

The Survival of Ingalls Family in Social Changes of America in the Era of 1882 in Laura Ingalls
Wilder's *Little Town in the Prairie*

(Pertahanan Hidup Keluarga Ingalls dalam Perubahan Sosial yang Terjadi di Amerika Sekitar Tahun
1882 di dalam Novel *Little Town in the Prairie* Karya Laura Ingalls Wilder)

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Abstrak

Little Town in the Prairie adalah novel karya Laura Ingalls Wilder yang menceritakan petualangan keluarga Ingalls dalam menghadapi perubahan sosial di Amerika yang terjadi sebagai dampak dari Revolusi Industri yang terjadi di akhir abad sembilan belas. Revolusi Industri ditandai dengan adanya kemajuan teknologi dan ilmu pengetahuan yang telah merubah kehidupan masyarakat Amerika. Perubahan-perubahan sosial yang terjadi meliputi perubahan-perubahan dalam perkembangan teknologi, pertumbuhan ekonomi, serta perilaku sosial dan hubungan sosial masyarakat. Perubahan-perubahan ini mendorong banyak orang untuk berjuang menciptakan kehidupan yang lebih baik. Keluarga Ingalls berusaha keras untuk bertahan hidup melewati perubahan-perubahan sosial yang menimbulkan banyak permasalahan dan kesulitan-kesulitan dalam mewujudkan kehidupan yang lebih baik dengan menggunakan kemampuan dan potensinya dengan bekerja atau melakukan aktivitas-aktivitas lainnya. Novel ini merupakan gambaran kehidupan masa kecil penulis saat berusia lima belas tahun pada sekitar tahun 1882. Novel ini mencerminkan kondisi nyata kehidupan masyarakat Amerika di masa lalu. Skripsi ini menggunakan teori Janet Wolff tentang kreativitas manusia untuk menjelaskan kemampuan seseorang untuk melakukan dan mengubah sesuatu. Peristiwa perubahan sosial dapat mempengaruhi cara berpikir berjuta-juta orang untuk memperbaiki kehidupan mereka. Pertahanan hidup keluarga Ingalls pada saat itu dibutuhkan untuk menumbuhkan semangat dalam mengubah dan memperbaiki kehidupan mereka menjadi lebih baik.

Kata Kunci: Perubahan Sosial, Pertahanan Hidup Keluarga Ingalls

Abstract

Little Town in the Prairie is Laura Ingalls Wilder's novel which tells a story about the experiences of Ingalls family in facing social change of America occurred as the impact of the Industrial Revolution in the late of nineteenth century. Industrial Revolution is marked by the advancement of technology and science which has changed the life of American people. The social changes include changes in technological development, economic growth, social action and social relation. This changes encourage many people struggle to make a better life. Ingalls family tries hard to survive in going through social changes that emerge many problems and difficulties in creating a better life by using the ability and potensial in works or other activities. The novel is the reflection of the author's childhood in her fifth in the era of 1882. The novel portrays the real condition of American life in the past. This thesis uses Janet Wolff's theory of human creativity to explain the ability of a certain person to do anything to change something. The phenomenon of social change is able to influence the way of thinking of millions of people to improve their life. The survival of Ingalls family at that time is needed to keep up the spirit in changing and improving the family's life in a better condition.

Key words: Social Change, The Survival of Ingalls Family

Introduction

Published in 1941, *Little Town in the Prairie* is the seventh of the eight Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels which is focused on an American family's life, named Ingalls family. Lived in the era of 1882, Wilder is an

American author who experienced the era of social changes as the impact of Industrial Revolution in the United States of America in her fifth. Industrial Revolution is marked by technological and educational advance that changes social life. Wilder knows that

she has many wonderful memories of living with her family in Dakota Territory. Then, Rose, Wilder's daughter encourages her to write her books. Certainly, *Little Town in the Prairie* novel is the reflection of the author's life and the era surrounding her that influenced the creation of the novel. It means this literary work is the reflection of certain time and society, which occurs as the result of social phenomena happened in the real life.

Taken place in the summer of 1881, *Little Town in the Prairie* begins with the experiences of Ingalls family consists of Pa, Ma, Mary, Laura, Carry and Grace in the Dakota prairie. Pa has a plan to send Mary, Laura elder's sister, to the college for the blind in Vinton, Iowa for seven years. Mary wants to be a schoolteacher but she can never teach at school. By studying at the college, she will learn anything such as playing the organ, reading Braille books. Pa works a part time job as a carpenter in town but his wages are not enough to send Mary to the college and the family's crops of oat and corn are also destroyed by some blackbird, therefore, he decides to sell one of his cows to pay Mary's tuition fee. Laura wants to help her Pa to keep Mary there until she finishes the full seven years' college. Although she hates to work but she also tries to take a part time job like her Pa, as a hand sewer in the city during summer. Then, she is able to help Ma to buy some Mary's necessities. She continues to force herself to study hard to get a teaching certificate and hopes to be a schoolteacher. Ingalls family cares of education. Pa and Ma support their daughters to get a proper education and achieve their dreams.

