



**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**  
**IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S "THE LITTLE BLACK BOY"**

A FINAL PROJECT  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## PRONOUNCEMENT

I state truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I did not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in the bibliography.

Semarang. 10 April 2018

Dyah Ayu Nurindra

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

<Knowledge of language is the doorway to wisdom

(Roger Bacan)

<So be patient. Indeed, the promise of ALLAH is truth

(Quran 30:60)

This thesis is dedicated to:

My beloved family: Ayah, Mama, and Rani

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I realize that this thesis is still far from perfection. I, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this thesis better.

Finally, I expect that this thesis will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about racial discrimination in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

Semarang, 10 April 2018

Dyah Ayu Nurindra

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## ABSTRACT

This research is analyzing William Blake's "The Little Black Boy". In this final project, the writer chooses to analyze denotation, connotation, figurative language such as simile and two kinds of imagery of "The Little Black Boy" as the intrinsic elements and racial discrimination in "The Little Black Boy" as the extrinsic element. The goal of this final project is to explain more deeply what the author means and to give the readers knowledge about racial discrimination in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. The writer uses sociology of literature approach and close reading method. The result shows that there are two kinds of racial discrimination in "The Little Black Boy"; namely discrimination in education and discrimination in society. Then, discrimination in society is divided into three types: labelling in human's characteristics, labelling as an uncivilization race, and labelling in position.

Keyword: Poetry, racial discrimination, Britain in 18th century, black and white people

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis puisi William Blake yang berjudul "The Little Black Boy". Pada tugas akhir ini, penulis memilih menganalisis denotasi, konotasi, bahasa kiasan yaitu simile, dan dua jenis *imagery* pada "The Little Black Boy" sebagai unsur intrinsik; diskriminasi ras pada puisi "The Little Black Boy" sebagai unsur ekstrinsik. Tujuan dari tugas akhir ini adalah untuk menjelaskan lebih dalam mengenai maksud Blake dan juga untuk memberi pengetahuan terhadap para pembaca mengenai diskriminasi ras di Inggris pada abad 18. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi sastra dan metode pembacaan cermat. Hasilnya, ditemukan dua jenis diskriminasi ras pada "The Little Black Boy"; diskriminasi dalam pendidikan, dan diskriminasi dalam masyarakat. Kemudian diskriminasi dalam masyarakat dibagi menjadi tiga tipe: pelabelan pada karakter manusia, pelabelan sebagai ras yang tidak beradab, dan pelabelan pada posisi.

Kata Kunci: Puisi, diskriminasi ras, Inggris pada abad 18, orang kulit hitam dan putih

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Research

There are many races in the world. White people and black people for instance. White people are referring to Caucasian race, and black people are referring to Negroid race. This different race can be a social conflict when it is followed by racism ideology. “The Little Black Boy” is written by William Blake in 1789. The writer chooses to analyze this poetry since this poetry is written when slavery is illegal but still visible. It reflects how racial discrimination did exist at the time.

To identify racial discrimination in Blake’s “The Little Black Boy”, the writer uses denotation, connotation, figurative language and imagery as a means to analyze the poetry. These intrinsic elements are needed to explain deeper what the meaning of every single word in the poetry is. After the writer identifies the intrinsic elements, the writer finds that there are some correlations between these intrinsic elements and racial discrimination.

The author, who is the writer of “The Little Black Boy”, was born in London, England. He is an English artist and poet. “The Little Black Boy” (1789) and “London” (1794) are the famous poetries that written by William Blake. One of the poems in Songs of Innocence (1789) is “The Little Black Boy”. “The Little Black Boy” is a poetry which is written in Romanticism period between the 1780s to the mid of the 1830s.

There are the top two of the previous researchers: First, “The Innocence of Heart Voices of The Little Black Boy in Knowing God and His Own Identity

as A Black Reflected in The Little Black Boy, A Poem by William Blake”, a thesis written by Neisya in Diponegoro University 2010. This thesis explains about diction, figurative language, and imagery as an intrinsic element. Then, for the extrinsic element, Neisya explains about individual psychology of Alfred Adler. Second, “Blake’s The Little Black Boy”, a research journal written by Chiramel Paul Jose in Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia 2017. The research journal talks about blackness and whiteness, gift from God, color of the soul, realization, and eschatology.

