

## CREATIVITY AND SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE ANTHOLOGY OF *TRANSIT* SHORT STORIES: THE WORK OF SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA

Vedia

Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas  
Islam Syekh Yusuf Tangerang, Indonesia

Email: vedia@unis.ac.id

DOI: 10.24815/.v1i1.14830

### Abstract

This research focuses on analyzing the anthology of short stories entitled "Transit" with a structural and sociological approach to literature. The structural approach is used with the aim to see the languages and the way how to write short stories. While the aim of literature sociological approach is to see social criticism in the anthology of short stories "Transit". Research shows that the anthology of short stories "Transit" by Seno Gumara Ajidarma has creativity in terms of wordplay, writing style, and *mbeling* plot (unconventional plot). While the social criticisms found are a criticism of dehumanization, infidelity, and moral degradation.

**Keywords:** Creativity, criticism, social.

### 1. Introduction

Literary is the works that show a reflection of life. Although literary are imaginative, literature cannot be separated from the facts of life. Moreover, we can say that literary is a drama of life that is displayed through a beautiful piece of writing.

Beautiful because literary are present through the reflection of an author on what is around him. However, the privilege of an author is that he is able to imagine what appears and does not appear so that it seems real to the reader. This was also stated by literary critic M. H. Abram (1981) that "*Literary was born from the contemplation of one who understood art to the life of the universe, then the work comes to the audience*".

From the description above, that is clear that a literary was created through a process. The meaning of life as outlined by the author in his work must have certain tendencies from various aspects surrounding it. Thus it is not strange if a work has a tendency towards a particular field. This is what makes a genre of literature, for example in the fields of social, political, economic, cultural, and religious. From this genre, the literary can be analyzed to find out the meaning in its entirety through to the way of the analytical theory that matches to the purpose.

Similarly to the work of Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Through to the anthology of short stories entitled *Transit* (Ajidarma, 2019), Seno presents how real urban life is. The life of Seno in the fact that who often visits or lives in a certain place makes him able to describe

the life of urban. Urban's life is very interesting to tell because urbanization is unavoidable due to population and economic growth. This is appropriate with Tischler's statement (2011, p. 365):

*Looking at population issues, we begin to see two very different trends in the world. In some parts of the world, we have rapid population growth, which will produce economic, social, environmental, and political strains.*

The statement above emphasizes that the occurrence of urbanization is indeed inevitable. Even the condition of urban has formed agglomeration. As stated by Frey and Zimmer (2001, p. 14):

*In fact, compared to the entire history of human evolution, it has only been fairly recently that people have begun to live in relatively dense urban agglomerations. None the less, the speed at which societies have become urbanized is striking and the extent to which societies of today are urbanized and size of present-day agglomerations is unprecedented.*

So is the rapid growth of urban, so that it creates a phenomenon that color the entire life. Literature is part of the mirror of life itself, so it is not surprising if an author is inspired by the life of urban.

As stated above, basically literature is part of the creative process. This is because writing literary involves elements of creativity towards something that is renewable. Putra (2012, p. 10) revealed that creative includes as follows:

- a. *Moves builds, creates, and produces "creative works" and innovative*
- b. *Having the ability, power, to create an imaginative work the concept, design, and artwork of the advertising world.*

Seno's creativity contained in the anthology of short story *Transit* is worthy of attention. Literary that are the results of the reflection of an author are certainly creativity. However, creativity between individuals can be very different. This is because individuals themselves are unique and different from each other.

Creativity can be seen in terms of writing and content. Therefore, this study reviews literary with a structural approach to look at the language and ways of writing that used by the author. This is in accordance with Abram's statement (1981, p. 189) which states that "*Structural studies consider literary to be a model of writing formed by various elements that give rise to literary effects.*" Although reviewing literary in terms of meaning or content is far more important, if you want to see the creative process of work, structural studies are also important. This is due to structural studies analyzing a literary based on the elements of the work itself, both elements of psychic and extrinsic elements. As stated by Emzir and Saifur Rohman (2015, p. 38), "*For structuralists, elements play a decisive role in the literary text and what is done through text.*"

Meanwhile, based on the tendency of the contents of Seno's work, the writer is interested in looking further into his work through the blades of social criticism. This is because the works of Seno told a lot about the social life of urban people who describe the side of life that is hidden or usually covered up. With his expertise, Seno displays the dark side of Urban's life so that it makes things seem taboo to be worth talking about. The ability of Seno tells that the life of urban society is strongly supported by the real life of Seno who likes to "range over".

