

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

Children's literature is not quite different from the adult one. Children's literature also provides the same enjoyment and understanding as literature for adult do. Children seek pleasure from reading literary works, the only thing which limits them is the source of their pleasure. Lukens (1999: 9) in *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* suggests that children, giving their limited experience, may not understand the complexity of some ideas. That is why children's literature takes simpler form and language. When children read literature, they will find ideas and understanding.

Many discoveries that children can make through literature might provide a truth that may be significant to their consciousness. Cultural and social historians believe that there is a useful tool in the record created by children's books. Malcolm Cowley (1961: 11) describes literature as a social creation, verification. It embodies history, institutions, moral questions and many more.

The example of children's literature which contains social verification of truth dates back since 19<sup>th</sup> century, R.Gordon Kelly (1974: 24) , in *Self and Society in Selected American Children's Periodicals, 1865-1890*, states that children's literature of the nineteenth century had both institutional and ideological base, in this case is the myth that white people more superior than the black people. Thus, it creates some negative impacts on the black people such as stereotyping. This idea, that the white people are being more superior than the black people,

emerged since nineteenth century, the first literary form dealing with this matter is “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin or, Life among the Lowly*”. It is considered the first children’s literature dealing with slavery and racial discrimination.

Taking this form, it can be seen that a literary text can reveal the scope of the ideology of white people’s superiority. The myth goes as far as dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the era of slavery particularly in the United States. In “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin or, Life among the Lowly*”, slavery is seen as a horrific and cruel thing. However, the Black’s identity in the novel is presented as of less value than European American’s identity.

There is always a tendency among Europeans, including Americans, to associate blackness with “savagery, heathenism, and general failure to conform to European standards of civilization and propriety” (Fredrickson, 1981: 12). It becomes a tool to legitimate the superiority of Whites. Furthermore it is a barrier that will benefit Whites. The example of white’s supremacy in children’s literature is that Whites are always presented in higher strata than Blacks.

In order to understand the myth of Whites being more superior to Blacks, there is a need to consider some aspects. First, there is a need to look at the texts of children’s literature and the period of it. Second, there is a need to examine the biographical history of the writers and the social/political contexts of the time that text starts to gain attention including the specific conventions of the particular era. This is important because the sense of superiority is dangerous for children; they can grow up seeing other races inferior to them.

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin or, Life among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe still has the enduring notion that it is seen as the first “grand work” of children’s literature and it is still found in many children’s reading list in the United States. According to Stowe (1901: 53),

“the first audience *Uncle Tom* had was children, to whom (because her husband was out of town) she read the scene of Tom's death shortly after she wrote it”. After the last installment of the novel, Stowe wrote addressed her words "in particular" to "the dear little children who have followed her story" in its serial publication. Moreover, it is known in *Uncle Tom's Cabin Told to the Children* by H.E. Marshall (1904: 74) that in many northern families the novel was read aloud to children of all ages. Yet, there were also editions of the novel designed specifically for children. It was published on March 20, 1852, and by about a year after its publication was reported to have sold more than 300,000 copies in the United States and well more than another two million throughout the world, both in the original and in translation. By far now, according to African American Registry , it is still one of the reading lists for children and the view that it is one of the great canonical works during the Civil War era continues until now. That is why *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life among the Lowly* is still popular among children these days.

In the *Short Preface to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1994: 37), Stowe is explained as adopting “a tendentious authorial voice that marks her novel as a call to reform”. In abolitionist diction, highly moral and just as sentimental, Stowe advises the readers that “the object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us,” in pre-Civil War America. These aims are in conjunction with the situation at that time, slavery was seen as a horrific deed. Slavery is the overarching evil to be eradicated; yet stereotypes of African Americans infuse the text from its first sentence, and the cultural superiority of the “dominant Anglo- Saxon race” is, perhaps, never previously in question. Through the experiences of various protagonists, the themes of the novel pivot upon a Christian model of suffering and redemption, the acts of the moral individual and the corresponding failure of a

democratic society, and the troubling replacement of racist cruelty by racist kindness. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a narrative of its time, but it offers to the modern critical reader insight into the enveloping effects of racism and slavery upon American culture (Broderick, 1973: 56).

The book is seen as one of the first anti-slavery or abolitionist movement. The book, also helped popularize a number of stereotypes about black people, many of which endure to this day. These include the affectionate, dark-skinned "mammy"; the "pickaninny" stereotype of black children; and the 'Uncle Tom', a dutiful, long-suffering servant faithful to his white master or mistress.

In this study the term "Black" is used to mean all peoples of African descent. While, the term "White" here designates or implies an ethnic population. During the mid 1800s, there was a movement called "abolitionist movement" which had the intention of eradicating slavery. This notion was also vividly expressed on the literature of the Antebellum Era. In this era, many of white authors tried to deliver this message through children's literature. While these authors were trying to eradicate slavery, they did not see Blacks as equal. The image that Negroes are brutish people, having little more of humanity and imbecile is one of the proofs of the racist indoctrination, which was experienced by children in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in The United States.