Doing this research is important since the writer analysis connotation, denotation, figurative language, and imagery as the intrinsic elements and racial discrimination as the extrinsic element. This analysis is the new one since it discusses racial discrimination. In the academic side, this extended research is expected to provide a scientific contribution on the correlation between those intrinsic elements and racial discrimination. Moreover, this study can be a new reference on the analysis of Blake’s “The Little Black Boy”.

## 1.2 Paraphrase the Poem

There is a black child who was born in “the southern wild” of Africa, first he describes that though his skin is black his soul is as white as that of an English child. He tells how his loving mother taught him about God who lives in the East, who gives life to all creation. “We are put on earth,” his mother says, to learn to accept God’s love. Then, the black boy says, he will be like the English boy, and the English boy will love him.

### 1.3 Research Problem

Related to the background of the study, there are two questions identified by the writer:

1. What is denotation, connotation, figurative language, and imagery in Blake's "The Little Black Boy"?
2. How is racial discrimination described in Blake's "The Little Black Boy"?

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

Based on research problem, the objectives of the study are:

1. To explain denotation, connotation, figurative language, and imagery in Blake's "The Little Black Boy".
2. To explain racial discrimination in Blake's "The Little Black Boy".

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this research, the writer chooses to analyze connotation, denotation, simile, and imagery. There is the correlation between these intrinsic elements and racial discrimination in Blake's "The Little Black Boy".

### 2.1 Denotation

"...denotation or denotations: that is, the dictionary meaning or meanings of the word." Perrine (1969: 38). Denotation is truly the literal of word meaning. It is regarded as a "lexicon explanation" for instance. Thus, when people look for the

word “crow” in the lexicon, people will stumble upon its most denotative definition like black feathers, black eyes, and it can be found all over the world.

## 2.2 Connotation

“The connotations are what it suggests beyond what it expresses: its overtones of meaning.” Perrine (1969: 38). The emotional input can also include in it, which is related to a certain word or term. And so, when people are asked about the connotative meaning of the word “crow,” one of the best answers could be the death since it is a carrion bird, a bird that feeds on dead animals.

## 2.3 Simile

There are many kinds of figurative language, however, simile is discussed in this poetry. Barnet *et al.* (1989: 444) explain that simile is a figure of speech that compares two things are different but have the same characteristics. Simile can also be defined as a figure of speech in which one thing is associated to another, dissimilar thing. Simile usually uses connecting words such as: like and as.

## 2.4 Imagery

Imagery definition had already been argued in Warren (1960: 268) “There is the pattern of sound: the poem invites us to read it aloud. And there is the reliance on imagery, visual imagery, and every other kind”. By using imagery in the poetry, the human senses are required to be more sensitive to words that contain imagery so that reader can feel the experience of the author.

### 2.4.1 Visual Imagery

“The word *image* perhaps most often suggests a mental picture, something seen in the mind's eye-...”. Perrine (1969: 54). The example of visual imagery: The “big house” is burning with the blue fire. People can see how big the house, and what the color of fire is.

### 2.4.2 Organic Imagery

According to Perrine (1969: 54), organic imagery is “An internal sensation, such as hunger, thirst, or nausea”. It deals with creating an explicit emotion or feeling within the reader. The example: she “feels” extremely happy when she gets the free ticket to Thailand. The organic imagery in this sentence is almost an indescribable feeling.

### 2.5 Racial Discrimination

Fugazza (2003: 23) says that racial discrimination is when an individual is treated less kindly than another individual in a similar condition because of their color or race which has the purpose abolishing the pleasure. A different treatment is given because of a different race or skin color that disadvantages a racial group. The practice of racial discrimination has been going on for centuries and has had a deeply negative effect on the lives of many individuals. For example, there is an owner of a house who refuses to rent a house to an individual since they are of a particular skin color or racial background.

