

ABORTION AS SEEN IN GWENDOLYN BROOK'S POEM

“THE MOTHER”

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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the intrinsic elements of the poem which uses New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks. In addition, by using imagery, rhyme, diction, paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension as the intrinsic elements, the goal of this research is to show the meaning of the poem. The method of this research is qualitative method. Close reading technique is applied to collect the data. For the process of analyzing data, this research uses descriptive analysis of data variables which includes description of the texts based on the intrinsic elements to get interpretation of the meaning. Based on the analysis, this research finds the description of mother's figure that does abortion in “The Mother” poem. As unity, based on the paradox, the abortion case shows the contradictory situation of the figure of a mother who loves her children and a mother who can become monster that kills her own children. Then, based on irony, abortion is one crime which kills the fetus on mother's womb. Although, she kills her children but she is still called a mother because she has experience when being pregnant. Based on ambiguity, abortion may have ambiguous status between motherly that she is giving-birth her children and un-motherly that taking her children's life. Based on the tension, abortion shows the innocent mother who kills her children although it is one of sins and crime but she feels guilty and sad after doing abortion. Therefore, through abortion or killing children, the speaker in this poem shows her position as the mother.

Keywords: *Abortion, Mother's Figure, “The Mother”, New Criticism.*

ABORTION AS SEEN IN GWENDOLYN BROOK'S POEM

“THE MOTHER”

Oleh: Heni Puji Lestari

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis unsur intrinsik puisi yang menggunakan teori Kritik *New Criticism* oleh Cleanth Brooks. Selain itu, dengan menggunakan citra, sajak, diksi, paradoks, ironi, ambiguitas dan tension sebagai unsur intrinsik, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan arti dari puisi itu. Metode penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif. Teknik pembacaan cermat digunakan dalam pengumpulan data. Dalam proses menganalisis data, penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis deskriptif dari data terhadap variable-variabel yang berisi deskripsi dari teks-teks berdasarkan unsure intrinsic untuk mendapatkan makna interpretasi. Berdasarkan hasil analisis, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa deskripsi sosok ibu yang melakukan aborsi di "The Mother" puisi. Sebagai satu kesatuan, berdasarkan paradoks, kasus aborsi menunjukkan situasi yang kontradiktif sosok seorang ibu yang mencintai anak-anaknya dan seorang ibu bisa menjadi monster yang membunuh anak-anaknya sendiri. Kemudian, berdasarkan ironi, aborsi adalah salah satu kejahatan yang membunuh janin di rahim ibu. Meskipun, dia membunuh anak-anaknya, tapi dia masih disebut seorang ibu karena dia memiliki pengalaman saat hamil. Berdasarkan ambiguitas, aborsi bisa memiliki status yang ganda antara sifat keibuan yang mau melahirkan anak-anaknya dan tidak mempunyai sifat keibuan yang mengambil nyawa anak-anaknya. Berdasarkan ketegangan, aborsi menunjukkan ibu yang tidak bersalah yang membunuh anak-anaknya meskipun itu adalah salah satu dosa dan kejahatan, tapi dia merasa bersalah dan sedih setelah melakukan aborsi. Oleh karena itu, melalui aborsi atau membunuh anak-anak, pembicara dalam puisi ini menunjukkan posisinya sebagai ibu.

Kata Kunci: *Aborsi, Sosok Ibu, “The Mother”, New Criticism*

MOTTO

“Do the Best to Get the Best”



DEDICATION

I dedicate this graduating paper for:

My Beloved Mother

SURIYATUN

You are My Hero



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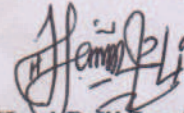
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Mother is a human who has full of sincerity to her children. Mother is a woman who wants to protect her children during pregnancy and give-birth her children. Because of her love, she wants to care and to educate her children in all of her life. Her contribution for her children is needed to appreciate because she sacrifices her life for the children as her responsibility. Therefore, the figure of mother is interesting to discuss because her existence is important and can give many lessons for other humans.

Furthermore, the discussion about mother can also be found in poetry. Poetry is one of literary that becomes a part of mankind's civilization that never ends. Altenbernd said that "Poetry has been produced by every civilization in history, and it shows no sign of losing its power in our time. The Renaissance and twentieth century indicate that poetry is closely related to mankind's deepest concern." (1966: 1). There are differences between poetry with the other literary works. "Poetry differs from some kinds of prose in usually being more *concrete* and *specific*. That is, it communicates experiences, emotions, attitude, and propositions by dealing with a particular situation or event that implicitly embodies abstract generalization" (Altenbernd, 1966: 4). Therefore, the idea of

poetry more focuses on a situation which describes the specific object than other literary work.

