

THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CRITICISM IN MILLAY'S POEM *EPITAPH FOR THE RACE OF MAN*

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Abstract : The purpose of this study is to describe the social criticism in the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man* by Edna St. Vincent Millay. In this study, the researchers use qualitative descriptive research method.. This study used sociological approach which is connects fiction in literary works with the existing reality and have a relationship. Data sources in this research is the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man* by Edna St. Vincent Millay especially in sequences I,IV,V,X and XI which there are social criticism with indirect form of submission or implicit meaning. From the result of this study, the researcher found social criticism of how humans treat nature by providing an overview of disasters as the impact of human behavior and also seven problems of social criticism: (1) Social criticism of moral problem; (2) Social criticism of economic problems; (3) Social criticism of political problems; (4) Social criticism of technology problems; (5) Social criticism of religious issues; (6) Social criticism of Educational problems; (7) Social criticism of cultural issues. It can be concluded that the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man* really contains social criticism.

Keywords : *Social Criticism Sociological Approach, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Epitaph for the Race of Man*

Abstrak : Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan kritik sosial dalam puisi *Epitaph for the Race of Man* oleh Edna St. Vincent Millay. Dalam penelitian ini, para peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis yang menghubungkan fiksi dalam karya sastra dengan realitas yang ada dan memiliki hubungan. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah puisi *Epitaph for the Race of Man* karya Edna St. Vincent Millay terutama pada urutan I,IV,V,X dan XI yang terdapat kritik sosial dengan bentuk penyampaian tidak langsung atau makna implisit. Dari hasil penelitian ini, peneliti menemukan kritik sosial tentang bagaimana manusia memperlakukan alam dengan memberikan gambaran bencana sebagai dampak perilaku manusia dan juga tujuh masalah kritik sosial: (1) Kritik sosial terhadap masalah moral; (2) Kritik sosial terhadap masalah ekonomi; (3) Kritik sosial terhadap masalah politik; (4) Kritik sosial terhadap masalah teknologi; (5) Kritik sosial terhadap isu-isu keagamaan; (6) Kritik sosial terhadap masalah Pendidikan; (7) Kritik sosial terhadap isu-isu budaya. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa puisi *Epitaph for the Race of Man* benar-benar mengandung kritik sosial.

Kata Kunci : *Pendekatan Sosiologis Kritik Sosial, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Epitaph untuk Ras Manusia*

INTRODUCTION

Language is the ability of living things to communicate with one another. Moge (2019: 9) reveals that language is used to express feelings, emotions, ideas, and desires to one another. Literature itself, according to Terry Eagleton (2019) is a written work that is subtle in nature by summarizing notes of daily forms of language in various ways using the language which is condensed, encased, twisted, elongated, inverted, and made odd. Literature in general provides an overview of social and cultural phenomena that occur in society (Sabudu, 2020: 26). This opinion is also in accordance with what is put forward by Rorintulus (2018) that literature is a reflection of human experiences and is in the form of a description of certain phenomena found in society. Literary work itself can be concluded as embroidered words using threads of logic, imagination and feelings that are presented using communicative language with aesthetic purposes. In every type of literary work, various stories, both fictional and based on existing facts, are recorded (Potabuga, Moge & Sabudu, 2021: 710).

Poem is part of a literary work that is ambiguous and complex is generally defined as a written art in which the poet uses language to add aesthetic quality to the intended meaning. The meaning of poetry, according to Dresden, is more straightforward, which defines poetry as a world in words that contains content that reflects the poet's experience, knowledge, and feelings that form a world called poetry. In an effort to increase human awareness about the importance of treating nature as well as possible, ecological ideas in literary works about the human

perspective need to be expressed (Wuntu, 2015: 99). Nowadays, the meaning of a literary work, in this case poetry, has its own peculiarity, where there is a meaning that is motivated by the social and ecological conditions that occur. *Epitaph for the Race of Man* (1934) by Edna St. Vincent Millay was published just before World War II. This Millay's poem is a classic sonnet and has a deep meaning that leads the readers to reflect on what humans have done which nature has then bestowed on them through the ravages of disaster. In this case, the poet wants to convey a critique of the way humans treat nature. Therefore, based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in carrying out a study with the aim of describing the social criticism contained in the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man* by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Criticism

