

Struggle over Racial Equality in Seth Grahame Smith's *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*
(Perjuangan atas Persamaan Ras dalam *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* karya Seth Grahame Smith)

Eko Suryo Nugroho, Dr. Eko Suwargono, M.Hum, Drs. Imam Basuki, M.Hum.
English Department, Faculty of Letters, Jember University
Jln. Kalimantan 37, Jember 68121
E-mail: kirengging@yahoo.co.id

Abstrak

Ditulis oleh Seth Grahame Smith, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* diterbitkan pertama kali pada tahun 2010. Novel ini menceritakan pengalaman Presiden Amerika yang ke-16 atas upayanya menghapus perbudakan. Penelitian ini terpusat pada penghapusan perbudakan yang terjadi di lingkungan Amerika. Oleh karena itu, peneliti membagi analisis berdasarkan oposisi biner yang ditemukan, yaitu rasisme dan anti rasisme. Karakter utama dalam novel ini menggambarkan kelompok sosialnya, khususnya yang tergabung dalam organisasi politik Northerners yang sadar tentang nasib para budak (ras kulit hitam) di Amerika. Ada tiga masalah yang akan dibahas di dalam penelitian ini. Masalah pertama adalah faktor-faktor yang mendasari adanya penghapusan perbudakan, yang kedua adalah upaya-upaya yang dilakukan untuk penghapusan perbudakan, dan yang ketiga adalah peran Abraham Lincoln sebagai tokoh utama dalam penghapusan perbudakan atas ras kulit hitam di Amerika. Selanjutnya, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah; untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor apakah yang mendasari adanya penghapusan perbudakan, untuk mengetahui upaya-upaya apa saja yang dilakukan dalam penghapusan perbudakan, dan untuk mengetahui peran Abraham Lincoln sebagai tokoh utama dalam penghapusan perbudakan ras kulit hitam di Amerika. Metode penelitian kualitatif digunakan di dalam penelitian ini. Data disajikan dalam penelitian ini dalam bentuk kutipan. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori strukturalisme genetis. Dengan menggunakan teori strukturalisme genetis yang digagas oleh Goldmann, peneliti menganalisis pandangan penulis dan sejarah tentang kondisi sosial di Amerika.

Kata Kunci: Rasisme, Anti Rasisme, Strukturalisme Genetis, Kondisi Sosial Amerika

Abstract

Written by Seth Grahame Smith, Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter was firstly published in 2010. It tells about the experiences of American 16th president on the slavery abolishment. This research focuses on the slavery abolishment that is happened in American society. Therefore, the researcher breaks the analysis based on the binary opposition between racism and anti racism as it is found in the novel. The main character represent his social group, especially those belonging to the political organization of Northerners that aware about the fate of the slaves (blacks) in America. There are three problems to discuss in this research. The first is the factors that make slavery abolishment happen, the second is the efforts of slavery abolishment, and the last is the role of Abraham Lincoln as the main figure to abolish the American black race from slavery. Further, the goals of this research are; to investigate the factors that made slavery abolishment, to investigate the efforts of slavery abolishment, and to analyze the role of Abraham Lincoln as the main figure of American blacks' slave abolishment. The qualitative research method, then, applies in this research. The data is written in this research as quotations. This research uses genetic structuralism theory. By using the theory of genetic structuralism proposed by Goldmann, the researcher analyses the worldview of the writer and American historical social condition.

Keywords: Racism, Anti Racism, Genetic Structuralism, American Social Condition

Introduction

Racism was happening in America since 1600s. The Americans are familiar with the system of slavery. Slavery is the condition in which one person is owned as property by another and is under the owner's control, especially in involuntary servitude. Since the cotton industry became large in the South America, it made the development of slavery in America also happened. At the same time, the development of textile factory also happened during the industrial revolution. That condition made the demand of raw cotton rapidly increased. As the result, the need of slave labor to work in the cotton company was highly increased. On the other case, the sugar cane fields also required a lot of labors. It also played a role to the spread of slavery in the South. Black people in America frequently got a bad treatment. They were not only forced into slavery, but also they did not get the rights to vote in the general election.

