

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Problem

Literature is believed as a medium to represent ideas, emotion or self-defiance. Although it is hard to define what literature is, literature has become a great part of all societies in this world. When people talk about moral, politic, law, art etc., they look for another option to make a change for these topics. That is through writing. Since writing always deals with language, then literature, as a part of language, tries to fill this need.

However, literature has a specific characteristic. Literature does not bind in form and content, which is different from formal writing such as in thesis or any paper research. Literature should be beautiful. This beauty appears through three types or genre of literature.

The three genres of literature are poetry, prose and drama. The differences of those three genres depend on their form. A reader can easily find this type of genre visually as a convention of literature says that poetry is formed in stanza. Prose is a declarative story and drama is formed by dialogues—the focus of this paper is poetry.

Generally, a literary work has elements such as character, plot, setting, point of view, etc. In the genres of literature: novel, drama or poetry has those elements but mostly in poetry those elements are blur or bias. Poetry has already

had a special characteristic in its typography. Poetry is constructed in lines and stanzas.

Poetry is the oldest genre in the history of English literature. In its early appearance, poetry already has its specific characteristic like what people have known today, although it has developed and make a significant changing in generation to generation. The form and purpose (content) of creating poetry also follow its changing. But one thing in poetry that is still consistent until today that is typography. Poetry is formed in lines and stanzas. This typography makes poetry different from other genre of literature, prose and drama.

A process of creating poetry has become a poet's authority. It is the poet's authority to determine a form and language or purpose of a poem, whether it is formed in rhythmical pattern (*verse*), *free verse* or *blank verse*. A poem is written for different reason and different purpose. Some poems are written purely to entertain readers, others solely for the purpose of moral persuasion.

In its first appearance, the purpose of poetry is used to gain a spirit of war, for example *Bewoulf*. In the middle age period when people talked about "going back to nature", poetry became a medium of how their spiritual awareness had flown to nature. It can be understood because poetry is a medium to express feeling, as William Wordsworth in Luxemburg, et. al. (1986:5) says: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling". Besides of determining a form of poetry, feeling or wit in term of Pope, also determines its meaning or significance. Mostly when a poet feels sad or the one whom beloved is death, then the poem

will be a poem of sadness or about death. This theme of sadness is a consequence of the poet's psychology at times.

To write a poem is not by accident made by a poet, but it is purely a creativity of the poet through his or her awareness. The words are chosen by noticing elements or convention of poetry. In the book of *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*, Pradopo (2001:70) says that a convention of poetry includes convention of language: figurative language, rhetoric, and style in general; visual convention: stanza, line, rhyme, rhythm enjambment, typography, homologue, and so on. There are also convention of ambiguity, contradiction, and nonsense. One kind of tools that is used by the poet to express his or her thought is through symbol. Symbol is included in convention of language especially figurative language. So in analyzing poetry, a theme of sadness or symbol of death could be tracked by analyzing those conventions especially its symbols.

In this opportunity, the study discusses a theme of poetry especially about symbol of death in the work of Dylan Thomas using structuralism-semiotic approach. Sutadi Wiryaatmadja (Puji Santoso 1990:3) says that *semiotik adalah ilmu yang mengkaji kehidupan tanda dan maknanya yang luas di dalam masyarakat, baik yang lugas (literal) maupun yang kias (figurative), baik menggunakan bahasa maupun non bahasa*. Semiotic is a study of sign and its significance in society either literal or figurative, verbal or non-verbal.

Poetry is known as a field of words, it means that it has many chances to put many figurative images in few words. Therefore, poetry is a good example for

semiotic criticism because it uses many images or signs. The study of symbol is semiotic field.

Thus, the present study uses Riffaterre's theory of reading method for semiotic analysis, which is divided into two reading methods or analysis: heuristic and hermeneutic or retroactive methods. Structural approach is heuristic reading that analyzes structure of language, while semiotic is hermeneutic reading that the analysis is based on convention of literature especially poetry. These methods are used in analyzing Dylan Thomas' poems.

Dylan Thomas is a poet of 1940s era in English history of literature. Many poems in his anthology "Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas" talk about death. This anthology shows how the struggle of contemplating the highest spiritual awareness has met the point. "*Do not go gentle into that good night*", for example, shows how an author contemplating himself as if he was passing his own death. '*my father*' can be his another reflection of death, though many critics say that this poem addressed to memorize his father's death. The words '*grave*', '*dying of the light*' indicate a representation of death.

A symbol of death is hidden in the words and has relation to the whole story. Symbol is simply a metaphor—the difference is about how many times a metaphor appears in the text; if the poet uses repeated metaphor, that metaphor could be a symbol. When a metaphor has crossed a limit of its meaning or significance, that metaphor is a symbol. Thus, symbol is further interpretation of a metaphor. According to Pierce, symbol is arbitrary (Budiman, 2005:19). The

poem “*Do not go gentle into that good night*” has put ‘*good night*’ as a symbol of death.

