
RELIGIOUS EVENT (DOOM) AND PURITAN TEACHING IN MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH'S POEM *THE DAY OF DOOM*

Riris Yusrina

Universitas Sebelas Maret

Email: ririsyusrina909@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

American literature was strongly influenced by English literature because it was brought by the English colonies who came to America. The Colonial Period in American literature occurred from 1607 until 1775. Many writers had an important role in this period, such as John Winthrop, Anne Bradstreet, William Bradford, and William Wigglesworth. The colonial period started in the colonial era, one hundred years before the Revolution War. The Characteristics of the colonial Period such as historic, simple, religious, and influenced by the English tradition. One of the religious poems written in that era was Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom". It became one of the most famous poems from the Colonial Period. The puritan concept strongly existed in it, especially the Calvinism theology. Calvinist Theology has five concepts. They are Total and innate Depravity, Unconditional Election, Prevenient and irresistible grace, Perseverance of Saints, and Limited Atonement. The poem also represents the Day of Judgement which provides the conversation between God and the man.

Keywords: *American literature; Calvinist theology; Colonial Period; Puritanism*

Article information**(Filled by Editorial Management)***Received: 12 March, 2022**Revised: 18 April, 2022**Accepted: 22 April, 2022*DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v9i1.73535>Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/73535>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

INTRODUCTION

America is not only a superpower country in the realm of technology and education but also in the area of literature. There are so many American works of literature that become the consumption of the people around the world. American literature also attracted public interest and was written by the great writers in each period. American

literature is literary works that are created, written, and produced on American soil. American literature commonly uses the English language because American literature is still influenced by English Literature. Before the colony was established, English settlers who came to the New World were the Puritan people. Thus, American literature is identical to the English tradition.

In general, the period of American literature is divided into nine periods. The first period was the “colonial period”, which occurred from 1607 until 1777. The second was called the “Revolution Era” which occurred from 1765 until 1790. The third was “The Early National Period” which occurred from 1775 until 1828. The fourth was “Renaissance Period”, which occurred from 1828 until 1865. The fifth period was “Realist Period”, which occurred from 1865 until 1900. The sixth was “The Naturalist Period”, which occurred along 1900 until 1914. The seventh was “Modernism Period”, which occurred from 1914 until 1939). The eighth was “The Beat Generation”, which occurred from 1944 until 1962. The last period of American literature was called “The Contemporary period”, which occurred from 1939 until now (Greelane, 2019).

The colonial period started from 1607 until 1775. This period was marked by the establishment of Jamestown and right after one decade before the Revolution War. The characteristics of American literature in this era were commonly historic, simple, and religious. In this era, the famous writers were John Winthrop, Anne Bradstreet, William Bradford, and William Wigglesworth. The themes of American literature in the colonial period were very diverse, such as the Literature at that time wrote about the state of America, which was vast and rich. In addition, American literature during the colonial period also produced a love story entitled *Pocahontas*, which was very famous in America for centuries. Entering the new colonial period in England, the theme of literature became very religious, influenced by the Puritans’ culture. Writers and poets at that time wrote works based on the Bible and Holy books (Spanckeren, 1994). The

religious conflict also pushed the production of the literature. John Winthrop wrote the first writing called his journal entitled “The History of the New England”, then Edward Winslow also wrote the literature after the arrival of the Mayflower ship. The poetry in the colonial period also had religious characteristics. One of the poems produced at that time was “The Day of Doom”, written by Michael Wigglesworth.

Wigglesworth was a physician, puritan minister, and poet whose poem “The Day of Doom” was a bestseller in early New England. He was born on 18 October 1631 in Yorkshire, England. His father was Edward Wigglesworth, and his mother was Ester Middlebrook. They married on 27 October 1629. The family moved to New England in 1638, before moving to Charlestown, Massachusetts. After that, they moved to Haven, Connecticut (Britannica).

Wigglesworth graduated from Harvard in 1651 and taught there as a tutor until 1654. In 1662, he published *The Day of Doom*, a poetical description of the Great and Last Judgement. 18.000 copies were sold within a year, and for the next century, it held a secure place in Puritan households. During his life, Wigglesworth married three times and divorced twice. His first wife was Mary Reyner. They were married in 1655. The second wife was Martha Mudge. They got married in 1679. The third wife was Sybil (Avery) Spearhawk. She married him in 1691.