Urban whose lives are in the middle of urban areas with various activity and interest. A life that tends to be selfish needs to get social control. In this case, criticism is needed. Foucault as quoted by Patton (2011, pp. 267-268), states:

*Critique is a concern to find points of difference or exit from the present. More precisely, critique is the attempt to identify contemporary limits to present ways of thinking and acting in order to go beyond them.*

In his statement, Foucault said that criticism is needed to find the point of something that deviates from the right thing. Without criticism, a deviation will continue to deviate until finally, it is more deviant. Critics of reading texts including literature are needed in order to find a better meaning. As stated by McKinnon (2006, p. 12):

*While this will not provide us with the "True" meaning of the text, if we fail to do so, our reading of the text will inevitably become yet another ritual repetition, reinforcing the received reading of the text, further repressing the metaphor and ironing out the dialectics.*

Social is something that is related to society. Humans cannot live without other humans around them. This happens because basically, humans are weak creatures. He needs other people to meet his needs.

In a community life between one human being and another, many will touch each other, when the touch occurs in the same way, there are no problems that arise. But on the contrary, if what is the touch is something that is the opposite then there will be an outburst. Therefore, social criticism is needed.

In dealing with these social problems, sociology is very necessary. Sociology is a social science that studies the behavior of life in society. While literature is a means that can be a teaching material for life in a beautiful way. Thus the sociology of literature is the study of social life in literary. Therefore, the study of literature that focuses on the social side will require a sociological approach. In this case, Ratna (2004, p. 59) states:

*The sociological approach analyzes humans in society, with the process of understanding starting from the community to the individual ... the sociological approach considers the literary is the community itself.*

On another occasion, Ratna (2014, p. 26) also stated, "By returning literary works to the people, the symbols in literary will gain strength, validity, and objectivity." The purpose of this statement is to see literature by looking at the conditions of society there will then make literary which are works of imagination to be works that have sufficient objectivity.

## **2. Research Method**

This research uses analytical tools, namely structural approach and sociology of literary with descriptive qualitative methods. The anthology of short stories "Transit" by Seno Gumara Ajidarma is the main source of data in this study. The data was obtained using the techniques of reading literature, listening, and recording with steps, namely 1) carefully reading the short stories of Transit, 2) recording all data in accordance with the research, 3) sorting the data, and 4) grouping data. Data analysis techniques in this study are descriptive analysis techniques and content analysis. The steps taken are 1) to analyze structurally an

anthology of short stories, 2) analyze an anthology of short stories with a review of sociological literature theory.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The anthology of short stories “*Transit*” by Seno Gumara Ajidarma consists of 15 short stories. Entitled *Jakarta City Tour*, *Snake Leather Shoes*, *Dog (Segawon)*, *Transit*, *Tumble*, *Lingerie*, *Travelogue*, *Going Home Doesn’t Come Home*, *Hole Wall Palace*, *Rickshaw Satan*, *Dark*, *Gokill*, *Love Slaves*, *Elderly Clerics*, and *Bull Devils*. Themes are in 100% stories about life urban. Impressed Seno has succeeded in ‘exposing’ the lives of urban. However, that is indeed what happens as if nothing else can be covered up. As stated by Giddens (1986, pp. 93-94)

*“But cities no longer have walls, and in the most extensive urban conglomerations administrative demarcations frequently cease to correspond to any real divisions in the urban sprawl.”*

The themes contained in the anthology of short stories “*Transit*” are 1) love and sex (21%), 2) politics (22%), 3) horror (21%), 4) worship (21%), and 5) travel (16%). From the results of the study, it was found that the creativity of the authors in the anthology of short story *Transit* was: **wordplay**, **writing style**, and **unconventional (mbeling) plot**. While social criticism in the anthology of short stories *Transit* includes author criticism of **dehumanization**, **infidelity**, and **moral degradation**.

