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# **SOCIAL CRITICISM THROUGH “STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS” IN *SISTER CARRIE* BY THEODORE DREISER**

Prof. Dr. Albertine Minderop, MA  
Fakultas Sastra / Jurusan Sastra Inggris

## **ABSTRACT**

Penelitian yang berjudul *Social Criticism Through Stream of Consciousness in “Sister Carrie” By Theodore Dreiser* membahas kritik sosial dari Dreiser terhadap kehidupan masyarakat Amerika pada pengarang yang disampaikan melalui teknik *Stream of Consciousness* (teknik Arus Kesadaran). Teknik Arus Kesadaran adalah kekacauan pikiran yang berkepanjangan dan mengalir sebagai sebuah proses dari tokoh fiktional dalam novel. *Stream of consciousness* adalah teknik karakterisasi yang tampil dari kesadaran atau alam bawah sadar dari mental dan pola pikir yang mencakup: pikiran, persepsi, perasaan, dan asosiasi yang mengalir sedemikian berupa dan menggambarkan kekacauan pikiran yang berkepanjangan (Pickering dan Hooper, 1981:55). Kritik sosial adalah seni mengevaluasi atau menganalisis karya seni atau sastra - masyarakat manusia, interaksi individu dan kelompok, atau kesejahteraan manusia sebagai anggota masyarakat (Merriam-Webster, 2002: 275). Metode Penelitian yang digunakan adalah *Content Analysis* dengan teknik Hermeneutika (teori interpretasi). Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah kritik sosial Dreiser terhadap masyarakat Amerika pada zamannya. Menurut Dreiser masyarakat Amerika pada umumnya sangat materialistik, tidak mampu mengendalikan nafsu, menghalalkan segala cara untuk memperoleh kekayaan materi, hidup dalam kepalsuan, senantiasa mengedepankan kepentingan diri sendiri, keindahan dan kepuasan lahiriah. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah akibat dari pola pikir dan sikap hidup seperti tersebut di atas manusia mengalami berbagai penderitaan dan keputusasaan.

Kata Kunci: *Social Criticism, Stream of Consciousness, Content Analysis, Hermeneutika.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Theodore Dreiser, newspaper reporter and journalist, began his first novel in the early fall of 1899, at the age of twenty eight. He finished the manuscript of *Sister Carrie* in March 1900. In this novel, Dreiser put Caroline Meeber (Carrie) on the afternoon train from Colombia City in Wisconsin to Chicago in August 1889. “She was eighteen years of age, bright, timid and full of illusions, and Dreiser had created a novel that would have a publication history and critical reception as controversial as the career of his heroine (NMW, 1981:ix).

It was in August, 1889 when Carrie, a girl of eighteen years old that full of illusions of ignorance and youth boarded the afternoon train for Chicago where her sister was there. There were lights and sounds and a roar of things in this city. People were rich. There were vast depots. The purpose of Carrie to visit Chicago is to seek a better life. She is lack of education, inexperienced, but she is young and beautiful. When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. The city has its cunning wiles no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. The gleam of thousand lights is

often as effective, to all moral intents and purposes, as persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye.

On the way to Chicago she met a traveling salesman whose name is Drouet. He treated her so nicely until she fell in love with him and they are living together. Drouet fulfilled Carrie's needs but never thinks to take her as his wife. During her searching of better and better life, Carrie met with another one, a best friend of Drouet whose name was Hurstwood, a married man with two children. The later also fell in love with Carrie and so did she. The story becomes complicated when they faced a triangle love story and Hurstwood faced his tragic condition.

In presenting the story, the Dreiser used the techniques of viewpoint, the position of the narrator in relation to his story; thus the outlook from which the events are related and the stream of consciousness – omniscient description and soliloquy. Though the writer does not use most of the stream of consciousness in this novel but it is essential to describe what this technique is.

*Stream consciousness* novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter. This, rather its techniques, its purposes, or themes, distinguishes it. Hence, the novels that are said to use the stream of consciousness techniques to a considerable degree prove, upon analysis, to be novels which have as their essential subject matter the consciousness of one or more characters; that is, the depicted consciousness serves as a screen on which the material in these novels is presented (Humphrey, 1954:1-2).

There are four basic techniques used in presenting stream of consciousness, they are: direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy (Humphrey, 1954: 23). *Direct interior* monologue is that type of interior monologue which is represented with negligible author interference and with no editor assumed (Humphrey, 1954:25). *Indirect interior monologue* is, then, that type of interior monologue in which an omniscient author present unspoken material as if it were directly from the consciousness of a character and, with commentary and description, guides the reader through it (Humphrey, 1954:29).

