

**Comical aspects in nicholas udall's Ralph roister doister  
(a mimetic approach)**

*By*

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**Chapter I**

**Introduction**

**A. Research Background**

Horace Walpole, the eighteenth-century man of letters, once observes that this world is a comedy to those that think and a tragedy to those that feel (Pickering and Hoeper, 1997: 1164). Actually, Walpole's statement is only one of many definitions of comedy existing in the theory of literature. However, the statement mentioned is one way to understand comedy through someone's way in viewing this life. It is because human can learn something worthy from the process of life, which in turn can be applied to face the life itself. Regardless to Walpole's definition of comedy, it is needed to know that comedy is also form of literature genre found both in fiction and in drama. One of the examples is the drama named *Ralph Roister Doister*.

The play entitled *Ralph Roister Doister*, which was written in 1554 by Nicholas Udall, was developed in the form of comedy. The term comedy itself has four subcategories of definition, romantic comedy, comedy of humours, comedy of manners, and farce. When the main sources of humor are the ludicrous

complication of love, the play is called a romantic comedy. It is called a comedy of humours when the emphasis is on the ridiculous foibles or characteristic of the blocking figures. When the play makes fun of the affectation, manners, and convention of human behavior, it is called a comedy of manners. It will be called a farce, later, whenever it achieves its effect through buffoonery, horseplay, and crude jokes (Pickering and Hooper, 1997: 1165). However, *Ralph Roister Doister* is not included in such categories of comedy. The comedy is an interlude. Tennyson said that interlude was perhaps the earliest English comedy as such. The comedy of interlude uses the elements of low comedy, which uses physical action, especially beatings and rantings; drinking; clowning; jesting (often coarse); and person of low social status (Tennyson, 1967: 73). A play named *Ralph Roister Doister* is generally looked upon as the first real English comedy. John Gassner in his *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, stated that Ralph Roister Doister was the first fully adaptation of Roman comedy that was fundamentally English in spite of its dependence upon classic character types and despite its “regularity”-that was, its five-act structure and unified dramatic action presented in a single setting (Gassner, 1987: 263). In addition, Udall developed the play by imitating Roman’s playwright, Plautus and Terence. Within the framework of acts and scenes, Udall adjusted figures borrowed from Roman comedy but it was transformed to suit English conditions, and mingled with others of purely native origin. It is regarded as the first play to be written in the English language, especially West Germanic language (Gassner, 1987: 263).

Nicholas Udall himself was an English playwright and schoolmaster who was born in Hampshire in 1504 and died in 1556. He was educated at

Westminster School and at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He taught Latin at Eton College, of which he was headmaster from about 1534 until 1541 (Gassner, 1987: 263).

In short, the play tells the readers about the Roister Doister's attempts to make Dame Christian Custance to be his wife. He thought every woman who saw him was in love with him. So he made up his mind to marry a rich and beautiful widow named Christian Custance. He was too confident that Custance would yield at once so he wooed her at first by ordering deputy to give her a love-letter. Not being a very good scholar, Ralph got someone else to write a love-letter for him, but Merrygreek put all the stops in the wrong places when he read it, which made the sense quite different from what he had been intended, and instead of being full of pretty things the letter was full of insults. Therefore, the lady responded it by sending her old nurse to give back the letter to Roister Doister. Realizing that his first attempt failed, he, then, asked his servant to bring ring and token as the symbol of his proposal. The following day, Roister Doister's companion, Matthew Merrygreek, was sent to bring back instant assent "to be wedded on Sunday next". Unfortunately, his second attempt also failed. Her refusal made him stand in great despair that he declared that he had to die. However, after a mock requiem had been said over him, Roister Doister revived at Merrygreek's suggestion to try the effect of personal interview with Custance. Unfortunately, Roister Doister was again overcome by his third repulse. Finally, he decided to conduct the last effort by preparing a grand assault upon Custance's house. In revenge for her scorn, Ralph Roister Doister threatened to burn the dame's house down, and set off to attack it with his servant. The revenge planning

was also caused by Custance's maids (Talkapace, Alyface, Mumblecrust, and Truepenny) who had put him into shameful rout. The widow, however, met him with her handmaidens. Throughout the play, the maids, with their high spirit, their gay loquacity, and their love song, formed one of its attractive and original features. They always succeeded assisting Custance to intercept Roister Doister attempts in approaching Custance.

To simplify the description of the research, the writer decided to specify the title into "*Comical Aspects in Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister (A Mimetic Approach)*". The main reason to write such title is to gain specific understanding of the comical aspects contained in the elements of the drama, mainly the comedy. Another consideration in analyzing *Ralph Roister Doister* based on its elements is because the writer sees that the elements have an important side in making the story of the comedy become humorous. Therefore, the writer is able to see closely the function of elements in a play particularly comedy.

## **B. Research Questions**

The study is conducted to answer the main problems dealing with the comical aspects of *Ralph Roister Doister* that the writer tries to analyze. There are two questions of the problem formulation that become the major discussion of the thesis. In details, they are stated below:

How do the elements of the drama create the comical effect of *Ralph Roister Doister*?

How does the comical effect produced by the elements of the drama effectively support the whole comical situation of *Ralph Roister Doister*?

### **C. Problem Limitation**

There are various kinds of elements of a play. Therefore, to avoid ineffective analysis, in the thesis the writer limits the research on the analysis of the elements of the structure that have significant contribution in shaping the humorous situation of *Ralph Roister Doister* such as character, theme, plot, dialogue, and diction. In other words, the writer merely analyzes the elements that can be put as the comical aspects of the comedy by correlating them with the theory of comedy applied in the thesis.

