

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

*Ask the Dust* movie (2006) is a movie which depicts racism in Los Angeles on 1933, when The Great Depression occurs in America. It is directed by Robert Towne and it is produced by Tom Cruise and Paula Wagner. It was released in April 13, 2006 by Paramount Classic in association with Capitol Films. *Ask the Dust* is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parents or adult guardian). This film contains salty language, sexuality and nudity. The movie is adapted from John Fante's *Ask the Dust* novel.

The director of this film, Robert Towne, is an American that was born on November 24, 1928. He married Louise Gaule in 1984 and has one daughter, Katharine Towne. He is not only a director, but also a screenwriter. As a director, he directed some film like *Tequila Sunrise* (1988), *Without Limits* (1998) and *Roads of Asgard* (2009). He wrote the screenplay for *The Firm* (1993), *Love Affair* (1994), *Mission Impossible* (1996) and *Mission Impossible II* (2000).

*Ask the Dust* story concerns with racism when The Great Depression era in Los Angeles on 1933. Arturo Bandini (Colin Farrell) narrates his own story about his condition in Los Angeles. He moves from Colorado to Los Angeles. He comes to Los Angeles with high confidence after his one story published in a magazine edited by his

favorite editor, H.L. Mecklen. So, his dream is like the other people to search fortune, fame, good health and beautiful woman but with different way, he would write a big novel "The Roads to Los Angeles", by Arturo Bandini. But after 5 months, he does not get any idea to his novel and tries to spend his last nickel. In the same time, Mrs. Hargraves (Eileen Atkins) collects motel payment. She is the owner of "The Alta Loma" little motel in Bunker Hill. Mrs. Hargraves does not accept a Mexican and Jew stay in his motel. When he thinks to spend his last nickel, Mr. Hellfrick (Donald Sutherland) offers milk. Mr. Hellfrick, an old man who always drinks having a friend who delivers milk in each house in Los Angeles.

His friend always comes to Mr. Hellfrick's room at 05.00 am, and Mr. Hellfrick says to Arturo, to take a bottle of milk. Although Arturo refuses it, but at 05.00 am, he takes two bottles of milk. At the morning, Arturo tries to spend his last nickel in Columbia Café. In this café, he meets Camilla (Salma Hayek) a waitress in this café. She works in a café possessed by a WASP. At the first meeting, he mocks Camilla because she wears huaraches (Mexican traditional shoes)

Then Arturo gives his magazine, where his first story is publicized, to Camilla. Actually, he wants to meet again with Camilla, but he does not have any money. He is lucky because Mr. Hellfrick pays his debt to Arturo. After it, he goes to meet Camilla to ask his opinion about Arturo's story "A Little Dog Laughter". Camilla said that she likes

the story and she likes dog stories. Arturo is very angry because there is no dog in his story. From this event, he knows that Camilla is illiterate. At the following day, Arturo accepts a check from Mecklen because his story is published in Mecklen's Magazine. So, at the night Arturo goes to "Columbia Cafe" to meet Camilla, Camilla's performance becomes "more American" because she uses different shoes, not her huaraches. But Arturo's attitude becomes arrogant. Camilla does not like with his attitude and she says that he and she are an American if she passes the test to become American citizen. Moreover, Arturo mocks Camilla if she wants to pass the test, she must practice to read. Hearing Arturo's comment, Camilla is sad. Arturo feels sorry and then he says that his shoes are not good enough with his feet. Then Camilla is taken home by Arturo with his car, on the way Camilla asks Arturo about his name. Arturo says that he likes his name, but Camilla knows that he does not like his name.

Vera Rivkin (Idina Menzel), Jewish housekeeper, enters Arturo's life. She falls in love with Arturo because of his writing. But Arturo does not love her. Then Arturo tries to Vera's apartment in Long Beach. Earthquake on March in Long Beach destroys Arturo's dreams; Vera is dead because of this earthquake. After that Arturo comes back to Camilla and he knows that he is falling in love with Camilla.

They live in a small house, near beach. Everyday Arturo teaches Camilla to read. They have happily live. One day Arturo tries to invite

Camilla to go to cinema. At the first, she refuses it, but finally she accepts to go Cinema. Then they go to the cinema. But a woman who seats behind Camilla in the cinema feels uneasy, and decides to go. Camilla knows why that woman was going, because she is Mexican and no one wants to seat behind a Mexican.

But marijuana breaks their lives. Arturo is very angry when he knows that Camilla still consumes marijuana and Camilla says that marijuana is her life. Camilla says that if Arturo loves her, he must marry her. Arturo is speechless and Camilla knows that he is ashamed to love and marries a Mexican girl. This film ends with sad story, Camilla dies because of TBC.

