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Convicts Life in James Tucker's The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh

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Abstract

Convicts Life In James Tucker's The Adventures Of Ralph Rashleigh. Convicts transported from Britain to Australia are one of historical phenomenon. This research is aimed to describe the convicts life in the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century in Australia as illustrated in The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh by James Tucker. This research was a descriptive qualitative research. The data were collected by using library research and it was analyzed by applying sociological approach proposed by Swingewood (1972) who revealed three classifications of sociology of literature. In this case, the researcher focused on the classification of sociology as the mirror of age. The result of this research showed that the convicts alive harshly in Australia where the flogging was a common punishment for them.

Keywords: Convicts, Australia, history, flogging.

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1. Introduction

Social condition, social phenomena and even the social movement are usually recorded in literary works. There are a lot of writers who have already taken the society history as the major theme of their literary works. Literature itself is also called as the mirror or reflection of the society.

Brennan & Richard (2014), stated that convicts were sent by Britain to Australia from 1788 until the end of the 19th century the convicts migration from Australia to England is one of the phenomenon of the social movement. Stewart (2010), stated that in 1787, the First Fleet was dispatched from the British Isles to find a penal settlement at Botany Bay, Australia. In 1788 the first fleet arrived in Australia. This colony consists of convicts, exile and common people from England. This migration happened because the crime rate was high and the prison were overloaded, so Britain parliament decided to find a solution of this problem. The solution is transporting convicts to a distant place for seven or more years were seen as the ideal solution to overcrowded British jails.

Convicts have an iconic status in Australian history. The convict past that lives in popular understanding, however, is often at odds with scholarly research on the subject. There are many stereotypes of convict life that appear and reappear in popular culture. Typically, convicts were almost exclusively male and always adults. Female convicts are imagined as prostitutes, or at least sexually promiscuous. Most convicts, both male and

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female, were transported as a result of manifestly unjust punishment for trivial acts such as theft of food or clothing that a harsh and inequitable society forced them to commit in order to survive.

Fabian & Loh in Lawrence (2011), state that what happened to convicts in Australia depended first on their age and sex. Almost 25,000 women were transported to the colonies, comprising almost 16 percent of the total of 157,261 convicts sent out in the 80 years the system operated. Young boys were also transported as convicts, some as young as 9 or 10 years of age. Muir (2012), stated that the convicts, navy guards, marines and family made their departure on 13 May 1787 under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip. Davies *et al* (2015), explained that between 1787 to 1868 Britain deported 150,000 convicts to Australia and during World War I. Furthermore, Meizer (2015) stated that Australian-born prisoners were taller than those who came from Britain as free immigrants.

This novel also shows the common punishment for the convicts in early Australia settlement. Gladwin (2012), stated that in colonial Australian history the entanglement of clergymen, colony, and empire has made the Anglican clergyman one of the colonies' more controversial figures. Historical and popular understanding of this encounter has been overshadowed by the "flogging parson" and "moral policeman" traditions in Australian historiography.

The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh is a novel written by a convict named James Tucker in 1845 and published in 1929. *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* in general tells about the convict named Ralph from England who worked as a thief, one of the great thieves in England before he was finally found guilty and sent to Australia. As the adventure in the land of Australia Ralph experienced many events in his life which reflected the reality of living in Australia. Ralph witnessed the rivalry of the convict gang against another convicts gang, the free settlers against the convicts, the bushrangers against the other bushrangers, and he also experienced the life in the middle of the Aborigines. In particular *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* is the first book to focus on Australia's unique combination of prison life, aborigines, and bush rangers and of considerable importance both for intrinsic merits and for its value as social document.

