

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The issues about racism of the African American have been acknowledged for decades. It is probably those issues that inspire some black authors to write their works. For example, there are many literary works that state about racism in the African American in the early years, which are based on the background of the author's society and political situation at that time.

The short story "Red-Headed Baby" is one of them. It is a short story with a Southern setting from the book of Langston Hughes entitled *The Ways of White Folks*, which was published in 1934. The short fiction portrays sympathy, rage, horror, and satiric humor, with the emphasized focus on relations between American blacks and whites. According to an Internet site (<http://www.harlem-renaissance.htm>, October 13th 2010, ¶ 1), this short story also reveals a sexual theme that deals with an exploitive black and white relationship. This relationship was of a secretly nature which overtly resulted in the birth of mulatto children.

Based on an article on internet site by Chad Wellington, the term Mulatto has been used for hundred of years to define a specific combination of racial combination. The term dates from 1593 and has general meaning according to the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: Mulatto is a person of mixed white and

black ancestry, especially a person with one white and one black parent (Wellington, 2010, ¶ 2).

One such story that reveals about mulatto is the “Red-Headed Baby”. The story is set in a poor rural area of Florida. The story opens with Clarence, a white seaman on a tramp ship coming to visit a black girl, Betsy, whom he visited three years earlier. The docking area is so barren and poor that there is nothing to do except get drunk and go out and sleep with black people. It is evident then that Betsy and her old mother earn their living from Betsy’s prostitution with white men. It can be seen from the quotation below:

Same old woman, wrinkled as hell, and still don’t care where the money comes from. Still talkin’ loud. ... She knew it was some white man comin’ up the walk, heh? There must be plenty of ’em, then, comin’ here now. She knew it was some white man, heh! ... (Hughes, 1990, p.3)

Betsy is described as a black African girl in her early twenty years with characteristics unlike any other blacks because of her golden yellow skin, thus she is more attractive than any other. In the story, Betsy is described as a:

Young fellow girl in a white house dress. Oiled hair, skin like an autumn moon. Gold ripe young yellow girl with a white house dress to knees. Soft plum bare legs, color of the moon. Bare-footed (Hughes, 1990, p.3).

In the story, the description continues with Betsy’s mother who pours Clarence a drink and so he is set to stay all night. Their night of greatly anticipated enjoyment is disrupted when Betsy’s red-headed child peeps into the room and is seen by Clarence. The child naturally gravitates toward Clarence out of curiosity because they both share the same red hair. Clarence becomes enraged when the little boy,

who is obviously his son and grabs his legs. Clarence immediately wishes to leave this unpleasant situation because he wants no responsibility and nothing to do with the half-black, illegitimate child. He pays for the liquor and leaves, never to return.

The writer decides to work on “Red-Headed Baby” as his thesis because after reading this short story, the writer realizes that the meaning behind this story is not as simple as it looks. This is not only a simple story that tells about a relationship between a white man and a black woman, but it also contains the situation of African-American or black’s society and also political situation at that time, which may have become the inspiration for the author to produce this literary work.

“Red-Headed Baby” is a literary work that was born in the era of Harlem Renaissance, which was also known as the Black movement in the time when Langston Hughes lived. Based on this nature, the writer sees that the most appropriate approach to analyze this short story is by using the sociological approach, because one characteristic of this approach is a way to analyze literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written. Most of Langston Hughes’ works in his book *The Ways of White Folks* which includes the short story “Red-Headed Baby” which was based on his personal experience and society’s background. Besides “Red-Headed Baby”, the writer also analyzed two other short stories from Langston Hughes. They are: “Thank You Ma’am”, and “One Friday Morning”. The reason why the writer analyzes the other stories is

because the writer needs to compare and show to the readers the main issues that usually exist in Hughes' work.

1.2. Field of the Study

The field of the study is literature, mainly short story.

1.3. Scope of the Study

The thesis deals with three short stories entitled "Red-headed Baby", "Thank You Ma'am", and "One Friday Morning." The focus of the discussion in "Red-Headed Baby" is about a relationship between the plot of the short story with the socio-cultural condition at that time which is known as Harlem Renaissance or Black movement in arts. Through the story, the writer explores the connection between the plot and Hughes' background. In addition to the story "Red-Headed Baby", the short story "Thank You Ma'am" and "One Friday Morning" will also be analyzed in this thesis because the writer wants to compare between the "Red-Headed Baby" with the other works of Hughes so both similarities and differences issues of the contained can be discussed in the thesis.

1.4. Problem Formulation

The problem formulations are as follows

1. What are the factors provoking the Harlem Renaissance shown throughout the three short stories chosen?
2. How does the Harlem Renaissance environment influence the plot in "Red-Headed Baby", "Thank You Ma'am" and "One Friday Morning"?

1.5. Objective of the Study

1. To find out what are the factors provoking the Harlem Renaissance shown throughout the three short stories.
2. To show and describe how the Harlem Renaissance environment influence the plot in “Red-Headed Baby”, “Thank You Ma’am” and “One Friday Morning”.

1.6. Significance of the Study

By reading this thesis, it is hoped that the reader of African-American literature, especially “Red-Headed Baby”, “Thank You Ma’am” and “One Friday Morning” can find some advantages. Firstly the reader can understand about the situation of the African-American people, in this case those who are living during the Harlem Renaissance through the short fiction. Secondly, it is about how the readers may enrich their knowledge of using sociological approach toward a work of literature.

1.7. Definition of Terms

1. Harlem: “a neighborhood in the New York City borough of Manhattan, which since the 1920s has been a major African-American residential, cultural, and business center. Originally a Dutch village, formally organized in 1658, it is named after the city of Haarlem in the Netherlands. Harlem was annexed to New York City in 1873. Black residents began to arrive in a mass in 1904, with

numbers fed by the Great Migration. In the 1920s and 1930s, the neighborhood was the focus of the Harlem Renaissance” (N.N., Wikipedia, 2011, ¶1).

2. Harlem Renaissance: “a period in the 1930s when African-American had high achievements in art and music and literature” (N.N., word.net, 2011, ¶1).

3. Sociological Approach: ‘an approach that examines literature in the cultural, economic and political context in which it is written or received, which explores the relationships between the artist and society. Sometimes it examines the artist’s society to better understand the author’s literary works; other times, it may examine the representation of such societal elements within the literature itself” (Kennedy & Dana, 1995, p.1790).

4. African-American society: “ the society of citizens or residents of the United States who have at least partial ancestry from any of the native populations of Sub-Sahara Africa and are the direct descendants of enslaved Africans within the boundaries of America” (N.N.,word.net, 2011, ¶ 1).

5. Mulatto: “A person of mixed white and black ancestry, especially a person with one white and one black parent” (Webster, 2011, ¶1).

6. Racism: “the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices” (N.N., Quizlet, 2012, ¶ 3).

7. Negrotarians: “Whites people who helped finance and support the Harlem Renaissance. This term come from a woman named Zora Neale Hurston. These

white patrons had only their color in common, since their reasons for involvement ranged from social interest to a belief that blacks were victims of civil rights abuses to an interest in recruiting blacks for revolutionary political purposes. The most notorious Negrotarians was named Charlotte van der Veer Quick Mason” (Hill, 2003, p.86).

8. Prohibition: act of prohibiting something, law or rule that forbids something” (Sinclair, 2003, p.342).