According to that fact, This research is conducted to answer certain problems; 1. What are the factors that make slavery abolishment happen? 2. How are the efforts of slavery abolishment portrayed in the novel? 3. How is the role of Abraham Lincoln as the main figure to abolish the American black race from slavery?

Therefore, this research is designed to reach certain goals; to investigate the factors that influence the blacks become slaves for the white race portrayed in the novel. Therefore, the efforts to abolish the slaves are also elaborated. In the last, the role of Abraham Lincoln as the central figure for the blacks' freedom is explained.

Research Methodology

This research belongs to qualitative research. Gray (2004: 320) states that "qualitative research method can take many forms and results from the use of data gathering instruments such as observations, interviews, questionnaires and document analysis". In this research, the researcher wants to interpret and analyze the data of *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*'s structure for knowing world view on racism and anti racism.

According to Blaxter *et al* (2006:154) "documents is a method in collecting data by using written materials as a basis for the research". There are two kinds of data which are applied in this research; they are primary and secondary data.

The primary and secondary data will be processed systematically. The first is sorting the fact and information about racism found in the novel. Those facts and information about racism, then, will be the primary data used in this study. The analysis of binary opposition between racism and anti racism will be processed by using the theory of genetic structuralism proposed by Lucien Goldmann. The books, journals, articles, and internet resources are also used as the secondary data that are written as quotations to strengthen and support the analysis.

Firstly, all the data that have been collected will be sorted into four categories of genetic structuralism such as human fact, transindividual subject, significant structure, and world view. After collecting the data, the researcher will discuss about the struggle over racial equality that is happened in the novel, and then it will be analyzed by using the theory of Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldmann (1975).

Referring to Damono (2009:42), genetic structuralism is the same as historical structuralism. He says that "a literary work should be analyzed from the historical perspective." He (2009:42) also states that "from the socio-literature point of view, genetic structuralism has an important meaning. It places the literary work as the basic data of the research. It looks the genetic structuralism as a structured meaning that cannot be separated each other". According to Lucien Goldmann (1975 cited in Faruk 2012:159), genetic structuralism is a combination of Structuralism and Marxism. This means that all of human activities do not only have a structure, but also have a meaning.

Result

The history of the United States of America Shows that black Americans are the minority group in America at that time and they belong to slaves. As slaves, they were threatened badly. They got several punishments when they did any mistakes.

Through *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, Seth Grahame Smith explains white domination upon black people manifested in discrimination and racial prejudice. White domination destroy the aspects of life such social and political aspects between black and white people.

The history of the United States of America also shows that the whites do violence against the blacks, for example beatings and whipping. These are the response of the white if the blacks did not obey their rules. Seth Grahame Smith represented the vampires in his novel as the whites that have slaves or slave owner.

He also writes that the blacks wanted freedom from white domination. The blacks also desire good employment, equality in politic opportunity, law protection and in other social life.

Discussion

1. The Factors of the Abolishment of Slavery

There are two factors such as politic and social as the basic reasons of the slave abolishment actions done by Abraham Lincoln and his friends.

A. Politic

Since he yet born, Abe knows that black people in America have been treated inhumanely. This is according to his statement in his journal as follow.

"It's worth noting that killing a slave was not considered murder, no matter the circumstances. It was

merely "destruction of property."
(Smith, 2010 : 22)

From the quotation above, it can be seen how the blacks got a bad treatment from the whites. The whites put the blacks are just a kind of property owned by the whites. In the era of slavery, the white slave-owners created "slave codes" regulating the relationship between slaves and their masters. These codes or laws were aimed at (1) preventing their slaves from escaping, (2) setting up strict rules for slaves from escaping, (3) setting up strict rules for slaves behavior in order not to revolt against their masters, (4) forbidding slaves to assemble, leave the plantation or own weapons, (5) forbidding slaves to learn to read or write. (Fatchul Mu'in: 2010)

B. Social

When Abe at 5 years old, this is the first time to him to has a sympathetic feeling to the blacks. He saw a group of black people taken by whites for an auction. This condition will shows in the following quotation.

