

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Research

One of the essential points in literature is the message of the works of written. Based on the message, the readers can assume the kind of story that they read. Good creations will have some capable impacts for the readers because it will be able to influence the mindset of the readers becoming better in social life. To find out the messages contained in written works can be conveyed in several forms, such as in the form of tension in new criticism.

Tension is created by the two contradicting things of work that are based on irony, paradox, and ambiguity. Through tension, we can analyze the meaning conveyed by the author. Without tension, a message to be conveyed by the author may not reach the reader. Based on this, we need tension to analyze the message contained in literary works.

One of the contemporary authors writing literary works is Colson Whitehead. He has contributed a lot to creating novels that contain some enduring messages. He is an American novelist. He has various works published; *The Intuitionist*(1999), *John Henry Days*(2001), *The Colossus Of New York* (2003), *Apex Hides The Hurt* (2006), *Sag Harbor* (2009), *Zone One* (2011). *The Underground Railroad* (2016), and *The Nickel Boys* (2019), was awarded the Pulitzer prize for fiction.

In my research, I choose *The Nickel Boys* novel to be my object of study to analyze the enduring message of this novel. Based on an article in Vanity Fair, entitled “The Outrage Was So Large and So Secret: Colson Whitehead Talks Hope, Despair, and Fighting the power in *The Nickel Boys*” (2019), Yahdon Israel said that Colson Whitehead was inspired to make the novel by Dozier School for boys, a century-old reform school in Marianna, Florida, which was closed in 2011. This case made headlines when 50 boys were exhumed on the grounds of the school. However, the government would cover up this case. Through this novel, Whitehead tries to tell the readers about that case again.

The *Nickel Boys* tells about Elwood as the main character, who lives with his grandmother and accompanies her to work at the Richmond Hotel. Elwood is a smart boy. He always asks for permission from his grandmother if he wants to make friends. In the Nickel School, Elwood sees a lot of unfair treatment. Thus, Elwood tries to tell that case to the inspector, but Spencer, one of the teachers there, know about it and plan to kill him. However, Turner save him with the way they escape. When they tries to escape from prison, only Turner survive. At the end of this story, Turner decides to change his name to Elwood. The purpose is to remember him and forget the past.

In this novel, the author presents the secrecy and manipulation as seen in Elwood and Turner's characters. Secrecy is a fact of making sure that no one knows about something or the state of being secret. The novel expresses many facts about the trouble concealed at Nickel School, such as racism, murder, injustice, etc. The

Nickel School manipulates the students to be fine on the cover. They make the students think that racism, murder, injustice, etc., are normal. Therefore, the title of this research is **"The Enduring Message In *The Nickel Boys* Novel by Colson Whitehead: Secrecy and Manipulation."**

## 1.2 Identification of The Problem

*The Nickel Boys* tells the tragic story of Elwood's character where Elwood's character tries to get their rightness as the same student in Nickel School. The teachers and staff with good personalities in public, whereas they bully students at the school, such as racism, murder, injustice, etc. In this research, I am interested in discovering the enduring message in this novel through the theory *New Criticism* by Cleanth Brooks, how Whitehead conveys the message through the elements of tensions. As mentioned, *The Nickel Boys* is a true story taken from the case of Dozier School. This novel shows us the mystery of the Nickel School and the people who have the power to do the violence.

## 1.3 Review of Related Literature

I found some journal articles and thesis related to the theory and issue in the related studies. First, a journal published by PalArch's Journal of Archeology of Egypt / Egyptology, entitled "Traumatic Elements of Oppressed Black American: Micro-Aggression in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*" (2022) by Mehvish Bashir, Dr Sahibzada Aurangzeb, and Aisha Bibi. This journal reveals how micro-aggression is negatively associated with various aspects of the psychological disadvantage of black Americans. The theory of micro-aggression has three types of

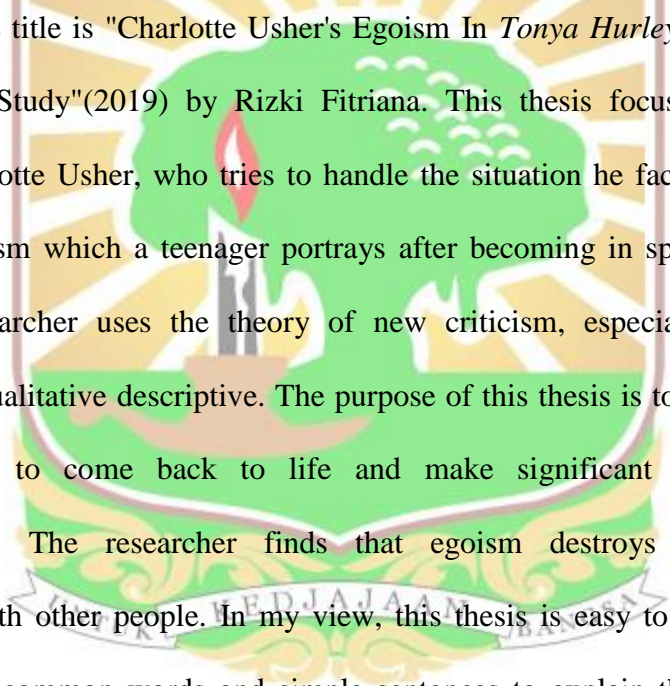
trauma. First is acute trauma, which is a result of a single incident, second is chronic trauma which is a result of repeated domestic violence or some abuse, and last is complex trauma, which is a result of several or many types. In my opinion, this journal is easy to understand because it describes what trauma is contained in Nickel School for black people, and this journal can help the writer to understand more deeply the consequences of the trauma so that the writer can understand the messages contained. This journal's weakness is that only a few incidents experienced at Nickel's school are presented.