## 2.6 A Brief Story about the Black People in 18th Century Britain

Kato says that the British and blacks in Africa met in the period of Roman occupation of Britain. Badness, lechery, and wickedness were three commonly equated in general. Black people have experience in the injustice and suffering. The basic opinion of the African is that their souls are in the darkness. (2002: 124, 129)

There several things that Black people experienced bad things at the time: insufficient housing, schools with bad resources led to low educational achievement, lower admission to colleges, and poor employment chances. All of these are exacerbated by continuous hostility from white bosses. White people have racist stereotyping that black people are potential to be troublemakers or criminals. It arises from unfamiliarity with the cultural traditions or behavior of people from marginal ethnic communities. Education, housing, employment, the criminal justice system are three various forms of racism experience that makes black people suffer. (Rattansi, 2011: 133-142)

The racial discrimination experienced by black people is producing a reaction called as British Black Power. Then, the ability to remove the negative stereotypes of black countries, black people and black culture, historically produced by white imperialists is to explain and excuse their unfair behavior to self-respect for black people in Britain. (Rosalind, 2008:1-6)

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

#### 3.1 Research Approach

Based on the background of this final project, the writer uses sociology of literature to analyze this poetry. Wellek and Warren (1949: 89) write, “Attempts are made to describe and define the influence of society on literature and to prescribe and judge the position of literature in society”.

Beside sociology of literature, the writer uses close reading method to analyze the object. According to Fisher and Frey (2014: 35), close reading is an instructional exercise that makes multifaceted text attainable using repetitive reading, cognitive scaffolding, and discussion.

#### 3.2 Method of Data Collection

The writer also uses library research to analyze the data in the poetry. As George states, “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on research question”. (2008: 6). In the method of data collection, the accuracy is required.

### **4. ANALYSIS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN WILLIAM BLAKE’S**

#### **“THE LITTLE BLACK BOY”**

#### 4.1 Denotation

The first denotative word of the poetry is “black” as found in stanza one, line two. As can be seen in *Oxford Dictionary*, black denotatively is a person who is in a certain race that has a dark skin (2011: 39).

The word “east” is the second denotative word in the poetry as found in stanza two, line four: “And pointing to the east began to say” (Abrams, 1962: 51). The word of “east”, in *Oxford Dictionary*, means the place where people can see the sunrise; one of the fourth directions that is showed by a compass. (2011: 141).

The third denotative word of the poetry is “light” as found in stanza three, line two: “And gives his light, and gives his heat away” (Abrams, 1962: 51). As stated in *Oxford Dictionary*, light is energy that can help people to see things (2011: 255). Light is a visible thing so that people can see it easily

The word “cloud” in stanza four, line four is the fourth denotative word in the poetry. Clouds are a group of water droplets or ice in the atmosphere, based on literal meaning in *Oxford Dictionary* (2011: 78). Condensation is the process of cloud formation.

#### 4.2 Connotation

The word “black” is the first connotative word of the poetry as in stanza one, line two: “And I am black, but O! my soul is white” (Abrams, 1962: 51). There is a boy who has a black skin because he is a Negroid. The black boy would live a difficult life. In Blake’s view, the black skin of the little black boy connotatively means unfortunate, because black people are labelled as “bad people”.

The second connotative word of the poetry is the word “east” as found in stanza two, line four. By pointing to the place where the sun is rising, the mother educated his son how kind God is. The mother also talks about the power and love of God. The east connotatively means where the beginning of life begins.

“Light” is the third connotative word in the poetry as found in stanza three, line two. The mother explains to her child that God gives heat and light to all creatures in this world so that all creatures can live comfortable. Light connotatively means the concept of education. It can be associated with knowledge or education.

The fourth connotative word of the poetry is “cloud” as found in stanza four, line four. “Cloud” connotatively means two things, sadness or happiness, nevertheless the cloud change the conditions quickly according to the weather. Similar to the person’s feelings which easily change.

#### 4.3 Simile

The first figurative language, simile in the poetry is “white as an angel is the English child” in stanza one, line three. This simile is comparing the little black boy’s heart with the pureness of an angel. He tries to say that there is no correlation between the color of skin and kindness of people. People can be judged either bad or good through reflection of their attitude.

Then, the second figurative language, simile in the poetry is in stanza four, line four: “Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove” (Abrams, 1962: 51). Cloud and grove are two things that compared in this simile. Cloud in the atmosphere and grove in the land. Although the location both of them are different, they are equally calming for human and animals. Cloud and grove can protect creatures from the heat of the sun.

