



Romantic Ideas in William Wordsworth's Play *The Borderers*

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Abstract

William Wordsworth is mostly known as a poet, but in reality he also wrote a closet drama *The Borderers*. As an author, William Wordsworth is also influenced by his surrounding society, political movement, as well as philosophical ideas of Romanticism. As the result, most of his works contain the aspect of Romanticisms in the use of language as well as in developing the story. This research, tries to describe the Romantic aspects in William Wordsworth *The Borderer*, including the celebration of the nature, the importance of dream, and an interest toward social surrounding. In writing his work, Wordsworth not only describes the landscape as it is, but he also adds his personal experience in exploring the countryside as well as in presenting his social critique. Wordsworth uses both landscape and dreams to criticize the society and to describe the possibility of good and bad in human nature. In consequence, *The Borderers* is not only considered as a common play but also a private writing about Wordsworth disappointment toward his social surrounding.

Key words: William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, Romanticism.

I. Introduction

The object of the analysis of this paper is Wordsworth's play entitled *The Borderers*. In analyzing the literary works: both historical and biographical background of the play need to be explained, since both of them have an intimate relationship with the literary work. In the following explanation, the analysis of the play will be divided into 2

sub-discussions including Romantic Period and its Influence to Literary Work and Romantic Ideas in William Wordsworth *The Borderers*. The purpose of the analysis is to disks Romantic ideas that present in Wordsworth's *The Borderers* as the result of his personal ideas toward celebration of the nature as well as the importance of his personal life in creating the literary works.

Several researches have been conducted in analyzing William Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, first, Donald G. Priestman essay entitled "*The Borderers: Wordsworth's addenda to Godwin*". It indicates that Wordsworth was still influenced by Godwin ideas when he wrote *The Borderers*; as he added the ideas that both guilt and crime have no place in society in his writing. Second, Geoffrey H. Hartman in his "*Wordsworth, The Borderers, and Intellectual Murder*" that focuses on the intellectual murder indication that presents in *The Borderers*, the result of the analysis implies that man's mind is linked to someone death. It also indicates that a person true identity is born during crime and betrayal. Donald Hayden's "*Toward an Understanding of Wordsworth's The Borderers*" indicates that Wordsworth *The Borderers* is more like a description of Wordsworth problems rather than explaining the possible solution for his concerns. He also explains that *the Borderers* is a two face works because it accepts the generalization of society, but at the same time it rejects it. Then followed by R. F. Storch with his "*Wordsworth's The Borderers: The Poet as Anthropologist*" that analyzes the representation of Wordsworth ideas toward social condition through literary work. *The Borderers* contains rebellion

against corruption and social injustice which are written into personal experience writing.

II. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Romantic Period and its Influence to Literary Work

Romantic period is said as a poetry era; since most of the literary works that are published during this period are in form of poetry; even though small number of dramas can also be found, but most of them are categorized as closet drama or a play that is enjoyed through reading. Romantic period occurred in Britain around 1770 until 1840, it appeared as a reaction against neo-classism. It is an era where order, decorum and normality of experience became the main topic in the literary works. Romanticism is not only a reaction against neo-classism, it also presents as the consequence of French and industrial revolution.

The historical events both French and industrial revolution created a rapid industrial area, it also increased the number of urbanization that made the old pattern of work and relationship collapse. In previous era, people were doing their business in agricultural by planting necessary items such as vegetables and fruits while taking care of livestock, but then it changed into industrial business; where everything were produced in large

scale by the help of machinery. As the result, the previous Landlord Aristocracy working relationship which was supported by agricultural economic system changed into large scale employees of modern industrial communities.

People began to depend on master, shop, taverns, school, and chapel who owned the factories and the industrial factors rather than to the landlord who owned the agricultural land and nobility title. Some historical events such as Napoleonic and American Wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, expanded empires also gave great effect to the social condition of the time. As Britain tried to save pennies to fund the wars and travels trough out the world to find new markets for their products.