The stream of consciousness technique that is most familiar to the reader of novels is description by an *omniscient author*. The use of description by an omniscient author to represent consciousness allows for almost as many variations as there are of style in general (Humphrey, 1954:33-35). *Soliloquy* in the stream of consciousness novel may be defined as the technique of representing the psychic content and processes of a character directly to the reader without the presence of the author, but with an audience tacitly assumed (Humphrey, 1954:36).



Anyone telling a story may begin, as narrator, by using his own voice; then introduce a narrator who tells the story – in which there are characters who, in turn, have their own voices and who, in their turn of course, may narrate (Cuddon, 1979:415-416). In spite of the technique used in this novel, there are some criticism that the author wants to present.

*Social criticism* in this case is the art of evaluating or analyzing works of art or literature – human society, the interaction of the individual and the group, or the welfare of human beings as members of society (Merriam-Webster, 2002:275). While moral (which a story, event, or experience teaches) teaching is the teaching of moral habit, standards of behavior, principles of right and wrong (Hornby, et al, 1973: 634-635).

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The materials used in this research are primary and secondary resources. The Primary resource is the novel entitled *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser. The Secondary resource is the reference that consists of some relevant sources of website. The Primary resource in the form of sentences and phrases quoted from the novel. The method used in this research is content analysis and technique of hermeneutics. Content analysis is used to explore the ideas expressed by the author in the forms of statements, questions, and dialogues of the characters. The method of interpretation used in this research is the techniques of Hermeneutics (theory of interpretation).

The materials were taken from the novel are in the form of quotes that contain and reflect the characters' view of nature and in form of imagery. The method of content analysis is to uncover, understand, and grasp the message of literary works. A researcher is doing this by building a concept associated with the literature. Aspects that are outside the literary aesthetics, explored, internalized, and discussed in detail. Elements were highlighted in the content analysis include, among others, the problem of moral ethics, things didactic, psychological problems, and philosophical values. The procedures relating to procurement data and determine the unit of analysis. Conclusion and analysis process include understanding of the symbolic meaning of a literary work. The paradigm of this study is a qualitative approach (Creswell,1994:21). The use of a qualitative study with the conceptual realm, to get the message that a comprehensive literature include: the validity of semantics, understanding the symbolic meaning inherent in context; while reliability is used for adjustment between the results of the review of the research literature that has been formulated (Endraswara,2008:162).

The technique of hermeneutics is the process of interpretation. Language is a medium without borders, which brings something in it - not only understood culture through language, but also everything that is contained in the field of understanding (Sumaryono,1993:28).

According to Prof. Dr. Abdul Hadi W.M., hermeneutical interpretation is a theory in understanding the meaning of the text, especially in literature. Modern Hermeneutics, as presented by Paul Ricoeur, stating that the language is a container of meanings, when someone reads a text, the intention to understand its contents is through interpretation. A researcher is able to reach the deepest meaning because a researcher has a complete knowledge of the culture, religion and history, not just knowledge of language, literature, and aesthetics.

According to Ricoeur, hermeneutics is the best strategy to interpret the texts of philosophy and literature. The study design was: the interpretation of deep understanding figurative language such as: similes, metaphors, symbols, and metaphors. Coherence is to understand the meaning of the element structure, internal relations to integrate all the elements to get the deepest meaning, analogy is the observation of meaning and values, and describe their results through analysis by using some theories, in this context. First, the text read very carefully by interpreting figurative language. Secondly, the text is interpreted to understand figurative language that contains the idea of the author in the form of the character of the figures highlighted. Lastly, understand the text in the form of figurative language to show the main idea and comprehensively to convey the author.

### **BENEFIT OF RESEARCH**

This research might be beneficial for those who are interested in the field of Literature, Culture, and Philosophy mainly for students who are dealing with this knowledge (stream of consciousness).

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

There are four basic techniques used in presenting stream of consciousness, they are: direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy (Humphrey, 1954: 23). Anyone telling a story may begin, as narrator, by using his own voice; then introduce a narrator who tells the story – in which there are characters who, in turn, have their own voices and who, in their turn of course, may narrate (Cuddon, 1979:415-416). *Indirect interior monologue* is, then, that type of interior monologue in which an omniscient author present unspoken material as if it were directly from the consciousness of a character and, with commentary and description, guides the reader through it (Humphrey, 1954:29). The stream of consciousness technique that is most familiar to the reader of novels is description by an *omniscient author (omniscient description)*. The use of description by an omniscient author to represent consciousness allows for almost as many variations as there are of style in general (Humphrey, 1954:33-35). Here is Dreiser's criticism of the American people's mental

attitude in his era. Dreiser used the technique of *omniscient author* (*omniscient description*). He addressed his criticism to the readers – to men in general.

