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A SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS ON JOHN MCCRAE'S "IN FLANDERS FIELDS" AND R.W. LILLIARD'S "AMERICA'S ANSWER"

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji lebih dalam puisi yang ditulis John McCrae berjudul "In Flanders Fields" dan karya RW Lilliard berjudul "America's Answer" dengan menggunakan analisis semiotika. Pada puisinya, McCrae berusaha untuk memberikan kesempatan bagi para prajurit yang telah tewas saat Perang Dunia I untuk menyampaikan kegundahan mereka, sedangkan puisi Lilliard adalah respon dari generasi muda Amerika atas semua kegundahan para prajurit tersebut.

Dalam menganalisa kedua puisi di atas, penulis menggunakan teknik penelitian kepustakaan dan data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis melalui metode analisis deskriptif. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini, tampak jelas bahwa McCrae "In Flanders Fields" dan Lilliard "America's Answer" menggambarkan empat (4) nilai-nilai budaya dasar, yakni manusia dan keindahan; manusia dan penderitaan; manusia dan kegelisahan; dan yang terakhir adalah manusia dan tanggung jawab.

Keywords: *Semiotics Analysis, the basic cultural values, poetry.*

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, people have enjoyed reading literature. It gives them pleasure. In fact, to entertain people is the basic purpose of literature. The others read literature since it teaches them so many things. Basically, there are so many reasons why literature has a prominent place in many people's heart.

Regardless of what the purpose of readers to enjoy literature, every literary work is written in such an amazing way by its writer. Every poetry, play and novel is a mirror which reflects human life. It deals with some aspect of human life and experience. As stated by Moody (1987), literature can show its reader the real picture of situation in the world and human affairs.

One of the examples of literary work which discusses the world and human affairs is "In Flanders Fields". This is a poem which is written by John McCrae and its story is told from the perspective of dead soldiers during

the World War I. Based on an article entitled "Flanders Field and Replies to Flanders Field", this poem "remains to this day one of the most memorable war poems ever written". Thus, it is obvious that this poem touches the hearts of many readers since it talks about human's affairs.

"In Flanders Fields" has captured the writer's attention for several reasons. First, as previously mentioned, this poem was written during the World War I and it tries to give chance for the dead soldiers to speak their mind. Second, this poem is able to capture many people's heart with its simple form but deeper meaning. Third, this poem is not written by a professional poet. McCrae as the writer of this poem is a doctor and soldier in "the 1st Brigade Canadian Field Artillery" (in "The Great War 1914-1918: Inspiration for the poem 'In Flanders Fields' by John McCrae"). Fourth, it is because this poem discuss about

human's affairs which enable its readers to gain pleasure and also teach them about human's issues.

The last, there are many poets who try to give response to McCrae's poem. One of the examples is R.W. Lilliard with his "America's Answer". Therefore, to make this study complete, the writer will also discuss Lilliard's poem as the example of how important McCrae's poem in the heart of the American. Moreover, many readers regard those two poems as poems which can increase their love toward their own countries. Seeing those facts, thus, the writer tries to study those two poems deeper. She wants to study further several human affairs and cultural values that are discussed by those American poets by using the semiotics theory. She decides to examine those subjects found in both poems since poetry is known as one of literary genres which cannot be separated from the issue of humanity and culture. It also means that those literary texts can give the readers more than just a feeling of pleasure, but it also can teach them about so many things.

RESEARCH METHOD

In conducting the research, the writer carried library research and the compiled data were analyzed through descriptive analysis method. In short, this research tried to describe, explain, and analyze human affairs found in two poems written by two different American poets by using semiotic theory.

The unit of analysis of this research were John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and R.W. Lilliard's "America's Answer". Those

two poems are taken from a book entitled *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*. Besides, as argued by Teeuw (1983: 11), literary texts cannot be separated from the context of history, social and culture. Moreover, literary texts are not produced from the culture's absence. Thus, the writer of this article will also relate the discussion of this poem with of the discussion of the cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Structuralism and Semiotics

Structuralism cannot be separated from semiotics. Both subjects are correlated to each other since semiotics is continued working through the existence of structuralism. As commented by Surdulescu (2002), it is not easy to clarify fundamental differences between those two subjects as they have similar objects and methods. He explains further that the structuralism analysis of a literary text "may deal with models which are not signs proper, as for instance the kinship systems, but which can be regarded as sign structures." On the other hand, semiotic analysis "deals, instead of themes and general meaning, with the way in which meaning is produced by the structures of interdependent signs, by codes and conventions."

Swanepoel et.al (in Ntsonda, 2009: 9) stated that the semiotics' concept is derived from the Greek Word *semeion* which means as "sign". Thus, Semiotics is a study that concerned with everything that can be counted as significantly replacing something else. Cobley and Jansz (in Sobur, 2003: 15) add that

it is "simply the analysis of signs or the study of the functioning of sign systems."

As previously explained, semiotics is a study of signs. Sign itself has two aspects. They are signifier and signified. Signifier is the formal form (written/spoken) which signifies something called as signified. Whereas, signified is something which is signed by the signifier (meaning/concept). As explained by Bressler (1992: 92), "Saussure proposed that words are signs made up of two parts: the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and a signified (a concept): signs = signifier.signified."

