

# RACIAL SEGREGATION IN LANGSTON HUGHES'S "I, TOO"

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**ABSTRACT**“I, Too” is a poem written by Langston Hughes. The poem tells us about how the racial segregation happened between the whites and the blacks in America. In this paper, the writer analyzes the racial segregation by discussing intrinsic and extrinsic aspects in this poem. For the intrinsic elements the writer describes imagery and diction and for the extrinsic elements the writer describes racism. From this discussion it can be concluded that the whites think their social status are higher than the blacks are and the whites regard the blacks as slaves not as citizens of America, while the blacks believe that someday the whites will realize that they are wrong and will be ashamed. The blacks hope that they will have the same rights as the whites.

**Keywords:** racial segregation, the whites, the blacks, rights, social status.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

Poetry is a form in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm. Perrine says:

Poetry might be defined as a kind of languages that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language, to understand this fully, we need to understand what poetry says. For language is employed o different occasions to say quite different kinds of things; in other words, language has different uses (Perrine, 1969:509).

The writer chooses “I, Too” because this is a good poem to be analyzed since Hughes wrote “I, Too” from a black American or slave perspective.

### 1.2 Purposes of the study

1. To paraphrase the poem of Langston Hughes, “I, Too”.
2. To analyze the intrinsic elements such as imagery and diction in Langston Hughes’s “I,Too”.
3. To analyze racial segregation in Langston Hughes’s “I, Too”.

### 1.3 Scopes of the study

#### 1.3.1 To analyze intrinsic elements in “I, Too”

The purposes of analyzing the poem “I, Too” is the writer can learn about two kinds of imageries which are visual and organic imageries and discuss about diction in this poem. Besides, the main purpose of this paper is to find the meaning of the poetry and what the poet wants to say in this poem.

### **1.3.2 To analyze extrinsic elements in “I, Too”**

Langston Hughes’s “I, Too” is one of the best poem in English Literature because this poem clearly give us about how is racial segregation happens in America during early 20<sup>th</sup> century (*www.poetryfoundation.org/LangstonHughes. 17 May 2016*)

Thus the writer is going to explain about extrinsic elements in “I, Too” and the writer will use the theory of Racism from David O. Sears.

## **2**

### **LITERARY REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Intrinsic Elements**

Intrinsic element is all of elements contained in a poem used for studying and understanding the meaning of the poem (Perrine, 1969).

There are so many kinds of intrinsic elements, but this study will only focus on imagery, connotation and denotation. The kinds of imagery that will be discussed are limited on kinds of them which are dominant in the poem.

### 2.1.1 Imagery

Imagery is figurative which is used to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. According to Perrine:

Imagery may be defined as the representative through language of sense experience. Poetry appeals directly to our senses, of course, through its music and rhythm, which we actually hear when it is read aloud. (Perrine, 1969:54).

There are some kinds of imageries and two of them will be used in this paper, those are:

- Visual Imagery

Represent a sight. Visual imagery is using descriptions to create a scene for the reader. (Perrine, 1969)

Example:

*"[t]o watch his woods fill up with snow"* in the Robert Frost poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

- Organic Imagery

Represent internal sensation. Organic imagery is a description of a physical sensation and also emotion such as hunger, thirst, pain or fatigue, fear, etc. (Perrine, 1969)

Example:

*"To stab me in the sneeze-nerve of a nostril"* in *The White-Tailed Hornet* by Robert Frost.

### **2.1.2 Diction**

Connotation and denotation become the other intrinsic element that will be used by the writer to analyze "I,Too".

Connotation refers to secondary meaning of a word or expression beyond the true meaning, and Denotation is the expression of the dictionary meaning or the explicit meaning of a word. (Barnet, Morton and Burto, 1967).

## **2.2 Extrinsic Element**

For the extrinsic aspect, the writer will discuss racial segregation by using racism theory.

Racism in the United States is defined as the systematic oppression of African-Americans and other people of color and the related ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority. These two aspects of racism have shaped U.S. society from the early 1600's until the present. (Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000).

From the quotation below, we know that racism has been existed since the era of slavery in United States. The whites control the blacks because of their skin color is different. The blacks are discriminated by the whites.

### 3.1 Intrinsic Elements

#### 3.1.1 Imagery

In this paper the writer only analyzes the organic and the visual imageries. From the first line of the poem, the writer arranges the imageries as follows:

Line 2:        I am the darker brother.

The underlined word is visual imagery. The word *Dark* here means the color of the skin of a person. This line tells us about how the blacks thinks they are brother with the whites, just the color of the skin made them different from each other.

Line 3:        They send me to eat in the kitchen

The word underlined is a visual imagery. We can sense with our visual that the blacks eat in the kitchen. The kitchen is the place where slaves and animals eat while the whites have their meal in the dining room. It shows that the whites have a higher class than the blacks.

Line 4:        When company comes,

The whole of line 4 is a visual imagery because it gives us a visual sense about the guest of the whites who comes to the dining room to have a meal together. It shows that the whites regard the other whites have the same class.

Line 5:        But I laugh,

The word *laugh* here means happiness and this is a part of organic imagery which represents internal sensation. We can feel that when the blacks are sent to eat in the kitchen, it is not make them sad, because they are still to be happy and they are sure that one day they will have the same rights as the whites. And word *laugh* also is an auditory imagery because we can hear if someone laughs.

Line 7:           And grow strong.

The underlined word is an organic imagery. We can feel how strong the blacks are. Because when the blacks eat well, they will be strong enough to break the whites' domination.