In this opportunity, the analysis of death symbol in this paper represents Dylan Thomas thought about death with assumption that these poems are as his belief of final purpose of human being. It is also because symbol is one of important points in semiotic analysis. Therefore, the main topic of this paper relates to a symbolism, which title is “**Death Symbols on Dylan Thomas’ Poems: Heuristic and Hermeneutic Analysis**”

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

The discourse in this study is Dylan Thomas’ *Collected Poems*. This paper discusses about a study of structuralism-semiotic literary criticism usage by understanding the symbol of death using heuristic and hermeneutic method. In addition, the main problem of this paper could be specified into clear formulated follows:

1. How are heuristic and hermeneutic methods applied in Dylan Thomas’ poems?
2. What are the symbols of death presented in Dylan Thomas’ poems?

## **1.3 Purpose and the Significance of Research**

### **1.3.1 The Purposes of Research**

1. To know the application of heuristic and hermeneutic methods in Dylan Thomas’ poems.
2. To know the symbols of death presented in Dylan Thomas’ poems.

### 1.3.2 The Significance of Research

The significance of the research is to make a wide collection of English literature discourse so it can be a source for writing and give the advantages to readers. The job of literary writer is not limited only on interpreting the symbol, but also gives a judgment to the quality of creation, and could share his or her idea to the developing of literature, moreover could help to arrange theory of literature.

### 1.4 Frame of Thinking

In getting a freedom of an expression of a poet, poetry gives a way to any technique and idea as much as needed to a poet. Freedom, in this case, means poetry allows using minimal words to make many interpretations or meanings. It causes one word in poetry will have so many meanings depending on its interpreter.

Since words are called as symbol, as literature, especially poetry, symbol grows more and more sophisticated; it begins to manipulate this field of suspended metaphors as material in itself, often as an end in itself. It is because symbol represents something else. In fact, as has been said above, a metaphor could be a symbol when it has a relation to a great idea or complex meaning.

Poetry, however, is not solely concerned with the concrete, with objective reality, with individual psychology, or with subjective emotion. Some deal with abstract ideas or philosophical conceptions (as in the work of Dylan Thomas: *and death shall have no dominion*). It is understandable because a basic function of literature is an expression of feeling or idea. Thus, words in poetry will take a long

journey in people's mind; it means that each critic will have different perspective to one poem which depends on interpreter's literary experiences. There is no guarantee a result of a poem analysis is what the poet's intention unless the poet himself or herself stated what his or her poem about, especially when a critic deals with a difficult poetry. Any hidden meaning should be interpreted briefly to state poet intention and what the poem is really talking about.

Reading *Collected Poem* by Dylan Thomas is not only as reading other works, surely because each poet uses different 'approach or method'. In these poems there are poems that talk about death but in many different situations. Many images are made to explore a wide interpretation about death. These are used to gain more sensation when reader reads the poem.

In analyzing this symbol, structuralism-semiotic criticism especially a method of semiotic reading by Riffaterre: heuristic and hermeneutic is utilized to analyze how symbol of death is appreciated in Dylan Thomas works. But to understand a work of art, especially poetry, a reader must have known about poetry convention. The conventions of poetry: convention of language, visual convention, convention of ambiguity, contradiction, and nonsense, are included in intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Symbol places intrinsic element. Therefore structuralism-semiotic would be very helpful to search the symbol.

Structuralism sees a work of art as a structure which all its elements have relation each other. In a structure, those elements do not have their own meaning. The meaning stands to its relations and the wholeness of the story. Those elements could be understood by understanding its place and function in the story.

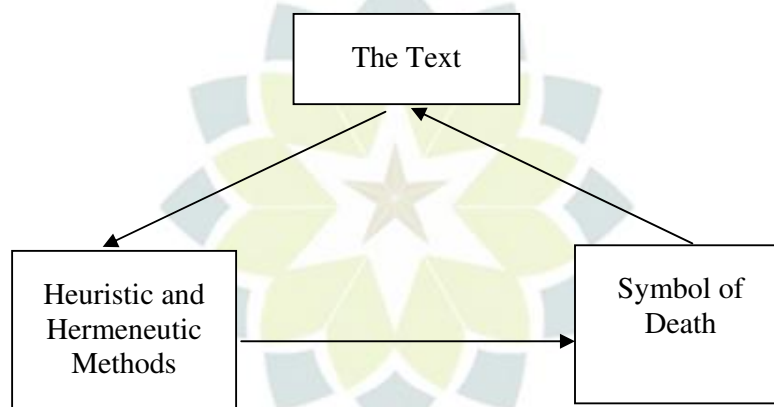
Structuralism only analyzes the structure of story or a form of poetry. It describes the function of words and sees its connection in a poem. For example, in *The Conversation of Prayer*, there is a statement “whom shall they calm?”(line 11) has connection with “who climbs to his dying love...”(line 3) which shows the great sadness of the poet to see his loved dying. Moreover, the study of symbol—the focus on this paper, needs another theory to support another aspect of the first theory (structuralism) that is isolated—that is the content of poetry. The reason is that a work of art must be influenced by the history or by the culture of the author. Besides, reader as an interpreter also takes place to enrich a work of art. In fact, Riffaterre in Teeuw (2003:67) said that it is not a linguist who determines what is relevant in a poem, but it is the reader who determines the meaning of a poem based on his or her experience as poem’s reader. That is why in analyzing a work of art needs other theory to support it. In this manner, Semiotic takes place.