Social criticism is a satire or response to something or circumstances in the community that are considered inappropriate or not in accordance with the values that should be. In simple terms, social criticism is a form of social sensitivity. Social criticism is based on the responsibility that humans are jointly responsible for their social environment. Damono (1979: 25) argues that social criticism in literary works no longer only concerns the relationship between the poor and the rich, poverty and luxury. Social criticism includes all kinds of social problems that exist in society, human relations with the environment, social groups, rulers and existing institutions. Soerjono Soekanto (2000: 3) reveals that social criticism is a scientific

assessment or examination of the situation of society at a time.

The Problems of Social Criticism

According to Soekanto (1990), social problems will arise when the reality that occurs is not in accordance with the values and norms that apply in society. The problem of social criticism is divided into nine aspects: (1) Social Criticism of Moral Issues is criticism that aims to convey truth values and criticize moral values that do not pay attention to the human aspect, as well as the norms that exist in a society; (2) Social Criticism of Family Problems is criticism that arises due to disorganization in the family; (3) Social Criticism of Economic Problems is criticism that arises due to economic inequality in society, for example unemployment, high prices of basic commodities, and lack of jobs; (4) Social Criticism of Political Problems is a criticism that arises when there is inequality in political aspects where the political mechanism is not carried out in accordance with the portion of each aspect; (5) Social Criticism of Cultural Issues is criticism of cultural issues that are considered not in accordance with the norms of culture applicable norms; (6) Social Criticism of Educational Problems is criticism caused by problems in the process of carrying out education itself which results in not achieving the expected goals; (7) Social Criticism of Religious Issues is a criticism that arises due to human who behaves deviate from the teachings of the religion they believe in by not carrying out the commands of their God, as a result it will affect their social life and cause social problems; (8) Social Criticism of Gender Issues is a criticism that arises due to the subordination of women, namely women are considered weak and cannot lead and have a position below men; (9) Social

Criticism of Technological Problems is criticizing the misuse of existing technology.

American Society Life History in the 1930s

From 1914 to 1918 there was a war involving many countries in the world and divided into two alliances that fought each other and destroyed each other. America is one of the countries involved in the war. This involvement made America also suffered a lot of losses as a negative impact of the war. The use of modern tactics and weapons as well as poison gas during the war gave rise to various kinds of diseases so that many living things became victims. A not only human, nature is also affected. Forest damage to environmental pollution made life at that time even worse.

Of the various fields affected by the war, the worst impact was in the social sector. In addition, The Stock Market Crash that occurred since 1929 or known as Black Tuesday caused a dramatic impact for an unprecedented era. This was a major disaster for American society at that time, and plunged the United States into the Great Depression. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their homes and have no other choice but to live in slums with substandard living conditions. The government doesn't offer insurance or compensation for the unemployed, so when people stop earning, they stop spending too. In addition, in the 1930s natural disasters also occurred in America. During that time, the people of the Plains State suffered the worst drought in American history, as well as hundreds of severe dust storms or black blizzards. As a result, soil conditions became unfavourable and made it impossible to grow crops. So by 1940, millions of people had left their farms. From these events, it can be said that the

1930s were difficult years for the people of the United States.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, researchers use descriptive qualitative research methods because the data to be generated are in the form of descriptive data, namely written words that describe what they are. Qualitative analysis is expressed descriptively whose application is to tell, provide analysis and interpret (Satoto, 1995: 15). According to Moleong (2007: 3), qualitative research is a research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviour (observation). In this research, researcher uses qualitative descriptive method with Sociological approach.

The sociological approach is an approach that reviews literary works by considering the social aspects (Damono; 1978:2). This is in line with what is stated by Ratna (2003:2) that the sociological approach is an understanding of literary works by considering the social aspects that lie behind it. The sociological approach is an approach that connects fiction in literary works with the existing reality and is considered to have a relationship. This approach is used based on the reason that literature is a reflection or description of the state of society and contains messages for readers as society itself. So it can be concluded that the sociological approach is a procedure for studying literary works based on social conditions in society.

