

## Social Criticism In Wladyslaw Szpilman's Novel The Pianist

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### Abstract

*This study aimed to discover and explained the types of social criticism in Wladyslaw Szpilman's novel entitled "The Pianist" and this study was hope to be utilized by further researcher. The data sources used in this study was the novel "The Pianist". In analyzing the data, the writer used descriptive qualitative research method through sociological approach. Data were obtained by using the techniques of reading, noting and analyzing. While in classifying the data, the writer used Marx's theory of nine concepts of social criticism and used Alan Swingewood's theory sociological of literature. The writer found that some the social criticism such as: social criticism of political problems, social criticism of economic problems, social criticism of educational problems, cultural problems, social criticism of moral issues, social criticism of family problems, social criticism of religious problems and social criticism of technology problems. The most dominant data were social criticism of moral issues.*

**Key words:** Social Criticism, Social Condition, Sociological, Novel.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the times, literary works which were originally produced as a spill of feelings and used as mere leisure time reading has become a material for understanding the dynamics of life. Literature can be interpreted as a form of language and language itself has a lot of meaning in it. Literature was also a form of creative writing that was imaginative using beautiful language (Eagleton, 2010, p. 4).

Literary works were divided into two parts, namely prose and poetry. Prose is an independent literary work while poetry was a literary work that had rules or regulations. The examples of prose were novels. Literature described life itself in a social reality (Saryono, 2009, p.18). This means that literature can provide insights to humans about themselves and the world around them, so literature indirectly also gave ability to control the environment in order to achieve their welfare.

Humans in living life were always faced with various problems that surround them. These problems were not only limited to the personal problems of one individual, but it will develop into problems of the wider community. In literary works, the author certainly raised human problems (Waluyo, 2010, p. 2). Human and humanity problems arised because of the depravity or imbalance that occurs in people's lives. Social criticism is often found in literary works as a form of depiction of social reality in society (Palullungan, 2014, p. 14). Novel is a one of literary works that describe human life through characters and behaviors that contain social criticism. Through literature, humans can learn how to respond to a problem so it is useful for life. In the framework of Durkheim's social theory, literature was particularly concerned with the development of social solidarity which was the main force for the formation for social order (Faruk, 2010, p. 53). Literature and society were related, because literature was a medium for expressing various social problems.

This social criticism study was certainly part of the sociology of literature approach

because it had the same relationship, namely society. Like the novel that will be discussed in this research. Sociology and literary works at the same stage will embody the same view (Wahyudi, 2013, p. 56).

Related with sociology or other science that discussed the community, Swingewood had three concepts in the literary work approach, namely: literature as a socio-literary document or as a reflection of the era, literature seen from author's social condition, and literature in relation to history of literary works at a certain period. With the existence of social criticism, the author tried to provide a response to the problems in the community (Dewi, 2017, p. 4). The social criticism that appeared will answer the problems formulation to find out the types of social criticism are presented in the novel and to describe how the social condition are reflected in the novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Previous Studies**

In this section, the writer lists the various results of previous studies related to the research, then made a summary.

“Wladyslaw Szpilman's Survival during the World War II as Reflected in *The Pianist*” (Hanifah, 2015). This research employed the objective approach through Freudian psychoanalytical theory. The discussion resulted that Wladyslaw Szpilman's psychological aspects contributed to his defence for surviving.

Hedonism Portrayed in Tony Kushner's Play Script “*Angels in America*” (Mangetan, 2021). In this research, the writer used descriptive qualitative research method through Sociological approach. Data were obtained by using the techniques of reading, noting, and analyzing. While in classifying and analyzing the data, the writer used Weijer's theory of Hedonism. The writer found 20 data of hedonism which were divided into 2 types of hedonism.

“Social Criticism as Reflected by William Blake's Selected Poems” (Monalisa, 2019). In this research, the writer used Expressive theory and social criticism theory to support the writing of this thesis. The writer finds four problems of social criticism that exist in William Blake's poems: Social criticism of gender issues in the *Earth Answer* poem, social criticism of moral problems in the poem *Little Black boy*, social criticism of technological problems in the poem *The Chimney Sweeper*, social criticism of economic problems in *London* poem.