Laurenson & Swingewood (1972), also state that there are three perspectives related to sociology of literature. First is the research which is considered the literary work as mirror of age, second is the research which is considered the literary works as the sociology of the author, and the third is the research which is considered the literary work as manifestation of history events and the social culture condition

Along with this novel, *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* by James Tucker has emerged some researchers interested in. Leane (2010), from ANU College of Arts and Social Science with her *The Whiteman's Aborigine*. In her research, she put Ralph Rashleigh also as one of the examples in her analysis of 1820's – 1840's early contact with the Australia including the landscape and the indigenous Aborigines. She said in her analysis that the Ralph Rashleigh represented the Aborigine as an Australian Adam. Furthermore, Emberg (2011), in his research entitled "Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Martin Cash/James Lester Burke Narrative/Manuscript of 1870". In his research, he put James Tucker's Ralph Rashleigh as one of the examples in his analysis about the rediscovery of the narrative/manuscript as the novel of Ralph Rashleigh was written from 1844-45 but just discovered in 1929 and it was edited then publish again in 1950. Ralph

Rasleigh stands as the novel that experienced the deconstruction the reconstruction in 1950. Mutmainnah (2014), with her research entitled "Sense of Loneliness in James Tucker's Ralph Rashleigh". In her research, she focused on the sense of loneliness of Ralph Rashleigh as convicts from England. How Ralph Rashleigh suffered from his depression when he arrived in Australia becomes her focus of analysis.

On the contrary, neither Leane and Emberg nor Mutmainnah has classified their research on the portrait of Australian people especially convicts in the late 18th century to early 19th century. Whereas this research focused on the portrait convicts life the late 18th century to early 19th century as represented in *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* novel by James Tucker.

The researcher chooses *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh*, an early novel in Australia by a convict, James Tucker as the objects of the research because this novel depicted the real condition and situation in the early settlement. Jonathan cape publisher also stated that *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* is rare and valuable record of exciting aspects of colonization. Very few researchers took this novel as their research object, and it's very interesting to know more about history of Australia through this novel. Furthermore, the researcher attempts to analyze the convicts life in Australia in the late 18th century to early 19th century by using the sociology of literature approach to know more the history of early settlement in Australia. Therefore, the sole objective in this paper is to find out *Convict's life in The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh by James Tucker*

2. Research Method

2.1. Type of Research

This research is a descriptive qualitative method, and to complete in analyzing this study, the researcher uses the sociology of literature approach by Laurenson and Swingenwood. The focus of this study is to analyze the convicts life in Australia as illustrated in James Tucker's *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh*.

2.2. Source of Data

The data used by the researcher in this research were taken from James Tucker's novel *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh*. The researcher uses the e-book novel which was posted on December 2003 via Project Gutenberg of Australia as the primary data and the secondary data were taken from various books, articles, journals and website on internet. Through this secondary data, the researcher collects and used them as they are relevant to the topic.

2.3. Method of Data Collection

There are some ways that the researcher does to collect the data. First, the researcher reads James Tucker's novel *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh*. The researcher will collect the data through the novel itself, the literary history, and another scientific writings which related to the research. Second, the researcher uses the library research method which allows the researcher to collect various sources related to the research such as text books, articles, journals, both in printed and electronics which could become as supporting data to find out the further information related to the subject matter of this research.

2.4. Method of Data Analysis

In this research, the researcher uses method of data analysis to support the analysis. In analyzing this novel, the researcher uses descriptive method and the sociology of literature which focus on the convicts life in Australia through the characters depicted in the novel. The researcher does close reading of the novel, determines the main focus on the research and highlights some important quotations from the novel to support the analysis.

In this research, the researcher does some procedures, such as read the novel carefully, intensively and writes the important note on the left side of the important quotation. Next, identifying some cases containing the convicts life in Australia. Then, Classify and clarify the convicts life through the dialogue among characters that will be analyzed by reading the novel and correlated with the supporting data from other sources and use sociology of literature approach. Finally, conclude the result of the research.

3. Findings

3.1. Convict's harsh life in the early settlement in Australia

In *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* Novel, James Tucker describes the portrait of Australian People in the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century in Australia. The main characters in that novel portrayed the life in that period, which focuses on the life of the main character that is represented by convicts named Ralph Rashleigh. The author described the life of Rashleigh since he was a prisoner in England until he was exiled to Australia.