### **D. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are stated as follows:

1. To describe the comical aspects of *Ralph Roister Doister* through the structure of the play.
2. To explain the effectiveness of the comical aspects produced by the structure in supporting the whole comical situation of *Ralph Roister Doister*.

## **E. Research Benefits**

The research benefits include:

1. To assist readers in apprehending relationship between structure and comical aspects in a comedy.
2. To give readers knowledge about the way to find one of comic effects based on mimetic approach.
3. As a reference for further research that studies similar theme.

## **F. Research Methodology**

Research methodology discusses the theoretical concepts of various kinds of methods concerning with their goodness and weakness. In scientific research project, methodology does not only talk about theoretical concepts but also choose the method that will be applied (Muhadjir, 2000:3). Based on Muhadjir's statement, it can be observed that there are two basic points in the discussion of methodology. The first is about theoretical concepts. It means that in methodology of a research, the writer should explain the theory or approach that will be applied. The second point is dealing with the method to conduct the research or to apply the theory. Whenever a researcher will conduct a research, he has to choose the appropriate method to apply the theory.

In conducting the thesis, the writer uses the mimetic theory as the principal to establish the research. Mimetic theory is the theory that views work of arts as the form of imitation of nature. Art is essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe

(Abrams, 1976:8). Socrates also says that the arts of painting, poetry, music, dancing, and sculpture are all imitations. Therefore, the term art in general is the form of imitation of the universe.

Furthermore, in using the mimetic theory applied in drama, the writer merely uses the imitation stated by Aristotle in the Poetics. He explained the genre of tragedy as the imitation of an action of high importance (Aristotle in Barnet et. al, 2001:78). This is advanced by Tennyson who cites that tragedy is the imitation in the form of action (Tennyson, 1967:3). The basic conception of mimetic theory lays in the “imitation of action”. Hence, in the relationship with comedy, the concept of mimetic theory says the opposite view with tragedy. If tragedy is in high importance, comedy is in lower one. Comedy shows men as “worse than they are” (Hatlen, 1962:102).

## **1. Type of Research**

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative library research. It is called descriptive because this research merely aims to describe, write down, and report certain condition of object or event in a systematical and an accurate way (Kartono, 1996: 29). Moreover, it is qualitative in the term of its result. Qualitative research is kind of research that the results are not gained from statistical procedure or another calculation method. The example can be research of someone’s biography and behavior, organization function, social movement, or causal effect relationship (Strauss & Corbin, 2003: 4). Therefore it can be concluded that qualitative research only deals with verbal or qualitative data. It is

library research, then, since the researcher used books and other writing materials as the sources to collect data and information for supporting the subject matter of the research.

## **2. Research Method**

Research method explains technically the method applied in a research (Muhadjir, 2000: 6). In conducting this research, the writer analyzes the data based on the mimetic theory. The writer directly relates the elements of the play and the theory of comedy by Allardyce Nicoll that is expressed in his book *The Theory of Drama*.

### **a. Data and Sources of Data**

There are two categories of data employed in the research, the main/primary data and the secondary data. The main data were taken from the dialogues in the play of *Ralph Roister Doister*. The secondary or supporting data are in the form of quotations of statements, were taken from criticism, essays, review, and any other information having relationship with subject matter.

### **b. Data Collecting Method**

To collect the data, the researcher applies the data collecting technique as follows:

1. The researcher explores the primary data by reading and understanding the drama *Ralph Roister Doister* to find the dialogues that contain phrases or words having relationship to the topic of analysis.
2. As the way to get secondary data, the researcher reads and quotes the selected information that is necessary to analyze the subject matter.

### **c. Data Analyzing Technique**

There are three main steps that the researcher conducts to analyze the data. Chronologically, they are arranged as follows:

#### **1. Classifying the data.**

Actually, the primary data of this research is dialogue. However, dialogue itself has its components such as sentence, phrase, and word. Therefore, the data are classified based on the form. In this research, the researcher categorizes data into three forms, sentence, phrase, and word. Moreover, the sentences, phrases, and words are classified based on their function on the analysis. For example, if there is a word that can be used to analyze character, the researcher puts it into the data of character. However, if a word can be applied to analyze character and diction, the researcher puts it into both elements. In classifying the data, in short, the researcher conducts two steps. The first is classifying the data based on their forms and the second is classifying the data based on their function in the analysis.

2. Analyzing the data by applying the theory of comedy proposed by Allardyce Nicoll.

After classifying the data, the researcher analyzes the data based on the theory of comedy proposed by Allardyce Nicoll. It means that the classified data is correlated directly with the theory of comedy in order to answer the problem formulation.

Drawing conclusion.

The third step of the data analyzing technique is drawing conclusion. In this step, the researcher draws conclusion based on the analysis.

#### **d. Thesis Organization**

The thesis is divided into four chapters to create detail explanation of the analysis of Ralph Roister Doister. Therefore the readers are able to understand and comprehend the content of thesis well.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION. It consists of background of the research, problem limitation, problem statements, objectives, benefits, methodology, and thesis organization.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAME OF THOUGHT. It consists of the review on the previous research, mimetic theory and theory of comedy.

CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS. It consists of the analysis purposed to answer the problem statements mentioned.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION. In this chapter, the researcher concludes the study and makes recommendation to the readers.