Data collection

The sources of the data taken from the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man*. The

researchers follow some steps in collecting the data as follows:

1. Literature review is technique that is done by searching, gathering, reading and learning the reference books that are related to the research (Hadi, 1987:9).

2. Reading and note-taking technique, it is a technique that is to read things that are related to the research object then write down the data that is suitable to the goals and objectives of the research (Subroto, 1992:41-42).

Data analysis

According to Sugiyono (2010: 335), data analysis technique is the process of searching for data, systematically compiling data that has been obtain from interviews, notes and documentation, by organizing data into categories, describing into units, synthesizing, compiling into patterns, choosing which ones are important and which will be studied and draw conclusion so that they are easily understood by themselves and other.

After determining the data collection technique through certain sources, the researchers then analyze the data .

1. Collecting Data

The first step in this study is to collect data through literature study techniques as well as reading and note-taking techniques. The researchers search for data that is in accordance with this research based on the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man* by Edna St. Vincent Millay. In the process of collecting this data, the researchers are searching for information through the internet and then read and write the information that was in accordance with this research.

2. Identifying and Classifying

After all the data have been collected, the next step is the writers begin to identify each data and then classify it into the form of social criticism.

3. Analyzing

The next step is to analyze all the data that has been identified and classified. The data analyzed are sequences I, IV, V, X and XI in Millay's poem entitled Epitaph for the Race of Man to find out what social criticisms were contained in the poem which was then explained in the form of a description.

4. Conclusion

After being analyzed, the last step is to draw conclusions from the results of the analysis of social criticism in the poem.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researchers analyze the implicit data found in the poem Epitaph for the Race of Man, especially in Sequences I, IV, V, X and XI.

Social Criticism of How Humans Treat Nature

Below are some of the data and analyses found by researchers regarding social criticism of how humans treat nature in Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Epitaph for the Race of Man".

*Before this cooling planet shall be cold,
Long, long before the music of the Lyre,
Like the faint roar of distant breakers rolled*

*On reefs unseen, when wind and flood
conspire*

(I, Stanza 1)

In the stanza above, Millay criticizes the planet is slowly dying, like all living things born with a limited lifespan. The opening sentence refers to a future when the planet will cool down and die. "Long, long before the music of the Lyre" seems to refer to a future when the story of Earth will be told. The earth will be in ruins where nature will move and shake everything in it while it is humans who are responsible for protecting this planet. This means that human activities are the cause of this planet being dying by human behavior that is not good at protecting and treating the nature in which humans live.

*To drive the ships inshore — long, long, I
say,*

*Before this ominous humming hits the
ear,*

*Earth will have come upon a stiller day,
Man and his engines be no longer here.*

(I, Stanza 2)

This is a message as a warning sign for mankind that there will come a time when nature begins to judge the inhabitants of the earth for the peace of the Earth itself, and when that time comes, humans and their creations will be eliminated by nature itself.

In the sentence "Earth will have come upon a stiller day", Millay argues that there will be a time when the earth will become stiller, which means that the earth will be free from all chaos and recover from various damages. The time meant is the time when humans no longer exist on this earth as in the sentence "Man and his engines are no longer her." Once again this means that it is indeed humans who are the cause of the earth becoming restless.

(X, Stanza 1)

*O EARTH, unhappy planet born to die,
Might I your scribe and your confessor
be,*

*What wonders must you not relate to me
Of Man, who when his destiny was high*
(IV, Stanza 1)

In the stanza above, Millay states that Earth is an unhappy planet. This statement emerged through Millay's observations of life that takes place on this earth. Humans continue to act detrimental to this earth such as the war that occurred at that time which caused destruction everywhere, nature became damaged so that it became the reason why this planet is not happy.

