is not easy for the reader to understand the poem just by reading it once. The language used in poetry can be understood easily by using and understanding as much vocabulary as possible. In addition, understanding and knowing several vocabularies can make it easier for someone to understand ideas, messages, etc. (Kadaruddin., Arafah, B., Kaharuddin., Ahmad, D., & Iska, 2020).

Through literary work, the author tries to describe human life. Various types of life such as economic, religious, political, and even social life are described in literary works by the author. Literary works can be seen as the social products that are equivalent to cultural, political, and social studies issues (Irmawati, Arafah, & Abbas 2020).

This writing only focuses its discussion on poetry. It is the same with other literary works from the thoughts and imagination of an author, the poet in writing his poems, is much influenced by the circumstances around him, including religious, cultural, or social aspects. The situation that happened around an author affects the way an author uses words because a literary work will only be meaningful and informative if it is observed in its context, such as by studying cultural discourse (Arafah, Thayyib, Kaharuddin, & Sahib, 2020). It is in line that poetry is the life of literary works and through literature, the vast territory in between as vast as human life itself, where they interact and influence each other, is the nerve of human existence (Tymieniecka, 2000).

There are lots of things that can be talked about in poetry, such as; economic, religious, political, scientific, and social life issues. One of these social issues has been occurred for a long time and still happening today. What makes this research is different from the others is that the writer chooses the work of Langston Hughes as the object because the author is Afro-American, which means that he indirectly also experiences social discrimination as a black person. In line with Dougless (1845), the author of the literary work is ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry wood, sweep the chimney, or roll oil casks, all he did for nearly three years in New Bedford. Discrimination that happened to black people did not only happen in men, but women also experienced such things. It did not only happen in the ancient era, but even in the modern era, women also feel discriminated against. It has been rooted in ancient times. It was because of

some discrimination issues that are existed within the society. The drops were rooted in some social changes, such as women who slowly start to gain popularity and get enlightened (Suleman, Arafah, Abbas, & Delukman, 2021).

The poetry in Langston Hughes' book entitled *The Collected of African American* descent, which means that he as a writer in literary work has experienced direct discrimination by white people. There was no work too hard – none too dirty. There are many works of poetry written by Langston Hughes which indirectly tell the life of African Americans who live as black people and experienced acts of discrimination throughout history. Some of his poetry shows many acts of discrimination felt by black people, both socially, culturally, and educationally. One of the triggers for these acts of discrimination is due to the difference in skin and hair color between black people as a minority with the white people. Black Americans have been defined as racially different by white groups for several centuries. Through the poetry of Langston Hughes as a literary work, it provides a description of the life experienced by black people for many years as a minority. Langston Hughes, as the author of the work, stimulates readers to come in and experience their lives indirectly. He as an author opens the doors of the unknown and invisible worlds to readers not only by stimulating feelings and emotions but also by helping them to discover the meanings of life and existence (Floriani, Arafah, & Nur, 2020). In addition, literary works as a social product have many benefits in life; everyone must learn from anything and anyone including animals because whatever happens in the universe is a teacher (Irmawati & Arafah, 2020).

Langston Hughes's poems, which are literary works that tell the life of black people who experience discrimination, are the form and result of the author's thoughts, imagination, and experiences. The social phenomena that exist in Langston Hughes's poetry have a historical and social background. This is in line with Wellek and Warren (1956) ideas that literature is a social product that reflects the phenomena of social behavior in society, using language as its medium to express the author's thoughts. Therefore, the creation of a literary work through a historical process is appropriate for its time.

The writers of this article believe that Langston Hughes's works are the selection of the right research object to be used to analyze racial discrimination by white people against black people of African-American descent making real-life in describing the sense of discrimination against black people. Langston Hughes who is a part of Afro-Americans makes a thick work with history. Research on racial discrimination by viewing, reading, and analyzing the history is still limited, therefore this is one of the significant reasons for the writers to describe and analyze it with a more detailed explanation.

II. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Talking about a literary work, it cannot be separated from history. Literary and historical works are both sourced from past events or experiences so that literature and history place themselves as works that record events. Then it becomes a document or record about a person, building, event, or anything related to the past. Kuntowijoyo (1987) explained literary work in imaginary language to the aim of understanding historical events according to the level of the author's ability. Literary works can be a means for the author to convey thoughts, feelings, and responses about a historical event. Like historical works, literary works can recreate an event according to the knowledge and imagination of the author.