Based on the explanation above, the analysis of this research is about the supremacy of White people in children's literature; in this case is Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life among the Lowly*. An examination of the white supremacy brings two concepts of race prejudice and institutional racism. These phenomena are continuously interacting. Institutional racism gives birth to the racial prejudice. Institutional racism is dangerous for the children because they will develop a sense of superiority against other races while they grow up. These attitudes may

have developed since the era of Civil War, when Blacks are first regarded as subject matter. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life among the Lowly* is regarded one of the abolitionist children's literatures. While many abolitionists tried to erase slavery, the underlying message was clear in most white's abolitionist writing- the message that the European cultural values would always be the exclusive measure of what best.

Thus, such an analysis is worth to be done due the fact that children are prone to creating negative attitudes on other races and such understanding is need to be done when they are doing reading activities. Corner and Poussaint (1976: 23) state that:

“We believe that as long as a book presents Blacks with dignity—be it set in the suburbs, inner city, or Africa—it is satisfactory reading.... Books about African ceremonies and customs can prevent your child from developing the negative attitudes about Africa with which our generation is still struggling.... Books depicting black, brown, yellow, red, and white children are one way of preparing your child for tomorrow. Books that present different cultures provide you with an opportunity to help your child understand that people are different.... You don't want to let some adult “humorist” take care of his own anger and hate feelings at your child's expense.”

Therefore, there is a need that an examination of white supremacy in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* will give a light on why such an ideology that white belong to higher hierarchy is shaped and what is the dangerous impact to future children when they are making close reading to the book.

## **B. Research Focus**

White superiority in children's literature becomes the main focus of the analysis in this research. The analysis points out the superiority by showing the discrimination done by the author to the Blacks. It is represented by Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly*

through its author's points of view. The story in particular portrays the life of Uncle Tom and other black characters who undergo the pain of slavery and racism. The term "racism" has become such a code word in recent years that it sets off emotional reactions, whether the word is used narrowly (i.e., when it alludes to differences related to so-called biological makeup), or is used broadly to represent every discriminatory action. George M. Fredrickson (1981: 13) avoids this problem by using the term "white supremacy" in his comparative study of American and South African history. He views the latter term as more descriptive of the processes he studies. "White supremacy," he says, "refers to the attitudes, ideologies, and policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of white or European dominance over 'nonwhite' populations. "At the public level, this myth of superiority entails restrictions of meaningful citizenship rights. It is more than prejudice because, as Fredrickson explains, "It suggests systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race or color a qualification for membership in the civil community."

Though small in number compared to the other segments of the "patriot" movement, white supremacists are the most radical and appear the most likely to commit illegal and violent acts. The types of crimes associated with white supremacists range from minor hate crimes and vandalism through white-collar crimes involving frauds, bogus checks, counterfeiting and the like, to major violent crimes such as armed robbery and murder. Among the major white supremacist groups are the various Klan groups, the National Alliance, the Church of the Creator, White Aryan Resistance, Aryan Nations, and various other neo-Nazi and Christian Identity groups (Frederickson, 1981: 16). That is why; there is a need to uncover the white supremacy idea so that it will bring awareness to the children of such hazardous idea.

Another theory employed to analyze the white supremacy is Frantz Fanon's theory of racial difference in colonial and postcolonial societies. It is derived from a book entitled *Black Skin, White Masks*. The theory describes the relationship between Blacks and Whites, which focuses on the inferiority and discrimination Blacks must accept and endure from Whites. The ways in which Whites legitimate their superiority over Blacks can be traced through forms of attitudes: language, relationship between women and men of color with White women and men, and the creation of certain stereotypes. The points of view and the perspective of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* towards the Black also become the focus of the analysis, the author's view are represented by Uncle Tom and other black characters such as George and Eliza. The relationship between the black slaves and their master is also important to be noted; that the pervasive reaction of the Blacks who will readily sacrifice themselves to their masters will also become the main discussion. The story itself takes place in the Antebellum Era, an era dating back as early as the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of slavery, when children literature genre started to grow.

Thus from the statements above, there are problems that arise: the first is what are kinds of white supremacy existing in the novel and the second is through what way the ideas of white supremacy are constructed in the novel and why it is hazardous for children.

### **C. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are:

1. to identify what kinds of white supremacy exist in the novel, and
2. to explain how the supremacy is constructed in the novel and the danger of it

#### **D. Research Significance**

1. Theoretically, it is assumed that this research can enlarge the readers' insights about the history of the ideology the dominance of the white race in Civil War Era in the United States.
2. Practically, this research can give an understanding of the need of guidance of children when they do reading. Children are prone to many new ideas, good or bad. That is why this research is hoped to give a light on the bad effects contained in children's literature.