During this period, the Enlightenment philosopher took control of the social behavior; it happened as the consequence of the rapid development in science and technology that made people preferred to think rationally. Most of the Enlightenment philosophers' tent to give cold judgment based on the knowledge and rationality rather than spiritual ideas. Some critics saw that during this period, the science seemed to be far from God and religious principle; the development of science was seen as threaten. It is said by Emma Mason "Empirical science, it was feared, would threaten to replace the God

with pragmatic fact, deifying scientist while dehumanizing people as "atoms" and "matters" (2010, 25). It was occurred because the basic principle of the Enlightenment philosopher was based on rational and reason rather than the religious authority. Those aspects can be said as the main cause of the development of Romantic ideas in literature.

Romantic ideas gave the crucial effect to the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge and other writers during Romantic era. The worse conditions of industrial areas lead to the development of picturesque works that try to describe the beauty of the wild nature which is different with the urban area; as industrial revolution changed the natural surroundings, where the previous agricultural areas were developed into factories and slump. It triggered the ideas of celebration of the nature in literary writing. Authors who were unsatisfied with the capital city preferred to travel to the virgin places which have never been visited, to capture the beauty of natural as it is. Some authors were interest in lakes, while the others might write their own vision of the sky. In celebrating the nature, the basic ideas of celebration of the nature is not only about how you present the exact representation of the things you see, but it is about how an author sees them. It is the reason why, an

author can include his personal point of view in describing the nature he sees.

The standard value of society which is influenced by Enlightenment philosopher was then attacked by writers including William Wordsworth who were not satisfied with their concept of rationality. In addition, Owen noted that Wordsworth tried to focus on marginal people by exploring their important role in Enlightenment movement (1990, 123)

In Romantic literature, there are some characteristic elements that are usually found as the main discussion, including; the celebration of the nature, the important of dream and imagination, and the description of human condition. Even though most of the author during Romantic period concerned on these 3 issues, but the works between one authors with another were strangely different from one with another. It occurred because Romantic authors valued individuality that support the idea of personal freedom to create their own versions by adding their personal experiences and values. Those three characteristics were then used to support the freedom of the author that made each work differ with another.

The first characteristic of the Romantic literary work is the celebration of the nature. During industrialization and urbanization, the condition of the environment began to worsen with a large

number of slumps. The poor condition of the environment made the author create a type of literary work that makes the reader possibly escape from their daily life and environment. The author through their literary works tried to describe the beauty of the nature such as the glorious variety of flowers, trees, weathers, lake and urban surrounding that cannot be found in industrial area. The way each author celebrated the nature differ from one with another since each author used the nature to describe their personal experience. JR Watson in his book *English Poetry of the Romantic Period* described that the authors during 18th century saw the nature not only with the eyes but through the eyes; it means that the way author describes the nature may contain imagination, personal experience, value and feeling.

The second characteristic of Romantic literary work is the interest toward the dream and imagination. It is said that both dream and imagination give the actual freedom to the author; since they don't have limitation and it also contains personal experience. Dream is placed as a new world that combines imagination and things that previously unthought-of. There were several ways of how Romantic authors attached the experience of dream and imagination to their literary work; first by directly

reporting the sleeping dream, second by describing the strange works of the mind, dreams and imagination could also be used as a simile of metaphor to indicate the strange nature of the experience. Since the work of dream and imagination are something that cannot be controlled, it is why authors during Romantic period had an interest toward this object.

The third characteristic of Romantic literary works is the interest toward human condition. During Romantic period, the authors became critical toward their surrounding especially toward the issue of politic, religious, classes, international affair and so on. The interest of Romantic author toward the issue of social and political condition was stated by Anthony Jarrels in his book *Britain Bloodless Revolution-1688 and the Romantic Reform of Literature* who states that “in the eighteenth century writing, like politics- and eventually as politics- became a dominant subject of writing.... in Bowle’s words, though, it is clear that by the 1790s certain kinds of politics and certain kinds of writing had become closely linked to one another” (1969, 33). Romantic period faced some important historical events especially Napoleonic and American Wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, expanded empires and so on. Those events become the main discussion of literary

works, as it can be seen in Byron’s works that concern on aristocracy ideas, his disappointment toward British society, and also the scene of wars.

Those three characteristic which are already discussed can also be found in Wordsworth’s work entitled *The Borderers*. In some parts of the play the description of romantic elements presence as description of the nature and places, but the aspect of natural beauty, the dream and imagination may appear as part of the conversation among the characters.