#### 3.1 Creativity

As stated above, this research also analyzes an anthology of short stories with structural analysis to see literary as written in the text. This is as stated by Castle (2007, p. 188):

*Structuralism does not believe in an otherworldly realm of pure structure, but rather in the tendency of systems (natural and social) to exhibit structural relations. Structuralism is the study of these relations and the knowledge that they afford of the system itself. It is always the study of a human being(s) in the world.*

The above was stated by the structuralist because they trusted the work of its structural purity. They figure out the literature through the structures in the text.

##### 3.1.1 Wordplay

Many wordplays are found in an anthology of short stories *Transit*. Some wordplays come up with the same pattern frequently but in different words. Examples of wordplay can be seen in the following quote:

*The passengers really **suffer**, **suffered** by pilots who intentionally and voluntarily made passengers **suffering** from their **suffering**.* (p. 3)

*Passing with full of dream charm, **so slow**, **so slowly**, like nothing **slower**, but immediately flashed, lost from view.* (p. 11)

The use of repetitive words that is unusual as in the example above, the word **suffering** is repeated 5 times and the word **slow** is repeated 3 times showing wordplay and show the creativity of the writer. Creativity by repeating words excessively is used by the author to give attention to the matter in.

### 3.1.2 Writing style

The style of writing short stories generally are the same, namely the style of prose which consists of paragraphs. Even if there is something different from the other writing, there is a dialogue that uses quotes and causes the writing to not be full in one line. However, in the anthology of short story *Transit*, researchers also found a different writing style. We can see the different styles in the following example:

But it was too late, so that those who had already been knocked unconscious, it did not stop the next reassurance attempt.

"What is it?"

tumble!

"What is beautiful like?"

Tumble!

"Look!"

Tumble!

Tumble!

Tumble!

Tumble!

Tumble!

Tumble!

Tumble! (p. 39)

The writing style as above was usually found in poetry writing, but it is not unusual for a short story. However, this writing style is interesting to appreciate.

### 3.1.3 Unconventional (*Mbeling*) plot

Unconventional (*Mbeling*) plot that is meant by the researcher is an unusual plot. *Mbeling* is usually used for poems written not following the rules. The term used by the author in this study is because the plot used by Seno in his short stories were a lot unusual. According to Prawiroatmodjo (1988), "*Mbeling* comes from the Javanese language which means naughty, stubborn". This means that the grooves that are playing are grooves that do not follow the proper rules. In other words, learning is an unconventional path. The storyline does not have to always follow the pattern of proper flow. The story that Seno displays can be started from conflict first as seen in the following example:

*"The scabies dogs! Tourists do not have their awareness who want to enjoy the suffering of others! Welcome, and please come down!"* (p. 1)

The quotation above is the first part of the short story entitled "*Jakarta City Tour*". This sentence is the conflict that is a part of the previous long conflict but being told later. Besides showing unconventional plot, the storyline that was made is also unusual.

The above quotation also shows an unusual storyline because the tourist should get special treatment, but not. Moreover, foreign tourists who come to Indonesia. Isn't Indonesia a country with a high level of hospitality? However, Seno presents the stories outside of it all. Tourists who come to Jakarta have had the experience that a very different situation altogether.

The tourists in this short story were treated to a vicious story about the massacre of humanity due to differences in beliefs among followers of certain political parties and religions. Also, massacres caused by the social jealousy of the poor to the people who live in

luxurious lives. In addition, tourists also do not get friendly service. Terror throughout the journey and ended in torture.

### 3.2 Social Criticism

With the theme of the life of urban society, it cannot be denied that the stories contained in it are having social values. Urban society is unavoidable because of the explosion of the population in a place and lack of land for work. In this situation, urban society is vulnerable to deviant behavior. Seno in the anthology of short story *Transit* seems to be trying to explore how urban life is. The criticism expressed by Seno especially caused by he wanted a change to the truth. This was also stated by Foucault in Patton (2011, p. 269):

*Critique as “the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth.”*

The author criticism that I can find through the anthology of short stories *Transit* are as follows.