The example of poem that tells about mother is entitled “The Mother”. This poem is free verse that consists of 4 stanzas and 33 lines. This poem is made by Gwendolyn Brook. “Gwendolyn Brook is the first black African American poet that wins the Pulitzer Prize on May 1, 1950. Then, “The Mother” poem is the best poem originally published in Brooks’ first collection of poetry *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945)” (Bloom, 2003:13). However, this poem is different with other poems which have the same theme about mother. Poem which has theme about mother usually tells about figure of mother to protect and care her children. However, this poem is different that tells about a mother but she has abortion or killing her children. Because of it, the position of being mother is still contradictive after doing abortion.

In *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, the word “abortion” means “the removal of an embryo or fetus from the uterus in order to end a pregnancy” (Kipfer, 2001: 5). It also means that, it is an act of women ending their pregnancy by using some ways to remove the fetus from their wombs. As a result, the fetus will die before being born to the world. In other side, sometimes it is also dangerous for women’s life.

Related to the Islamic perspective, abortion is forbidden. It is affirmed on the Holy Qur’an in surah Al-Israa’ verse 33:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ... (٣٣)

“And do not kill the soul (i.e., person) which Allah has forbidden except by right...” (Shaheh International, 2010: 395).

From the verse above, abortion is one of a crime because it includes the murdering of innocent soul. Abortion or killing the fetus or the soul is forbidden by Allah. Therefore, women are not permitted for doing abortion without right reason such as emergency of health concern. Abortion also will give impact not only for the children but also the women physically and emotionally. The experience of abortion will not forget it forever in her life.

This poem shows the difficult situation of a mother after doing abortion. She knows that abortion is one of crimes and sin but because of some reasons she has to do abortion. Actually, she loves her children so she feels sad after killing her children by doing abortion. The discussion about abortion in this poem is important in this research because it is to shows the experience of women's emotion and feeling after doing it and to know why this poem is called “The Mother” if she has had abortion.

Considering the issue above, the researcher interests in choosing Gwendolyn Brook's poem “The Mother” and analyzing the intrinsic elements which uses new criticism theory by Cleanth Brook. In this research, the researcher wants to know more about abortion as seen in the poem. Since this research is conducted by using New Criticism theory, this research does not analyze the poet's personal life, religious background, educational, and literary trends during her life.

1.2 Research Question

The research question based on background of the study as follows: How is abortion described in Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother" intrinsically?

1.3 Objective of Study

Based on the research question, the objective of this research is to analyze abortion in Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother" intrinsically.

1.4 Significances of Study

Academically, this research can be used as the reference for other researchers in order to understand more about the content of a poem and to apply the New Criticism theory in the poem analysis especially English Department students, lecturers, and common people who interest in literature.

Practically, this research aims to reveal perspective of abortion for people. Commonly, abortion is one of criminal acts. By this paper, the researcher hopes that women will consider not do abortion in their life.

1.5 Literature Review

There are some books, journal articles, and graduating papers which describe about abortion in "The Mother" poem. The researcher finds two previous researches that have same object material about abortion and one previous research on the same object formal.

The first is a book by Harold Bloom (2003) entitled “*Comprehensive Research and Study Guide; Gwendolyn Brook*”. This book discusses several critical analyses and study guides of literature on research of Gwendolyn Brook’s works. One of the critical analyses of poem is “The Mother.” This book describes mother’s responsibility, children, mother’s memory, mother’s emotion, and women abortion.

The second is a journal research paper by Muththamizh Selvi (2015), a research scholar of Manonmaniam Sundarnar University, Thirunelveli, entitled “*Protesting Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks*”. This research analyzes the protesting of Gwendolyn Brook’s poem. It also discusses “The Mother” poem which described anti-abortion as reflected the unborn child. Then, the poem protests about the concept of life and death of women pregnancy.

One literature review that has the same object formal: a research by Gunawan (2013), a student from English Department, Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences, in State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta entitled “War as Represented in Michael Heart’s *We Will not Go Down*. This paper discusses the situation of the war with a special style of a song in the portrait of Palestine war. This paper analyzes the intrinsic elements of the song by using New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brook. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method for analyze the data. Based on the analysis, it is found that the description of portrait war in *We Will Not Go Down* song is divides into two contradictory situations; pleasant contra horrible situation and hopeless contra hopeful situation.