“Kritik Sosial dalam Novel *Lontara Rindu* by S. Gegge Mappangewa” (Palullungan, 2014). Which described social criticism of religion, culture, economy, in the novel by using the sociological theory of literature from Endraswara. From the results of this study, the researcher concluded that the novel *Lontara Rindu* by S. Gegge Mappangewa is full of social criticism.

“Social Criticism toward Pakistani Society in the 20th century Represented by the Major Characters in Qaisra Sharaz' *The Holy Woman*” (Semartini, 2008). The writer employed library research and applied sociocultural-historical approach to analyse “*The Holy Woman*”. The writer discovers that Qaisra depicts the Pakistani society, especially in Sindh in the 20th century, by presenting characters and social issues in the 20th century.

“The Social Criticism in George Orwell's *1984*” (Yuslina, 2017). The approach used in “*1984*” novel is the structuralism approach, social criticism and totalitarian theory to analyse the statement of problems. The study shows that the totalitarian system of Big Brother led to the unknown freedom in Oceania.

From the studies above, it can be seen some similarities and differences between the studies. The similarities between the all previous studies and this research is describe social

criticism and also, the all previous studies use a qualitative descriptive method. The differences can be seen from the approach. Palullungan (2014) used the sociological theory of literature from Endraswara. Monalisa (2019) used Expressive theory and social criticism theory. Meanwhile, Yuslina (2017) used the structuralism approach, social criticism and totalitarian theory. Hanifah (2015) used Freudian psychoanalytical theory, although the object is same but the topic is different from this research. Semartini (2008) applied sociocultural-historical approach. Beside of the different approach, the objects are also different. In this research, the researcher will analyze the social criticism from Wladyslaw Szpilman's novel *The Pianist*.

## **2.2. Research Theory**

In this research the writer used two theories to answered the problem of the research.

### *2.2.1 Types of Social Criticism from Marx*

Social criticism can be devided into nine concepts (Marx, 1973, p. 134-152). The first are social criticism of political problems, the second are social criticism of economic problems, the third are social criticism of educational problems, the fourth are social criticism of cultural problems, the fifth are social criticism of moral issues, the sixth are social criticism of family problems, the seventh are social criticism of religious problems, the eighth are social criticism of gender issues and the last are social criticism of technology problems.

### *2.1.2 Sociology of Literature from Alan Swingewood*

In principle, Swingewood (1972:13) put three forward perspectives related to the sociology of literature. First, the most popular perspective was literature as a social document which was a reflection of the situation at current time. Second, literature seen from the author's social condition. Third, literature in relation to history of a certain period. These three things can stand alone or be revealed at once in the sociology of literature research. Here the writer took this view to seen the relation between literary work and history, the background of the author's social condition in producing literary works and also to seen literary work as a reflection of an era that cause the appearance of social criticism.

## **3. METHODS**

In this research, the writer used descriptive analysis method to completed the data. The object of this research was the novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman. This novel consists of 18 chapters and 224 pages. It was published by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A, Great Britain in 2000. The data collecting method used in this research were reading technique, taking note, describing, drawing conclusion. The data analysis technique that will be used in this research was descriptive qualitative method. The writer will used the nine concepts of social criticism from Marx and Alan Swingewood's theory called sociology of literature. Swingewood's theory consisted of three perspective. First, literature as a social document which was a reflection of the situation at a time. The second was literature seen from the author's social condition, and the last was literature in relation to history.

## **4. RESULTS**

The writer presented the findings of the research on social criticism and social condition in Wladyslaw Szpilman's novel *The Pianist*.

