

## CRITIZISING A NOVEL

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### Abstract

Dalam dunia sastra, kritik adalah sesuatu hal yang sama pentingnya dengan karya sastra itu sendiri. Kritik adalah suatu proses memberikan penilaian terhadap suatu karya baik itu fiksi maupun non-fiksi. Terkadang kritik disalah artikan sebagai suatu hal yang berkaitan dengan penilaian negatif terhadap suatu karya, tapi sebenarnya tidak. Kritik justru dapat menggali keunggulan dari suatu karya, tapi tentu saja dengan mengikuti standar dan aturan yang sesuai dengan tujuannya.

*Key word: criticizing, novel, process.*

### A. Introduction

In its broad sense, literature includes all written materials such as history books, philosophical works, novels, poems, plays, scientific articles, dictionaries, and so on. Jones (1968) states that the material is divided into two different groups, namely writings that mainly present information and those mainly entertain. Famous writer in Halim (2002) states that there is first, the literature of knowledge, and secondly, the literature of power, the function of the first is to teach; the function of the second is to move. Therefore, the intended literature here as an imaginative work that aims to arouse thoughts and feelings.

Imaginative literature is classified as poetry and prose, whilst novel is included in prose. Novel is born in the middle of society as an imaginative work of its author and as a reflection in accordance with the social symptoms where it is around. Therefore, the presence of novel is a part of social life. Novel as a part of literature actually is a social institution that speaks loudly its author's viewpoint about the world.

Cole and Lindemann (1990: 50) suppose that people read literature since first, literature is art; reading it is an aesthetic experience. Second, literature is "real" even though, paradoxically, the situations and characters it portrays may be fictive. Third, then, literature teaches, and there is enjoyment in learning about self and others.

Unfortunately, when reading literature, for instance a novel, someone will face a problem on focusing on characters, events, settings, etc. It may be caused by lack of information in terms of novel. Moreover, it can be also be caused by the fact that the reader does not get accustomed to finding out the deep understanding of the novel or others.

No one denies that literature plays an important role in teaching English, especially for the students, who indeed must be qualified in this field. They have to recognize and understand deeply any terms that relate to novel's elements such as what the characterization is, what the theme is, where the events happen, and so on. Unfortunately, the teacher, his or herself who should be the informant of analyzing a novel sometimes also get problem in teaching it. Even though they have the knowledge about how to analyze a novel, but they do not know how to apply the knowledge.

### **B. Problem Statements:**

Based on the background above, the write then formulate the problem statements as follows:

1. What is critique?
2. How is the process of criticizing a novel?
3. What are the things that should be considered in a process of criticizing a novel?

### **C. Discussion**

#### **1. Critique**

In fact, many researchers have analyzed novel, however, critical reader is hardly done by the researchers in accordance with critics on novel. One thing that must be emphasized is that the purpose of critique is to evaluate somebody's work in order to increase the readers' understanding of it. Unavoidable that critical analysis based on the readers' side is subjective writing because it expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a text.

When one hears the term "critical" or "criticism", he or she thinks of negative or unfavorable judgments or comments. This idea, however, makes up only one part of the meaning of criticism. The word critic comes from the Greek *kritikós* – one who discerns, which itself arises from the Ancient Greek work *krités*, meaning a person who offers reasoned judgment or analysis, value judgment, interpretation, or observation (Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2007). The term can be used to describe an adherent of a position disagreeing with or opposing the object of criticism. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (1997), criticism is defined as the art of literature.

An analysis explains what a work of literature means, and how it means it; it is essentially an articulation of and a defense of an interpretation which shows how the resources of literature are used to create the meaning fullness of the text. There are people who resist analysis, believing that it 'tears apart' a work of art; however a work of art is an artifice, that is, it is made by someone with an end in view: as made thing, it can be done and should be analyzed as well as appreciate.

Alwi (1994: 25) states novel as a long composition of prose which implies a set of someone's story life with his surroundings by proposing character and attitude

dominantly each characterization. Therefore, novel is literary work that can be discussed scientifically, it describes all moments that felt by the characterization.

In Encyclopedia Britannica (1970), novel is defined as a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length, in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity.

As a kind of literary work, novel comes later in literature. It becomes one way of conveying feeling and thought or a medium that can be used to criticize everything that happens in this world where someone lives. Besides that, it also has certain elements that build it to be interesting and enjoyable thing to be read.

Novel is built up by many elements. These elements then determine the perfection of a story. The intended elements are:

a. Theme

Undeniable that reader is eager to know what the author wants to convey through his or her novel, or what the meaning beyond the story in the novel is.

Theme can not be concluded based on certain parts of the story; it must involve all part of the story to be decided. Even though, it is not an easy thing. It is not a hidden thing. Theme is the wholeness meaning of the story that the author wants to convey to the reader that makes it unhidden.

