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**SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE POEMS AND DRAMAS
CREATED BY W.S. RENDRA FROM NINETEEN SEVENTIES
TO NINETEEN NINETIES**

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ABSTRACT

**SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE POEMS AND DRAMAS
CREATED BY W.S. RENDRA FROM NINETEEN SEVENTIES
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This study analyzed the poems and dramas created by W.S. Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties. Such an era was a period of time during which Rendra creatively created his literary works. Politically, the decade from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties was an era during which the Authoritative New Order held the power and did not hesitate to take action against those, including artists, who bravely expressed their criticisms. It was in that repressive period of time that Rendra appeared as a poet who so bravely used the poems and dramas he created to articulate his social criticisms. This study aims at revealing the themes and consistency of the social criticisms expressed by Rendra in the poems and dramas he created.

This study was importantly conducted as the social criticisms the literary works Rendra created were not only strong but are still currently factual as well. Many researchers have analyzed the social criticisms the poems and dramas created by Rendra contained but none had analyzed such a topic comprehensively and consistently. This present study attempted to complete the studies previously conducted so that the ideas, thoughts and concepts expressed by

him through his literary works can be more comprehensively understood and exceed the era when they were created.

The theory of sociology of literature and the theory of semiotics were used to analyze the social criticisms expressed by Rendra through his literary works. The theory of literature was used to analyze the social criticisms by contextualizing the themes and era when he created his poems and dramas, and the theory of semiotics was used to analyze the meanings of the sign systems the two genres contained. These two theories were used at the same time and were supported by the other relevant theories such as the theory of politics, the theory of capitalism, and the theory of feminism. His dramas were analyzed before his poems so that the consistency of the social criticisms he expressed in the two genres could be described.

The result showed that the social criticisms expressed by Rendra in his poems included four great themes; they were values of feminism, education, capitalism and poverty, politics and law. His dramas also contained such social criticisms, as exemplified by the poems “Sajak Sebotol Bir” and “Sajak Pulau Bali” and the drama “Kisah Perjuangan Naga”, which contained the theme of how vicious capitalism was. The language styles used to articulate his social criticisms were also identical, indicated by the use of metaphors, repetitions, paradoxes, rhetorical questions, ironies, and cynicisms. His consistency in expressing social criticisms through his poems and dramas made him successful in becoming the most talkative man of letters during the Indonesia’s history of literature.

Keywords: social criticism, poem, drama, consistency

1. Introduction

This study explores the poems and dramas written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties. Such a period of time was the golden era of the New Order regime.

His poems and dramas published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties contained social criticisms of various social problems in Indonesia such as feminism, poverty, the power the capitalist had, education, politics, law and human rights.

The social criticisms the poems and dramas written by Rendra from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties contained were worth exploring for the following reasons. *First*, they revealed various social problems in Indonesia with their themes starting from feminism, education, capitalism and poverty to politics and law. Rendra’s awareness of and attention to social life in Indonesia caused such themes to appear. Such a period of time was the golden era of the New Order government which was authoritative in all aspects of state life. The

government executed was not based on the awareness of and attention to what people needed but on the power for maintaining national stability.

Second, the period of time from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties was the period of time during which Rendra was highly productive. Therefore, it was an important period of time of his authorship. Before and after that period of time, he was not so productive. Prior to that period, he paid less attention to the social life in Indonesia. After that period of time, his productivity as a poet and stage of actor was decreasing.

Third, Rendra was a great poet, stage actor and cultural observer. He was not only popular in Indonesia but also in other countries; therefore, his works were worth exploring. It was believed that his works contained great ideas, insights and concepts which needed revealing. Apart from that, as a poet and stage actor, he was different from the other poets and actors in his era.

The problems which were explored in this study were (1) what social condition in Indonesia was reflected in the poems and dramas written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties? (2) What social criticisms could be revealed from the poems and dramas written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties? (3) How the social criticisms revealed from the poems and drama written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties related?

2. Theoretical Framework

The theory of sociology of literature and the theory of semiotics were used as the main theories in this study, and the theory of capitalism, the theory of feminism, and the theory of politics were used as the supporting theories. The reason why many theories were used was

that in the study of literary works, no theory was independent; in other words, supporting theories are always needed.

In this study, the theory of sociology of literature proposed by Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood (1972) was used. According to them (1972:16-22), the analysis of sociology of literature includes three perspectives: (1) the sociology of literature is not only supposed to find out the social history and reflection any literary work has, but is also supposed to be able to find out the facts it contains; (2) the sociology of literature considers any literary work a production, especially the production of the writer's social situation; (3) the sociology of literature attempts to find the events in any literary work which can be accepted as social facts, especially historical events. This theory accommodates all the concepts related to the theory of sociology of literature. It was expected that the theory of sociology of literature could reveal optimally the social criticisms the poems written by Rendra contained.

