

**BLAKE’S RELIGIOUS VIEW IN THE POEM
“THE LITTLE BLACK BOY”**

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Abstract

Poetry is one of the kinds of literary works that can be used by the author to say his or her feeling based on the situation and condition at the time the work is written. William Blake is a big poet. He writes most of his work to criticize the situation of the society. This paper has a purpose to analyse the poem of William Blake entitled “The Little Black Boy”. The writer wants to analyse and examine the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the poem. The poem entitled “The Little Black Boy” has three kinds of figures of speech, there are denotation and connotation, imagery, and simile. The writer uses sociological theory to analyse the extrinsic discussions. The discussions are about the relation between the society and the poem, and the religious view of William Blake through the poem. The writer finds that in this poem, William Blake uses a lot of words that can be interpreted as his thought about situation at that time.

Keywords : poem, imagery, simile, denotation and connotation, society

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

William Blake, an English poet, painter, and printmaker. He writes majority of his works to criticize the situation and condition of society through his knowledge about religion. According to article entitled *William Blake* from biography.com, one of his poem “The Little Black Boy” that is in his book entitled *Songs of Innocence* was published in 1879. Poetry is one of the kinds of literary works that can be used by the author to say his or her feeling based on the situation and condition at the time the work is written. The author uses this kind of literary work to criticize the situation that cannot be told with ordinary language. It is not just an ordinary language but it delivers us as a reader a meaning. According to Perrine, “poetry might be defined as a kind of language that says more intensely than does ordinary language” (1956: 3). By understanding the explanation, the writer concludes that poetry is not only a form of writing works, but a literary work that has deep meaning. The elements of poetry are feeling, imagination, thoughts, ideas, tone, rhythm, sensory impression, density, mingled feeling. Poem is the literary work as interpretive dramatization of experience in metrical language. The writer chooses “The Little Black Boy” because this poem is very interesting to be analyzed. The poem does not only has deep meaning, but also contains issues related to the condition of life, such as racial and religion.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In writing this Final Project, the writer has two purposes :

1. To analyze the Denotation and Connotation, Imagery, and Simile in the poem “The Little Black Boy”
2. To analyze the religious view of William Blake in the poem “The Little Black Boy”.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This final project only focuses on three main aspects which are suitable with analysis of the poem, they are: Denotation and Connotation, Imagery, and Simile. The writer assumes that those three main aspects are the most suitable intrinsic elements to analyze “The Little Black Boy” written by William Blake. To analyze the religious view of William Blake reflected in the poem in the poem, the writer uses sociological theory.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1 Denotation and Connotation

Connotation is created when a word means something else, something that might be initially hidden. The word *home*, for instance, by denotation means only a place where one lives, but by connotation it suggests security, love, comfort, and family. Perrine states that “the dictionary meaning or meanings of the word” and “The Connotation are what it suggest beyond what it expresses : its overtones of meaning.” (1965: 38). Denotation is when you mean what you say, literally.

2.2 Imagery

Imagery is one of the figures of speech to represent something through language of sense experience of humans. There are seven kinds of imagery, they are: visual (something seen in the mind’s eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), organic (internal sensation), and kinesthetic (movement and tension). Of all mentioned before, in the discussion of this essay, the writer will only talk about three kinds of imagery. According to Perrine, imagery maybe defined as“the representation through language of sense experience”(Perrine, 1956:54).

2.4. Metaphor

Metaphor is a kind of figurative languages that make comparison that is not made explicitly, it is not made clearly and directly and is not made with clues such as "like" or "as". According to Perrine, “in metaphor the comparison is implied – that is, the figurative term is substituted or identified with the literal term”. It is, instead, an indirect comparison between two things that are basically unlike. In metaphor, the figurative term is substituted

for or identified with the literal term, the thing being compared. This is done to make the meaning of a word in literary work more forceful.

2.4 Sociological Theory

Theory that will be used in this final paper is sociological theory. The final project uses this theory because the writer wants to analyze the situation of society when the poem is written. Literature is a reflection of society. Through literature, the author reveals the problems of life which is likely to be the author himself took part in it. Literary work is influenced by society and at the same time able to make an impact on society. Often people will determine the value of literary works that live in an age, while the author himself is a member of the public who tied a certain social status and cannot escape from the influence it receives from the environment at the same time he is raised and shaped. Wellek and Warren (1976) discusses the relationship of literature and society as the statement below :

Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. They are conventions and norm which could have arisen only in society. But, furthermore, literature 'represent' 'life'; and 'life' is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary 'imitation'. The poet himself is a member of society, possessed of a specific social status; he receives some degree of social recognition and reward; he addresses an audience, however hypothetical. (1976:94).

The author of literary works maybe influenced by the condition and situation of the society at the time they are writing the works. The literary works are representative of the society or life of the author.

3. Research Method

The research method used in this final project is library research, it is used to find data in order to develop a research. The data are collected from some books, journals, and articles. In this study, the analysis examines how the religious views of William Blake reflected in the poem, and also the influence of the community in the writing of the poem entitled "The Little Black Boy". This method is used in helping the writing of the research because most of the students use the library as a means to find source of a variety of books that are already confirmed its authenticity. The library is used as a means to find documents related to the study object so that in doing research can produce good research results and accurate.