The life of Ralph Rashleigh in the novel is divided into some parts. It started when he was a convict and exiled to Australia, then the author continues the story of Rashleigh's life experienced with Bushranger and his contact with aborigines. From some parts of Rashleigh's life in the novel the portrait of Australia people can be seen through different times, which shows the life in Australia in the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century.

The usual image of the convicts that sent to Botany Bay is starving caught stealing a loaf of bread. In fact, most of these convicts were professional criminals from some of the jail in Britain. The Australia's situation and condition were different with the situation in Britain. Most of the convicts were stress and depressed. Similarly, the marines and the official from Britain also faced the same problems. They were not pleased with the situation in the new land. None particularly of them was happy about this, mostly of them were from the cities and were not accustomed with the manual labor.

"Fouled with his own excrement, his whole body loathsome with dirt, it was decided that he must wash before being taken to court. His handcuffs were taken off for this purpose, but the anguish of bringing his arms round into their natural position was so intense that he collapsed in a swoon. He came to in a puddle of water, which a sneering constable had flung over him from a bucket. His wrists were swollen to twice their natural size, and when he tried to wash, he found that he could not bend his elbows. The constable therefore assisted him, with rough and obscene comments, and presently he was ready to start for the dreaded court. (Tucker, 2003:47)

When it came to re-handcuffing him, there could not be found a single pair of darbies to fit his swollen wrists, and the officials were therefore grudgingly compelled to have him taken to Penrith without any". (Tucker, 2003: 48)

The description above shows how Rashleigh suffered from his pain after long voyage to the Botany Bay. His wrist was swollen, his body was injured and he suffered

from terrible pain. This condition did not only happen to Rashleigh, the other convicts faced the same problem. Their bodies were suffered, and they still had to work building tents, as well as cleared the bush.

Agricultural condition was difficult. The convicts were from Europe. The traditional European growing methods were failure, because the landscape, the condition of the soil and even the climate in Australia were different from it was in Britain. Almost all the member of the society wondered what they had been consigned to. They had never experienced the situation and condition in Britain.

“The living conditions of the emaciated wretches who were condemned to work at the lime-burners’ camp were incredibly severe at this time. The only clothing which was permitted did not vary in the heat of summer or the bitterness of winter, and consisted of the rag apron worn for the sake of decency. Every man wore not less than two sets of leg-irons--many had four and six as punishment for excessive delinquencies--and at all hours, governed only by the state of the tides, they were compelled to work breast-high in the sea in order to unload their baskets in the boats which drew about three to four feet of water. In the summer their bodies were peeled of skin, and in the winter they were frozen and frost-bitten; huddling together at night on the floor of their sleeping-hovels in order to generate some warmth. (Tucker, 2003:125)

From the description, it can be seen the living conditions in Australia in the early settlement. The people faced the different climate and whether in Britain where they were not used to it. The Description above also shows that the convicts had only one clothes and it was not suitable with the weather.

3.2. Flogging as Common Convicts Punishment in Australia

The punishments for the convicts during the voyage and during settlement are also illustrated in this novel. The punishment for convicts is very cruel. Flogging was used to punish them in the penal colonies of Australia. In early Australia settlement, there were three main punishments for male convicts; the wheel, irons and floggings. Flogging is one of the examples of the punishment in this era. Flogging conducts by the guards.

“This particular commandant was, in a sense, a victim of the system of extreme corporal punishment which was in common practice during that period. Flogging was a recognized form of punishment in the Army and Navy, and it was not many years since the sentence of flogging a seaman round the fleet had been abolished. He had almost certainly been selected for his present post by reason of his record as one of the most effective disciplinarians in the Army; and, apart from his unnatural joy in witnessing these floggings, he sincerely believed that the only sure means of controlling the two thousand desperadoes under his charge was to break their bodies as well as their minds” (Tucker, 2003:126)