New historicism is a perspective that develops in history. As in terms of a perspective, new historicism is an alternative approach used in understanding and writing history. Simply the New Historicism can be understood how the study of the past is based on the placement of historical documents and non-histories (literary works). In this regard, Tyson's (2006, p.291-292) explained that *New Historicism* is the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text (the literary work) and context (the historical conditions that placed it) are mutually constitutive, they create each other. More explanation from Greenblatt in Melluga (2015, p.197), Greenblatt provides a similar list of "practices" that characterize new Historicist investigation: (1) one should begin with specific details, anecdotes, and examples in order to avoid a totalizing version of history; (2) one should proceed from such details to illustrate how they are tied up with larger contradictory forces in a given time period, no matter how apparently innocuous the detail may seem at first; (3) one should remain self-conscious about one's methodologies, thus resisting "a historicism based upon faith in the transparency of signs and interpretative procedures," (4) one should be suspicious of liberatory narratives: everything is, on some level, caught up in the circulations of power in a given time period; and (5) all cultural products, whether they are high art, political documents, personal letters, or trash, are a part of larger discursive structures and, so, can offer clues to the ideological contradictions of a given time period.

Black people in America experienced problems and difficulties in carrying out their lives. They not only felt in work or social condition, but they experienced various forms of racism, both in the form of prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. This is also in line with Oliver (2003, p.3) that many African Americans, particularly males, have been stereotyped as dumb, violent, dangerous criminals. This expression proves that the racism committed by white people to the black people is not only socially and work, not only violence and cruelty in physical form but also mentally. Discrimination cannot be changed or eliminated, it still exists in America and is still being felt in the 1930s. Mehrotra and Wagner (2009, p.6) stated racial discrimination in terms of physical characteristics like skin color, facial features, hair type that are common to an inbred, geographically isolated population. The history of racial discrimination in the United States has recorded various racial issues.

Langston Hughes is an Afro-American writer who tells a lot about the discrimination that black people experience. However, he did not only describe the suffering felt by black people, but also told the black people's pride and struggles. According to Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p.3), Langston Hughes is one of the more controversial names in the history of American poetry. To many readers of African descent, he is poet laureate, author of poems well in an Afro-American culture that exudes Hughes's affection for black Americans across all divisions of region, class, and gender. He created his works by reflecting reality and real human personality. The personality of the white people who discriminate against black people by looking at their different physical appearances brings about various readers' feelings. In addition, people indeed believe that human behaviors and personality are still attributed to inner motives, intentions, aims, and plans (Purwaningsih, Arafah, & Abbas, 2020).

There is a lot of black discrimination committed by white people, both in discrimination of skin, employment, and education. In this case, the author reveals racial discrimination by white people to black people by applying a new historicism approach to seek more information about the history and racial discrimination that occurs in black people.

III. METHODOLOGY

The technique of data analysis that is used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The writer discusses the act of discrimination based on the text in the selected poems of Langston Hughes. Specifically, a descriptive qualitative was used to analyze the primary and secondary data. The primary data are the selected poems of Langston Hughes, while the secondary data are those gathered from another source as the supporting data related to the object discussed (Purwaningsih, Arafah, & Abbas, 2019). All the collected data are then further analyzed by employing the New Historicism theory to discuss the discriminatory practices that happened to black people by white people at the time. New Historicism deals principally with the importance of local, political, and social contexts for the understanding of literary texts (Wayne, 1990). The history or events of literary works do not just happen by chance. At least there is something to underline history. This is supported by several aspects such as religion, culture, politics, or ideology.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Langston Hughes's poetry presents a social phenomenon or problem that has existed for a long time, namely, discrimination. Discrimination against black African Americans makes them a minority group. This is not only due to physical differences between blacks and whites, but the implementation and practices in education, social, and economic also makes black people discriminated against. The discrimination isolates them in the process of getting a decent life as human beings. This discriminatory act becomes a bitter and traumatic history for black people. In this case, the author found several things related to acts of discrimination committed by white people against black people.

Statement 1:

I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p.46, Stan 2, Line 1-3)

As conveyed in his other poems about black people, in the poem entitled "I, Too" Langston Hughes describes racial discrimination and Afro-American minorities. racial discrimination and injustice experienced by black people represented through Hughes' characters in obtaining the same civil rights as can be obtained by white people majority. The words "I am the darker brother" as an acknowledgment of the identity that African Americans have black skin. "Darker" in this case refers to the skin color of Afro-Americans who have dark skin tones, so are called black people. The word "brother" does not mean that one brother is related to one black person, but it does represent all black people. "They send me to eat in the kitchen" in the sentence refers to white people. In this case, black people are sent to the kitchen to eat, it does not like eating in a family who eats in the kitchen or sits at the dining table, but they go to the kitchen to eat because between master and slave they never eat together at the dining table, that's why "they" in this case black people are told to eat in the kitchen. Because the kitchen was a place to eat for animals and slaves, blacks were of a lower class and so did not deserve to eat at the same table as white people. "When Company Comes" in this sentence it becomes clearer that black people are sent to the kitchen to eat because their master had arrived; they were asked to go into the kitchen while the whites are at the dinner table. White people do not want to sit together with black people, especially when their families, friends, or guests arrive. They are afraid that black people will hurt their families because white people think that black people are scary, criminal, and rude.