### 1. Humans Only Look For Wordly Pleasure and Self Interest

Dreiser was concerned about the mental attitude of the American people who were too oriented towards material wealth and selfishness without regard to the interests of others.

- Men's thought is only to obtain pleasure without responsibility. They move to one and another girl to pursue the happiness: What his intentions were we may readily guess from our knowledge of men. Many individuals are so constituted that their only thought is to obtain pleasure and shun responsibility (Dreiser, 1981: 132).
- They travel more and more to find pleasure and leave it when they are bored. They are totally irresponsible for everything: *They would like, butterfly-like, to wing forever in a summer garden, flitting from flower to flower, and sipping honey for their sole delight* (Dreiser, 1981: 132).
- They do not realize that all human actions are always followed by a responsible attitude: *They have feeling that any result which might flow from their action should concern them. They have no conception of the necessity of a well-organized society wherein all shall accept a certain quota of responsibility and all shall realize a reasonable amount of happiness* (Dreiser, 1981: 132).
- They are only selfish, ignore the power of the law, never feel guilty, and never realize that this destruction is the result of their bad deeds: *They think only of themselves because they have not yet been taught to think of society. For them pain and necessity are the great taskmasters. Laws are but the fences which circumscribe the sphere of their operation. When, after error, pain falls as a lash, they do not comprehend that their sufferings is due to misbehavior* (Dreiser, 1981: 133).
- They do not realize that the suffering of life they experience is a result of their bad deeds:

*Many such an individual is so lashed by necessity and law that he falls fainting to the ground, dies hungry in the gutter or rotting in the jail and it never once flashes across his mind that he has been lashed boundaries which necessity sets. A prisoner of fate, held enchained for his own delight, he does not know that the walls are tall, that the sentinels of life are forever pacing, musket in hand* (Dreiser, 1981: 133).

They always maintain a life that only prioritizes personal interests. They never think that everything they get in a bad way is not without risk. They make a strong guard so that all their bad deeds will not be bad for them:

*He cannot perceive that all joy is within and not without. He must be for scaling the bounds of society, for overpowering the sentinels. When we hear the cries of the individual strung up by the thumbs, when we hear the ominous shot which marks the end of another victim who has thought to break loose (Dreiser, 1981: 133).*

They never realize that so many people are martyred to uphold the truth and stop evil from the earth: We may be sure that in another instance life has been misunderstood – we may be sure that society has been struggled against until death alone would stop the individual from contention and evil (Dreiser, 1981: 133).

Dreiser warned that girls should be more careful in stepping their foot for a new life. Young girl should be gradually growing up in healthy environment otherwise they may become the victims of society. They should have very good education since they were very young from good parents that might show good examples to their children:

*Transplantation is not always successful in the matter of flower maidens. It requires sometimes a richer soil, a better atmosphere, to continue even a natural growth. It would have been better if her acclimatization had been more gradual – less rigid. She would have done better if she had not secured a position so quickly and had seen more of the city which she constantly troubled to know about (Dreiser, 1981:54).*

Dreiser criticized girls who left their homes too quickly and tried to live independently because if they were not able to resist the passions of pleasure and the desire for luxury without hard work, they would fall into immoral life. They were unable to resist glamorous life in urban areas:

*When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. ... . The gleam of thousand lights is often as effective, to all moral intents and purposes, as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye. Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman (Dreiser, 1981:3).*

The temptation of life in the city that greatly influences their mental attitude and the demands of city people who value glamorous people plus the lack of control from parents or they are respected, made them fall into hedonic life:

*A blare of sound, a roar of life a vast of array of human hives appeal to the astonished senses in equivocal terms. Without a counselor at hand to whisper cautious interpretations, what falsehoods may not these things breathe into under guarded ear! Unrecognized for what they are, their beauty, like music, too often relaxes, then weakens, then perverts the simplest human perceptions (Dreiser, 1981:4).*



Dreiser wanted to say that our life went on as it is and no matter how the creatures anticipated. For those who were not ready to face all experience they might be up against some difficulties as men were mostly dependent upon material:

*Once the bright days of summer pass by, a city takes on that somber garb of grey, wrap in which it goes about its labors during the long winter. Its endless buildings look grey, its sky and its streets assume that somber hue, the scattered, leafless trees and wind-blown dust and paper but add to the general solemnity of color. ... If it were not for the artificial fires of merriment, the rush of profit-seeking trade and pleasure-selling amusements ... We are more dependent upon these things that is often thought for. We are insects produced by heart and wither and pass without it (Dreiser, 1981:90-91).*

## 2. Loss of Control Can Be Trapped and Might Lead to Inner Conflict

Dreiser reminded the American community not to get stuck in a bad life because the trap could lead to inner suffering as well as physical suffering.