"I recall seeing a horse cart pass, filled with Negroes. There were several. All women, and of varying age. They were... shackled at the wrist and chained together on the cart bed, without so much as a handful of loose hay to comfort the bumps of the road, or a blanket to relieve them from the winter air. The drivers, naturally, sat on the cushioned bench in front, each of them wrapped in wool. My eyes met those of the youngest Negro girl, who was close in age to myself. Perhaps five or six. I admit that I could not look at her more than a moment before turning away - such was the sorrow of her countenance."
(Smith, 2010 : 27)

The slaves were chained together and brought to the auction place for sale. In the same time, Abe realize his humanity has emerged. Moreover, he saw a Negro girl in the same age with him among them. This condition continues until he becomes adult.

Abe hates slavery not only because children get enslaved, but also it seems super hypocritical for a country that says it is based on equality to really be based on inequality. When the Declaration of Independence was written "all men are created equal". The term "men" referred only to those who were able to be land owners which, at that time, meant only white men. The term excluded anyone of any color as well as women. It means that basically Thomas Jefferson was racist hypocrites.

In his journal, Abe writes his frustration after a debate in Illinois with Senator A. Douglas. Because his inability to get at the real issue.

"More signs in the crowd today.
"Negro Equality Is Immoral!"
"America for Whites!" I look out at these crowds... at these fools. These fools who haven't the slightest idea how to live the morals they espouse. These fools who proclaim themselves men of God, yet show not the slightest reverence to His word. Christians preaching slavery! Slaveholders preaching morality! Is it any different from a drunkard preaching temperance? (Smith, 2010: 234)

Abe explained here that slavery in America is based on the idea of racial inequality. Ancient Roman slavery, for example, is not based on race and usually not permanent. The point is that even if Abe weren't an abolitionist, he's a smart guy, and can easily see the hypocrisy inherent in this racist form of slavery.

2. The efforts of the abolishment of slavery

A. Politic

Black people were the weakest in the United States at that time, because they were the slaves, while the vampire were looking for weak people and the slaves is the right target for the vampire to survive. So, Abe decided to fight through political lines in order to become a council member.

"I am young, and unknown to many of you. I was born, and have ever remained, in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the county; and if elected, they will have conferred a favor upon me for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined." (Smith, 2010 : 143)

From the quotation above, it shows that Abe wants to take a new path, the political path. He decides and he is really ambitious to be a candidate of Illinois State Legislature because he recognized injustice in America.

On August 3rd, 1846, Abe was elected to the United States House of Representatives. In December of 1847, well

over a year after his election, Abe arrived in Washington with his family for the beginning of his term.

“[Henry’s] letters arrive monthly. He begs I reconsider. Insists that it is crucial I take up my errands again. I answer each one with the same simple truths: that I will not risk leaving my wife a widow, or my children fatherless. If I am truly meant to free men from tyranny, I tell him, then I must do so in the spirit of that old adage concerning the pen and the sword. My sword has done its part. My pen must take me the rest of the way.” (Smith, 2010 : 196)

Abe was afraid to leave his wife and children if he fought against the vampire as a young man. He has been trained to become a good speaker and writer. Therefore, he preferred to fight on the desk then using the martyr (Abe’s weapon) and consider politics is the right path to finish the war at that time. Washington DC got an attack on 11 of July 1864 and Abe required hiding in the fort. According to this fact, I assume that by using a pen (through politics’ way), could change people’s thought without any violence as if using sword.

For many years, Abe killed vampires by using a gun. However, the number of vampire is still high. Further, Lincoln thought to lay down arms and fight by using his pen. In 1834 Abe won the election to the state legislature. When he became a council member, he was morally opposed to slavery and expected to see it ended over time until he became the president of United States. 22nd, 1862 Abe convened his Cabinet.

“Gentlemen,” I began, “we have spoken a great deal about the true nature of this war; about our true enemy. We have argued—always in the spirit of friendship—over the wisest way to meet such an enemy, and bemoaned his power to strike fear into the hearts of our men. I daresay that we have even come to share in that fear ourselves. This will not do.