### **4.1 Types of Social Criticism in the Novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman**

#### *4.1.1 Social Criticism of Political Problems*

Based on Data 12, sentence ‘‘venting their anger with the government for bungling mobilization. The rest were going from one military authority to another, unable to get themselves into the army for love or money’’ explained the anger and disappointment of men towards an unfair government in carrying out military service which only certain people can follow it. Wladyslaw criticized by said that there are only two choices, namely choosing to live with love, go home with disappointment to look after their family in such a threatening time or live by relying on money to enter military service. This criticism aimed to criticize the government therefore this sentence was a social criticism in political problems.

#### *4.1.2 Social Criticism of Economic Problems*

According to Data 4, sentence ‘‘I lost two illusions here: my beliefs in our general solidarity and in the musicality of the Jews’’ described a situation when Wladyslaw played in the Warsaw ghetto cafes, he was disheartened when he witnesses the wealthy client talking loudly and ignoring his music. He notices the extremely divide between being wealthy Jew and poor Jew. This indicated there were an injustice reign between classes in economic problems because wealthy Jew still can enjoy a decent food and eat at the restaurant, while the poor Jew was very struggling to get food for their live.

#### *4.1.3 Social Criticism of Educational Problems*

Based on Data 39, sentence ‘‘but I felt I would rather have such people as neighbours than semi-educated Poles loyal to their masters who might hand me over out of fear’’ contained criticism conveyed by Wladyslaw regarding educated people who helped him greatly in his escape as he fled from one hideout to another. He said that during his last escape he was had a neighbour in the next door to a married couple who were highly educated and they were also on the run same with Wladyslaw. Wladyslaw's critique of education was very clear by said he would be better off as neighbors with highly educated people like them although he also felt threatened to be around them if the German suddenly found out where they were hiding, but it was all considered better by Wladyslaw than being around ‘‘a semi-educated Polish who was loyal and afraid of his master’’, which was Germany. They would definitely not hesitate to report Wladyslaw if they saw Wladyslaw hiding there.

#### *4.1.4 Social Criticism of Cultural Problems*

According to Data 5, sentence ‘‘then he knocked the coins gently on the marble surface of the table, picked them up in his fingertips, raised them to his ear and listened hard to their ring – the only music in which he took any interest’’ was a criticism that Wladyslaw conveyed to rich people where he worked as a pianist in a cafe. In his existence he felt no one listened to the music he played. They just busy with their life and their own world, even there was a time when Wladyslaw was asked to stop playing the piano because a guest wanted to test a gold twenty-dollar coins that he had just acquired from a fellow guest. then he knocked the coins gently on the marble surface of the table, picked them up in his fingertips, raised them to his ear and listened hard to their ring. Wladyslaw criticized by said ‘‘it was the only music they enjoyed listening to’’. This criticism in the form of culture was in accordance with the understanding of culture which had four important points, one of it was the idea of what is worth (values). This quote clearly illustrated how these rich people did not care about anything other than what they thought was the most value which were money, gold and so on.

#### *4.1.5 Social Criticism of Moral Issues*

According to Data 8, sentence “the poor simply wondered when they would die of it, while the rich wondered how to get hold of Dr Weigel’s vaccine and protect themselves” described of two very different lives when typhus strikes their city. The rich were wondered how to get of Dr Weigel’s vaccine and protect themselves while “the poor can only wondered when they will die of the disease”. Here it was clearly illustrated that the rich people did not care about their surroundings, they have become selfish humans who only think about themselves. They did not know how to live as a people who has moral. There were no good moral values that they can showed, life was only about them without thinking about others.

#### *4.1.6 Social Criticism of Family Problems*

According to Data 7, sentence “so I earned well at this time and could just meet the needs of our family of six, although with some difficulty” described a few of the many Wladyslaw’s struggle in fighting for his family to stay alive by eating decent food. He fight as hard as he can to get a decent job in order to meet the needs of their family. He felt very responsible to his family because he was the first child of the four siblings so he felt he was the most responsible person as a solution to his family problems. His father who was in such a difficult time was very difficult to get a job because of his old age. Wladyslaw in this sentence got a job in the biggest cafe in ghetto with a lot of visitors so he also earns money to live with and struggle with his family although he said “he lived it with some difficulties” but all of that he did to fulfill his obligation to be responsible to the family he loved so much.