Wigglesworth was known as a “genial philanthropist”. He was very cheerful that his friends thought he could not be sick. His other works were “God’s controversy with New England” and “Meat out of the Eater”. He the stopped publishing his poem.

Wigglesworth died 10 June, 1750, in Maiden, Middlesex Country.

This article aims to elaborate on one of the American literature, poetry entitled “The Day of Doom” written by Michael Wigglesworth. I choose this poetry for the discussion in this paper because this poetry has a strong correlation with the religious belief of most American people, that is Christianity. This article will emphasize the puritan teaching, which includes the theology of Calvinism. The Puritans shape the history of the country.

The main objective is to give new information and new insight to the article reader regarding American literature, especially American poetry entitled “The Day of Doom” which was written by Wigglesworth. Besides, the topic that is raised is that religiosity in American literature will give some knowledge and lessons for ordinary people because all religions always teach good things to the people who follow them. This article thus will give so many benefits to many readers. In addition, this article will add to their knowledge of the American studies program for the American students because they will understand and find new kinds of American poetry. This article is also beneficial for the other researchers because they can develop and enrich their research.

The methodology used to write the article is library research. It is the method to collect the data from books, articles, journals, and gain the materials from the internet, etc. The first step was reading the book related to religiosity, especially Puritanism. One of the Puritan concepts this article aims to understand is Calvinist theology. “The Day

of Doom” was chosen because it underlines the concept of Puritan teachings.

DISCUSSION

Doom as a Religious Event in “The Day of Doom”

The poem was one of the American literature that was produced during the Colonial Period. It became one of the best-selling works in the Puritan era. One of the characteristics of American literature in the colonial period era was religion, so is the theme of “The Day of Doom”. The poem tells about the religious event called Doom, and this poetry also presents the day of Judgement after Doom happened in the world.

The poetry explains clearly the day of Doom, from stanza 1 until stanza 13. After the day of Doom on the earth, the following stanza explains the Day of Judgement, which portrays that the people on this earth are brought and judged by God. Wigglesworth explains about the Doom that the day of Doom is horrible. It makes the reader will feel fear when imagining the day of Doom.

In the poetry, the first stanza introduces that the people who live on this earth are still in peace in the middle of the night, and they all sleep. Believers and people who have many sins are resting in a deep sleep. They do not know and do not understand that the Day of Resurrection will come to them. In the following stanzas, the Day of Judgment is described as suddenly the dark sky at night splitting open and flashing a very blinding light. This incident made people afraid and cried a lot. No one can escape from the incident. After the sky was split in the poem, rain and storms fell and destroyed and

crushed their lives and homes. The people try to save themselves, but doomsday will never escape from their lives. Some people try to save themselves in caves and quarries. They jump in, some are headed for the rocks, and some run to the mountains. However, their efforts will be in vain. They cannot escape the wrath of their Lord, and none can save them but their Lord. After the earth is destroyed, humans are brought and judged by God.

The doomsday described in the poem feels scary. According to the teachings of Christianity, the signs of the Day of Judgment are described as the occurrence of various natural disasters, such as floods, landslides, and earthquakes. The poem clearly describes the disaster in which there was heavy rain and a mighty storm. The disaster shocked all humans who were resting and destroyed the earth and its contents (tuhanyesus.org).

Puritan Teaching in “The Day of Doom”

Puritanism is a philosophy or behavior based on the teachings to purify. Puritanism in America was a form of teaching that was based on religion. Puritanism was also referred to as the most extreme sect of Protestantism. (Milian & Suparman 2003). The main core of puritan teaching was the relationship between the human and God, and the source of the religion was based on the holy book and God’s revelation. The puritan is also based on complex Christian teaching (Bremer).

Based on history, Puritanism was born in England in the 16th century. In that year, a church named “Anglican Church” was initiated by King Henry VIII. This was a compromise between radical Protestantism

and Roman Catholicism. This Anglican Church is the official church.