“Gentlemen... let our enemy fear us.“Let us deny him the laborers who tend the farms of his living allies; who build his garrisons and carry his gunpowder. Let us deny him the poor wretches who are themselves grown as crops to be consumed by darkness. Now, gentlemen, let us starve the devils into defeat by declaring every slave in the South free.” (Smith, 2010 : 295)

From the quotation above we can see Abe’s effort as the president or the head of the government in America. He

leads his cabinet to unite and abolish slavery in the South. He said that as the American people, they have shared the same fear. Fear of Vampire and the civil war. He tried to burn the spirit of his cabinet at that time. He declares to end the civil war and abolish slavery in the south.

B. Social

When he was young, Abe heard a story from his father that his grandfather and his mother died of a vampire killed. Automatically, it makes Abe desired to kill all the vampires that exist in America. This is the start for Abe’s effort to abolish slavery in America.

“I hereby resolve to kill every vampire in America. (Smith, 2010:53)”.

Moreover, this condition drives Abe to have desire to kill the vampires in order to set the black free from oppression, therefore it will make the black has an equal right as well as the white as a human. Vampire here means white people that become slave masters. Abe really wants to abolish slavery. Written by Anonymous in (www.asnwer.yahoo.com) that this is caused by some reasons; people are regarded to be free, despite the color of the skin, gender, or sexual preference. Further, as human we all are equal, by making someone to be a slave is inhumane; it hurts humanity and seizes someone’s human right. Moreover, it hurts the nations.

3. The Role of Abraham Lincoln as the Main figure to abolish the American Black Race from Slavery

Abraham Lincoln (February 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865) was the 16th President of the United States, serving from March 1861 until his assassination in April 1865. Lincoln led the United States through its Civil War. It is bloodiest war and its greatest and political crisis. He preserved the Union abolished slavery, strengthened the federal government, and modernized the economy.

In the novel Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, as already depicted in 4.1 and 4.2 and also this is a novel contains a journal of Abraham Lincoln during his life that means this story is told by the third person. This is the reason why Abe role as the main figure to abolish the black race from slavery.

In the context of sociology of literature, particularly genetic structuralism, what was described in Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter is an expression of the author’s world view in response to the historical social conditions that occur in the society. In this case Abraham Lincoln represented his social group, especially those belonging to the political organization of Northerners that aware about the fate of the slaves (blacks) in America.

In the real life, Lincoln also do the same effort to abolish slavery by doing some ways, such as delivering message that human has equal status and rejecting the slavery through his speech when he was the president of America.

Conclusion

The history of the United States of America Shows that Americans' black people are the minority group in America that time. They are becoming slaves at that time. As slaves, they were threatened badly. They got several punishments when they did any mistakes. In every aspect of life, they were dominated by the whites. That condition Continued until the appearance of Seth Grahame Smith's Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter.

Through *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, Seth Grahame Smith explains white domination upon black people manifested in discrimination and racial prejudice. White domination destroy the aspects of life such social and political aspects between black and white people. As a result, white domination brings about in all aspects of life. If there is still injustice toward black people, democracy in America will not completely developed because democracy is based on equal rights in all aspects of life.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to my supervisors Dr. Eko Suwargono, M.Hum. as my first supervisor and Drs. Imam Basuki, M.Hum as my second supervisor, I do thank you for give me valuable assistance to finish this study.

Bibliography

- Blaxter, et al. 1996. *How to Research*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Damono, Sapardi Djoko. 2009. *Sosiologi Sastra*. Ciputat: Egitum
- Faruk. 2012. *Metode Penelitian Sastra Sebuah Penjelajahan Awal*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar.
- Finkelman, Paul. 2012. (Online), (http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5386&context=faculty_scholarship), Accessed on July 10th, 2015.
- Goldmann, Lucien. 1975. *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*. Great Britain: Tavistock Publications Limited
- Gray, D. E. 2004. *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: Sage Publication.
- Grahame-Smith, Seth. 2010. *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*. New York: Grand Central Publishing
- www. asnwer.yahoo.com. Accessed on 10th April 2015