#### *4.1.7 Social Criticism of Religious Problems*

Based on Data 47, sentence “God allows all this to happen, lets these forces have power and allows so many innocent people to perish to show mankind that without him we are only animals in conflict, who believe we have to destroy each other...And it is the same today” described when the young Germans were still easy to be influenced with given a false doctrines which made the child become a slave in their own fear and not hesitate to obey all the commands that given to them. They were forced to deny their beliefs because every time they have different mindset they will inevitably get intimidated, so they did not hesitate to do a bad action. Wilm criticized this act by said “God allowed this all happened so that mankind could see that without God human beings were just like conflicting animals” that thought we have to destroy each other and it was the same with was happening in that time, or it can be said that the war between German and Jewish. This quote clearly described the existence of God and human beliefs that break the commandments of their God.

#### *4.1.8 Social Criticism of Technology Problems*

Based on Data 14, sentence “They were not particularly accurate, and fell some distance away was a criticism” expressed by Wladyslaw about the technology that Germany used during the war against the Jews. According to him, the technology that Germans used did not support their work, in this case to bomb and destroy the city of Warsaw. He said that the bomb did not hit them and was only disturbed by the sound of the explosion. This could be happen due to a lack of technology accuracy they used, here was not explained about what kind of technology that German used but through this quote can give an idea that technology can not always support all of our work, maybe this was because at that time the technology was not too advanced and did not experience renewal as much as it is today.

## **4.2 Social Condition in the Novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman**

The social condition described in the novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman were located in a city called Warsaw, Poland with a population that was partly Jewish with the general situation of small-town people working in a variety of decent jobs. The social conditions depicted here were the conditions of the people who lived during the oppression of an occupation when this country was described with an atmosphere of chaos due to the war in which Germany led by Hitler. This social condition was based on the point of view of a talented pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman.

Under the leadership of Hitler the Germans managed to entered the city of Warsaw with the aim of exterminating the Jewish there, they quickly issued regulations that were very tortured the people there, first with small rules that gradually become a suffocating rule. When the first German attack began the people of Warsaw did not know what was going on to happen to them, they were shocked and did not know what to do, and also the men were not all who can take part in military service because their government was made them angry. Based on Data 12, sentence "venting their anger with the government and unable to get themselves into the army" represented of their anger to government because the bungling mobilization so they did not know what kind of opposition they can did to survive. As time goes by Wladyslaw and his family were very worried because their family of six people had to survive with minimal money in this hard situation to get a job. Based on Data 28, sentence "the beginning of the action in the ghetto had found me with only a few hundred zloty in my pocket" described the economic difficulties that happened in Wladyslaw's family because the Jewish did not allowed to had more than two thousands zloty in their house at that time and Germany will not stand still if they break the rules that they had made and the Jewish had no other choice beside to follow German orders so that they can still live.

Another rules came, Jewish must wear the blue star symbol that represented in Data 21 by sentence "to provide themselves with white armbands on which a blue star of David must be sewn." This rule greatly embarrassed Wladyslaw of his pride, as if being a Jew was a fatal mistake but no one could disobey the German order. The regulations made the population even more tormented when the Jews were separated and exiled by made a wall as a barrier from the non-Jews. In the refuge they were forced to live in a cramped and inadequate area, their lives changed one hundred ninety degrees from before. In Data 11 represented their terrible life in the place that they were called the ghetto by sentence "other children tried appealing to people's consciences, pleading with them. 'We are so very, very hungry'." The attacked they carried out also quickly made the beautiful and peaceful city turned into dead city with all its ruins. Then another nightmare came, typhus disease attacked the city which made many of them die in vain especially the Jews who lived in exile, in Data 8 interpreted by sentence "conversation among both rich and poor was typhus; the poor simply wondered when they would die of it." They could not get vaccine from Dr Weigel who was the only person who found the vaccine to cure them from typhus because they could not had a decent job to make money that cause many of them died in vain because they could not against the disease. Based on Data 18 described how difficult their life by sentence fictional life based on rules which forced people to work from dawn to dusk, almost without eating.

