

**MORAL VALUE VIOLATIONS IN AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY NOVEL
BY THEODORE DREISER
(A Study of Psychoanalysis)**

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ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative research. The technique is content analysis using the data in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. Writer uses a psychoanalysis study. In revealing moral values infringement, writer focuses on three questions; how are the type, cause, and effect of moral values violations in the story. Based on psychoanalysis, there is a moral value infringement. The type of moral values infringement is a murdering case. The cause of moral values violations is a self ambition to reach wealth and prosperity. The effect of moral values violations is a charge of death sentence. Based on the research, there are practical implications in education; to improve the quality and quantity of literature learning in high schools in accordance with the objectives contained in the curriculum. Teachers invites the students to enjoy literature study to differ on good and bad moral teachings and to enhance their ability in using English.

Keywords: *Moral, psychoanalysis, novel*

INTRODUCTION

The title of this thesis is Moral Value Violations in An American Tragedy Novel by Theodore Dreiser which is based on a true story. Novel has big impact to the development of language because it helps a person to increase his or her ability in

understanding a foreign language. Besides, novel also gives a psychological impact to the reader because it consists of problematic stories of each character. As a complex literary copyright, fiction contains various elements, including beauty, contemplation that relates to values or

reflection, exposure media, and intrinsic elements that are related to the characteristics of fiction as a literary text such as characters, themes and so on (Ismawati, 2013, p. 70).

In teaching literature, analysis of a novel is considered important because it can benefit the readers, especially in order to enhance the morale value of the senior high school students. This will make students engage in positive activities that will improve their ability to speak and understand the cultural diversity that exists in the world so that they will not fall into negative activities such as anarchic actions that are often carried out by students such as student brawls, bullying actions against younger students, theft, and so on. However, the analysis of literature is only a small part of our efforts to shape the character of moral students because teaching about religious values remains the most important one.

If someone always tries to improve himself, then he will be a person with high standard moral where he can carefully consider the good or bad things he wants to do, so he has a noble character towards God and humans.

One of the most important things that we have to realize is that our life in the world is temporary. We will leave everything in this world when we die. Therefore, it is very disadvantageous for people who try to make the pleasures of life in the world as the purpose of their lives, even more they have the heart to sacrifice the rights of others to achieve the goal. If this happens to someone, it means that he has committed an act of violation of moral values. This act of violating moral values is reflected in the story of a novel entitled *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser. The main problem in this novel is about the violation of moral values in the form of an act of murder committed

by a character named Clyde Griffiths on a girl named Roberta Alden because Clyde considered Roberta as a big obstacle for him to reach his desire to be a rich and respected person.

One element that builds a story in a novel is characterization. Characterization is the appearance of the parties involved in a series of stories. Each figure involved must have certain behaviors that will be an attraction for the story presented. The behavior of the leaders is of course very much related to the realm of psychological studies because psychology is a field of science that discusses human behavior.

Various kinds of conflicts that occur in a life event can be displayed in a novel. One form of conflict that can be displayed in a novel is a conflict about violating moral values. This can be analyzed using psychoanalytic studies which are part of the realm of literature psychology.

The first person who put forward the psychoanalytic theory is Sigmund Freud. Freud discussed the division of human psychism into three things: Id which is a reservoir of reservoirs and a source of psychic energy. Ego which is a mediator which reconciled the demands of corruption and the prohibition of the superego. The superego is in charge of supervising and obstructing the complete satisfaction of these pulses which are the results of education and identification with parents. The relationship between literature and psychoanalysis is the existence of elements of psychiatric or psychological manifestations of the author, fictional figures in stories and readers in literature, novels, drama or poetry. This shows that literary works can be used as a mean to express the psychological problems examined through psychoanalytic theory so that we know about the thoughts and feelings of

the author about the stories displayed in a novel (Albertine, 2013, p. 21).

