

Nature vs Enlightenment: Romanticism Analysis of William Wordsworth Poem “The World Is Too Much with Us”

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ABSTRACT

Romanticism is not just a term that marks a certain period in western European society, it is also reflected in the works of literature in the 18th century and emerged as a movement, understanding, value, thought, freedom, morals, nature, art and literature. Thus, the aim of this research is to find how nature as the one of romanticism value reflected in William Wordsworth’s poem “The World is Too Much with Us”. In this research, the writer used a qualitative approach in collecting data and descriptive method in analyzing the data. The aim of this method is to describe the state of a situation in a systematic and factual manner. This makes it easier to understand the meaning of dictions, idioms and topics Finally, the William Wordsworth’s “*The World is Too Much with Us*” shows us how the element of nature found inside the poem. It is the author's way of contrasting the ideas of Romanticism over the materialistic society which is the product of the Enlightenment.

Keywords: *enlightenment; literature; nature; poem; romanticism; the world is too much with us; william wordsworth.*

INTRODUCTION

In the history of western Europe, we know certain periods or eras, such as the ancient European period to modern Europe. This period appears and disappears with various complex processes recorded in history. So that all the processes of civilization are not only felt by the European community, even the implications for the entire world. This also shows the world how the efforts of the western European community in shaping and achieving their civilization.

Call it *Romanticism* and *Enlightenment* are two periods recorded in European history. This period marked the space and time that existed and marked the birth of thoughts, values, ideas, to the mental and physical movements of western European society. These two terms oppose each other. Some scholars argue *Romanticism* was born and existed between the 17th and 18th centuries as a *counter* to the rationalists who were none other than the product of the *Enlightenment*. The rationalists were too carried away by the *euphoria* of the majesty of reason and logic, which gave birth to a materialistic and consumerist society. This is what the Romantics argue about. The arrogance of rationalists who have denied a life that should be in harmony with nature cannot achieve the happiness that they aspire to together. So many writers were born who carried *nature* in their works as an effort to support the ideas and values promoted

by romanticism, one of which was William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in England. Thus, in this research, the writer wants to see how *nature* as idea of *Romanticism* is shown in the poem “*The World Is Too Much with Us*” by William Wordsworth.

METHOD

In conducting the research, the writer uses a qualitative approach as the focus of the research method. Qualitative research intends to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically by means of descriptions in the form of words and language in a natural context with a view to exploring meanings that come from the social environment (see Cresswell, 2014; Laswanayah, 2021; Nissa et al., 2021; Septiadi et al., 2021; Suryadi, 2022; Wulandari, 2022; Yansyah, 2022). In analyzing the data, the author uses the descriptive method (Dalman et al., 2020; Kusuma & Apriyanto, 2018; Subyantoro & Apriyanto, 2020). The aim of this method is to describe the state of a situation in a systematic and factual manner. This makes it easier to understand the meaning of dictions, idioms and topics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Defining Romanticism

Defining romanticism would certainly be very complex, even to limit it to a certain definition. Even contemporary studies, more in Europe, are still looking at what the term means from various perspectives. Thus, this romanticism has many beginnings in various forms. One that can be considered is in one of Lovejoy's essays entitled “*On the Discrimination of Romanticism*” (1924). In this essay, Lovejoy recommends using the word *romanticism* rather than *romantic*, which, according to him, has implied various meanings. In addition, in 1949, Rene Wellek also developed what Lovejoy wrote about Romanticism in an essay also entitled “*The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History*”. He carefully found Romanticism as a name for value system. He argues that romanticism is a sign of poetry in opposition to poetry in the era of neo-classicism, which also describes the inspiration and model of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

“We find throughout Europe the same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of the poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relation to man, and basically the same poetic style, with a use of imagery, symbolism, and myth which is clearly distinct from that of eighteenth-century neoclassicism.” (Wellek, 1963: 160-161)

Wellek, in this case, tries to see that there is a certain pattern in the romantic period. This distinctive pattern at the same time offers a different view from the works before that era. Especially the patterns depicted in poetry by collaborating between nature, imagination and humans.

In his book “*The Roots of Romanticism*” (1999), Isaiah Berlin tries to see romanticism out of its relationship with literature. He is of the view that romanticism is a large-scale cultural movement capable of influencing and moving life and thought in the European world from the 19th to the 20th centuries.