*Strode like the sun into the middle sky
And shone an hour, and who so bright a
he,*

*And like the sun went down into the sea,
Leaving no spark to be remembered by.*
(IV, Stanza 2)

In this stanza, Millay wants to mention the attitude of humans who seem arrogant towards nature or this earth. Millay likens humans to the sun that shines brightly when he is lucky or in a good mood and disappears like a sunset without regard to the things around him. Humans seem to feel entitled to behave arbitrarily over nature that is just silent. Just like the people at that time that ignored the state of nature during war, but eventually complained until they experienced severe depression when the land began to not produce.

*The broken dike, the levee washed away,
The good fields flooded and the cattle
drowned,*

*Estranged and treacherous all the
faithful ground,
And nothing left but floating disarray*

The stanza above is an illustration of the impact of the destruction of this nature. The dikes are damaged; the fields are flooded so they can't be cultivated, until the cattle drown so they can't produce. Millay wants to remind people that the destruction of this nature will greatly affect human life. How not, this nature is a place for humans to carry out their lives and therefore it is the responsibility of humans to protect and maintain this nature. In the phrase "*Estranged and treacherous all the faithful ground*", this shows that if the land is managed properly, it will surely produce good results. "*And nothing left but floating disarray*", the sentence reminds again of the effects that arise when humans do not take care of nature properly or even destroy it. Destroying nature means destroying one's own home.

*Sweeter was loss than silver coins to spend,
Sweeter was famine than the belly filled;
Better than blood in the vein was the blood
spilled;*

Better than corn and healthy flocks to tend
(XI, Stanza 1)

The stanza refers to the attitudes and behavior of humans who often prefer to sacrifice nature for temporary interests. Humans are often reckless in their actions. For example, during the war they used dangerous materials resulted in the destruction of plants and the killing of other living things. Humans seem to forget that what they do will also have an impact on human life itself.

The Problems of Social Criticism in Millay's Epitaph for the Race of Man

In addition to criticism how humans treat nature, in this study, the researchers also analyze the problems of social criticism in Millay's *Epitaph for the Race of Man* using the theory of Soekanto as explained in chapter II. From the poems, the researcher only found eight problems of social criticism as stated by Soekanto, including: Social criticism of moral problem; Social criticism of economic problems; Social criticism of political problems; Social criticism of technology problems; Social criticism of religious issues; Social criticism of Educational problems; Social criticism of cultural issues.

Social Criticism of Moral Problem

Moral problems are problems related to an assessment of the good or bad of a thing with respect to human attitudes and behavior. Morality is something related to the ability to determine right and wrong and good and bad behavior (Wantah, 2005). Morality refers to morality that conforms to social rules, or concerns laws or customs that govern behavior (Chaplin, 2006). The assessment is adapted to the ethics that develop in the community environment which in other words must also be in accordance with the values and norms of life that apply in an environment.

In this poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man*, Millay criticizes a lot of moral issues that mainly lead to human behavior in general that is considered inconsistent with the prevailing values of life.

*O EARTH, unhappy planet born to die,
Might I your scribe and your confessor be,
What wonders must you not relate to me
Of Man, who when his destiny was high*
(IV, Stanza 1)

As previously explained, the stanza above is a criticism conveyed by Millay

about the way humans treat nature inappropriately so that he states that this planet is an unhappy planet. This is certainly closely related to moral issues because the reason the earth is said to be an unhappy planet is because of human behavior that is not in accordance with the values of life as it should be. The sentence also points to the selfish and arrogant nature of humans as if they feel entitled to treat the earth as they please. The war that continued at that time became an example of human behavior that damaged nature because the impact of the war was the destruction of plants and the destruction of various other types of living things.

*Strode like the sun into the middle sky
And shone an hour, and who so bright a
he,
And like the sun went down into the sea,
Leaving no spark to be remembered by.*
(IV, Stanza 2)

In the stanza above Millay also mentioned again about a trait of human, which even today we can still see everywhere, especially in social life. The sentence describes the arrogant trait of human when his destiny or position is high. It is undeniable that many people who when they are happy and lucky begin to forget themselves and begin to lose their caring attitude towards their fellow human beings, but not everyone is like that. This is what Millay wants to remind through his poem, that as humans we should not be arrogant and forget ourselves when we are on top.