In this final project, the writer will examine the poem by using a contextual approach. With this approach, the writer will examine the poem "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake on the intrinsic and extrinsic elements. In the intrinsic elements of this poem, the writer will examine the Denotation and Connotation, Imagery, and

Metaphor. The final project will examine how William Blake convey the meaning of every word in the poem. While in researching extrinsic elements in this poem, the writer uses sociological approach to discover how the religious views of William Blake that can be found in this poem, in addition, the writer will also examine how the influence of the situation of society with the writing of the poem. This final project use the Bible to know the meaning of the words that William Blake uses in the poem.

In writing this final project, the analysis is divided into two part. The first part of the analysis is about the intrinsic elements of the poem. The intrinsic elements that can be analyzed are Denotation and Connotation, Imagery, and Metaphor. The second part of the analysis in this final project is discussion of extrinsic elements. The writer limits the analysis only on religious view of William Blake that reflected in the poem.

4.1 Intrinsic Elements of the Poem “The Little Black Boy”

4.1.1 Denotation and Connotation

In the poem “The Little Black Boy” written by William Blake, there are many words using denotation and connotation to deliver a meaning. The poem’s lines will be shown in below :

My mother bore me in the **southern wild** (*line 1 stanza 1*)

The word *southern wild* in first line of first stanza, maybe, means living in or originating from the south. Nevertheless, in this poem, this word has a connotation meaning as Africa, because the body of the boy is black and the majority of African are black.

My mother taught me underneath **a tree** (*line 1 stanza 2*)

The word *a tree* in line 1 stanza 2, has a denotation meaning as a woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground. However, William Blake in this poem, describe “a tree” as the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Paradise, the Garden of Eden. It can be seen in the Bible that says “The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:9)

And, pointing to **the east**, began to say (*line 4 stanza 2*)

The word *the east* has a meaning as the direction towards the point of the horizon where the sun rises at the equinoxes, on the right-hand side of a person facing north. Nevertheless, in connotation, it has a meaning as the direction of the rising sun, and in Christianity, it is associated with the direction where heaven is; “Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed” (Genesis 2:8)

And these **black bodies** and this **sunburnt face** (*line 3 stanza 4*)

Black bodies and **sunburnt face** have a connotation meaning as a bride whose face is black and sunburnt and it is considered beautiful. It has a denotation meaning as a body and face with black skin.

Are but **a cloud**, and like a shady grove (*line 4 stanza 4*)

A **cloud** in denotation means a visible mass of condensed watery vapor floating in the atmosphere, typically high above the general level of the ground. However, in the connotation meaning, it means a soul. He is told that his black skin “*is but a cloud*” that will be dissipated when his soul meets God in heaven.

And round my **golden tent** like **lambs** rejoice (*line 4 stanza 5*)

Golden tent in this poem has a connotation meaning as the golden tent where God lives in heaven, house of God. In the Bible, God lives in heaven. The last word that uses a connotation meaning is **the lambs**. *The lambs* in denotation meaning means young sheep and in connotation, it has a meaning as innocence and humility of the boy. In another connotation meaning, it can be interpreted as Jesus because in the Bible, it is said that Jesus is the lamb of God. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

4.1.2 Imagery

a. Visual Imagery

In the second stanza of the poem “The Little Black Boy”, there is one kind of imagery. The visual imagery is in first and fourth line of the poem:

My mother taught me **underneath a tree** (*visual imagery*)

And, pointing to **the East**, began to say (*visual imagery*)

In stanza 4, there is one word using visual imagery :

And these **black bodies** and this **sunburnt face** (*visual imagery*)

The *black bodies* and *sunburnt face* can be seen by our eyes. The word *underneath a tree* and *the east* are used to show the condition of the situation that The Boy and his mother did. The word “black bodies” and “sunburnt face” can be interpreted if the little black boy is near the God because his mother said that in the Sun, there God lives.

b. Tactile Imagery

In the third line of the third stanza and the first line of sixth stanza, the writer considers that there is writing using a tactile imagery

She **took me on her lap** and **kissed me**. (*Tactile imagery*)

Thus did my mother say, and **kissed me** (*Tactile imagery*)

Both of it show the things that can be felt by the boy, the boy can feel when his mother took him to her lap, and then she kissed him.

c. Organic Imagery

In the second stanza, the writer considers the use of Organic imagery in the second line of the stanza

And **sitting down** before the heat of day (*Organic imagery*)

In fourth line of third stanza, the writer found :

Comfort in the morning, **joy** in the noonday. (*Organic imagery*)

The both word *Comfort* and *Joy* show the internal sensation of the boy.

4.1.3 Metaphor

In this poem, the writer finds that at least there is one line that uses Metaphor to make its meaning more forceful. It can be seen in first line of the second stanza of the poem :

Look on the rising **sun**: there **God** does live

The word “sun” and “God” they are actually the words that have different meaning; but the author of the poem wants to delivers us a meaning if in the Sun, there is God who lives. It can be interpreted if the Sun is a kingdom of God.