Those first and second previous researches have the same object material about abortion in Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother", and the last research has the same object formal New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brook. However, this research has different method and conclusion because the researcher uses different ways in analyzing this poem in this research. The researcher focuses on abortion as seen in Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "The Mother" by using some poetic elements like rhyme, imagery, diction, paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. Therefore, unlike the previous researches, the researcher describes and analyzes intrinsic elements using an objective approach by New Criticism theory that sees the text itself without using the external elements.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

A theory is "an interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions, or hypotheses, that specify the relationship among variables (typically in terms of magnitude or direction)" (Creswell, 2009: 51). Since the researcher analyzes the poem intrinsically, an appropriate approach in this research is objective approach. "Objective approach is an approach that concern on the work itself" (Ratna, 2008: 73). Therefore, it only focuses on the intrinsic elements of the work.

In analyzing "The Mother" poem by Gwendolyn Brook, the researcher uses New Criticism theory. Abrams mentions New Criticism as "the distinctive procedure for a New Critic is explication or close reading: the detailed analysis of the complex inter-relationships and ambiguities (multiple meanings) of the verbal

and figurative components within a work” (2009: 217). It means that the researcher should pay attention on the detail of the work that describes in the text of literary work especially poem.

The New Criticism is different with another in many ways, but the following of view and procedure were shared in many ways. John Crowe Ransom said, “is that is shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object and shall be recognize “the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own safe” (Brooks, 2009: 216). “The emphasis is on the “organic unity” in a successful literary work, of its overall structure with its verbal meanings, and we are warned against separating the two by what Cleanth Brooks called “the heresy of paraphrase” (Abrams, 2009: 217).

According to Carter, new critics argue that every element in a poem has connection with other elements. The critic discards the presence of the author and his background to make the poem in coherence (2006: 27). Therefore, the analysis of new criticism just focuses on the text itself by using intrinsic elements without using the extrinsic elements of the poem.

Furthermore, the basic elements of New Criticism, according to Richard “idea of the poem as a complex activity of meaning, inspired many of the key terms and concepts of the new criticism: ambiguity, irony, paradox, tension, gesture, etc” (Routledge, 2006: 156). New criticism has four basic elements which establish the structure of meaning. Paul H Fry in his book *Theory of Literature* has said that all these words— irony, paradox, ambiguity, tension concern effects

that one locates within a text or “poem” as part of its meaning (2012: 79).

However, according to Quinn:

In NEW CRITICISM, tension is a term used to describe the synthesis of conflicting elements that constitutes the unity of a poem. In this view, a poem is an example of dramatic conflict in which the play of conflicting elements is resolved in the form of PARADOX. The words of a poem, in the New Critical view, incorporate intractable, warring elements the conflict, for example, between concrete and abstract language or between literal and metaphorical meaning. The successful poem creates a synthesis out of these conflicts (2006: 413).

Therefore, the researcher just focused on the analysis of the intrinsic elements such as paradox, irony, ambiguity, tension and poetic device in the poem. New critics (Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt), the task of criticism is to explain individual works of art. Focusing on ambiguity, paradox, irony, and the effects of connotation and poetic imagery, the New Criticism is sought to show the contribution of each element of poetic form to a unified structure (Culler, 1997: 122).

However, the researcher focuses using new criticism theory by Cleanth Brook to analyze abortion as seen in Gwendolyn Brook’s poem “The Mother”. He is a well-known person who also focuses on irony, ambiguity and paradox. Brook says, “The language of poetry is the language of paradox. The paradox is the language of sophistry, hard, bright, witty; it is hardly the language of the soul” (1960: 3). The researcher uses New Criticism by Cleanth Brook because he uses

interpretation of meaning of paradox which is deeper than others with added irony and ambiguity. Brook said that, but the reader may well feel that the amount of attention given to the structure of the poem is irrelevant, if not positively bad. In particular, he may find the emphasis on paradox, ambiguity, and ironic contrast displeasing (1960: 160). Indeed, whatever statement we may seize upon as incorporating the "meaning" of the poem. immediately the imagery and the rhythm seem to set up tensions with it, warping and twisting it, qualifying and revising it (Brook, 1960: 180). So, the intrinsic elements of the poem are important to emphasize the meaning of the poem and to build the unified theme.