#### 3.2.1 Criticism of the author to dehumanization

As human beings created by God who have the brain to think and heart to cultivate taste, it is only natural that humans can have virtuous characters. Mans who are virtuous will be able to spread his love to others, to nature, and his environment. However, how if it turns out that humans who are expected to be virtuous don't even have compassion for each other? If this happens then that is what is called dehumanization. Dehumanization (KBBI) means the removal of human dignity. While from Indonesian Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, dehumanization is a behavior or process that demeans someone and other things.

The author's criticism of dehumanization are shown in the following quotation:

*“That is the fate of the followers of the forbidden party,” said the narrative of the tourism promotion show, “Until now noble actions like that are still ongoing, those who feel right themselves may do whatever they want, including completing one's life ...” (p. 2)*

*Since then I know that human love for dogs can be eternal, but his love for humans depends on the circumstances, and I have to adjust to that situation if I want to live without honor like now. (pp. 25-26)*

In the above quotation, we can see the author's social criticism of human behavior. Humans are described as having a cruel heart to be able to kill their neighbors. Worse, humans are described as being more affectionate to animals. In his short story entitled “*Segawon*” (Dog), Seno described how finally a beggar came to eat dog food because no human would want to give it a donation. However, when the beggar wrote, “Today my dog hasn't eaten.” So he got some donation in the form of dog food so he divided the food with his dog named Obelix. Ironic events were also subject to criticism for McKannon (2006, p. 1) like the following statement:

*The sharp irony I heard in his declaration that nothing could be more reasonable than the suppression of individuality in contemporary society struck a true if discomfiting note.*

The above statement confirms that there is cruel oppression for humans to other humans because dehumanization has indeed occurred.

### 3.2.2 Author criticism to infidelity

Loyalty is needed both in friendship, work, especially in married life. In the anthology of short stories "Transit", the author describes how loyalty should be there, but is lost for various reasons. When infidelity arises in married life, the most common thing is free sex. The author's criticism of infidelity can be seen in the following quotation:

*Still at the airport? Did you say two hours? It's enough if you just come back again / let's have a quickie!* (p. 27)

*However, without being asked, both Lana and Maya have become a part of his life, to whom his heart is always called to one, each time being with others ...* (p. 49)

In the above quotation, there is a *quickie* term to express an invitation to have quick sex that can be done anywhere and anytime. This kind of encouragement is certainly done by someone, not with their partner. This illustrates infidelity, they doing that does not because of love. Even, there is a sentence in the figure of the short story "Lingerie" which says "Don't talk about love," Maya said. (p. 49).

What the author describes is a phenomenon from real life. This is what was criticized by the author because as part of social science the data that can be taken in criticism is a phenomenon. This is as expressed by Bruce (1999, p. 16) based on a Rosabeth Kanter study of the Utopia community:

*While we cannot experiment as easily as the natural scientist, with some imagination we can find 'naturally occurring' data, examples from real life, to simplify social phenomena.*

The statement above describes social criticism as being different from natural science. Data obtained in social science is data taken from existing phenomena. This certainly requires also the science of hermeneutics so that when interpreting the text as data it does not merely look at the writing, but also the thing that builds the text. In this case, Hadi W.M. (2008, pp. 6-7), stated:

*The effort to find objective truth is almost impossible if what is meant by truth is the truth which is at the heart of the theory. The truth lies in the deepest part of the text so that to find it is necessary to have an interpreter available for intensive dialogue with texts.*

So understanding of the sentence in the "Lingerie" above, which says "Don't talk about love," Maya said, for example, can't be limited to the meaning of the word don't talk - love. Instead, you must understand why this sentence was said, at what time this sentence was spoken, and who was the figure of Maya who said this statement.

When it is understood that this sentence is pronounced because those who say only seek pleasure, are spoken when people seduce and are spoken by a woman with her cheating friend, then we can understand what has happened, that is a husband's infidelity to his wife.