“The flogging endured for longer than an hour, and when he was unbound he collapsed insensible on to the deck, whence he was borne to the hospital ship. Resuscitation was effected brutally, and he came to his senses screaming with the pain inflicted by the salt dressing which had immediately been applied to his unsightly back. The pain caused by this rudimentary treatment was infinitely worse than anything he had felt during the actual flogging, so that he was nigh driven out of his mind by the stabbing, gnawing horrors of the action of the salt upon his wounds. He cursed and roared under the treatment, which was repeated every day as each new dressing was applied, though it was the rough stripping of the old ones from the festering back that gave Rashleigh a never-fading memory of the torture of being flayed alive.” (Tucker, 2003:35)

“In the end about twenty prisoners were specifically identified and, after a severe public flogging, were heavily ironed and confined in a den under the forecandle for the remainder of the voyage.” (Tucker, 2003: 38)

The description above shows the flogging punishment in Australia. This punishment reserved only for those who committed further crimes or offences in the colonies. In addition, harsh living in Australia was one of the convict's difficulties. Convicts had to face working hour, disease, conflicts between convicts and also convict's punishment. One of the convict's punishments was flogging. Flogging is common punishment in the settlement at that time.

"He was put in charge of a constable, who was given strict orders to crack his head if he made the slightest attempt to escape. They reached the court-house without any incident, Rashleigh being too weak and spent even to want to escape. There were a great many men from Emu Plains brought up to answer various charges, mostly fabricated by the tyrannical overseers, and the majority of them had been summarily tried and sentenced to seventy five or a hundred lashes, before Rashleigh's turn came to appear before the court."(Tucker, 2003:48)

The description above shows the flogging punishment for the convicts who tried to escape. Tucker in this novel describes how flogging punishment in the early settlement was a common practice. If the convicts make a mistake, didn't obey the rules, or if the convicts not discipline, they will got flogging punishment from the guards.

4. Discussion

This discussion is to show about the portrait of early Australian people which is portrayed in *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* novel. The portrait of Australian people which is described in the novel also related to the portrait of convicts, bushranger, and aborigines in the early settlement in Australia. The discussion contains the data which are related to the theory of Laurensen and Swingewood by using sociology of literature approach.

The researcher uses the theory of Laurensen and Swingewood based on the sociology of literature approach which focuses on literature as a mirror of age and also as a mirror of society. In *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* novel, James Tucker describes the portrait of the Australian people in the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century in Australia. It can be seen through the data that the researcher found in the novel. There were many changes in the twentieth century, especially after the war. The portrait of convicts, bushranger and aborigines in the early Australia settlement were reflected in the novel. It can be seen through the conversations also the descriptions in the novel.

The Adventure of Ralph Rashleigh novel by James Tucker is a masterpiece novel. This novel can be categorized as the historical novel. The historical moment of convict that sentence to Australia also recorded in this novel. The convict's harsh treatment in the voyage also describe clearly in this novel.

This novel also describes the harsh life in Australia. Not only the situation and condition in Australia, but also the punishments for the convicts. Flogging was the common punishment in Australia. In this novel Rashleigh witnessed the flogging punishments. The flogging punishment was a common happen the early settlement in Australia. The convicts got flogging punishment if they disobey the roles or neglected the work.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing whole content of the novel based on the topic of the research, the researcher found out that the living of convicts in Australia in the early settlement were very hard. Another thing which can be seen in the novel is harsh living in the voyage of

convicts and in the early settlement in Australia. The convicts were transported from Britain to Australia by ships. The voyage was spent more or less three month. During the voyage the convicts got the harsh treatment from the guards. Their hand and foot were secure by chain. There are a lot of convicts dead because of this treatment. The harsh living in the settlement also portrayed in this novel. The climate, situation, condition and the environment of Australia is very different with Britain. The convicts not only face the extreme climate, but also the brutal punishment from the guards. Flogging was the common punishment for a convict who disobey of neglected their work. This study has provided valuable insight on how the portrait of convicts in Australia in the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century. It provides the portrait of the social life of the convict at that time, especially their lifestyle and the belief. It is recommended for the other students who are interested to do a research on the novel to explore more aspects of early Australian settlement.

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