Everyday they could heard the German bombs dropped in their city and also their abominations were shown with easily killed the innocent Jews, in Data 29 and Data 37 described the abominations by sentence "they liked killing anyway: killing for sport and drew his revolver without a word, put it to the boy's temple and shot", all of this in accordance with their goal of exterminating the Jews and proving to the world that they were the strongest country. In that exile the Jews were increasingly pressured by German

regulations, started from an economic perspective that restricted them from eating decent food and diminishing employment opportunities due to their separated live from the outside world. They were all under the terrified pressure and could only wonder when death would come for them.

That day arrived, they were gathered in a field, they did not know where this time they would be taken by the Germans, what they knew was that they would be evacuated to another place but the truth was they will face their death. Based on Data 33 interpreted their anxiety by sentence "He was nervous and bitter...We're letting them take us to our death like sheep to the slaughter!." They were put into the freight train by being crammed into it because the capacity of the train was not suitable for many of them. At that time there was also a policeman who secretly saved Wladyslaw from the death row. Wladyslaw was surprised and shocked with the action of the police but saw that he had been saved he had no other choice and quickly left the place and left his beloved family to be carried into the death train. He returned to the city full of rubble alone with cried, went to the places and houses of his friend and all he found were their corpses. Wladyslaw was devastated and did not know what to do but the only thing that he had to do was hide and fought for his own life. In his hiding he managed to contacted one of his non-Jewish colleagues to help him in his escape, thankfully he found someone who could help, in Data 36 represented by sentence "Well, there was no help...perhaps others would be more humane." In his escape he moved from one building to another until finally the Germans managed to find his hiding place and fled again to another buildings, this time the building was one of the German headquarters in carried out their duties and Wladyslaw did not know that. Fortunately, the officer was not like other Germans who easily killed someone instead he helped Wladyslaw to survive, the people was Captain Wilm Hosenfeld. Based on Data 44 Wilm Hosenfeld wrote a sentence that said "The greatest ideal on earth is human love", by this sentence we could know that Captain Wilm was a kind people and actually he was one of the people who helped Wladyslaw in hiding in that buildings in the remnants of Wladyslaw's strength until the war ended with the German lost and retreated.

This novel clearly described the difficult social conditions experienced by the Jews during the war under Hitler's cruel action such as from economic, political and other conditions. The Germans did not stop until the city was destroyed and left none of the Jews behind, in Data 41 proved by sentence "they still had time to demolish the masonry of the ghetto, now 'cleansed' of its people." they destroyed building after building, Jews ended with with a cruel death into history that the world could not forget.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

According to the results above it be concluded that from Marx theory there were eight types of social criticism that found by writer. They were social criticism of political problems, social criticism of economic problems, social criticism of educational problems, social criticism of cultural problems, social criticism of moral issues, social criticism of family problems, social criticism of religious problems and social criticism of technology problems.

The first type of social criticism that the writer analyzed was political problems. The political system was an aspect of society that functioned to maintain law and involvement in society and to determine the external relations among the community. The first thing that the writer did was read the theory in order understand the definition of social criticism of political problems according to Marx then categorized the data according to its type and

finally explained the data through descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected through Marx's theory of social criticism of political problems which explained the anger and dissatisfaction to the Jew's government. The conclusion of this type was the government of the Jews did a lot of money politics in doing their job which explained how greedy they were.

The second type of social criticism that the writer analyzed was economic problems. Economic problems were issues that concerned how humans met their daily needs from a limited resources and even scarce resources. After understanding the definition of economic problems, the writer applied the theory of social criticism of economic problems by Marx in classifying and analyzing the data. Finally, the data showed the difficulties from economic problems that the Jews face in that time because there were injustice reign between being wealthy Jew and poor Jew.