Second, the title "Racial Discrimination Towards Curtis Elwood in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys: An African American Study*" (2020) by Dedy Kurnia Putra. This thesis focuses on the main character, Elwood Curtis, who tries to handle the situation he faces. The researcher uses the theory of African-American criticism. It tells about racial discrimination experienced by Elwood Curtis and the way he handled it. The impact of the discrimination was founded in the relationship that resulted in bullying and racism. This thesis is good because the researcher explains the main character in detail through every act of Elwood, which carefully in taking action. However, it is quite difficult for this thesis to take the important points because the analysis needs to be clearer.

Third, the journal published by *BYU Scholars Archive Citation*, entitled "Ghosts Of Past, Present, And Future: On Political Purpose And Critical Hope In Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*" (2021) by Adelaide Strickland. This journal explains that the political picture in *The Nickel Boys* novel has a bad effect on Elwood



Curtis in the past, present, and future. This journal aims to give the readers critical hope to see what happened in history to make them realize the bad effect so that it can be changed for the future. In my opinion, this journal is interesting to read because it has a unique topic, but it is difficult to understand because it uses unfamiliar grammar. Additionally, the researcher does not divide the important points in it, making it difficult to understand. However, the writer can study the picture of messages contained in the past in *The Nickel Boys* story so that it is useful for the future.



Then the title is "Charlotte Usher's Egoism In *Tonya Hurley's Ghost Girl: A new Criticism Study*"(2019) by Rizki Fitriana. This thesis focuses on the main character, Charlotte Usher, who tries to handle the situation he faces after death. It tells about egoism which a teenager portrays after becoming in spirit form. In this thesis, the researcher uses the theory of new criticism, especially new critical approach and qualitative descriptive. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how Charlotte aims to come back to life and make significant changes in her characterization. The researcher finds that egoism destroys self-image and relationships with other people. In my view, this thesis is easy to understand. The researcher uses common words and simple sentences to explain the analysis. This thesis can be an example for the writer to analyze *The Nickel Boys* novel because it has the same theory and issue. This thesis's weakness is that it has a different story from the writer, so one can only understand the thesis through theory.

Last, the title is "Monstrosity and Humanity in *Frankenstein* by mary Shelley: a formalistic reading" (2020), written by Sherly Dwi Putri. The problem tells about

the tragic story between Victor Frankenstein and his creation, who is often touted as the monster. In this thesis, the researcher uses the New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks. It shows that the kind character is not always presented with his goodness, and the monster's character is not always presented with his cruelty. The researcher wants to make the reader see the story from a different perspective. From this thesis, the writer considers that the language used to convey the analysis is easy to understand. Even though this thesis has a different story from *The Nickel Boys* but the theory used is the same. It can be a guideline for understanding the theory of New Criticism for the writer.

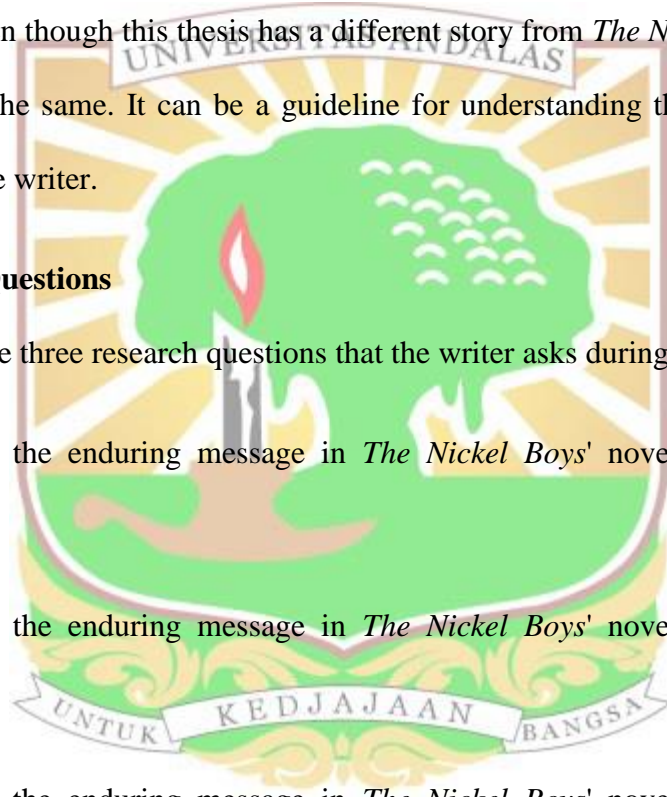
#### 1.4 Research Questions

There are three research questions that the writer asks during the research :

1. What is the enduring message in *The Nickel Boys'* novel through central irony?
2. What is the enduring message in *The Nickel Boys'* novel through central paradox?
3. What is the enduring message in *The Nickel Boys'* novel through central ambiguity?

#### 1.5 Scope of The Research

To limit this research, I focus on the formal elements, and the elements of fiction are those I found by doing a close reading. It functions as a preliminary



analysis to know more about the elements. I also use these elements like symbols and point of view to analyze the enduring message of *The Nickel Boys* novel.

### 1.6 Objectives of The Study

According to the problem, I would like to expose how Whitehead conveys the message through the elements of tensions. Second, to reveal what happens in the Nickel School that we don't know and to find out the Enduring Message in *The Nickel Boys* By Colson Whitehead.