“The history not only of thought, but of consciousness, opinion, action too, of morals, politics, aesthetics, is to a large degree a history of dominant models. Whenever you look at any particular civilisation, you will find that its most characteristic writings and other cultural products reflect a particular pattern of life which those who are responsible for these writings - or paint these paintings, or produce these particular pieces of music – are dominated by.” (Berlin, 1999: 2)

The echo of romanticism has been recorded in the history of the western world, especially in Europe, as a movement that is quite significant and is not only reflected in literary works. After the Renaissance, which freed European society from the dictating authority of the church, romantic claimed to be one period that implied a revolutionary movement that influenced almost all aspects of people’s lives such as music, painting, and writing, all reflecting that era.

In English, the word “Romantic” came into general use in the 18th century, as a connotation of the word “romance” in the Middle Ages, which included a sense of beauty and fantasy . This can not be separated from the worship of society on matters relating to feelings. Classical thinkers like Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) in Heath and Boreham (1999: 4), was skeptical of romanticism as “the new tendencies” of the era.

“Romantic” has in fact been used since the Renaissance to suggest free expression of the imagination in the arts, but mainly in a negative sense. Romantic imaginings were thought to interfere with the clarity of the art form, and so lay beyond the bounds of proper subject-matter. The emerging Romantic spirit of 18th century England was seen by some as a revival of Elizabethan literature and its “Gothic” tendencies. English Romanticism has been described as a “renaissance of the Renaissance”. (Johnson in Heath and Boreham, 1999: 4)

Johnson experienced his own disappointment when he saw the romantic movement, but it is undeniable that he acknowledged the fact that the romantic movement had given people freedom of expression, especially in the arts, even though he admitted this era was the next generation of renaissance. Unlike the theorists in Germany, they actually saw Romanticism as a way of thinking that was appropriate for contemporary society.

“Instead of “improbable” notions and “false” sensibility, Romanticism came to stand for authenticity, integrity and spontaneity. It was seen as a positive artistic and intellectual assertion of the extremes in the human psyche, the areas of experience beyond logic and reason which could only be expressed in a direct and heartfelt way. These new concerns were seen as a valid response to the extremes of change and uncertainty which the age itself displayed.” (Heath and Boreham, 1999: 5)

Looking at the various views above, we can conclude that Romanticism is not just a term that marks a certain period in western European society. The meaning of the word Romanticism has gone far beyond what is reflected in the works of romantic literature that have been known before. It has been the life of western European society at least in the 18th century and emerged as a movement, understanding, value, thought, freedom, morals, nature, art and literature, which was recorded in the history of the western European world in particular.

2. The Concept of Nature According to Rousseau

Rousseau was one philosopher who contributed strongly to the birth of romanticism. He sees the phenomenon where humans return to nature (original nature) is part of the idea that romantic writers are trying to convey. He poured his writings into several of his works, such as *Emile* (1762) and *The Social Contract* (1762). His famous statement is '*Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains*'. This is an expression that sees humans have been polluted by their environment. He believes humans are born good people, and that is indeed the basic state of human beings being created. In this case, he sees that the external condition of man keeps him away from his original good nature so that evil appears in man. He also believes that by living side by side with nature, humans will become their true self and live in goodness.

"We are born capable of sensation and from birth are affected in diverse ways by the objects around us. As soon as we become conscious of our sensations we are inclined to seek or to avoid the objects which produce them: at first, because they are agreeable or disagreeable to us, later because we discover that they suit or do not suit us, and ultimately because of the judgments we pass on them by reference to the idea of happiness of perfection we get from reason. These inclinations extend and strengthen with the growth of sensibility and intelligence, but under the pressure of habit they are changed to some extent with our opinions. The inclinations before this change are what I call our nature. In my view everything ought to be in conformity with these original inclinations." (Rousseau in Boyd, 1956: 13)

He sees nature as an inclination or tendency before human consciousness is influenced and suppressed by the surrounding conditions, such as when faced with good and bad things. Finally, the ideal of happiness is even further away. There is only the idea of happiness that is formed by human logic. In fact, this idea stems from his observations that he put into *Emile* (1762) seeing children in his era who had lost a simplicity in his life. Everything has been replaced by a complex social life, a cultural environment, religious pressures and urban conditions that require a child to grow up faster. This condition is nothing but a real symptom which is the implication of modern civilization. In Watson (1992: 38), he said "*Modern arts and sciences were part of a whole fabric of manners, society, and government, and these prevented man from understanding and feeling the truth.*" I see Rousseau's distrust here of the arts and sciences that have shaped the civilization of modern society. Both things are seen as a trick that contributes to keeps people away from nature or their original state. So he thinks that the place where humans can return to their basic state or goodness is by returning to nature. In this way, humans can achieve true happiness.