In addition to several advantages mentioned above, specifically, the novel entitled *The American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser also has advantages compared to one of Dreiser's other works which was the first Dreiser work published in 1900, a novel entitled *Sister Carrie*. Although basically the two novels tell about the ambitions of the characters to achieve success in life in the world, but the novel titled *An American Tragedy* is more interesting because the story was inspired by the famous criminal act in 1906 which Dreiser himself observed was the murder of a landlord lodging made by drowning the victim in a lake. The culprit was Chester Gillette who was eventually subject to the death penalty by being electrocuted on an electric chair. Chester Gillette (CS) initials were finally adopted by Dreiser as the name of the character in the story of *An American Tragedy*, Clyde Griffiths. Meanwhile, the novel titled *Sister Carrie* has limitations because it is considered inappropriate to be read by the most prominent because the story contains the support for a naughty woman named Carrie Meeber.

In addition, compared to Dreiser's latest novel published in 1947, *The Stoic*, *An American Tragedy's* novel is clearly superior because the novel *The Stoic* is not included in the list of best works and the story only emphasizes poverty. Therefore, the author considers that the novel *An American Tragedy* is worthy to analyse.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach method, namely fact finding is done by interpreting written data in the form of a literary work accurately. Therefore, the results of this study will

be in the form of a description accompanied by quotations of data derived from a written text in the form of a novel that is interpreted according to literary study techniques. In this case, the theory used for research methods is the theory of psychoanalysis.

The research is carried out objectively to emphasize the intrinsic aspects of literature. The beauty of literary texts depends on the use of distinctive language and relations between established elements (Endraswara, 2008, p. 51). In this research, there are five steps of the data collection procedure, namely: (1) Reading phase, the researcher reads literary texts that are used as objects of research carefully while marking discourses that are in accordance with the subject matter, namely the forms, causes and consequences of violations of moral values that occur in the novel *An American Tragedy*, (2) Recording stage, a researcher records facts, phrases, sentences or discourses on a special note sheet along with the origin of the page, (3) Grouping stage, the researcher groups the results of the second phase according to the research sub-chapter. For example, a discourse containing moral elements is included in the sub-chapter of the cause of violation of moral values and so on, (4) Sorting stage, researchers apply carefully to the data in the form of words, phrases, sentences or discourses that do not comply with the sub-chapter then removed, (5) The meaning stage, after arriving at the stage of grouping and sorting data, the researcher gives meaning to every word, phrase, sentence or discourse that is in accordance with the theory, supported by relevant references.

The research data is in the form of quotations in the form of words, phrases, sentences or discourses that describe and interpret the forms, causes

and consequences of violations of moral values in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

The procedure of data analysis is carried out after determining the research approach and method as well as data collection techniques, the collected data is then compiled and elaborated by explaining the phenomena that will be determined in the process of data collection. The aim is to limit the discovery to become organized and organized data and then analyzed systematically. This study then describes and interprets the form, causes and consequences of violating moral values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The form of Moral Value Violations based on the results of the study can be seen in the quotations that contain disclosures from forms of violation of moral values that occur in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

... Rest but a moment - a fraction of a minute! Wait - wait - ignore the pity of that appeal. And then - then - But there! Behold. It is over. She is sinking now. You will never, never see her alive any more - ever. And there is your own hat upon the water - as you wished. And the boat, the rowlock a veil belonging to her. Leave it. Will it not show that this was an accident? ". (Dreiser, 1964, p. 12)

The above quote illustrates the violation of moral values that occurred in the form of a murder carried out on a character named Roberta Alden where she was killed by drowning in a lake. This certainly hurts the feelings of the readers, especially if we look at the following quote containing Roberta's cry before drowning into the lake:

"Help! Help!

"Oh, my God, I'm drowning, I'm drowning. Help!

Oh, my God!

"Clyde, Clyde!"