The paradox of poem is included in the intrinsic elements of the poem. Brooks also says that his purpose is not only building the statements in the themes of a poem but also the other intrinsic elements. He also shows how the imagery effects that related to the theme makes them more powerful and accurate (1960:137). "Brooks has discovered that "the structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings" (1960: 178). Therefore, the pattern of the poem's structure is also important to build the meaning of unity. Brooks and Warren (1938: 249) also discuss the understanding of poetry. He argues the constant factor of a poem is rhythm in using the language and getting the special interpretation from the verse. However, the other constant factors are alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme.

According to Brooks, “the beauty” of the poem considered as a whole. The latter is the effects of a total pattern, and a kind of pattern which can incorporate within itself items intrinsically beautiful or bad, attractive or repulsive”(1960: 178). Therefore, a pattern of the intrinsic elements gives effects to meaning of the poem. Then, the beauty or the ugliness of a poem comes from the intrinsic elements of a poem.

The descriptions of the intrinsic elements of poetry as mentioned above can be formulated into seven elements. They are imagery, rhyme, diction, paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. The researcher explains more about these intrinsic elements of a poem on the next chapter. Therefore, the researcher analyzes the poem by using the New Criticism theory to describe abortion in Gwendolyn Brook’s poem “The Mother”.

1.7 Method of Research

This section explains the type of research, data sources, data collection technique, and data analysis technique. Each of them is briefly described in order.

1.7.1 Type of Research

The researcher uses a qualitative research method. According to Creswell in his book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, “Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (2009: 22). Qualitative research is done by using a library research; the researcher observes

several books and documents in obtaining the data to get necessary data with poem analyzing.

1.7.2 Data Sources

The main source of this research is the poem itself, Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother" in 1945th which is included in an anthology "*The Norton Anthology of American Literature Shorter Sixth Edition*" (Baym, 2003: 2698). The data of this research are divided into the main data and the supporting data. The main data of this research is the text of Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother" that relates with the research question. The data consist of stanzas in the poem, the lines of the stanza, the phrases in each line, the words in each line, and the syllables in each word. Then, the supporting data is from dictionaries, books and internet sources.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

The method of collecting data in this research is close reading as the technique to collect the data. According to Abrams, close reading is "the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationship and ambiguities (multiple meaning) of the verbal and figurative components within a work" (2009: 217). It means the reader should be carefully in understanding the detail of the research which occurs in the poem.

The close reading is directed into "The Mother" contents such as the stanzas in the song lyric, the lines in each stanza, the phrases in each line, the word in each line, the syllables in each word, and the morphemes in each syllable.

Through the close reading, the researcher collects the data which is considered as the intrinsic elements of the poem. This classification refers to the data which are appropriate to be selected as the variables such as rhyme, imagery, paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension which are analyzed in the next step.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

After collecting the data, the researcher uses a descriptive analysis to analyze the data. The researcher applies the new criticism theory by Cleanth Brooks as the primary weapon to analyze the classified data in order to find the answer of the main problem of abortion. During the analyzing step, the researcher focuses and concentrates not only on rhyme, imagery, paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension as the variables which will be analyzed, but also toward more information which confirming the analyzing data to answer the main problem of abortion as mother's figure by using secondary data. The researcher includes supporting data to be related to the variables in order to get some explanation about abortion. So, the researcher finally can describe the meaning of intrinsic elements and interpret those to discover abortion as seen in Gwendolyn Brook's poem "The Mother" is the conclusion of this analysis.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research consists of four chapters. Chapter one is introduction, and it consists of background of study, research question, objective of study, significances of study, literature review, theoretical approach, method of research, and paper organization. Chapter two is analysis the formal element that consists of

the related theoretical approach that is The New Criticism theory which is presented by Cleanth Brooks and the analysis of the data which show the intrinsic elements of the poem. Chapter three is conclusion to point out the result of this research and the last is suggestions for another research.



CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

3.1 CONCLUSION

There are some poetic devices used in the poem “The Mother” in describing the figure of a mother after doing abortion. The poetic devices that are used in this poem are rhyme, imagery, diction, paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. The use of rhyme and imagery can be found in each of the lines. The diction such as denotation can be found in each stanza while connotation can be found in 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th, 13th and 17th lines. The use of paradox can be found in the 2nd line in first stanza and in the 2nd, 11th, 16th, 20th, 21th, 21th and 32th. The use of irony can be found in the 23rd, 26th and 32th lines. Then, the use of ambiguity can be found in the first and second stanza.