In the wintertime, Ingalls family cannot stay in the claim shanty and has to move to the city. The shanty is not weatherproof and will not protect them for the unpredictable hard winter. They only hope that the coming winter will not as hard as the previous one. In the city, Laura and Carry attend to school. During schooldays, they have to face a lot of problems made by their a new teacher and a new girl friend. However, Laura keeps her mind that she must study hard to get her own teaching certificate, then she is able to take a teaching position.

Pa, Ma and Laura hope that Mary will be a skilled person by studying in a school for the blind, no matter how they have to earn much money to keep her there. By getting a teacher certificate and being a schoolteacher, Laura will earn enough money to help Mary's education. The members of Ingalls family are in mutual understanding to reach a better life. They support each other in work and in education.

Wilder experienced the spirit of American dream that men and women have the same opportunities in

making a better life (in Basuki, 2011:7). The real story of Wilder's family life in the era of 1882 as expressed in the novel shows the depiction of American people in pursuing happiness. In the Industrial Revolution era, millions of people hoped to get chances to improve their life. The experiences of Ingalls family is the reflection of the real Wilder's family life in the novel are described in an endless spirit in making a better life. Getting a job, making attention in education and social relation are the main ways in improving family life better for survival in the era of social changes. Ingalls family tries to go through the hardships in their daily living. Through it all, they struggle and persevere together as a family. As stated by Janet Wolff in her book, *The Social Production of Art* that "People have ability and potential to act, consciously and with the use of abstract thought and imagination, to change nature and their surroundings" (Wolff, 1981:14). This Janet Wolff's theory of human creativity is used in this thesis to explain and comprehend the ability of a certain person to do anything to change something using the way of thinking. The phenomenon of social change is able to influence the way of thinking of millions of people to improve their life. The human creativity theory will help the understanding about how social action appeared as the expression of a certain person toward something. The survival of Ingalls family at that time is needed to keep the spirit up in improving family life better. Through this novel, Wilder shows how Ingalls family survived facing social changes of America that affected the life of American families in the era of 1882 in reaching their dream to make a better life.

As the explanation mentioned above, the two main problems of this thesis are formulated as the following:

1. What social changes of America occurred in the era of 1882 as reflected in *Little Town in the Prairie*?
2. How are Ingalls family' survival in social changes of America in the era of 1882 as described in *Little Town in the Prairie*?

Research Methodology

Qualitative research is used as a type of this research which deals with library research that has many sources in identifying several historical events in the novel. Library research is used to complete some information from several books or other written sources related to the content of the novel and the topic of this thesis. It is to collect the description of the social changes of America in the era of 1882 in accordance with the novel of *Little Town in the Prairie*.

The novel of *Little Town in the Prairie*, as source of this research, contains some important facts and information about social changes of America and the survival of Ingalls family at that time through several events in the novel, such as narration, character's conversations or setting. The secondary data are taken to support the analysis and answer the problems concerning with the discussion that are collected from many sources such as books, internet websites related to the novel and also the information and facts about social changes and Ingalls family' survival.

Little Town in the Prairie and all resources used in this thesis are collected to find the complete data for this research and analyze the data in order to understand the novel better in describing the social condition of American society in the era of 1882, and the existence of social changes during that era. Then, the human creativity's theory of Janet Wolff in her book, *The Social Production of Art* is applied to analyze people's way of thinking in using their ability and potential to do and to change something which is influenced by the phenomena of social changes as reflected in *Little Town in the Prairie* novel.

This thesis uses deductive method as the method for analyzing the data. Deductive method is taken from general one to the specific one. In this research, the writer begins with the analysis of the novel related to the issue of American social changes and the fact that actually happened in America in the era of 1882. Then, the writer analyzes the survival of Ingalls family of the novel in American social changes during that era which uses Wolff's theory. It can be proven that *Little Town in the Prairie* represented the reality of American social changes in the era of 1882.