### 3.2.3 Author's Criticism to moral degradation

The subsequent critics of the author are the most severe criticisms of the critique that is a moral degradation. Degradation (KBBI) means setback, deterioration, decline, etc. (about quality, morale, rank, etc.) Deviant behavior carried out by humans will ultimately have an impact. The worst impact is when this behavior becomes an example for young people. Here the author tries to describe a very sad cause-effect relationship. The following is a quotation that illustrates how moral degradation has become rampant until it reaches a very young age.

*"You a child, what do you want being here?"*

*He turned with his chest pounding.*

*"Looking for Mbak Tum."*

...

*"She was there, did you see that? Middle carriage. "... No matter how dark the night, he could see the naked woman's face on the chest of the man whose T-shirt had a hole in it." (p. 81)*

*We, mighty children, may not kill birds, but our mighty adults hear killing humans. (p. 93)*

The moral degradation is clearly seen in the short stories above. The quotation on the short story *"The Hole Wall of Palace"* illustrates how a child aged eleven years intentionally came to the location of prostitution looking for a woman whose name he knew from his friends. He deliberately collected money to pay for the woman called "Mbak Tum".

Moral degradation occurs not without cause. Moral degradation occurs because of the absence of social control. The moral degradation of children who are still very early is due to the example of adults around them.

In the second quotation from the short story *"Satan Rickshaw"*, the author told an irony of how a child should not kill a bird, while adults around him kill other humans. In another short story entitled *"Gokill"*, the author holds a character who since the age of 7 years has known human cruelty to other humans through the tragedy of 1965 followed by the events of 1998. These events become the inspiration for the character to be a mercenary gunner.

Although the author (Seno) presents the events of 1965 and 1998 in his stories. But still what the author conveyed is no longer a reality. The facts that have been imagined in such a way become literary. As stated by Mahayana (2005, p. 336):

*The description of a society in literacy is no longer exactly the same as the actual condition of society. The life described by the author is a life that only exists in the work itself; a "world" that comes from the experience of the author who has experienced the process of appreciation, interpretation, and meaning of all that.*

Although the description of literary is no longer the same as the real condition of society, literature cannot be separated from social problems. This is because literature and social sciences have similar objects. As stated by Laurensen and Alan Swingewood (1972, p. 11):

*Sociology and literature share similar conspectus. Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institutions and of social processes; it seeks to answer the questions of how society is possible, how it works, why it persists.*

This statement affirms that between social science and literature both have objects about people's lives. The difference is that sociology is the study of people's lives, while literature is a picture of the life of society itself.

#### 4. Conclusions

The anthology of short stories *"Transit"* by Seno Gumara Ajidarma consists of 15 short stories. Themes are in 100% stories about life urban. Impressed Seno has succeeded in 'exposing' the lives of urban. The themes contained in the anthology of short stories *"Transit"* are 1) love and sex (21%), 2) politics (22%), 3) horror (21%), 4) worship (21%), and 5) travel (16%).

The anthology of short stories "Transit" by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, is an anthology of short stories that tell about urban life. The stories that were described presented many figures and events inspired by the events of 1965 and 1998 in Indonesia. This Incident has a lot of social criticism not only in Indonesia but also in the world. So the anthology of short stories also presents social criticism of urban life.

Seno's expertise in writing stories in an anthology of short stories "Transit" presents the creativity in writing short stories. Seno is able to present events that seem taboo to be worthy to be told. Creativity is present through *wordplay*, *writing style*, and *mbeling plot* (*unconventional plot*).

The *social criticism* that can be found in the anthology of short stories "Transit" is a criticism of *dehumanization*, *infidelity*, and *moral degradation*. Dehumanization is described by telling how humans care more about animals than other humans. Disloyalty is described by telling how a person is involved in free sex so that he forgets the promise of being loyal to his partner. Moral degradation can be seen through the story of how adult behavior can be an example for young people to act improperly. Finally, this collection of short stories is very useful as human contemplation through social criticism and can be an example of how literary can be presented with new creativity.

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