According to Kenny (in Nurgiyantoro, 2002: 67), theme is implied meaning of a story. To find a theme, someone should find a common issue that is projected throughout the story.

b. Plot

One of the appeals of novel is that it organizes and unifies events. Fiction satisfies the urgency to find the explanations that link the past to the present by direct cause and effect. "Stories make sense, in a well-made story it is never merely "first this happen, then this happen", it is "this happened, and that caused this to happen" (Lughlin, 1989: 344). This organization of events over time is called plot.

The plot is the novel's story. Therefore, when a reader describes the plot of a novel, the reader should describe both what happens to the characters and the meaning of the events. Nurgiyantoro (2002: 15) states that event, conflict, and climax are three essential elements in developing a plot of the story.

c. Characterization

One of the strangest things about fiction is that authors can make someone reacts to a bunch of words as if they were a real person. These assemblages of language can make someone laugh or cry, get someone angry or indignant and even occasionally treat them as more important to someone than people he or she knows. This powerful illusion of a person makes up what is called characterization.

Nurgiyantoro (2002: 67) proposes technique in describing character can be classified as telling technique and showing technique. While, Sujiman-Panuti (in Sofia and Sugihastuti, 2003) assert that there are two methods in unveiling the characters; first, direct or analytical method: the story teller tells the characteristics, desires, thoughts, and feelings of the characters. Second, indirect or dramatic method:

the characters are concluded by considering thoughts, feelings, dialogues, which are presented by the story teller.

d. Setting

Aminuddin (1987: 42) states that setting in a literary work is not merely about certain place in time but also the atmosphere which is related to the behavior of society when they cope up with problems. The setting of literary work is the physical world of the work: the place, the time, and the circumstances of the action. While, Geurin (1979: 327) explain that setting is combination of locale historical period, seasons, hour, spirituality, and environment, ethnic and cultural background.

e. Point of View

One of the main factors which determine the meaning of a story is the matter of who is telling the story and how is the story told. There are many positions or perspectives or point of view from which a story can be told. By point of view, someone generally means two somewhat different things: (1) the relation of the narrator to the action of the story, whether the narrator is, for instance, a character in the story, or a voice outside of the story and (2) the relation of the narrator to the issues and the characters that the story involves, whether the narrator is sympathetic, whether she agrees supports or opposes a particular cultural practice or doctrine. (Lye, 2002: 83)

f. Symbol

Basically, language is a symbol. However, as a symbolic system, the language is entirely limited.

Cole and Lindemann (1990: 34) declare that a symbol is a person, place, situation, action, or object representing more than its physical reality or its literal meaning since the symbol as both literally itself and something else.

## 2. The process of critique

One thing to notice that the purpose of critique is to evaluate somebody's work in order to increase the readers' understanding of it. Unavoidable that critical analysis based on the readers' side is subjective writing because it expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a text. According to Crayne (2006) that the process of criticizing a novel should:

- a. Write down impressions as a reader.  
Was the story captivating from the very first few paragraphs? Did the critic enjoy reading it? What type of person would this book appeal to? Does the critic think that the story or book has sales potential?
- b. Try to give feedback on what could be changed.  
It is suitable with the purpose of writing a critique: (1) identify the weaknesses in the piece and (2) offer some constructive advice to the author that might lead to improvement in the story. To just bash the story without providing something useful to the author is not really being professional.
- c. Give examples of improvements, if possible.  
In giving an example, should be much clearer to the author.
- d. Praise where praise is due.

The critic should remember to add some positive comments on the piece, where the author did something that the critic thinks very good.

- e. Never criticize the author personally. Focus on the story as written.

### **3. The things that should be considered in a process of critique**

After considering the main things of doing critiques, then there should be some points to point out before (Crayne,2006) as follow:

a. Opening

Do the first few sentences or paragraphs of the story grab our attention? Do they present the protagonist's main problem? Remember how to judge a book or story when we first see it in a bookstore. Don't often base our decision to buy or not buy upon those first few sentences.

b. Conflict

1. Conflict is the mental or moral struggle caused by incompatible desires and aims. That is the kind of conflict that makes stories vitally alive.
2. Is there emotional conflict within the main character? Between the main characters? Emotional conflict is part of what gets readers interested.
3. Are there too many or not enough conflicts?
4. Is there enough conflict between the characters? Is it expressed through action, dialogue, attitudes, or values? Were the characters sufficiently contrasted?

c. Plot

1. Was the main plot clear and believable?
2. Did the main character have a clearly defined problem to solve? Did this problem was solved by the end?
3. Were it easy to determine the time and place of the story quickly enough?
4. Did the story start at the right place? Did it end at the right place in the plot?
5. Are there scenes which do not seem to further the plot?
6. Were there too many flashbacks, which broke our attention?
7. If the piece was a short story, were there too many subplots? If the piece was a novel, could it be improved by more attention to the subplots or have more subplots? Conversely, does it have too many subplots and the reader would get confused about what was happening?
8. Was every subplot useful? Did it add to the overall story or did the author seem to stick it in just for complexity?
9. Resolution of conflict: Did the conflict and tension in the plots and subplots come to some reasonable ending? Or did the author leave us hanging, wondering what happened? When you finished, were there things that you still felt needed to be explained?
10. If the author did leave some conflict unresolved, did they indicate somewhere that future stories are pending?