#### 4.4 Imagery

There are several kinds of imagery, however, in this analysis the writer only uses two kinds of imagery: visual dan organic imagery.

##### 4.4.1 Visual Imagery

The first word that contains visual imagery in the poetry is “black” as in stanza one, line two. “Black” is the color that can be seen by eyes. “Black” in this line means the color of the skin. The speaker tells people that he has a black skin and people can see it clearly. Mostly, the black people are also called a Negroid race.

Next, there is a word “tree” that contains visual imagery as seen in stanza two, line one. The word “tree” here represents visual imagery. There is no explanation what kind of tree, surely the reader can visualize that it is a “tree”. A tree has a big trunk, supporting branches, and leaves.

“Sun” is the third word that has substance visual imagery as in stanza three, line one. Every day, people can see the sun. The star at the center of the solar system is called the sun. It rises from the east in the morning and downs to west in the evening. The sun is one of the important elements in the world.

##### 4.4.2 Organic Imagery

The first word of organic imagery in this poetry is joy as in stanza three, line four: “Comfort in morning joy in the noon day” (Abrams, 1962: 51). The word joy is something that people feel related to happiness and great pleasure. Various sources can be the causes of joy. A good life can cause a joy for people.

Love is the word of organic imagery in the poetry as found in stanza four, line two. The deepest interpersonal affection can be called as love. Love can be felt by someone. There are many ways to express love. People can love each other or something they like. Moreover, love can make someone feel happy or hurt.

#### 4.5 Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is divided into two kinds, they are: racial discrimination in education and discrimination in society.

##### 4.5.1 Discrimination in Education

In the third stanza, the mother and his son are sitting down underneath a tree. By pointing to the direction of the east, the mother explains that the sun, light, and heat are three blessing things from God to all creatures. These three things can make all creatures live comfortably. “Light” is another word of education. By education, people can give many benefits to other people. When Blake wrote the poem, there was a fact that Negroid people who live in Britain could not have any chance to receive an appropriate education as a consequence of racial segregation. There are some colleges, which could not accept Negroid people.

A full variety of professions is open to white people since white children go to their own schools at an early age. In the other hand, when black children could not go to school is a common situation since their parents think that it would be better if the parents ask them to work. By asking the children to work, they will get much money to survive. This horrible fact definitely influences future life opportunities of Negroid people living in Britain.

The black boy's outward appearance is "but a cloud". A cloud does not exist continuously throughout the day. It is also be pretended that Africans are compared to the cloud; the white people presume that their abilities are not equal; that the blacks cannot get as much experience and knowledge as the whites. In this case, mostly white people have always feared or hated people of a different skin color. Blake claims that it should not happen. As a human society, people must treat others equally.

#### 4.5.2 Discrimination in Society

There are three kinds of discrimination in society: labelling in human's characteristics, labelling as an uncivilized race, and labelling in position.

##### 4.5.2.1 Labelling in Human's Characteristics

"Black" is the color of the boy's skin, however, the color of his soul is white. His soul is as pure as an angel like the English child. He says he has black skin as if it is bereaved of light. It means, there is a difference among black boys with the others. It also means that having the black body seems fated to suffer. In Britain 1789, racial discrimination is common. Slavery was illegal but it was still visible.

The color of black and white does not mean bad and good. The boy explains although he is a Negroid race, he is also a good boy like Caucasian race which is the English child. He tries to give a clarification to the readers that there is no correlation between the skin color and the attitude of its person. In the society, Negroid race is labelled as the bad group. Many people of Negroid race do the criminals such as stealing something or killing someone. If there is

someone who commits a crime, it would be better not to blame what race or what religion he has. People just need to blame his bad attitude.

“And I am black, but Oh! my soul is white” (Abrams, 1962: 51), this line tells the people a great level of his awareness. He delivers that being tolerant of people who have a different appearance is important. Sometimes, labelling someone instead makes a person get worse. Not only gives a space for the black boy to speak out but also gives a space to the black boy to defend himself. Although the speaker is a child, he can express his perception about racial discrimination in his society.