Poetry is a system of sign that has meaning. It uses language as its' medium. However, the language of poetry will be different from the language that is used by people in their daily life conversation. According to Riffaterre (1978: 1), poetry is a language activity. Its' language will not be the same with the language that is used by many people during their communication. It has its' own structure. He explains further that poetry uses indirect expression. The causes of this indirectness are: displacing of meaning, distorting of meaning and creating of meaning.

Swanepoel (in Ntsonda, 2009: 10), also argues that in relation to the reading of poetry, a semiotic approach has a tendency to direct the reading of a poem towards signs that are seen as dominant communicative factors. Therefore, it helps the listener and the reader of a certain poem to construct and receive the message that the poem tries to deliver.

Moreover, as stated by Preminger (in Pradopo, 2007: 121), semiotics see social

phenomena in society and culture as signs. This study tries to scrutinize systems, rules, and conventions which allow those signs to have a certain meaning. Thus, literary studies which use semiotics approach attempt to analyse literary texts as certain sign systems and determine what kind of conventions that enable those literary texts to have certain meanings.

The Basic Cultural Values

According to Koentjaraningrat (2000: 190), cultural values are the concepts that live in the minds of most of community members. Those values are related to the things which the community members see as valuable, precious and important in their lives. Therefore, those values can serve as their guidelines that give direction and orientation to them to create a good and harmonious society.

In this study, the writer uses the concept of basic cultural values that are taken from the theory of basic cultural science proposed by Nugroho and Muchji (1996). Those values are: (1) human, love and affection; (2) human and sublimity; (3) human and hope; (4) human and way of life; (5) human and responsibility; (6) human and anxiety; (7) human and affliction; (8) human and equity.

The Biography of John A. McCrae and A Short Glance to His Poem's Background

As written in "In Flanders Fields: A Study Guide", John A. McCrae is a lieutenant-colonel and physician in the Army of Canada

He is also a university professor in Canada. During the First World War in 1914, he was listed in the First Brigade of his country artillery. In 1915, when the soldiers of allied forces fought the Germans, McCrae and his artillery unit were in the town of Ypres in the Flanders region of Belgium. Suddenly, on May 2, 1915, he had to witness the death of his best friend, named Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, in the second battle of Ypres.

As noted in "The Great War 1914-1918: Inspiration for the poem "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae", McCrae was second in command of the 1st Brigade of Canadian artillery during this second battle of Ypres and many people believed that the death of his friend was McCrae's inspiration to write his famous poem "In Flanders Field".

According to another article entitled "The Flanders Field Poem: The World's Most Famous War Memorial Poem By Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae", when one of McCrae's friends, named Sergeant-Major Cyril Allison, had to deliver mail. He met McCrae who was sitting alone in an ambulance parked "a few hundred yards north of Ypres, Belgium." Later Allison watched McCrae writing his "In Flanders Fields" and after McCrae was done writing it down, he gave his poem to Allison without saying any word. Allison was really moved by the poem, as he stated "The (Flanders Fields) poem was an exact description of the scene in front of us both. He used the word blow in that line because the poppies actually were being blown that morning by a gentle east wind."

DISCUSSION

John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields"

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

McCrae's "In Flanders field" consist of three (3) stanzas and 15 lines. It tries to give voice to the dead soldiers who have died during the war. It can be seen clearly that the first stanza of this poem discusses about human and sublimity. The first line portrays the beauty of the Flanders fields which has a lot of poppies grow in its ground, *-in Flanders fields the poppies blow-*. The second line gives more description about the flowers which grow in the Flanders fields. As it is mentioned in the 2nd line, those beautiful poppies grow in a row and they are functioned as the mark of the dead soldiers' graveyard, *-That mark our place;... - (line 3)*.

The portrayal of sublimity can also be seen in the 4th and 5th lines of this stanza. The dead soldiers, as the speaker of the poem, depict the graceful picture of some larks that still fearlessly sing and fly freely in the sky, although below them the guns are fired continuously, as if they are not afraid to die, -

The larks, still bravely singing, fly/ Scarce heard amid the guns below.–

The second stanza is about human and affliction. Human cannot avoid affliction. Sometimes in their lives they have to face problems that cause them to feel agony. It can be in the form of physical, psychological torture or both of them. The dead soldiers highlighted their recent condition. It can be seen from the 6th lines, *–We are the Dead, Short days ago–*, the use of the capital letter on the word ‘dead’ and ‘short’ means that those soldiers want everybody to see the reality that they have lost their soul a couple of days ago. Then, they continue to describe their agony by giving two different descriptions. The first description is related to their lives before they lose their souls, and the second one is the description when they had died. In line 7 and 8, those soldiers portray how beautiful their lives used to be. They can enjoy the radiance of dawn and see *–the sunset glow–*. They also stated that their lives are full of loves. They have got lots of love from their surroundings and they express their loves toward those people who have given them a lot of love, *–Loved and were loved... –*. However, sadly, they cannot enjoy the beauty of the world where they used to live and they also cannot feel the love of those people who love them anymore since now they are dead. They are buried under the Flanders field, *–... and now we lie/ In Flanders fields.–* Based on those description, one can sense the pain that the dead soldiers feel after they died. It seems like their comfortable lives and happiness with

their loved ones are forcefully taken away from them.