Puritanism continued to develop in England. They want to implement church government in the form of what is in the Holy Book. These puritans still didn’t like the Anglican Church. They want the church in England to be free from Roman influence. Because the puritans thought their teachings would not be able to develop in England and they did not like the Anglican church, they decided to immigrate to other countries. First, they had immigrated to the Netherlands, then to America by boarding the Mayflower. Their initial goal was to head to Jamestown, but they landed in Massachusetts because a storm hit their ship.

The term ‘puritan’ refers to the religious and political movement in the 16th century and spread their teaching in America, especially in New England colonies. Since then, Puritanism has been a religious movement and a political movement. Two important figures originated the Puritan teachings. They were Martin Luther King and John Calvin. As John Coffey and Paul C.H Lim stated:

Firstly, Puritanism was a variety of Protestantism, and Puritans were heirs of the Reformation inaugurated by Martin Luther’s seminal re-reading of Christianity’s foundational texts. Puritans affirmed the great slogans of Luther’s Reformation – sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura; faith alone, grace alone, scripture alone – though there was disagreement over exactly what these slogans entailed. Like Luther, they were intensely preoccupied with personal salvation, and convinced that God pardoned sinners in response to simple faith in Christ’s redeeming sacrifice on the Cross.

Secondly, Puritanism was a variety of Reformed Protestantism, aligned with the continental Calvinist churches rather than with the Lutherans.⁷ Calvin, Bucer, Bullinger and other Reformed divines had promoted a second (more radical) wave of the Reformation, one which broke upon English shores from the 1540s onwards, and came to define English Protestantism (Coffey and Lim, 2008).

Martin Luther King was a reformation figure from Germany. Thus, John Calvin was a man who came from France and stayed in Geneva, Swiss. Luther developed the concept of the priesthood that the pastor is not a position that is more than others, meaning that the person who has been baptized means that he has become an equal person to the pastor. While the concept brought by John Calvin was agreed upon as the basis of Puritanism theology. (Milian and Suparman, 2003)

“The Day of Doom” also contains the theology of Calvinism. Stanzas 31, 32, and 34, tell about the fall of Adam from heaven. The contents of these verses follow the teachings of Calvinism. Calvin based his theology on the “story of creation” and the “Fall of Adam”. The day of Doom is a clear illustration of Calvin’s theology. One of Calvin’s main ideas in Puritanism is “Covenant Theology” which Wiggelsworth describes in the poem. Covenant theology contains teachings about God creating the entire universe and its contents, including humans. And in that teaching, God created the first human, named Adam, with a perfect form. Then God also created a partner for Adam, namely Eve. They were both placed in heaven and made a covenant with God called the “Covenant of Work”. The covenant contained that Adam and Eve

would live happily ever after in heaven. But, to get it all, they must obey God’s rules and always do good. However, one day Adam and Eve violated the covenant by eating the forbidden fruit because the devil’s persuasion influenced them at that time. It was a sin that they had committed and was called the “first sin”. As a result of their actions, they were expelled from heaven and transferred to live on earth. On earth, they will find misery, and their descendants will also suffer the consequences of that first sin by living in a world full of toil and tribulation, and finally, they will die. They bring their sins on the earth, and this sin will be passed on to their grandchildren. The Puritans subscribed to the dictum “In Adam’s Fall, we sinned all”, which means that because of the Fall of Adam, Adam’s descendants, including humans, will bear the sins that Adam has committed, and the descendants of Adam will continue to sin and damage. In Calvinist theology, Calvin believed that God has absolute sovereignty over things, and humans are incapable of understanding God’s nature. In stanzas 31, 32, and 34, the history of the fall of Adam is presented well.

Besides, the poem also presents the main teachings of Calvinist theology. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin stated his five main theology. Calvin’s main thought had been formulated in Synode of Dort in 1619. The five main theology of Calvinism are:

- a. Total and innate depravity
- b. Unconditional election
- c. Prevenient and irresistible grace
- d. Perseverance of the Saints
- e. Limited atonement.