d. Setting

1. Is there enough description of the background in the story to paint a picture that seems real enough for the reader? Did the reader might feel that they were transported to 'that time or place'?
  2. Was there too much description so modern readers might tend to become bored? Was the description written with clichés?
  3. Did the author use good enough names for people, places, and things? Did some names seem inconsistent with the character? Were the names too stereotypical?
  4. Did the author convince the reader that people in that time or place would behave that way?
  5. Is the timing and order of events in the story consistent? For example, did John drive his new car on his vacation in chapter six but it wasn't until chapter ten that he bought it?
- e. Characterization
1. Did the people seem real? Or were the main characters stereotypes or one-cardboard characters?
  2. Were the facts about the characters accurate and consistent?
  3. People do not exist in a vacuum. They have family, friends, a job, worries, ambitions, etc. Did the reader get a sense of enough of these, but not too much, for the main characters?
  4. Did the reader get a good picture of the culture, historical period, location, and occupation of the main character?
  5. Did the reader get enough of a sense within the character? Enough of their emotions, attitudes, values?
  6. Back-story: Were the reader distracted by too much background information of a character at one time? Did the author seem to dump a lot of information on the background of a character in one or two long speeches?
  7. Did the protagonist undergo some change in the story?
  8. Could the story have been improved by adding more details of the protagonist's or another character's reputation; stereotyped beliefs; their network of relations to other people; habits and patterns; talents and abilities; tastes and preferences; or physical description of their body?
  9. Does each chapter/page have enough sensory description? Can the reader easily sense what is happening physically to the main character?
  10. If the story used a person as the antagonist (villain), did they seem real too? Or did they seem so evil or one-sided that they were more like ideal villains? Did the villain seem to be a hero in their own mind?
  11. Every reader has their own taste in how much characterization they like. Did this story have too little or too much characterization?
- f. Dialogue
1. Did the words from the mouths of the people in the story seem consistent with their personalities?

2. Was there too much or not enough dialogue?
  3. Did any character tend to talk in long monologues?
  4. Have the conflict, attitudes, and intentions of each character in their dialogue come to our sense without the author telling them directly?
  5. Were the reader able to detect any exchange of power that is sexual, physical, political, or social?
  6. Did the dialogue seem easy to speak?
  7. Does the dialogue seem too much like normal speech, with too many incomplete sentences, pauses, restarts, profanity, cliches, etc. that it was distracting?
  8. Did the author use dialect that was too heavy, making it difficult to read?
  9. Does each character have their own speech rhythm, accent (if necessary), vocabulary, and even length of sentences?
- g. Point of View
1. Was a given chapter or section written from one person's point of view? Are there too many points of view in the story?
  2. Did the story skip around between the first person or third person point of view (POV)? Were the changes in POV signaled clearly?
  3. When the POV changed, was the reader able to quickly sense who the new viewpoint was from?
- h. Show versus tell
1. When in the POV of a character, did the author describe what his/her senses showed, e.g., sight, sound, smell, touch, taste?
  2. Did the author describe exactly how the people acted?
  3. Was there too much abstract language where specific details would have made a greater impact on the reader?
  4. Did we get the chance to interpret what the characters were feeling or did the author just tell about it directly?
- i. Format of the text
- Was it easy to read or were the paragraphs too long or the lines too long (not enough margin)?
- j. Grammar and spelling
1. Was the English readable? Were there too many grammatical errors, misuse of punctuation, run-on sentences, etc.?
  2. Were there any misspelling? Were there so many such errors that they made reading difficult?
- k. Style
- The critic may wish to comment on the style the story was written in, e.g., humorous, wordy, sparse, literary, homespun, technical, etc.

By applying the concepts of criticizing above, this activity will no longer be something difficult anymore, but it will become something that enjoyable and give pleasure to the critics, as well as creating reference for the readers and the artists who create the work.

### C. Conclusion

Novel as a part of literature actually is a social institution that speaks loudly its author's viewpoint about the world. They have to recognize and understand deeply any terms that relate to novel's elements such as what the characterization is, what the theme is, where the events happen, and so on. Unfortunately, the teacher, his or herself who should be the informant of analyzing a novel sometimes also get problem in teaching it. Even though they have the knowledge about how to analyze a novel, but they do not know how to apply the knowledge since the reference about it is still difficult to find.

When we are criticizing a novel, we have to read the passage of novel closely with deep understanding, than we can know what was the weakness and susceptibility of our reading. There are elements of novel that we should pay attention, they are theme, plot, setting, point of view, symbol, and characterization.

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