Social Criticism of Economic Problems

Economic problems are problems related to the material or financial condition of humans, which is how humans obtain all their needs in life. To get everything they need, humans need to make various efforts

which can then produce to achieve prosperity. In this case, the problem is when humans experience difficulties or obstacles that can prevent them from getting what they need. These problems can be caused by various factors such as a lack of skills that match the existing job opportunities or even a lack of employment opportunities. However, in addition to these factors, humans are also often the cause of their own difficulties.

*The broken dike, the levee washed away,
The good fields flooded and the cattle
drowned,
Estranged and treacherous all the
faithful ground,
And nothing left but floating disarray*
(X, Stanza 1)

In the stanza above, Millay wants to remind the impact of human activities themselves which then bring difficulties in their lives. This is the result of Millay's observations about the state of society at that time. During the war, not only to the natural environment, many infrastructures were also severely damaged and many fields were damaged to the animals that were destroyed as a result of the war. That was the cause of the paralysis of the community's economy at that time.

Through the words that she used into her poetry, Millay continues to remind people not to act rashly because later it will lead to negative impacts that are also detrimental to humans themselves.

*Sweeter was loss than silver coins to
spend,
Sweeter was famine than the belly filled;
Better than blood in the vein was the
blood spilled;
Better than corn and healthy flocks to
tend*

(XI, Stanza 1)

The stanza above describes the rash attitude of humans who act as if they don't think long about what will happen after that. Humans seem to prefer loss to gain, hunger than satiety, or even disease rather than health. In fact, it is not logical if humans prefer these things, which are choices that are detrimental. This is what Millay wants to remind everyone that we must be careful in choosing or in acting so as not to regret in the future

Social Criticism of Political Problems

Social criticism of political problems is a criticism that arises when there is inequality in political aspects where the political mechanism is not carried out in accordance with the portion of each aspect. Political problems that arise in society often lead to one party who may be disadvantaged from the incompatibility of the political mechanism.

*And a tight roof and acres without end
Was the barn burned and the mild
creatures killed,
And the back aging fast, and all to build,
For then it was, his neighbor was his
friend.*

(XI, Stanza 2)

The stanza above describes about humans often sacrifice things around them to achieve what they want. Human desires will continue to exist and will not end with age, every time humans succeed in getting what they want, other desires will appear as well, the reason being to build a good and better life than before. And it cannot be denied that humans are social creatures who need other people, and the closeness between human beings is also one of the

factors that affect human life itself. The closer humans are to each other, the more they influence each other.

In the phrase "*all to build*" has another meaning, which is all as if for welfare. But looking at the state of society at that time, all were far from prosperous. This may be Millay's benchmark for criticizing political problems in America at that time. As discussed in the previous section, it has been explained about the condition of American society at that time which was experiencing an economic downturn where many workers were unemployed and had to experience difficulties in meeting their needs. And to address this problem, unfortunately the government does not offer insurance or compensation for the unemployed, so when people stop earning, they also stop shopping.

Social Criticism of Technological Problems

Technology is an object or non-object created with the aim of helping humans, with technology humans can more easily solve various things. However, the use of technology is often misused by humans, namely by relying too much on technology as a result; humans begin to experience a decrease in performance in them. This is the focus of social criticism of technology problems, namely criticizing the misuse of existing technology.

*To drive the ships inshore — long, long, I
say,
Before this ominous humming hits the ear,
Earth will have come upon a stiller day,
Man and his engines be no longer here.*
(I, Stanza 2)

The stanza reminds humans that one day everything will disappear so that humans cannot forever depend on technology. The

war that occurred at that time is an example of humans depending on technology. The war takes place using various technologies such as war weapons, tanks, and so on.

Social Criticism of Religious Issues

Social criticism of religious issues is criticism that arises as a result of human behavior that is considered to deviate from the teachings of the religion he believes in by not carrying out his God's orders, as a result it will affect his social life and cause social problems.

In his work, Millay also criticizes religious issues based on his observations of his environment at that time.