Above are the main teaching of Calvinism. The first, Total and innate

Depravity, means that humans have been corrupted and humans are sinners because they have inherited sin from Adam. For the Calvinist, all the humanism has been fall in sin. None of us is unaffected by this fall. It also means that sin has affected our hearts, minds, and bodies. Stanza 44 presents the first point of Calvinist theology, “Total and innate Depravity”. It is stated clearly that human always has sin and always be a sinner. It is proven in the first and second line in stanza 44 “You sinners are, and such a share, As sinners, may expect” Besides that, in line 8 from stanza 44 stated that “Though every sin’s a crime”, it means that the sin that owned by the human is kind of crime, all the human in the world have done the depravity and they are a sinner. In her article entitled “Konsep Keselamatan dalam ajaran Calvinisme.”, Maria (2019) writes that Total Depravity can be understood from the error of this doctrine. Firstly, total depravity does not mean absolute destruction. Absolute destruction means that humans have expressed their crimes to the vilest level (as evil as humans are), while total depravity means that humans are not so evil. Second, total depravity does not mean the loss of relative virtue. The meaning of relative virtue is the virtue that does not stem from true faith. Third, total depravity is always and solely in sin. Fourth is, Man cannot do true goodness. Fifth, man cannot understand goodness. Sixth, man cannot desire true goodness. (Widiastuti, 2019).

The second is Unconditional election. The Calvinists define God’s election as God selecting some people to be in heaven. Thus, the people who are not selected will go into hell. Thus, the term “Unconditional” means that God chooses the people to come into heaven not because God looks for something

or a good thing from the human, but God chooses the people to come into heaven based on what the people have done. The second point of Calvinist theology is clearly presented in the last stanza. It demonstrates that all the saints are finally brought into heaven and live eternally and happily there, while the sinners have been taken to hell and punished by God. The saints referred to in the last stanza of the poem “The Day of Doom” are God’s chosen people who will be entered into heaven. As has been explained in Calvin’s theology, the chosen people are people chosen by God at random.

The third, Prevenient and irresistible grace, means that God will give the grace to the some elected people, the amount of the people are not big. Human can not reject or gain this grace by their own effort, because God is authoritative over anything. No one can choose whether they will get the grace or not. Grace is a gift from God to the people he has chosen to get grace. God can give grace in the form of people who are hated to become people he loves, and nothing can hinder God.

The fourth, Perseverance of the Saints, means that the Saints or Christians will continue to believe that Christ is their Savior.

The fifth, Limited atonement, means that Christ’s sacrifice has resulted in God’s forgiveness for those who are chosen. They are a limited number of people. Christ had the purpose of erasing all the sin for the people who trust Him.

CONCLUSION

“The Day of Doom” is an American literary work written by Michael Wigglesworth. It is classified as a Colonial

literary work because it was published between 1607 and 1775. The characteristics of literary works during the colonial period were that their literary works were more straightforward and more religious. The poem has a religious character because this poem has a theme of the Day of Judgment which tells how the Day of Doom event and the conversation between humans and God. The poem contains the concepts of Puritanism. The concept of Puritanism that is clear in the poem is the theology of Calvinism. The five concepts of Calvinism are Total and innate Depravity, Unconditional Election, Prevenient and irresistible grace, Perseverance of Saints, and Limited Atonement.

REFERENCES

- Bartleby.com (n.d). The Day of Doom. Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://www.bartleby.com/96/10.html>
- Bremer, F. J. (2009). Puritanism: A very short Introduction. Oxford University Press
- Britannica.com. (2021). Michael Wigglesworth. Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Wigglesworth>
- Coffey, J & Lim, P.C.H. (2008). *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*. Cambridge University Press
- Dabney, R.L. (n.d). *Five concepts of Calvinism*.
- Greelane.com. (2019). *Periode sastra Amerika dari Kolonial ke Kontemporer*. Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://www.greelane.com/id/sastra/literatur/american-literary-periods-741872>
- Milian, S & Suparman. (2003). *Ide-ide Besar: Sejarah Intelektual Amerika*. UII Press.
- Mimirbook.com (n.d). literature Amerika. Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://mimirbook.com/id/c318584a444>
- Tuhanyesus.org. (n.d). *15 Tanda-tanda kiamat menurut Kristen dan Alkitab*. Retrieved June 01, 2021, from <https://tuhanyesus.org/tanda-tanda-kiamat-menurut-kristen>
- VanSpanckeren, K. (1994). *Outline of American Literature*. The United State Departement of States
- Widiastuti, M. (2019). Konsep Keselamatan dalam ajaran Calvinisme. *Jurnal Pioner*. 5(4), 228-296.