The next type was social criticism of educational problems. Education became one of the important things in life because with education we processed to developed ourselves to be able to live and carry on life. The process of developing ourselves to become educated individuals was very important to be able to produced qualified and intellectual human beings. The writer applied this definition of social criticism of educational problems by Marx in order to categorized the data which were considered as educational problems. As the result, the writer found that the data was portrayed that even educated people can endanger the life of people who do not in line with them.

The fourth was social criticism of cultural problems. According to Marx's theory culture had four main elements, namely the idea of truth, the idea what was worth (values), the idea of what was special to achieve certain goals, and the last was the idea of how humans did something related with the norm. After understanding the definition, the writer applied the Marx theory of cultural problems and found the data that described the rich people did not care about anything except money, gold and so on that they thought as the most value thing in their life.

The fifth type was social criticism of moral issues. Moral is a value system of how we should live as a humans. The value system is formed from advice, regulations, orders that had been hereditary through certain religions and cultures about how humans should live. The writer applied this definition of social criticism of moral issues by Marx aimed to classified the data which were considered as moral issues in the novel *The Pianist*. The result explained that the rich people that portrayed in the novel were not care about other people it can be seen from the the data finding above that life was only about themselves without thinking poor people that need so much help.

The next type was social criticism of family problems. Family disorganization was the breakdown of the family as a unit because its members fail to fulfill their obligations according to their social roles. This occurred when there was a social conflict such as dissent or economic factors. After read and understanding the definition of social criticism of family problems, the writer used Marx's theory to categorized the data and found the result that explained about the difficulties of Wladyslaw family in that time. Wladyslaw had struggle for his family to stay alive.

The seventh type was social criticism of religious problems. Criticism of religion involved criticism of the validity, concept, or ideas of religion. Critics of religion in general may portray religion as one or more of: outdated, harmful to the individual, harmful to society, an impediment to the progress of science, a source of immoral acts or customs, a political tool for social control. From this definition, the writer applied Marx's theory of social criticism of religious problems and then categorized it to found the result. From the



data finding above, the result described the existence of God and the human who break the commandments of their God. In this case, the German break the rules of God to achieve their goals by killed the innocent Jews.

And the last type of social criticism that the writer analyzed was technology problems. Seeing the bad effects of industrial and digital technology, it can be said that in all advanced industrial societies, technology became a means of domination, control and exploitation, or it can even become something that threatens the survival of mankind. From this definition, the writer applied Marx's theory of social criticism of technology problems to classified the data that considered as a technology problems in the novel *The Pianist*. The result showed that the lack of technology accuracy that the Germans used to bombed Warsaw. The data explained that the technology the Germans used did can not always support their work, the Jews only disturbed by the sound of the explosion.

From all of data, the practice of Alan Swingewood's theory used to described the social condition that presented in the novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman. The social condition described in the novel *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman were located in a city called Warsaw, Poland. Under the leadership of Hitler the Germans managed to entered the city of Warsaw with the aim of exterminating the Jewish there. Finally, Jews ended with with a cruel death into history that the world could not forget. This novel which was published in 2000 was known to written by Wladyslaw Szpilman after the war, it helped him to escape with the shocking experiences he suffered during the war, cleared his head and his heart in order form him to be able to cope in his life. In truth, Wladyslaw was not a writer, he was a pianist, composer and significant inspirer of the Polish cultural life, he was a person who lived for music and who could survive through music.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This research has answered the researcher's problem, which represented the social criticism in the novel "The Pianist" by applying sociological literature approach from Alan Swingewood to described the social condition and nine types of social criticism from Marx. Types of social criticism formerly called social criticism of political problems, economic problems, educational problems, cultural problems, moral issues, family problems, religious problems and technology problems.

Through these problems the writer was able to explained social criticism based on their respective problems. In addition, the most dominant social criticism found in this novel was a social criticism of moral issues. The practice of literary sociology theory by Alan Swingewood was in the description of the author's social condition when experiencing that era. The author's social background influenced the creation of the novel "The Pianist". This was evidenced by life experience, history life, and Wladslaw's views on the Polish situation in the German colonies which he conveyed in this novel.

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