And then the voice at his ear! (Dreiser, 1964, p. 493)

After screaming for help from Clyde Griffiths, Roberta Alden finally sank and died as stated in the following quote:

Silence. More of those nervous twitching of the mouth, eyes, hands. Then ... "Dead! She's been - been drowned! " (Dreiser, 1964, p. 514)

The causes of Violations of Moral Values based on the results of the study, can be seen in the quotations that contain disclosures of the causes of violations of moral values that occur in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

Some of Clyde Griffiths's big wishes include the desire to become a rich person and become a respected person because he wants to change his status in society. We can see this in the following quote:

And that is quite enough by the one girl of his highest level who has the most materialized and meaningful for that upper level itself. (Dreiser, 1964, p. 308)

One of Clyde Griffiths' efforts to obtain his ambition was to approach a girl from a wealthy and respected family, Sondra Finchley. Clyde thinks, by marrying Sondra, his ambition to become a wealthy and respected person will soon be realized.

... a thought which is not a little, but it does not serve to modify his thoughts in regard to Sondra to the least.

That wonderful girl!

That beauty!

She lived in! (Dreiser, 1964, p. 314)

This made Clyde became dark-eyed and decided to kill his girlfriend, Roberta Alden and this was the cause of the emergence of violations of moral values in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

Due to Moral Value Violations Based on the results of the study, it can be seen in the quotations that contain disclosures of the consequences of violations of moral values that occur in the novel *An American Tragedy*.

After committing an act of murder against Roberta Alden, Clyde Griffiths was found guilty by the court for committing murder to Roberta Alden. We can see this in the following quote:

And so, all rising and being sworn in. And at once Mason rising and beginning: "Gentlemen of the Jury." And Clyde, as well as Belknap and Jephison, is now gazing at them and wondering what the impression of Mason's opening charge was likely to be. (Dreiser, 1964, p. 39)

In the trial conducted at the court, besides being found guilty, Clyde was finally sentenced to death. This punishment is done by electrocuted on an electric chair.

"But various voices - as Clyde entered the first door to the cross room chair, calling" Good-by, Clyde. "And Clyde, with enough earthly thought and strength to reply:" Good-by all. (Dreiser, 1964, p. 810)

The violations of moral values began to rise at the end of the story where Clyde Griffiths planned to kill Roberta Alden by sinking her into a lake.

The personal ambitions or inner desires of Clyde Griffiths as mentioned above belong to the concept

of personality structure Id from the psychoanalytic study developed by a figure named Sigmund Freud. As a result of the actions of moral violations that have been committed, Clyde Griffiths has finally failed to achieve his ambition to be a wealthy and respected person. Due to the act of murder committed against his girlfriend, Roberta Alden, Clyde Griffiths was arrested by the police and thrown into prison.

Theoretically, this research is expected to provide benefits in the form of moral disclosure reflected in the novel *An American Tragedy* more comprehensively through psychoanalytic studies. Practically this research is expected to be able to provide benefits in developing methods of literary learning for educators and instructors. Specifically, this research is expected to help senior high school students to improve their ability to speak English in accordance with the competency standards specified in the high school English learning syllabus, namely speaking, reading, listening and writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted on a novel entitled *An American Tragedy*, it was concluded that a series of events that occurred in the story is a description of violations of moral values that are reviewed in terms of their causes, their shape and consequences. Humans should realize that life in this world is temporary. All the pleasures and difficulties that exist in this world sooner or later will end. Therefore, it is good for us to be wise in leading this life. Do not let life in this short world be in vain.

In the story of the novel *An American Tragedy*, it is portrayed a figure whose life ended in vain because

of doing a form of moral violation in the form of an act of murder of a woman so that he could not reach his dream even he had to die at a young age in an execution of a death sentence, and the occurrence of violations of moral values in the story above is based on the characters involved in the story who come from a poor family but had a very big ambition to become rich and respected person. The courage of the young person to get what he wanted without deep thinking about the result will cause an action that violates moral values in the form of murder, as a result of violations of moral values carried out by the characters in the story, he failed to reach his dream of becoming a rich and respected person. Any ambition in oneself should be

adjusted to the real situation so that it does not cause harm to others.

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