4.2 Extrinsic Elements of the Poem “The Little Black Boy”

There is a relationship between the society at that time with one of William Blake’s works entitled “The Little Black Boy”. Literature is a reflection of society. Through literature, the author reveals the problems of life which is likely to be the author himself taking part in it. Literary work is influenced by society and at the time the poem is written. After reading the poem, the writer concludes that the poem tells about a little boy who compares her black skin with white children. In writing the poem, the writer finds that if slavery is perfectly legal to do. The slaves is brought from Africa and they were sent to American Colonies. In the 18th century, the Anti-Slavery movement began in England. When William Blake writes this poem, there is a slave-trade in the Europe, especially British. The Europe brought slaves from South and West Africa and then settled them in England before send them to North America. There is no regulation about naturalization, so it is the best choice to send the slave to American Colonist to work at plantation and get a feedback of the result of their industries. When the poem is written, the campaign of Anti-Slavery was still young. It is excerpted from article entitled *Abolitionist Movement* from history.com staff that said “The goal of the abolitionist movement was the immediate emancipation of all slaves and the end of racial discrimination and segregation”. The goal of this movement is to show that there is no difference among the same human. The poem was written in 1789, and the abolitionist movement against Slave-

Trade was first established in 1787. The period of the movement with the writing of the poem is in the same time. According to *Dr. John Oldfield in British Anti-Slavery*, “The history of British anti-slavery can be divided into a number of distinct phases. The first of these stretched from 1787 to 1807 and was directed against the slave trade”.

My mother bore me in the southern wild,

And I am black, but O my soul is white!

Based on the above excerpt of the poem, it is concluded that the sentence has a meaning if the black people especially the little black boy are born in wild place (Africa) but the little boy said that his soul is as white as English child. It can be interpreted that William Blake knows that there is a Slave-Trade that brought slaves from Africa to England before sending them to North America.

White as an angel is the English child,

But I am black, as if bereaved of light.

It is said by the black boy if black skin due to sunburn which can be interpreted if the slaves have been working under the scorching sun. Then, he tells us if his skin color is just a cloud, as well as white children. The child said that he would serve or protect the white boy until he is able to bear the heat alone God has given them, that is, a slavery which could be interpreted to show that the whites make the blacks as slaves because he could not bear the burden of their own lives. It can be seen in the following excerpt of a poem:

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear

William Blake commonly makes social comment through his poems. In this poem itself, William Blake talks about racial issue and slavery. Although he talks about the two themes, the writer finds another issue related to another theme, that is, religious view. The writer finds that there is a big relation between the poem content with a religious view of William Blake. The words that Blake uses to write this poem are related to something that really happens or exists in Bible. The words that Blake uses to express his feeling about his religion.

In the Bible, Jesus is the lamb of God who is ultimately sacrificed. It is the same as the black boy who sacrifices his life as a child, it ought to be a happy life without any problems, by suffering from bearing the burden of white boy until he can bear it himself. In the poem, the black boy has a mother that teaches him the life under the tree. It can be Maria or Mary who is the mother of Jesus in his life. Through his mother's lesson, the black boy learns that he lives his life in the earth with black skin and he has to bear the suffering from being a black. The little black boy maybe represents the life of Black people at that time. There is no explanation about the little black boy is a slave, but if the writer looks at the situation at the time the work is written, it can be stated that there is no black people in England unless it is slaves. William Blake wants to criticize the situation when there is a Slave-

Trade in England, and it is the time when Abolitionist Movement was spread in British. The poem is a part of literature that is used to campaign anti-slavery. William Blake uses his knowledge of his religion to show that in living in this earth there is no difference between one race to another, there is no difference status in the God's eyes.

5. Conclusion

The Little Black Boy, a poem of William Blake tells the story of a boy who is black. This poem has seven stanzas, the first to the third stanza tells about the past of the child. Then, the fourth and fifth stanza, a poem tells about the state in which his mother teaches him life. The sixth to last tells the story of a future child. A black child tells the story of how he comes to know his own identity and to know God.

There are three kinds of figures of speech in the poem. The denotation and connotation can be found in the first, second, fourth, and fifth stanza. The imagery is in this poem. Three kinds of imagery are visual imagery, tactile imagery, and organic imagery. Beside two figures of speech, the writer also finds simile in the poem. The writer finds at least four sentences that contains simile to compare two things. The three figures of speech are the most suitable intrinsic elements that can be learnt.

After reading and researching the meaning as well as the elements in the poem, the author writes a conclusion if this poem has a purpose to satirize slavery in those days where white men used black people as object of slavery. This poem has meaning as well as the election of a very beautiful word. William Blake delivers his view of religion in this poem to criticize the Slave-Trade in British. It can be found in each line of its stanza that the poem gives us a meaning about God and Christian. William Blake gives us a meaning in this poem if a black skin or white skin are the same in God's eyes.

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