"But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the

pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul . Such is the state which I often experienced on the Island Of Saint-Pierre in my solitary reveries, whether I lay in a boat and drifted where the water carried me, or sat by the shores of the stormy lake, or elsewhere, on the banks of a lovely river or a stream murmuring over the stones.” (Rousseau in Mason, 1979: 88 – 89)

It is clear here that there was an attempt by Rousseau to point out the contrasting conditions between finding happiness and wholeness in nature and the polluted modern life. This opposition seems to want to say that life is between enlightenment and Romance. The quote below, more clearly shows how Rousseau saw the so-called Romantic situation.

“The ‘Romantic’ is said to favor the concrete over the abstract, variety over uniformity, the infinite over the finite,; nature over culture, convention and artifice; the organic over the mechanical; freedom over constraints, rules and limitations. In human terms it prefers the unique individual to the average person, the free creative genius to the prudent person of good sense, the particular community or nation to humanity at large. Mentally, the Romantics prefer feeling to thought, more specifically emotion to calculation; imagination to literal common sense, intuition to intellect.” (Rousseau in Quinton 1996:778)

The quote above reaffirms that the relationship between nature and romanticism is indeed very close. The concept and value of freedom offered in the romantic era is not far from Rousseau’s theory of seeing *nature* as something pure (unpolluted), far from pressure, neutral, and prioritizing the purity of the human soul. “Thus romantic poets believe that nature is a source of revelation. They use simple language and shape nature as God, man, etc” (Kumar, 2014).

3. Enlightenment

The term “Enlightenment” may not be separated from the ideas of Emanuel Kant, which he put forward in his article entitled “*An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*” which was published in Berlin in 1784. But before that, what we know as the Enlightenment is nothing but a continuation of the Enlightenment period which in Italy is known as the Renaissance, in Germany it is known as Aufklärung, in France it is known as “Lumières”, which until now claimed to be the roots of the modern era. In European history, this period is known as the period of the rise of European society from church or traditional authority, which dictated all aspects of their lives. This period also marks the formation of a new civilization in European society, commonly known as *The Golden Age* . People today are no longer bound by church doctrine. They determine their own destiny. Science and science are developing rapidly along with the human ability to solve problems with their minds. So that came the notions such as rationalism, individualism, and also humanism.

Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, is noted to have changed the mindset and life of western European society, estimated to have taken place in the 17th century until the end of the 18th century. This period is known as a movement era, or even more so the way of thinking of European society. This period marks a time when humans celebrate the greatness of logic, independence of reason, and capabilities as

intelligent humans who can solve all problems. This can be seen in Kant's writings below.

“Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Saper aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment (...). For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could even be called freedom: namely, freedom to make public use of one’s reason in all matters (...). I have put the main point of enlightenment, of people’s emergence from their self-incurred minority, chiefly in matters of religion because our rulers have no interests in playing guardian over their subjects with respect to the arts and sciences and also because this minority, being the most harmful, is also the most disgraceful of all.” (Kant, 1996: 17 & 21)

Kant's definition is quite interesting. Enlightenment was a liberation for humanity. The freedom that humans can achieve by their efforts to free themselves from the external impulses that control them. Kant emphasized once again that humans can free themselves from their shortcomings as subject to be controlled. He assumes that the human self has a *reason* to be a solution in his life.

4. Irony in the poetry “The World is Too Much with Us”

William Wordsworth 's poem is nothing more than a simple poem . However, it does not mean that this simple poem does not contain significant meaning if we do an in-depth reading of the poem. In reading literary works, there is a method of reading the second level of understanding or reading the second meaning. This reading method is used especially for active readers who do a critical reading to find out the deepest meaning that the author is trying to convey. Here, the writer tries to do an in-depth reading of the poem “The World Is Too Much with Us” by William Wordsworth.

Without reading the entire content of the poem, the title of this poem has shown us how Wordsworth, as a person who lived at the time, was very disappointed with the condition of the existing society. The ironic tone is clearly read immediately from the title alone *“The world is too much with us”*. The author presents two real facts or oppositions, namely between the world or nature (*“world ”*) and humans (*“ Us ”*) who should live side by side in harmony. However, ironically, this world seems to no longer be able to accommodate the humans who live in it. Like a container that overflows with water and eventually spills over. In this point, the author may want to make us ask, perhaps ourselves, what sin has man committed to separate him from his own home.