Result

The result finds that *Little Town in the Prairie* is the reflection of the American social condition in the era of Industrial Revolution, especially in 1882. The experiences of Ingalls family is the portrait of the real life of American who competed and survived to create a better life in achieving the dream. The belief that life should be better for everyone conducts Ingalls family to be free, skilled and educated people and to struggle in facing any problems, challenges and also difficulties of social changes. Laura Ingalls Wilder is successful in expressing this American spirit through the struggle of Ingalls family in pursuing happiness as reflected in *Little Town in the Prairie* novel.

Discussion

Goldmann states that "Human behavior is always a response to the problems with which the environment faces man, and this response points towards

significance." (in Elizabeth and Burns, 1973:116). *Little Town in the Prairie* novel is Laura Ingalls Wilder's reaction and expression to the social facts of America in the era of 1882. The novel portrays the real American social condition existed in the past through such events experienced by the characters. In the history, America has become a greater industrial country since the late of nineteenth century after the Civil War especially in the era of the Gilded Age. It was the era of reconstruction and economic growth as the result of Industrial Revolution. It emerged many social changes especially in various actions of American people facing their new condition. Wilder shows some phenomena of the social changes specifically in the era of 1882. In the novel, Wilder does not tell about the term of the Gilded Age in a specific explanation but her novel portrays the real condition of American society in the era of 1882.

Alden describes that the industrialization influences many American industrial productions, technological inventions and commerce. This development of the industrialization is used to improve transportation, supporting manufacturing industry, and developing American agricultural products. It, of course, influences the increase of national income, includes personal income, operating income, and other income (Alden, 1963:507).

Hagen states that "Income in society may rise because of the spread of the use of tools and machines even the absence of technological progress" (Hagen, 1962:4). Hagen means that the development and advancement of technology and science stimulate many productions of human needs and goods. Wilder shows technological advance in the era of 1882 that is depicted in the novel by many new inventions, such as a plow that supported agricultural and commercial activities to make easier in working .

"Pa had a new plow, a breaking plow. It was wonderful for breaking the prairie sod. It had a sharp-edged wheel, called a rolling coulter that ran rolling and cutting through the sod ahead of the plowshare..."(Wilder, 1941:8-9).

Through the quotation above, it is clear that Pa is the representation of American villager who lived in the era of technological advance that supported agricultural activities. His family was all so happy about that new plow because Pa would not too tired to work in the garden and their horse also did not spend a whole day's work to plow up the ground.

A wave of new immigrants also came from Europe, such as Italian, Greek, Jews, moved to the United States to get some opportunities to change their life. It was in line with technological advance, which

influences economic growth. Many vacancies and opportunities were available in the United States of America, especially in the city. They tried to move to industrial area, which contributes many chances in getting jobs and earning money. Certainly, the city became a very important destination for many strangers in making a better life (Alden, 1963:507). Wilder also depicts those conditions in the novel.

“People were coming from the East now, to settle all over the prairie. They were building new claim shanties to the east and to the south, and west beyond Big Slough. Every few days a wagon went by, driven by strangers going across the neck of the slough and northward to town, and coming back.”(Wilder, 1941:8).

Those words describe the process of immigration and urbanization as the way to pursue happiness. It shows the social change of America as the impact of industrialization. Millions of people want to get a better life and they have to move to the right place, such as the city as the central of industrial and commercial activities. Some of them leave their farm to get good opportunities in the city. As many factories are opened in the cities to produce any kinds of new invention, for instance: manufactured goods, transportation facilities, agricultural products. The factories will of course need a lot of employees to handle some kinds of jobs which also support the city life. Automatically, the new arrivals increase the population of the city (Harlow, 1961:453). Wilder also describes a new condition of the city in the novel. The city as the central of industry area becomes an important destination for million of new strangers to stay and to earn money.

“Pa said that the new town was growing fast. New settlers were crowding in, hurrying to put up buildings to shelter them. One evening Pa and Ma walked to town to help organize a church, and soon a foundation was laid for a church building. There were not carpenters enough to do all the building that was wanted, so Pa got carpenter work to do.”(Wilder, 1941:27).

The rapid increase of city’s population shows the change in American life. American people know the right place for them in improving family life better by moving to the city. Although, the city grows rapidly and being so crowded, people have to face this condition to survive there. As the reason, these changes affect Ingalls family’s life as the portrait of the life of American society to survive through it all. It is clear that the real condition of America in the era of 1882 is vividly described in the novel of *Little Town in the Prairie*.