III. Methods of Research

In analyzing the literary works, the text is seen as an expression of author’s personal experience. As the consequence, Abram’s term of expressive approach is applied. The research analyze the literary works by considering the biography of William Wordsworth’s, because his play indicates an intimate relationship with his childhood memories, his interest in country’s beauty, as well as his political point of view.

By applying expressive approach, William Wordsworth’s personal ideas can be easily identify. As the result, literary work is not only seen as a description of the actual surrounding but also as a tool to share ideas.

IV. Findings

4.1 Romantic Ideas in William Wordsworth *The Borderers*

Wordsworth is known as a poet rather than a dramatist, during his life he produced lot of poems and only a single play that remains till now; even his play *The Borderers* was written in blank stanzas. People know him for his *Lyrical Ballad* or *Tintern Abbey*, both of the works basically contain the celebration of the nature; especially the beauty of the lake. Wordsworth is considered as “The Greatest Nature Poet” as it is said by Ralph Pite in his “*Wordsworth and the Natural World*”. He was born on Lake District in 1770 and he enjoyed the natural surrounding very much as it is expressed in his writings.

His delight toward the nature is stated by Emma Mason in *The Cambridge Introduction to William Wordsworth*, she states that “ the natural surrounding Hawkshead, Windermere, and Coniston offered Wordsworth the most stunning of mountainous landscape from which to borrow poetic image and sound” (2010, 2). Nature becomes the main object of his poem, this fact can be seen even from his young age; he prefers to learn from his experience of poetry, his travel with the family and his natural surroundings. The way he describes the beauty of the nature is connected with his personal experience

during his childhood. He is also an author who believes that a person can only learn what it means to be a human through the relation with the nature.

Wordsworth grown during Enlightenment period, it is the time when reason and rationality were the key point of life. Wordsworth used his poem to against the principle of the Enlightenment philosopher, the way he rejected the idea can be seen from his description of the nature. Enlightenment philosopher believed that countryside was less respectable and inhabitant differed with the rural area; in contrary, Wordsworth used his work to describe the beauty of the countryside as the true nature. In his point of view, he denied the idea that saw the urban life as a “natural”, besides he also used his works to describe the relation between the nature, human, and social surrounding.

The first characteristic of Romantic ideas which is also attached to William Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* is the celebration of the nature. It is true that most of his poems contain the celebration toward the beauty of the lake and the countryside, but those ideas can also be found in his work *The Borderers*. It is presenter in a dialogue between Oswald and Marmaduke (1842, 248) in Act I

Oswald : *This wood is rich in plants
and curious simples.*

Marmaduke looking at them:

*The wild rose, and the poppy, and
the nightshade;*

Which is your favorite, Oswald?

Oswald: *that which, while it is*

*Strong to destroy, is also strong to
heal*

The conversation supports the previous statement which explained that one characteristic of Romantic writing is the celebration of the nature that contain the pleasure of seeking the various types of flowers. Wordsworth used his works to describe the pleasure of enjoying natural surroundings, even small things can be considered as the beauty; but the beauty which is considered as the nature is not a rural area but the countryside. As rose, poppy and nightshade can be easily found in the rural area which are not only please the eyes but also give benefit to medication. Wordsworth in his work took his pleasantness toward the beauty of the countryside, since the landscape which is offered by the wild is much different with the capital city.

But the beauty of the nature not only indicates his personal delight toward surrounding environment, Wordsworth used the nature to imply something else as it is explained by Donal Hayden in his articles "*Toward an Understanding of Wordsworth's The Borderers*" where he stated that "in the first act, for example, Marmaduke and Oswald look at the wild

plants growing in the wood. Oswald says his favorite is the poppy. Which, thought strong to destroy, is also strong to heal: one object, but in it are contain both good and evil" (1951, 4). It could be implied that Wordsworth is not only describing the nature as it is, but he also uses the beauty of the nature to send his personal idea about human being where Wordsworth describes Oswald as a human being who have both good and bad nature.