We see him continuing his poetry which reads *“Getting and Spending, We lay waste our power”* and *“We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.”* In this line, Wordsworth talks about how the human mentality was really materialistic. Humans become very consumerist who only know about grabbing and spending, following their endless desires until they will trade their pure hearts and consciences. He even said *“a sordid boon”* as an expression of how disgusted and disgusted he was to see it all. This

expression also shows his regret about what humans have achieved. In fact all of them are meaningless but humiliation. He continued, *“For this, for everything, we are out of tune.”* He insists that this really is not the life it should be. Materialism has polluted humans and distanced humans from their lives that should be in harmony with nature. Humans prefer to be busy with a shopping lifestyle and spend their money to get what they want. So that the sense of humanity in them slowly disappears because of their lives that spend each other.

The message that Wordsworth really wants to convey to his readers is the materialistic life that has polluted and distanced society from its harmony with nature or the world. Several times he also issued quite sharp words, one of which was *“a sordid boon”*. The term is usually used to denounce or say something that is got dishonorably, something that is contemptible, or morally unacceptable. And also, the word *“We are out of tune”* so we are on the wrong track as humans. These are not humans who should live in harmony with nature. Thus, this poem is nothing but talking about the sin of humanity, which is implied in this poem. He continued, *“We lay waste to our powers,”* powers here mean the human ability to see, feel, be, describe and appreciate. Instead of stating his beliefs, Wordsworth here actually wants to say that humans like that just waste energy doing useless things. All the material that they get in that way is not something that will make them memorable or eternal, it will disappear as soon as they are gone. He also suggested that humans should spend more time getting to know nature, because nature is no longer meaningful. Nature is no longer recognized as a place for humans to live (state of nature), even only becomes an object of exploitation: *“Little we see in nature that is ours”*. Humans no longer see nature as it should be. The environment became polluted by the industrial revolution, and nothing could stop it because people prioritized ends over means.

The next line is the peak of anger from the author so that he issued words such as slander or curses: *“Great God! I’d rather be A pagan...”*. Perhaps because he was too fed up with seeing the consumerist and materialistic human condition, he preferred to become a Pagan. I see Pagan here referring more to ancient people before, before the Enlightenment, who still had pure belief in their god (as opposed to Christianity which is full of doctrine). He declared (if he could) to prefer to be Pagan than to be human beings who live their lives where God and the spiritual are meaningless, annihilated, unappreciated and ridiculed.

At this point, I can see that there is another message from the poem that Wordsworth is trying to convey. It is not surprising why God and the spiritual are forgotten. At least, it is caused by the emergence of materialism and its bad effects, accompanied by the fall of human awareness of God's favors. Humans forget nature just as humans forget God. Humans who are no longer in harmony with nature are tantamount to denying the power of God as the Creator of nature and the entire universe. This image clearly leads to movement social - economic Industrial Revolution, which became the root of rationalism and materialism. The power of science to create the means of production has made goods can be produced faster and more affordable. So, people want more and more. As a result, indirectly, people slowly turn away from God and spirituality. Pray is considerably unable to provide them with a living such as eating and paying rent. Unlike what is produced when working,

entrepreneurship, and do business. Spirituality is gone, people do not have time, therefore even they blame the Lord above their problems in the world. Ironically, people become selfish and serve others before self seems like a thing ridiculous for done.

“Wordsworth conveys his experiences with nature to readers through his poem using vibrant imagery, a narrative-like structure and abstract metaphors” (Fetterman, 2015). This is the irony that Wordsworth is trying to convey in this short poem. The irony of the world or nature has been polluted by consumerists and materialistic humans. Humans have forgotten nature and their original self. The irony of the mental health of people who have forgotten their spirituality and God. This is clearly contrary to the principles and beliefs of Wordsworth known as *Romantic Poet*. Therefore, he prefers to become a Pagan to see how great and beautiful the nature of the Lord’s creation is. Thus, this is also why history records that Romanticism was born as nothing but a form of mental resistance to enlightenment, which became the dominant discourse and constructed the civilization of western European society at the time.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the William Wordsworth’s “The World is Too Much with Us “shows us how the element of nature found inside the poem. It is the author's way of contrasting the ideas of Romanticism over the materialistic society which is the product of the Enlightenment. In a materialistic society, nature is no longer seen as it should be. Humans tend to do damage for personal use, even distance humans from their belief in spirituality and God. This shows the failure of the Enlightenment, which promised a more dignified and happier life to the people of western Europe in particular. For this reason, Wordsworth is present as a representation of Romanticism, which carries natural ideas and values which should be interpreted as a human liberation to return to their original self free from misleading impulses by his poem.

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