Statement 2:

Ah,
My black one,
Thou art not beautiful

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p.58, Stanza 1, Line 1-3)

The next data is, entitled "To the Black Beloved" in the first line the author mentions "Ah, My Black one" which is an affirmation of the identity of black people who have a dark skin color. "Thou art not beautiful" sentence states that they are ugly, which in this case they are black people. Black people will not feel and call themselves ugly if they have

never felt discrimination. Because they have dark black skin, which is identical to darkness, they then are called ugly. This is in contrast to the beauty standards, according to white people, where white people possess white skin, a sharp nose, straight hair, and a tall body. Acts of racial discrimination are committed by white people against black people, because of their physical differences. The white people in certain circumstances do not merely hate black people because of the actions or attitudes of black people who are different, but because their physicality is far from the standard of white people's beauty.

Stanza 3:

My black one,
Thou art not good
Yet thou hast

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p. 58, Stanza 8-10)

This sentence is almost the same as the previous line; this seems to give the impression that black people vilify themselves or their identity; it gives the impression that they think they are different from other humans. However, if we look back on the life history of black people who have been discriminated against by white people, this just likes bringing back the memories of black people who were discriminated against by white people because of their dark skin color, so it looks scary and cruel. Therefore, in this case, black people refer to themselves as people who are not beautiful and cruel.

Stanza 4:

Yet why do you torture me,
O, white strong ones,
Why do you torture me?

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p. 37, Stanza 1, Line 5-7)

Furthermore, the discrimination received by black people is not just the treatment of minorities or the absence of recognition of equality between the two. Black people not only experience discrimination verbally but also through action. Disturbances received by black people are not only through words but also actions. White people are free to do this because they have stronger powers than black people; that's why white people are free to do anything to black people. This is also confirmed by the history that between 1885-1908 in Belgium, there was a labor tax rule of 10 percent, and it also applies to slaves of the King of Belgium where there is another tax rule for them. According to Kisangani and Bobb (2010, p.104) a 10-percent tax, passed in 1890, became an excuse for demanding large quantities of rubber from African populations. Failure to pay the tax was punished by flogging, execution, and occasionally the destruction of entire villages. This is a witness to the racial discrimination committed by white people against black people which has an impact on physical violence.

Stanza 5:

At first, they are nice to him,
But finally, they taunt him
And call him "nigger."

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel 1995, p. 36, Stanza 2, Line 5-7)

The poem entitled *Migration* by Langston Hughes shows that the discrimination committed by white people to black people is not only done by adults but also children. The first sentence "At first they are nice to him" they in this sentence refer to white children who when they meet black children they are very kind, and even welcome them warmly, and invite them to play. The sentence "But Finally they taunt him" told us that the attitude of the white people to the black people was not as beautiful and gentle as the first sentence said. They do finally social discrimination because of differences in skin color, face, and body shape. Last sentence "And call him Nigger" the white people call black people Nigger (both adults and children) because of their dark and black faces.

Stanza 6:

He is a little dark boy
With round black face
And a white embroidered collar.

(Hughes in Rampersad and Roessel (1995, p. 36, Stanza 4, Line 11-13)

A continuation of the poem is still about discrimination by little white, children because of their different skin color. In the first sentence "He is a little dark boy" they still think that they are not the same because they have different skin colors, so that is their reason not to play with a little black. This is also further stressed in the next sentence "With round black face." The last sentence "And white embroidered collar" implies that the only thing that looks white from a black man's body is the collar of the school uniform he wears; the rest are black and dark. This showed that the poet came from a place where white people hate them, because of his black skin, and they discriminated against and tortured him and his family.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis that has been described and explained previously, it is certain that the forms of racial discrimination against black people are clearly described in Langston Hughes' poems that are the subject of this study.

The racial discrimination committed by white people that appears in Langston Hughes's poems is related to physical appearance with the assumption that black is not beautiful; stigma black people are inferior, stupid, criminals, cruel, and unequal to white people. It leads to discrimination against black people, who in the injustice, inequality, and arbitrariness carried out by the majority, in this case, are white people. White people treat other people based on their skin, they have racial tendencies towards black people. Therefore, white people still tend to think of black people like their former slaves, white people do not treat black people based on their actions, but by looking at the color of their skin.

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