*High on his naked rock the mountain sheep
Will stand alone against the final sky,
Drinking a wind of danger new and deep*
(I, Stanza 3)

In the stanza above, humans are likened to mountain sheep. Humans seem to be made aware that they have nothing but a mortal body. One day every human being will stand alone against the judgment of his own actions; will stand alone against the final sky.

The sentence "*Will stand alone against the final sky,*" is a description of humans who will be responsible for their respective actions to the Creator when humans die and leave this world. The depiction is in line with the teachings of several religions that existed in America at that time.

*Staring on Vega with a piercing eye,
And gather up his slender hooves and leap
From crag to crag down Chaos, and so go
by.*

(I, Stanza 4)

Who will then look up, to the Creator while carrying all the hopes and efforts for

Social Criticism of Educational Problem

As explained in the previous chapter, social criticism of educational problems is criticism caused by problems in the process of carrying out education itself which results in not achieving the expected goals.

*But no; you have not learned in all these
years*

*To tell the leopard and the newt apart;
Man, with his singular laughter, his
droll tears,*

(IV, Stanza 3)

Millay use two very different types of animals, leopards live on land while newts live in water and to tell the difference between the two, we don't need to study for years because the difference is very clearly visible to the human eye. The parable generally means that humans get education with the aim of being able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong or what is good and what is not. Human behavior can show how far he got an education. Educated or not a person can be seen from the way he behaves to the way he thinks. Therefore, this relates to all the problems that are criticized in the poem *Epitaph for the Race of Man*, namely economic, political, technological, religious, family, cultural, even moral issues that cannot be separated from the education obtained by humans. When there are things that deviate from aspects of life, this means that the expected goals are not achieved which may be caused by problems in the process of carrying out education.

Social Criticism of Cultural Issues

Differences of opinion on a cultural product are the cause of cultural problems, so it can be concluded that social criticism of cultural problems is criticism of cultural problems that are considered not in accordance with applicable norms. Cultural

problems that are also vulnerable to occur are cultures that are slowly being forgotten by the community due to various factors such as the influence of foreign cultures and new habits.

*Before this cooling planet shall be cold,
Long, long before the music of the Lyre,
Like the faint roar of distant breakers rolled
On reefs unseen, when wind and flood
conspire*

(I, Stanza 1)

The sentence "*Long, long before the music of the Lyre*" refers to a change that occurs in society, like the previous one was Lyre music, therefore it uses the word "long" which can mean much different or much changed and begins to be replaced with other types of music that may be more modern. This means that people begin to forget the existing culture because it is influenced by the influence of new habits along with the times. In essence, the sentence contains criticism so that as a society we do not forget the existing culture but continue to preserve it.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis of social criticism contained in the Poem *Epitaph for The Race of Man* by Edna St. Vincent Millay as explained in the previous chapter, the researchers conclude that the poem *Epitaph for The Race of Man* was written by Millay as an expression of his emotions and feelings for what he was experiencing at that time. This poem, written after World War I, is a poem whose basic premise is that we know from the evolutionary history of the earth that no species lasts forever. For this reason, Milay wants to give warnings and reprimands to the community and all mankind about how humans should treat nature.

In addition, based on the state of American society at that time, which was also experiencing difficulties in various sectors, the authors also analyze social criticism regarding several social problems. First, the social critique of moral issues implied in the fourth sequence of the poem, which describes the way humans behave especially towards nature. Second, the social criticism of economic problems contained in the poems sequence X and XI which describes the difficult economic conditions in accordance with the conditions at that time. Third, social criticism of political problems contained in the XI sequence of poems, which allude to people's welfare. Fourth, Social Criticism of Technological Problems contained in the first sequence of poetry, which describes technology that will eventually disappear. Fifth, critique of social religious issues contained in the poetry sequences I and V which describe the sovereignty of God as the Creator. Sixth, Social Criticism of Educational Problems contained in the fourth order about the human learning process. Seventh, the criticism of social cultural issues contained in Sequence I, which is about the development of the times that affect culture.

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