Dreiser reminded men not to be easily tempted and seduced only by beauty, pleasure and glittering things. Once they are careless they will be trapped that may bring them to a very miserable condition:

*A man in his situation, who comes, after a long round of worthless or hardening experiences, upon a young, unsophisticated, innocent soul, is apt either to hold aloof out of sense of his own remoteness, or to draw near and become fascinated and elated by discovery. It is only by a roundabout process that such men ever do draw near a girl of the kind described. They have no method, no understanding of to ingratiate themselves in youthful favor, save when they find virtue in the toils. If unfortunately, the fly has got caught in the net, the spider can come forth and talk business upon its own terms. So when maidenhood has wandered into the moil of the city, when it is brought within the circle of the rounder and the roué, even though it be at the outermost rim, they can come forth and use their alluring arts (Dreiser, 1981: 122).*

Sometimes men are unable to face heavy pressure in their life that might cause feeling of helplessness; because they do not understand the nature of life: Deprived of his position and struck by a few of the involved and baffling forces which sometimes play upon man, he would have been as helpless as Carrie – as helpless, as non-understanding, as pitiable, if you will, as she (Dreiser, 1981: 63).

Some men did not learn how to balance between duty and desire because they never listened to their conscience, they did not know which one was right or wrong. Because of their powerful desires they chose the wrong and regarded it as truth that might lead them to evil. This condition happened when men only relied on their instinct that might lead to mental conflict:

*To those who have never wavered in conscience, the predicament of the individuals whose mind is less strongly constituted, and who trembles in the balance between duty and desire, is one which is scarcely appreciable, unless graphically portrayed. Those who have never heard that solemn voice of the ghostly clock of the mind which ticks with awful distinctness “thou shalt,” “thou shalt not,” “thou shalt,” “thou shalt not,” are in no position to judge.*



*Not alone in sensitive, highly organized natures in such a mental conflict possible. The dullest specimen of humanity, when drawn by desire toward evil, is recalled by a sense of right, which is proportionate in power and strength to his evil tendency (Dreiser, 1981: 269).*

Whenever man has followed in the footsteps of life and had a bad experience they soon forget that; they will do the same thing to heal sufferings. They just go and go without any destination except to seek for happiness that will cause miserable ones:

To the untraveled, territory other than their own familiar heath is invariably fascinating. Next to love it is the one thing which solaces and delights. It us a boon to the weary and distressed, the one thing, which, because of its boundless prodigality of fact and incident, causes the mind to forget (Dreiser, 1981: 290).

Miserable things that happen to some men sometimes regarded as nothing. On the hand, some others regard it as grief. The first ones will easily forget what had happened to them and they will do the same things and the same mistakes:

*We are inclined sometimes to wring our hands much more profusely over the situation of another than the mental attitude of that other, towards his own condition, would seem to warrant. People do not grieve so much sometimes over their own state as we imagine. They suffer, but they bear it manfully. They are distressed, but it is about other things as a rule that their actual state at the moment (Dreiser, 1981: 74).*

## CONCLUSION

Dreiser showed social criticism of American society in his time. The social criticism was conveyed through Stream Of Consciousness with the Omniscient Participant technique. That is, even though this novel discussed the life of a girl who is tempted by city life so as to release moral values in her life, Dreiser addressed his social criticism to the readers in general. He was concerned witnessing the lives of American people, especially poor and uneducated rural girls had the courage to live their lives in pursuit of material wealth without thinking of the risks they would face.

If we look at the contents of the novel as a whole, Dreiser might want to state that poor and beautiful girls without education but who were attractive would use their beauty to get a luxurious life because they would easily attract the attention of men. Dreiser not only criticizes women, but also American society in general. According to Dreiser, even though they are trapped in a life that is not in harmony with social norms and sometimes experience inner conflicts, the need for luxury life has a stronger influence on their mental thinking and attitudes.

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