Getting a job is evident expressed in *Little Town in the Prairie*, which shows the struggle of American people to earn much money. This struggle is motivated by the desire to create a better life and survive in going through the difficulties and any challenges in the era of social changes. The novel reflects that American families can bring it into reality using their opportunities in working. Working will make them to be a creative person because they will learn something new and they will use their ability to do it. Then, by using their way of thinking, they hopefully can handle such a job and change their condition better than before. That is one of very significant purposes in American life in going through the era of social changes caused by Industrial Revolution. Therefore, the sense of getting job agrees with the Wolff’s explanation about human creativity that people act appropriately with their abilities and opportunities using conscious thinking to change something (Wolff, 1981:14).

Wilder shows the illustration of American people’s attention in working through Pa, Laura and other characters in the novel. As there are not carpenters enough to do all the new building in the city, Pa takes a job as a carpenter (Wilder, 1941:27). Laura also takes a part time job as a hand sewer to earn much money to help sending Mary to the college for the blind in Vinton, Iowa. In fact, she does not want to work in the city. She feels that the city is so crowded with many new buildings belong to new strangers. However, she tries hard to ignore her fears about the city’s life and keeps her mind to focus in work. The family cares of Mary, the first daughter of Ingalls family. Mary was blind because she got fever when she was a little girl. She wants to be a schoolteacher, but she cannot. Instead of that, she always tries hard to study and does not care of her blindness. Laura thinks that she has to help her Pa to keep Mary in college until she will pass the full seven years’ college. There are many kinds of job in the city but it is difficult for a girl like Laura to get one, appropriate with her ability.

““A job? For a girl? In town?” Ma said.

“Why, what kind of a job” Then quickly she said, “No, Charles, I won’t have Laura working out in a hotel among all kinds of strangers.”

“Who said such a thing?” Pa demanded. “No girl of ours’ll do that, not while I’m alive and kicking.””(Wilder, 1941:1-2).

Laura has to study hard at school so that she can earn a teacher's certificate in her sixth and take a job as a schoolteacher to help Mary's education. The struggle of Pa and Laura is related to Wolff’s theory about human creativity (Wolff, 1981:14). Laura's desire in

getting a job for helping her family without care of her fears of living in the city, automatically, will bring her family to reach out for a better condition. The importance of education at that time affects the family to care of education. Pa and Ma support their children to study hard getting a better education, with a purpose, they can increase their quality of life and take a place for them in society, especially in works.

Education is an important aspect that supports economic growth of the country, especially in the era of 1882. The advancement of science was a major issue that influenced the social changes of America at that time. The role of education for human being life is significant to clutched attainment in making a better life. The development of the country is affected by the quality of life of the society. The increase of population and facilities of the city is also influenced by the existence of creative and skilled person with many new ideas. Without education, someone has no certain quality and he just has little chances to get place for him in works, moreover in the era of social changes. Education makes people learn how to produce things. An educated person can be a creative person because he has more knowledge and skill to make innovation. Certainly, he has many ideas to develop science, then, stimulated the creation of such things. It means that education can make human life more modern.

Wilder shows those problems clearly through the novel. In the era of 1882, some of strangers were in low quality because they did not have any special skill. Automatically, they would get any difficulties to get chances in taking such kind of job. Ingalls family who lived in the era of industrialization had to keep their spirit and togetherness since they faced many hardships in facing social changes at that time. Ingalls family cares of education. Education has important roles in their life. As it is shown in the text below,

“Often while Laura worked in the garden, she thought of Mary’s going to college. It was nearly two years since they had heard there was a college for the blind in Iowa. Every day they had thought of that, and every night they prayed that Mary might go. The sorest grief in Mary’s blindness was that it hindered her studying. She liked so much to read and learn, and she had always wanted to be a schoolteacher. Now she could never teach school. Laura did not want to, but now she must; she had to be able to teach school as soon as she grew old enough, to earn money for Mary’s college education.”(Wilder, 1941:28).

Pa and Ma always support Mary, Laura and Carrie to be good students, therefore, they can easily realize

their dreams. Laura and Carrie always optimize that they can go through the difficulties during the schooldays. They keep their mind enjoying schooldays. By studying hard and being good students at school, it can support them to achieve her dream comes into being in changing the family life better. Those reflect the struggles and the spirits of American children in getting education as represented by Laura, Carrie and Marry that stimulate the development of human skill and ability. Being a skilled and educated person will create many chances to do anything or to make something.

In line with the importance of getting a job and education as the way to survive in going through a lot challenges in the era of social changes, social relation in a certain community is a very significant aspect to support the fluency of communication and togetherness for each other. In fact, human being needs mutual understanding and mutual assistance in social relation. There will be a good relationship in a society if everyone desires to create good interactions. Without the presence of interactions, someone, of course, has a little chances to make place for him in society. He will live in a desolate condition. Moreover, in the era of industrialization, people have to face many social changes. They have to choose the way of their life in going through many challenges which will influence their future. Surely, people will live peacefully by creating a good relationship and a good interaction.