Almost similar to the second stanza, the third stanza of this poem still deals with the negative feeling that are possessed by the speaker of the poem. This stanza talks about human and anxiety. It is clear that human always have to face many problems in life which they cannot run from them. Sometimes those problems can make them feel insecure since they are not only have to face those problems, but also have to find the best answers for those problems by themselves.

Related to the discussion of McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields”, realizing that they no longer can fight and serve for their country, then those dead soldiers express their anxiety to the future generations. At first, the dead soldiers want the future generations to continue their struggle against their country foe since they feel that they have failed to fight, *–Take up our quarrel with the foe:/ To you from failing hands we throw–* (line 10 – 11). Those dead soldiers ask the future generations to fight with a high dignity and continue their fight against their enemy, *–The torch; be yours to hold it high.–* (line 12). They force the future generations to fight with all of their strength since the dead soldiers cannot rest in peace if there is no one who can continue their struggle even though they have rested in a beautiful place like the Flanders fields, *–If ye break faith with us who die/ We shall not sleep, though poppies grow/ In Flanders fields–* (line 13 – 15). The last three lines of this poem (line 13 – 15) show that the dead soldiers feel anxious, they are worried

that there will be no one can continue their struggle against their enemy. Thus, they want to make sure that the future generations will not stop their effort to fight against their enemy, so that the dead soldiers will not die in vain.

R.W. Lilliard's "America's Answer"

REST Ye in peace, ye Flanders dead.
The fight that ye so bravely led
We've taken up. And we will keep
The faith with you who lie asleep
With each a cross to mark his bed,
In Flanders fields.

Fear not that ye have died for naught.
The torch ye threw to us we caught.
Ten million hands will hold it high,
And freedom's light shall never die!
We've learned the lesson that ye taught
In Flanders fields.

Lilliard's poem entitled "America's Answer" consists of two (2) stanzas and 12 lines. This poem talks about human and responsibility. The discussion of responsibility is closely related to the discussion of human's obligations. In fact, every human has his/her own obligations and all of his/her life he/she has to be able to show his/her responsibility toward his/her own duties.

In Lilliard's poem, the speaker of the "America's Answer" opens this poem by addressing the dead soldiers who were buried in Flanders fields to rest in peace, *-REST YE in peace, ye Flanders dead.* - (line 1). In line 2 - 3, the readers of this poem can see who exactly the speaker of the poem is. As stated in those lines, the speaker of this poem is more than one person since it uses plural subject *we*. The title of this poem also gives another

clue about the speakers' background. It is clearly seen that the speakers of this poem are the American since the title of this poem is "America's Answer". Or in other words, the word 'America' in the title refers to the speaker of the poem.

The speakers of this poem want to convince the dead soldiers that they have taken all the responsibilities from the hands of the dead soldiers to protect their country. They will continue to fight against their enemy just like the things that are done by the dead soldiers, *-The fight that ye so bravely led/ We've taken up...* - (line 2 - 3).

The speakers keep trying to convince the dead soldiers by saying that those soldiers should not be worried since they are not fighting for nothing and as the American future generations they have taken all the duties that are given by the dead soldiers of Flanders fields, *-Fear not that ye have died for naught./ The torch ye threw to us we caught.* - (line 7 - 8, stanza 2). Convincingly, the speaker stated that there are a lot of people who will support and continue to fight to keep the America's independence since they have learnt so many meaningful lessons from the struggle of the dead soldiers in the Flanders fields, *-Ten million hands will hold it high,/ And freedom's light shall never die!/ We've learned the lesson that ye taught/ In Flanders fields.* - (line 9 - 12).

Based on the above explanation, it is clear that Lilliard's poem entitled "America's Answer" is discussing about human and responsibility. As previously mentioned, the speakers of the poem are trying to convince

the dead soldiers who are died and buried in Flanders Fields that they can continue to fight against the enemy since they are fully conscious that it is their duties to fight for the America's freedom.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of literary works (poetry/ novel/ play) which talk about the world and human affairs. The examples of poetry which discuss those subjects are John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and R.W. Lilliard's "America's Answer". In this study, the writer tries to scrutinize both poems by using semiotics theory.

Based on the findings that have been explained in the previous section, it can be concluded that McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and Lilliard's "America's Answer" portray the issue of humanity and cultural values. There are four (4) basic cultural values that can be found in those two poems, namely human and sublimity; human and affliction; human and anxiety; and the last one is human and responsibility.

Seeing the above fact, it is clear that literary texts can also be used as a medium to gain pleasure and to get deeper understanding of human's affairs. Therefore, the writer would like to encourage many people, especially educators to give a special place to literature in their classrooms since it can enable their students to experience a new way to gain happiness and it also allow them to get the deeper understanding of problems that many humans have to face in their lives.

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