

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In literature we will find many aspects of our life. It can be about our culture, society, religion, sadness, happiness, etc. Most of them influence the author to express their emotion in a form of literary work. Literature is, then, a socially purposive discursive activity (sign practicing and organizing) that we suppose to serve some specifiable role within the totality of different discursive practices composing what we call society (and how any society understands itself) (Reiss 1). Literary works is the result of literature which rich of human imagination and feeling. Poetry, short story, and drama are some example of literary works.

In this study, the writer chooses a drama as the object that will be further analyzed. The writer chooses the drama of Rita Dove, *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Rita Dove is an author who is also noted as the former poet laureate of the United States. She was born in Akron, Ohio in 1952. Dove graduated from Butchel High School as a Presidential Scholar that made her become one of the 100 top American high school graduates that year. Then Dove graduated summa cum laude with a B.A. from Miami University in 1973. Besides producing the drama, Rita Dove also famous with her poetry and published her first poetry collection in 1980, When she was twenty-eight, she published her first full-length volume of poetry, *The Yellow House on the Corner*. The characteristics of Rita

Dove's work are about beauty, broader issues of American history and culture, but she has been principally concerned with family themes, especially mother-daughter relationships. Much of her works focus on the beauty and significance of everyday events, show of ordinarying how such events make up the history of ordinary individuals and add to the experiences that human beings share (Oakes 110).

During her career, Dove has received numerous literary and academic honors such as Emily Couric Leadership Award in 2003, Duke Ellington Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001, Barnes & Noble writers for Writers Award in 1997, Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities in 1996, etc.

In 1994, Rita Dove published the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth* which premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon in 1996 and was subsequently produced at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the royal National Theatre in London and in many other venues. On the other hand, great drama always exhibits a central atmosphere, or dominant passion, which gives an informing purpose to the human events narrated in the course of the five acts; and it is this dominant passion which was so lamentably lacking in the dramas produced in England between the time of Otway and that of the Romantic poets (Nicoll 157). This drama is based on the Greek Myth *Oedipus* (psychologist Sigmund Freud appropriated the myth to describe young men who fall in love with their mothers).

The Darker Face of the Earth, is noted as one of Dove's famous dramas. This drama tells about the main character Amalia, a white owner of the plantation, gives birth to a slave's child, and must give it up for adoption because of the threats of her husband, and through the complicity of the white doctor. Years later, Augustus is brought to the plantation in chains, is seduced by Amalia, and we find that this man is her son. When Augustus realizes he has made love to his own mother, he murders his father, Louis (as Oedipus did) and would kill his mother, Amalia, in keeping with the myth, but then Amalia kills herself to save her son.

The writer only focuses on Augustus character because Augustus is the main character in *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Augustus Newcastle is a twenty year-old slave who is at the heart of Rita Dove's play,. He is the illegitimate child of Amalia Jennings Lafarge and her slave, Hector. Augustus is purchased and raised by a British sea captain, who treats Augustus as his own son. He travels the world with the captain, particularly to the West Indies. Along the way, Augustus is given a quality, classical education which he later uses to his advantage to impress the other slaves. Rita Dove draws Augustus character as a brave person who loves adventure, but this character often deals with some conflicts with other characters, for example the love scandal with Amalia.

The writer is interested in analyzing this drama because this drama reflects the conflicts that occur in the seventeenth century, pre-civil war era, where slavery and poverty dominate most of Southerners' life in South Carolina. This drama also has a unique story that its original story is inspired by the myth of *Oedipus*

since the conflict that happens in the main character is similar with the story of the Greek myth *Oedipus*. Another reason why the writer is interested in choosing the drama to be studied is because Rita Dove's is a very influential dramatist whose works influence any other dramatis and playwrights around the world. Rita Dove was the first African-American writer and youngest person ever to be appointed poet laureate of the United States, an appointment she held from 1993 to 1995 (Oakes 110).

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study, the writer would state two problems as follows:

1. How does Augustus characterization in the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth*?
2. What conflicts that involve Augustus with other characters in the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

After reading the whole story of the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth*, there are many conflicts found which dealing with the main character, Augustus.

Therefore, the writer can summarize the objective of the study into two objectives, they are:

1. To find out Augustus characterization in *The Darker Face of the Earth* using new criticism approach.
2. To find out the conflicts dealing with Augustus and other characters.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer expects that this study can give the reader a better understanding about the application of the new criticism approach in literary study, especially the organic unity of the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth* by Rita Dove. Besides that, the writer also expects that this study can give a meaningful and useful contribution to the students of English Department of Airlangga University especially to those who are interested in analyzing play by applying new criticism.

1.5 Theoretical Background

In the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth*, the writer applying the theory of New Criticism to analyze the drama since this theory is considered to be the most suitable theory that only uses the drama script in finding the meaning of the text itself. In examining Augustus character, the writer analyzes it through its

characterization (one of the formal elements in the drama). Besides that, the conflicts of Augustus character also will be analyzed in order to find its relation with the theme that Augustus characterization influences him in achieving the freedom.

1.6 Method of the study

In this study, the writer use qualitative method and New Criticism theory to support the analysis of the drama. The writer collecting some data and information that needed from the relevant books or other resources such as articles, journals, PDF files, and internet articles which is known as library research. Library research is done to collect the data by finding some books related to the research as references. The subject of this study is the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth* by Rita Dove and the object of the study is Augustus character. Then the writer use close reading technique by reading the text more than once to get the understanding of the story.

The conflicts between Augustus and the other character will be analyzed through organic unity. Elements of drama such as setting, theme, plot, and characterization are the main object for analysis since the aim of this study is the text itself. Besides using organic unity, the writer also uses descriptive analysis and explanation through dialogues, events, and actions in the drama to determine the characteristic and the conflict between Augustus with the other characters in the drama *The Darker Face of the Earth*. The last step is drawing some

conclusion from the data analysis that enriches the understanding of the text and reveals the theme of the text based on its formal elements.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

- Close reading : understanding the meaning of a literary work by interpreting its elements through individual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, figures of speech, and allusions.
- Slave : a person who is held in bondage to another, one who is held as a chattel and one who has no freedom of action (the person are wholly under the control of another).
- Rebellion : The act of rebelling; an organized uprising of subjects for the purpose of coercing or overthrowing their lawful ruler by force.

- Slavery : A condition of subjection or submission characterized by lack of freedom of action or of will.