*Ask the Dust* movie has grown many comments from the people that have watched it. It includes positive and negative response about the movie. However, this movie gets B from the film reviewer.

The comment about this film also comes from the movie viewer. The first comes from Mr. Whitman from Riverside. He says that John Fante writes a very good novel and it is first time there is a novel describing Los Angeles at 1932. The act of the actor and actress is very good.

“I read the book 8 years ago. I was moved by it. I saw the movie today, and everything in the movie was the way I pictured things in the book. This has to be the best movie of the year. I thought it did justice to the great John Fante's classic. I can also see why Charles Bukowski liked Fante so much... he was one of the first writers that wrote about the LA of rooming houses, cheap hotels and seedy lounges... although, I feel *Ask the Dust*, the book and the movie, made it seem a little more romantic. I can't say enough about Colin Farrell's performance; this is by far my favorite. Salma, I have always liked. I was transported back in time. I liked the fact that there was very little profanity, which kept the integrity of the book and was most likely, accurate for the period

that was being portrayed. I think no matter what station in life you were in back then, you always tried to put on your best face. This was interesting, because it contrasted with the dingy atmosphere of 1930's LA.”

The second is from Tom Parker from Huntington Beach.

“One of the other commenter’s mentioned that they almost walked out. I think it’s not a good movie and one of the worst adapted screenplays I’ve ever seen. From time to time there are hints that something interesting might happen, or that there is potentially some depth underneath one of the characters, but that’s all we get - hints. There is not a single payoff or revelation in the entire movie. The characters add up to nothing. For the entire duration of the film you don’t care what happens to a single one of them. As a matter of fact, you almost start hoping they die, because at least a death might be more interesting than watching their inexplicable behavior, which is so strange and unpredictable that you’d think it in itself would be compelling, but it’s not. Instead of quirky, noir-esquire characters acting in hard-boiled fashion, you simply recognize it immediately for what it is: a bunch of talented but miscast actors, brooding and raising their eyebrows while reading bizarre dialogue without a hint of relevant context. All this for two plodding, painfully slow hours. Awful. “

*Ask the Dust* movie had been nominated in one of awards. It won in Moscow International Film Festival 2006 as best director by an ensemble category that went to Robert Towne.

*Ask the Dust* movie is interesting movie. It can be looked from the major character, and dominant issue or real condition in the setting of time in that film, 1933 in Los Angeles. For the first is the major character of the movie. Arturo Bandini is the major character of this movie. He is young Italian-American author who comes from Colorado to Los Angeles to create his future. Los Angeles in Great Depression Era very hates an immigrants from Italy, Mexico or Negro, because they consider that immigrant take their job. Therefore, Arturo tries to speak in American accent and dressing like an American in order to make all people sure that he is a truly American.

His other dream is to meet a beauty girl who will inspire him to write great novel. Actually, he is a man who never gives up. Every day Arturo Bandini is travelling around Los Angeles to get any idea to write his novel. Although he is always mocks Camilla, but actually it is his ways to show his love. His character is difficult to understand. Actually he falls in love with Camilla, but his attitude is different. He does not hesitate to spill a free glass of beer from Camilla in front of her. He always makes Camilla angry and mocks her Mexican status.

Camilla is a waitress in cafe where Arturo spends his last nickel. His complete name is Camilla Lopez, a Mexican immigrant, but she change her name become Camilla Lombard, in order to hide a fact that she is a Mexican. Dressing in her tight polyester uniform and the open-toed huaraches (traditional shoes from Mexico) that give her Mexican heritage away. Her dream is to marry a white and wealth man to raise her positions in society and to become an American. Then she meets Arturo and falls in love with him.

The second is dominant issue in the film. Racist is the word for people who hate the existence of other race. Racist always relates to Racism. The term “racism” is usually applied to the action or attitude, conscious or unconscious that subordinates the dominant group in a society, but it can be also applied to any individual or group, based on skin color or race, regardless of social status or dominance.

There are several meanings relating to the word “racism”. According to Webster (1981: 1870), racism is the assumption that psycho cultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that race differs decisively from one another which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to dominate over others. Another meaning of racism that is still stated by Webster (1981: 1870), racism is a doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles.

Racism can be a theme in a literary work. Literary work itself means a social institution, using language as medium social creation (Wellek and Warren, 1993: 109). Its goal is to get a complete fact and comprehensive description about cause and effect relationship between the author, the work and society (Jabrohim, 2003: 159). The literary work and the author cannot be separated since the literary work is a reproduction of the author’s mind.

An author expresses his or her social reality by creating a work of art. The author can determine the theme of his or her work as he or she likes. Through his or her work, an author wants to change the social view of his or her society to give a solution for a better view and behavior in social life. As stated by Jabrohim (2003: 157), literature is something which is not autonomous, independent; rather it is something which is bound to the condition and situation of the society where the literary work is created.