#### 4.5.2.2 Labelling as an Uncivilized Race

Before the abolition of the slave trade in 1787, the slavery was legal and there were many white people trading the black people as slaves. A racist ideology is created by white people to justify the trade. Many white people assume that black people are inferior and uncivilized to white people in every way. “Looking on the rising sun: there God does live” (Abrams, 1962: 51) is the sentence as found in line one, stanza three. This sentence breaks down the white people’s assume that the black people are uncivilized. This is the evidence that black people are civilized.

Then, in the fourth line of stanza five and six, there is an indication of the Christian religion. “Lambs” symbolize gentleness of Christ. Jesus is symbolized as a sacrificial lamb which by his sacrifice, the human is forgiven of the sin. Over the centuries, black people have experienced the racism in Britain. Because of

this, Blake emphasizes the racial equality, that is, equality between the black and white races.

Blake shows that the racial inequality happened in Britain in the 1780's. The basic message of the poem is God gives a physical identity to an individual, so that mankind should not be judged by the color of people's skin but by what is inside. In fact, although slavery is illegal in Britain, black people either adults or children are suffering.

In the last stanza, the speaker is the black boy himself. Although he is inferior and black, he feels that his soul is as well as a white child. The black boy states, God will love him and the conflict between blacks and whites will be erased. By enduring greater suffering on earth, the little black boy will help the white boy learn to bear the beams of God's love. The black boy and white boy will be possibly similar and equal.

#### 4.5.2.3 Labelling in Position

This line, "and be like him, and he will then love me" (Abrams, 1962: 51), is delivered by the black boy that he would get the same position as the white boy. The black boy knows that there is an opinion in his society. Black people cannot in the same position with white people because black people no more than a slave at the time. By showing the reader the arguments of African-American during their racial discrimination, it can be said that Blake is extremely successful.

The black boy thinks that the only way people love him is to be like the white boy. Although this is not true and the black boy does not. In fact, the readers are given the impression by Blake that the little black boy passively receives

injustice, oppression, and racism without even thinking of rebelling against white people. Blake hopes that one-day black boy and white boy can be friends regardless of the race. Racial discrimination is an extremely important topic of the time and a topic that is still talked about presently.

Indeed, there is a boy that very scared and worried about his skin color. The little black boy states that he is a good boy even though he is black people. He did it because he worries white people will blame him or hurt him. In the last line of the seventh stanza, the black boy hopes that little English boy can accept him and they can be a friend without discriminating the color of his skin. God creates different people to make people appreciate each other, not to blame each other.

Regardless of time, the fundamental reason of racial discrimination is the separation based on the color of people's skin. By this poem, Blake wants to highlight that he stands for racial equality. Unity is one of the themes that stick out in "The Little Blake Boy". Indeed, Blake tells the people that as humans, either black people or white people need to come together as one.

By adding the theme of religion, Blake confirms that whatever will happen and how heavy the life is, there is God who will give people the power to face the reality. Blake as the writer knows well that the condition in Britain was horrible at the time. Britain in the late modern which is between 1701-1799 was extremely tragic, particularly when the slavery was legal.

## 5. CONCLUSION

“The Little Black Boy” written by William Blake is a poem about racial discrimination. Blake tries to illustrate how racial discrimination happened in Britain late 18th century. When Blake wrote this poem, slavery is illegal, but it was still visible. In this poem, race can cause a social conflict when it is followed by racism ideology. Blake wants to restore black people’s rights so that he puts a little black boy as a speaker in this poem.

With regard to the literary element, William Blake uses denotation, connotation, figurative language, such as simile and two kinds of imagery to explain more about the content of the poem. Blake uses imagery, particularly visual and organic imagery, so that the readers can freely imagine the situation he writes in the poem. Blake writes this poem to show how black people are maltreated by labelling them because of their skin color. There are two kinds of racial discrimination in “The Little Black Boy”: discrimination in education and discrimination in labelling. Then, discrimination in labelling is divided into three types: labelling in human’s characteristics, labelling as an uncivilization race, and labelling in position.

The black boy thinks that being born as a black people seems fated to suffer. He emphasizes that he is a good person although he has a black skin. By showing the readers the arguments of African-American during their racial discrimination, it can be said that Blake is extremely successful.

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