The refrains which occur in the rhyme of the poem represent abortion act as the process of ending pregnancy from women’s womb. There is also refrains about the woman’s love toward her children. Then, based on the imagery which is found in the poem such as visual imagery, auditory imagery, kinesthetic and tactile imagery, it can be inferred that it represents actions, feeling, and thought expression of women when doing abortion. She feels sad and guilty after committing sin of abortion. Based on the diction, especially in denotation and connotation, the researcher finds the using of connotation words as the expression of subtle language when the speaker communicates with the aborted children. So,

a woman in this poem seems kind to the children even though she had done abortion.

There are three characters in the poem, the speaker as the first person, a woman and the children as the second person. The first stanza is dominant with presence, love, and happiness situation. Pronoun “you” in the first stanza refers to a woman called mother. The first stanza represents women’s imagination if the children are still alive; she will love her children and feel happy in her life. The second and third stanza is dominant with presence, hate, absence and sadness situation. Pronoun “you” in the second and third stanza refers to the children. The second stanza represents a woman’s imagination of her terminated fetuses. She imagines them growing into babies, children, adults and old. In fact, the children have died in the beginning of their breath. While the third stanza represents the confession of women of doing abortion that is actually a crime and sin. The fourth stanza is the refrain of the song that contains love situation. The fourth stanza represents the power of love of a woman as sad note. A woman is for against abortion but because of some reasons, she decided to have an abortion.

As unity, based on the paradox, the abortion case shows the contradictory situation of the figure of a mother who loves her children or an un-mother who becomes monster that kills her own children. Then, based on irony, abortion is one crime which kills the fetus on mother’s womb. It can be concluded that killing her baby can make she is a mother. Although, she kills her children but she is still called a mother because she has experience when got pregnant. Based on ambiguity, abortion may have ambiguous the status of the speaker as motherly for

giving birth her children or un-motherly for taking life her children by killing them. Based on the tension, abortion show the innocent mother who kills her children although it is one of sins and crime but she feels guilty and sad after doing abortion.

As unity of paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension show the description of mother's figure that does abortion in "The Mother" poem. Abortion is a choice in life as a result that could make death. Abortion is life choice but it can make dying as the result. Abortion is one of a crime and sin. Abortion shows the figure of mother although she doesn't give-birth the children but she has experience in being pregnant. Mother who kills her children is innocent's woman but she loves and feels guilty after does it. Therefore, through abortion or killing children, the speaker in this poem can be a mother although her children do not exist and may have never existed.

3.2 SUGGESTION

This research employs the New Criticism theory by Cleanth Brook to describe the paradoxical situation of abortion in poem "The Mother". This research is a limited to analyze because it only uses intrinsic elements of the poem such as rhyme, imagery, and diction.

The researcher suggests for the next researchers to use another theory to analyze this poem to make it more interesting for the reader, for example, the next researcher can use reader response theory. Therefore, the researcher can get the opinions of the poem from the respondents and also can put the extrinsic elements of the poem. The researcher can also use psychoanalysis theory to analyze this

poem. By using psychoanalysis theory, the researcher can use intrinsic and extrinsic elements to describe the guilty feeling of a woman after doing abortion in her life.



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APPENDIX

The Mother Poem, Rhyme, Paradox, Irony, and Ambiguity

Stanza	Line	Text	R h y m e	P a r a d o x	I r o n y	A m b i g u i t y
1 st	1	Abortions will not let you forget	a			✓
	2	You remember the children you got that you did not get,	a	✓		
	3	The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,	b			
	4	The singers and workers that never handled the air.	a			✓
	5	You will never neglect or beat	c			
	6	Them, or silence or buy with a sweet	c			✓
	7	You will never wind up the sucking-thumb	d			✓
	8	Or scuttle off ghosts that come.	e			✓
	9	You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,	f			✓
	10	Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.	g			✓
2 nd	11	I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.	h	✓		
	12	I have contracted. I have eased	i			✓
	13	My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.	j			✓
	14	I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized	i			

	15	Your luck	j			
	16	And your lives from your unfinished reach,	k	✓		
	17	If I stole your births and your names,	l			✓
	18	Your straight baby tears and your games,	l			✓
	19	Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches, and your deaths,	k			
	20	If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,	k	✓		
	21	Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.	m	✓		
3 rd	22	Though why should I whine,	m			
	23	Whine that the crime was other than mine?—	m		✓	
	24	Since anyhow you are dead.	n			
	25	Or rather, or instead,	n			
	26	You were never made.	n		✓	
	27	But that too, I am afraid,	o			
	28	Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?	o			
	29	You were born, you had body, You died.	p	✓		
	30	It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.	p			
4 th	31	Believe me, I loved you all.	q			
	32	Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you	r	✓	✓	
	33	All.	q			

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