Line 9:           I'll be at the table

As I mentioned before, the table is the place where the whites have their meal, in the dining room. The blacks are not allowed eating with the whites. The sentence "I'll be at the table" gives us the sense of visual. So this line contains visual imagery. It means that someday the blacks will have the same rights as the whites.

Line 11:         Nobody'll dare

This line contains of organic imagery. This line tells us about the whites who do not dare to ask the blacks to eat in the kitchen any longer, because the whites just realize that the blacks and whites have the same rights.

Line 16:         They'll see how beautiful I am

Clearly this line contains of visual imagery in it. We can imagine how beautiful the blacks are. This line tells us about how the whites in the end will realize the difference between white and black is just the matter of skin color. Mentally, it could be that the blacks are better than the whites.

Line 17:       And be ashamed—

The word underlined is an organic imagery because it represents feeling. This line tells us about the whites that just realize that the blacks have the same right with them, even they may be are better than them. It just takes too long for the whites to realize it and they feel embarrassed.

As the discussion about imagery above, we know that all of visual and organic imageries are related to racial segregation that happened between the whites and the blacks.

### **3.1.2 Diction**

Another discussion about the intrinsic element of Langston Hughes's "I,Too" is diction in the poem. There are connotation and denotation which included in "I,Too" that writer wants to mention and discuss here.

Line 1:        I, too, sing America.

The underlined word is connotation. Langston Hughes in this poem describes *sing America* as his effort to be a citizen of America. He imagines that America is a



song and all of people singing together, and he wants to sing that song too. In the other hand, Hughes claims that he is an American; he was born in America so he wants to be the part of America.

Line 3: They send me to eat in the kitchen

The underline word is denotation. Kitchen here usually is the place to eat for animals and slaves. The blacks are asked to eat in the kitchen by the whites. Because of the whites thinks the blacks' social status are lower than them.

Line 4: When company comes,

Company here is a connotation. Company means the guest of the whites that will have their meal together. The whites have their meal in the dining room with their white guest because, the whites not just have a meal but also talking about something, gathering information, and sharing ideas with their white guest.

Line 6: And eat well,

The underline word is a connotation. The word *eat* is not just put food in the mouth, but also put the knowledge into their mind, put the courage into their lives and build strength to their bodies. We might think of these are the ways in which African Americans educated themselves, bound together, and rose up to fight the oppression from the whites.

Line 8: Tomorrow,

This word is a connotation. *Tomorrow* here is not really the day tomorrow, but this is like a hope. *Tomorrow* here is a hope to a better future time when the blacks and the whites have the same rights.

Line 9: I'll be at the table

The underline word is connotation. The table here is the dining room, the place where the whites have their meal together where the blacks are forbidden to eat in the dining room. The dining room is the place where the whites have their meal, so they send the blacks to eat in the kitchen.

Line 16: They'll see how beautiful I am

The underline word is a connotation. Hughes wants to say that someday the whites will realize that the black is same as the whites; they have the same rights as the citizen of America. The main difference is just the color of the skin, but the blacks have the same quality and quantity to be the part of America.

So, all of the discussion about the diction in "I, Too" are related to racial segregation because we know how the whites do not want to have their meal with the blacks because of their skin color is different.

## **3.2 Extrinsic Elements**

### **3.2.1 Social Status**

In this poem we can see the racial segregation through the social status. The whites think that they have better social status than the blacks. We can see through this line of “I, Too” from several lines of Hughes’ poem.

I, too, sing America. 1

I am the darker brother. 2

They send me to eat in the kitchen 3

The whites have their meal in the dining room and they ask the blacks to eat in the kitchen instead of they can have their meal in the dining room together. They do not want black people eat in the dining room with them, because they think that the blacks have lower class compared to them.

They send me to eat in the kitchen 3

When company comes 4

When the whites have a guest (in this case the white), they ask him/her to have their meal in the dining room. While the blacks still eat in the kitchen. It proves that the whites have higher social status than the blacks.

But I laugh, 5

And eat well, 6

And grow strong. 7

Tomorrow, 8

I’ll be at the table 9

The blacks just laughing when they eat in the kitchen because they believe that one day they will have the same rights as the whites. The blacks also sure that the whites are their brothers and no social status that make them separated.

### **3.2.2. The Whites Regard the Blacks as Slaves**

The whites regard the blacks as slaves, not as the citizens of America because of the color of the skin. The blacks have darker skin color but they regard the whites as the brother and the blacks wants to be the part of America as in lines 1 and 2 of the poem.

I, too, sing America.	1
I am the darker brother.	2

We can see this segregation through the way how the whites treat the blacks when they want to have their meal, so they send the blacks into the kitchen. The whites do not want to have their meal together with the blacks, so they only accept the other whites to have meal together in the dining room. This does not make the blacks lost their spirit. They are eating well, learn and build strength to be strong enough to break the whites' domination. The blacks are still trying to have racial equality.

The intrinsic and extrinsic elements in the poem are related to each other; the interrelation is about racial segregation. The discussion tells us about how the whites dominate the blacks and how the whites maintain their status by discriminating the blacks.

## CONCLUSION

This poem tells racial segregation between the blacks and the whites in America. This poem also tells us about the blacks hoping to have the same rights as the whites. From imageries and diction, we know how the whites regard the blacks as slave. Their place to have a meal is separated. The whites eat in the dining room while the blacks eat in the kitchen because the whites not just have a meal but also talking about something, gathering information, and sharing ideas with their white guest. Besides, the whites think the black is just eating their food.

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