Wilder shows the life of Ingalls family in the novel to have time to experience a saturation when they have to face the hard and unpredictable winter in the city. In the wintertime, the activities of people is decreasing. The blizzard obstructs their activities in work, school and social interaction.

The existence of new activities during wintertime in the city will stimulate the enthusiasm of the people in going through the saturations and difficulties during wintertime. The new activities also influence the sense of coalescence and confraternity of people. Pa understands about the situation and the condition of the city every winter. Pa and all of the head of the family in the city take the initiatives to make a social organization and its members. They have met to discuss such changes. The purpose of the meeting is to organize a literary society. The member of organization will arrange several events, such as drama, literary exhibition (Wilder, 1941:214). As it is showed by Wilder through these sentences below,

“Living in town was so exciting that fall that Pa said there was no need of Literaries. There was church every Sunday, prayer meeting every Wednesday night. The Ladies’ Aid

planned two sociables, and there was talk of a Christmas tree. Laura hoped there would be one, for Grace had never seen a Christmas tree. In November, there was to be a week of revival meetings at the church, and Mr. Owen, with the school board's approval, was planning a School Exhibition."

(Wilder, 1941:273)

Those social activities are very important to support social relation. Pa's contribution in making some ideas for the association related to the concept of human creativity that people use their thought in doing anything to change something (Wolff, 1981:14). Many challenges and several difficulties during wintertime do not affect them to live happily. They do not give up and try to join all the organization's programs (Wolff, 1981:14). The ideas of daily activities of city's people change the situation of the city being a comfortable place to live during wintertime. The comfortable condition of the city will influence them to survive and keep struggle in realizing their dream and improving their family's life.

Conclusion

The history of American life in the era of 1882 is vividly reflected in *Little Town in the Prairie* novel. The struggle of American people in facing the phenomena of social changes as the impact of Industrial Revolution is shown clearly in this literary work. The novel describes the society, which is dominated by immigrants and American villagers. The dream of millions of strangers in improving life better by moving to the right place, especially in the city, is shown by the struggle in getting such jobs and in going through any problems occurred at that time. It means that, in the era of social changes, people try to survive facing any challenges. The survival is related to sense of freedom for everyone to do anything and equality for men and women in taking place for themselves in society.

The novel portrays the real American social condition in the era of 1882 is shown by the experiences of the Ingalls family. The member of Ingalls family, Pa, Ma, Marry, Laura, Carrie and Grace are the representation of the American people who experienced the process of social changes as the impact of the advancement of technology and science during industrialization, such as the economic growth, the process of immigration and urbanization, and the development of city life. Pa and Laura reflect the people who have the spirit in getting a job to improve the family's condition. Marry, Laura, and Carrie reflect the attention of the American children in education. The ideas of daily social activities in the

city during unpredictable hard winter reflect the togetherness and the harmony of the American families to change the situation of the city being a comfortable place to live. The comfortable condition of the city will influence them to keep struggle in realizing their dream and improving their family's life.

Getting a job, getting education and making social relationship, actually, bring Ingalls family to be a solid family to survive in going through the difficulties in the era of social changes. As the result, they are successful in realizing their aims. By working in the city and the land, Pa can fulfill the family's needs, although, sometimes he has to face failed harvest. Pa is able to send Mary to go to the college for the blind. Laura gets a part time job, earns enough money, and helps her Ma to buy some Mary's necessities. She also always attends to school with Carrie and tries to study hard to be a good student to realize her to be a schoolteacher for a better future. As the result, she gets a teacher certificate and teaches. She can help her parents to keep Mary there until she finishes the full seven years' college.

The sociological approach to literature is based on finding and proofing depiction of the real condition of certain people in certain era in literature. Laura Ingalls Wilder is successful in expressing her idea about American social changes occurred in the era of 1882 that emerges various actions and many challenges of people through *Little Town in the Prairie* novel. The literary work reflects the real condition of American society in the era of 1882. The Ingalls family is the reflection of American people who lived and existed in the era of in 1882. Regarding the era of 1882, the indication of Americans who competed and survived in the era of social changes was shown clearly through the literary work. American people in the era of 1882 had changed the way of thinking and the way of life for a better future, which led them into free, skilled and educated people. Those stimulate American people in the era of 1882 to survive facing its social changes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people who have supported me in writing and completing this thesis: Dr. Hairus Salikin, M.Ed., as the Dean of Faculty of Letters; Dra. Supiastutik, M.Pd., as the Head of English Department.

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