In celebrating the nature, Wordsworth did not only describe the beauty of flowers as he presented it by Marmaduke expression of delight toward rose, poppy, and nightshade. He also described the beauty of the country side by referring to person who might not be found in capital city, someone who he enjoyed seeing when he was a child. The beauty of countryside is seen in the following conversation in act one where Wordsworth (1842, 253) wrote in Idonea speech:

That you are thus the fault is mine; for
the air

Was soft and warm, no dew lay on the
grass,

And midway on the waste ere night
had fallen

I spied a Covert walled and roofed
with sods-

A miniature: belike some shepherd-
boy,

Who might have found a nothing-
doing hour
Heavier than work, raised it: within
that hut
We might have made a kindly bed of
heath.

It is already known that the age of Romanticism was the period of industrial and French revolution that changed the structure of social condition and works. The society changed from an agricultural to industrial, from Landlord Aristocracy to large scale employees of modern industrial communities. The characteristic of industrial revolution was the development of machine and tools. The quotation above, Wordsworth used "shepherd-boy" as the object of his interest. Shepherd was not something commonly found in the industrial area during industrial revolution, it could only be found in the countryside or agriculture area. By using the shepherd-boy as the object of interest for his play, Wordsworth tried to explain to his reader about the beauty of the countryside, and he denied the idea of seeing the industrial area as the "nature". The countryside performed a different kind of beauty, where nature influenced the human much stronger than the urban area.

Wordsworth in his works described the nature as it was experienced by him during his childhood period; it is the reason why his works usually relate to his

personal experience as a child. The main reason why Wordsworth describes the nature based on his childhood memory is supported by an assumption that author must not only describe the nature as it is, but they must describe the nature as the way they personally experience it; so each author expresses different aspect of the nature, because each text implies personal information. As it is described in act I in Maraduke speech in Wordsworth (1842, 251)

To love him. I remembered, when a
Boy
Of scarcely seven years' growth,
beneath the Elm
That cast its shade over our village
school,
"Twas my delight to sit and hear
Idonea
Repeat her Father's terrible
adventures,
Till all the band of playmates wept
together;
And that was the beginning of my
love.

The quotation describes the personal childhood experience of Wordsworth, it describes his delight toward natural surrounding when he lived in Hawkshead when attending the grammar school. It also expresses his closeness with his sibling Dorothy who spent most of their time together. The lines also explain his relation with his father who was rarely

home, as Emma Mason said that” Wordsworth’s early life was marked by a dependency on Dorothy, to whom he was especially devoted in the absence of his father, who often work away from home’ (2010, 1). As the consequence, some critics stated that most of Wordsworth childhood experiences were the main point of his poetries.

Wordsworth in *The Borderers* also describes the application of dream in literature. Both imagination and dream were often attached to Romantic writing, both of them were believed to give unlimited freedom to the author; so they can sent their own value, feeling, and idea trough the used of imagination and dream. Wordsworth (1842, 270-271) in his work wrote that:

Beggar: Oh Gentlemen, I thank you
I’ve had the saddest dream that ever
troubled
The hearth of living creature- My poor
babe Was crying, as I thought, crying
for bread
When I had none to give him:
whereupon
I put a slip of foxglove in his hand,
Which pleased him so, that his hushed
at once:
When, into one of those same aerated
bells
A bee came darting, which the child
with joy
Imprisoned there, and held it to his
ear,

And suddenly grew black, as he would
die.

There are various way in describing the dream trough literary works during Romanticism era as it is explained before, but we need to note about that dream and imagination actually implied of specific meaning, it was not only a dream which was written down for no reason. The beggar speech implied the relation between good and bad in human behavior. The relation between good and bad is described by using “the bee’ and the “the child, on the conversation of the beggar she explain: “the bee” is supposed to bring the joy to “the child” who is crying because of hunger but then “the bee” that give the joy also lead to the tragedy because the bee killed “the child’ in instance. So in other word, Wordsworth is the nature not only as the source of pleasure; but nature is also used as a moral force, as a source of inspiration, and also as a blessing and joy. Nature is not described as a simple object, but it also contains complicated ideas that lead us to a wider meaning and interpretation.

Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* is the only remaining play that is known, it is also a play that failed to be performed. His carrier as a dramatist was not as good as a poet, some critics considered his play as a bad drama as it is stated by Thomas Mcfarland in Crhistoph Bode; *The*

Borderers is “a bad play, a dramatically unromantic, and almost unwatchable play” (2008, 317). Even though this play is said as an unwatchable drama from some literary critics; artistic aspect, moral problems and Wordsworth’s ideologies that present within the drama create an interesting fact. The play itself is basically affected by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello*, as both three of them share similar characteristics. The influence of Shakespearian tragedy is described on the nature of the characters. Oswald has lot of similarities with Shakespeare’s *Iago*, in the other side; *Marmaduke* is a representation of *Othello*. Even though *Marmaduke* character seems to be closer to *Hamlet* since both of them has noble instinct with idealistic thought, world weariness, and mostly put his act as “justice”. Wordsworth’s *Idonea* is similar with *Ophelia* who weakly obeys her father’s request. This fact is actually possible as Wordsworth himself is very pleased with the work of Shakespeare even before he began his career as a professional poet. His delight toward Shakespearean works influenced his personal literary creation.

Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* is “a document in the history of Wordsworth’s mind” as it is stated by William Jewett in “*Action in The Borderers*”. It is said as Wordsworth’s document of mind due to

the fact that Wordsworth mostly used his works to send his idea about his social surrounding. *The Borderers* was written as his reaction against the Enlightenment philosopher especially Godwinian. Godwin was known as a rationalist who had a strong influence and he was regarded as an admirable representative of Enlightenment moral philosophy. Critics assumed that Wordsworth in *The Borders* tried to find the alternative philosophy to face the moral world; he was not only raising the question toward the Godwinian doctrine but also against it through writing.

Criticizing the standard moral of Enlightenment society through his literary work is considered as his personal movement to attack Godwinian philosophy, the reason behind his rejection toward Godwinian doctrine is explained by Peter L Thorslev JR in “*Wordsworth’s Borderers and the Romantic Villain-Hero*” that “the question he[Wordsworth] is posing is that of the moral or amoral nature of the universe: whether or not human moral values, freely chosen, have any ultimate sanction, either in natural law or in the will of God. And this is a more radical doubt than would ordinarily trouble an eighteenth-century rationalist like Godwin: enlightenment philosophers may no longer have had God, but they clung even closer to a

"natural law" built into a rational universe. Even the more extreme rationalists (like the Baron d'Holbach) argued that an atheist could still be a moral man, because he was a part of an orderly universe, and natural law, which was also moral law, was a part of his innermost essence" (1966, 89). Wordsworth was questioning the concept of Godwinian doctrine. His *The Borderers* is basically a writing about Godwinian versus Non-Godwinian, rebellion toward the orthodoxy, and his rejection toward Enlightenment philosophy.

Through his literary work, he also challenged the people who try to make the standard value of "justice" that are represented through Marmaduke and Oswald characters. It is a reaction against the common society that has a strong believes toward the reason and rationality. The drama believed that people who commit the crime need to be punished, because it is a form of "justice". But it becomes the tragedy when Marmaduke realizes that the act of "justice" that he agreed is actually a crime.

IV. Conclusion

Wordsworth is known as a poet in the age of Romanticism, during this period English was surprised by the industrial and French revolution that drastically changed the social structure of the nation. The

condition the industrial areas were poor, since there was lot of slumps with bad sanitary that made the environment unhealthy. While at the same time, the Enlightenment society believed that the countryside was inhabitant and less respectable, so the gap between the rural and urban area became bigger. The Enlightenment philosophers who influenced the society considered both reason and rational as the main concepts of their life, that was why most of philosopher during Enlightenment period is assumed to have no God.

The drastic change in the society also effected the development of literary works; some characteristic such as the celebration of nature, dream, and imagination became the main concept of literary work. The authors wrote critic about their social surrounding especially the political condition. Wordsworth is one of those authors who used his literary works to celebrate the nature, dream and imagination, besides he also criticized the social condition of his surrounding especially the Godwinian concept. Wordsworth described the beauty of the nature not only as a pleasure and enjoyment, but it also implied the moral force and his personal experience.

Even though his play *The Borderers* was failed to be performed, but it is still need to be studied; since various issues

and influences also give great effect to the development of British Literature. Some critics found that his works has similarity with Shakespeare's Hamlet and Othello, it also described his rejection toward Godwinian philosophy, and *The Borderer* is also considered as a document to Wordsworth's mind. Those are the reasons why *The Borderers* is considered as an important canon literature in Great Britain.

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