Mukarovsky and Vodicka in Sukada (1987:68) said that to understand a work of art briefly, should understand the characteristic of a work of art as a *sign*. A symbol in the case is a part of sign. Pierce in Eco (1986:136) said that there are three characteristics of sign: icon, index ad symbol. Icon sees an object resemblance to another object. Index is causality evidence like fire and smoke. Symbol is arbitrary interpretation of relation between objects and convention. For example, in taking an image or a word as a symbol—usually a noun, must follow the definition of symbol then that image must have another interpretation than its lexical meaning.



Structural approach is heuristic reading which is based on structure of language, while semiotic is hermeneutic reading which is based on convention of literature especially poetry. The Figure 1.1 shows the connection between the heuristic and hermeneutic methods and the symbols of death in analyzing the text.

FIGURE 1.1.  
Heuristic and Hermeneutic Analysis



## 1.5 Method of Research

### 1.5.1 Method of Research

Study of literary criticism is always descriptive method, as this paper does. In order to get a good result in this analysis, Structuralism-Semiotic is very helpful to search, analyze, category and interpret a symbol of death in the work of Dylan Thomas as a particular point in this paper. To find out an exact meaning or at least appropriate signification (as in this research), a researcher will use steps as in the book of *How To Study A Poet* by John Peck (1988:20). At first the reader should look for a central opposition in the poem. Next, the reader begins to look at details of the poem, trying to see how the poet brings his theme to life. Then the

reader looks at another section of the poems, trying to see how the poem is progressing. Finally, the reader looks at how the poem concludes.

Those steps are combined with the theory of Michael Riffaterre which uses reader response to analyze a poem. So, in searching a signification through any clues spreading in a poem is exploded out. Most of analysis in this paper uses Riffaterre's theory, which gives an easy step to have own interpretation of meaning related to any evident that is found in the process of analyzing poem.

### 1.5.2 Data Source

The approach in analyzing data is seeing the poem as a unity of thought in which the elements are inter-related as in the poems of Dylan Thomas's work, *A Collected Poem*. Therefore, the theory uses a method of semiotic reading by Riffaterre, *Semiotic of Poetry* in Jabrohim. 2003. *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*. Hanindita Graha Widya. Yogyakarta; Puji Santosa. 1993. *Ancangan Semiotika dan Pengkajian Susastra*. Angkasa. Bandung; theory of symbol will use Pierce in Kris Budiman, 2005. *Ikonsitas: Semiotika Sastra dan Seni Visual*. Buku Baik. Yogyakarta; Northrop Frye. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton Univ. Press. USA). The supporting books are Umberto Eco. 1986. *Semiotic and the Philosophy of Language*. Indiana Univ. Press. Blooming; Christopher R. Reaske. *How to Analyze Poetry*. 1966. Monarch Press. USA; O. Setiawan. Djuharie. 2001. *Pedoman Penulisan Skripsi, Tesis, Disertasi*. Yrama Widya. Bandung., etc.

### 1.5.3 Data Analysis

In selecting the poems, a random method is used to select which poems are appropriate for the research. First, the poems are divided based on years of published, then find the word of death or any image of death in the poems. A selected poem at least should have three words or images of death: those are “dead, die, death”. Finally, those poems pass these methods:

1. Riffaterre says that to use semiotic approach in analyzing poetry there are two ways of reading: heuristic approach and retroactive or hermeneutic approach.
  - Heuristic reading tries to deform every stanza of a poem into paragraphs or transform a poem into a prose by adding words in a space that requires additional word.
  - Hermeneutic reading tries to interpret a significance of the poem adapted to this research needed.
  - The next step searches the possibility of death symbols.
2. Final step of analysis is a conclusion of death’ symbol and the significance of death in *Collected Poems* of Dylan Thomas.

### 1.6 Organization of Writing

The paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter One: Introduction consists of Background of Problem, Formulation of Problem, the Purpose and Significance of Research, Frame of Thinking, Method of Research and Organization of Writing. Chapter Two: Literary Review consists Structuralism and Semiotic Approach to Poetry Analysis, the Usage of Symbol in Poetry, Biography of

Author and his works. Chapter Three: Poetry Analysis consists Heuristic and Hermeneutic Analysis and Death' Symbol through the Work of Dylan Thomas, and Chapter Four: Conclusion and Suggestion consists Conclusion and Suggestion.



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