Motivated by the facts above, the researcher is interested in conducting the research about one theme in *Ask the Dust* movie, namely racism. Therefore, the researcher is using Sociological approach as the appropriate approach in this research. This research is given a title **“Racism in Robert Towne’s *Ask the Dust* Movie: A Sociological Approach”**.

## **B. Literature Review**

Based on the researcher’s observation, the researcher found that no one had conducted a research in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta to study about racism in Robert Towne’s *Ask the Dust* movie by using sociological approach. On other hand the researcher found another study about racism entitled “*Racism in Harper Lee’s To Kill A Mockingbird: A Genetic Structuralism Approach*”. Which was done by Fauziah Arini (2007).

This research is about identifying the racism in Harper Lee novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The study has four findings. First, in genetic perspective, a literary creation is a meaningful response of the writer toward particular social reality where the author lives. Second, in *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, Harper Lee creates structural elements that are over character and characterization, setting, plot, point of view, theme and style to make a whole unity. Third, Harper Lee view is a response toward racism, which happened in America in the mid twentieth century. The last

finding shows that racism that remained until the mid twentieth century brought a contradictory response of white people and black people.

The second research was conducted by Saptarini from UMS entitled “Racial Discrimination in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings: A Marxist Approach*. The researcher investigates the racial discrimination in Maya Angelou’s novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The study has three findings. First, Maya Angelou wants to show her protest through her work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Second, Maya Angelou reflects that her works of portraying the oppressed blacks. And the last is Maya Angelou gives resolution into the process to get revolution.

The difference of this research and the previous research study lies in the objects and perspective view of the research. The first research uses *To Kill A Mockingbird* novel in genetic structuralism perspective and second research uses *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing* novel in Marxist perspective, and this research uses *Ask the Dust* movie in sociological perspective.

### **C. Research Problem**

The major problem of this research is “how the portrait of racism is reflected in the *Ask the Dust* movie.”

#### **D. Limitation of the Study**

In this research, the researcher is only focusing on racism based on Los Angeles society in 1932 as reflected in *Ask the Dust* by Robert Towne, using sociological approach.

#### **E. Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyze the movie based on its structural elements
2. To analyze the movie based on the sociological perspective, by identifying racism and the social background of the late twentieth century in American society, especially Los Angeles society

#### **F. Benefit of the Study**

Two kinds of benefits which can be gained from the study are as follows:

##### **a. Theoretical Benefit**

The study is expected to give additional information and contribution to the larger body of knowledge, particularly to the further studies of Robert Towne's *Ask the Dust*.

##### **b. Practical Benefit**

The study is expected to give the writer understanding about racism case.

## **G. Research Method**

The research method of this paper is broken down into five aspects: (1) Object of the study, (2) type of research, (3) type of the data and data source, (4) Method of data collection and (5) Method of the data analysis.

### **1. Object of the Study**

The object of the study is *Ask the Dust* movie directed by Robert Towne.

### **2. Type of Research**

In analyzing the data found in the movie, the researcher uses the qualitative method as the type of the research.

### **3. Type of Data and Data Source**

Type of the data is in the form of a script movie entitled *Ask the Dust* movie directed by Robert Towne. The writer divides the data and the data source into two categories: primary data source and secondary data source.

- a. The primary data source is the movie itself that is directed by Robert Towne
- b. The secondary data are taken from references and materials related to the study whether picking up from books and internet.

### **4. Method of the Data Collection**

The method of collecting data in this study is library research. The data from both primary and secondary sources are collected and

recorded in a sort of document as evidence. The methods of collecting data are as follows:

- a. Watching the movie several times and determining the character that will be analyzed.
- b. Reading some related books to find out the theory, data and informations required.
- c. Taking notes of the important part in primary and secondary data.
- d. Classifying the data into some category.
- e. Drawing conclusion to get the result.

#### 5. Method of the Data Analysis

The method employed in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis, in which the data are collected, described and then analyzed. It concerns with the relationship between the movie and sociological theory to show how racism is reflected in the story.

### **H. Research Paper Organization**

This paper is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is introduction that describes the background of the study, literature review, research problem, and limitation of the study, objective of the study, benefit of the study, research method, and research paper organization. The second chapter deals with underlying theory. It consists of Sociology of literature, the notion of sociological and the major principle of sociology of literature, structural elements of the movie and theoretical application. The third chapter includes the social background with all

aspects of the social reality of American society in the first 1933. The fourth chapter includes the structural analysis of the movie, which consists of characters and characterization, setting plot, point view, theme, mise en scene and design, cinematography, sound and editing and a brief discussion. The fifth chapter presents sociological analysis of the movie. The sixth chapter consists of conclusion and suggestion.