The theory of semiotics used is the one proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure (in Zaminar, 2008; Widana, 2009). He discovered the theory of signs. He formulated his theory by stating that signs in language involved three things; they were (a) sign, (b) signifier, and (c) signified. Every sign in a language had two sides; the signifier and the signified. It is through these two sides, the meaning of the signs the poems and dramas written by Rendra contained could be revealed.

3. Research Method

The method used in this study was library research. The other methods which were relevant to the analysis of sociology of literature and semiotics such as qualitative and hermeneutic methods were also used. The research was initiated by reading the poems and dramas written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties thoroughly and intensively. As far as the poems were concerned, they were read deeply,

identified and classified. Finally, the poems which contained social criticisms were found. In addition, the poems which contained social criticisms were further identified and classified based on the themes. It was the poems which had been identified and classified based on the themes were used as the sample of the study.

The dramas written by Rendra which were published during the same period totaled four. They were intensively read and the themes they contained were identified. The analysis was made based on the themes. Finally, the relationship between the social criticisms his poems contained to the social criticisms his dramas contained could be found.

In the process of analysis, every poem and drama written by Rendra which had already been classified based on the theme, were analyzed using the operating method taken from the theory of sociology of literature and the theory of semiotics. The relationship of the poems and dramas written by Rendra to the social situation during the period they were written and various signs they contained were identified. During the analysis, the poems and dramas used as the sample were interpreted using the hermeneutic method, the theory of sociology of literature and the theory of semiotics.

When analyzing the poems, they were read heuristically and hermeneutically or retroactively. Heuristic reading means the reading which is done based on the structure and convention of the language used in the poems. And hermeneutic or retroactive reading means the reading which is done based on the literary convention. By such readings, the social criticisms the poems written by Rendra contained and how they were related to those his dramas contained could be found.

4. Discussion and Results

Rendra's literary works revealed many actual social problems in Indonesia. It turned out that the social problems revealed in his poems and dramas which were inspired by the

condition in Indonesian during the New Order era were still currently factual. In addition, the language used was simple, factual and contextual. Therefore, his works were welcome by society in general and the lovers of literary works in particular.

From the analysis of the sociology of literature, it was found out that the poems and dramas written by Rendra which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties reflected the social condition in Indonesia during the New Order era. What was revealed in his literary works included poverty, capitalistic behavior, education, socio-political condition, law and human rights.

Through four great themes, Rendra expressed his responses to and attitudes toward the social situation in Indonesia. He criticized how the authoritative New Order government behaved toward its people. The functions and meanings of the four themes were to fight for what people should have received in regard to economy, politics, education, law, and human rights. In his poems, he expressed his social criticisms using metaphor, repetition, paradox, rhetorical question, irony, satire, and the image of sight and hearing. In his dramas, he expressed his social criticism through satire and irony.

The results of the study showed that his dramas had four themes and used satire and irony, which were continued in his poems, meaning that the quality and consistency of his social criticisms expressed in his poems were well maintained. As a poet, stage actor and cultural observer, he was consistent with his attitudes toward the social situation in Indonesia; he socially criticized the New Order government, which he should be responsible for. This also means that Rendra was consistent with his global view that the 'ability to survive' should be maintained in his literary works. His attention to the social life in Indonesia was so great that he could be stated

a sociologist as well as a poet, stage actor, and cultural observer as Umar Khayam and Mangun Wijaya.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusions

Rendra's poems and dramas which were published from nineteen seventies to nineteen nineties reflected the social situation in Indonesia during the New Order era. Through his poems and dramas, he criticized many social problems such as feminism, education, capitalism and poverty, politics and law. The language styles used in his poems and dramas were metaphor, repetition, paradox, rhetorical questions, irony, satire and the image of sight and hearing. By using such language styles and image, the social criticism he expressed became strong and simple.

The social criticism expressed by Rendra in his poems was similar to that expressed in his dramas. Similarly, the language styles used to express his social criticism in his poems were similar to those used in his dramas; the dominant ones were irony and satire. He expressed the same problems using the same language styles. From the two genres, it seemed that the social criticisms revealed by Rendra in his poems were still maintained in his drama, meaning that the quality and consistency were maintained.

6.2 Suggestions

Many literary works created by Rendra have not been comprehensively investigated yet. Exploring his literary works means indirectly introducing Rendra and his thoughts to the public. This study is a small attempt which may lead to it. It is recognized that his ideas and insights expressed in his literary works are sociologic in nature; therefore, they need to be comprehended and mused about by the readers. It is suggested that literary works need exploring perpetually. In this way, his thoughts and ideas could be understood and the social situation expressed could be understood as well.

It is recognized that this study has not been complete and perfect; many other things need exploring using psychology of literature, intertext and reception of Rendra's literary works. In addition, the social criticism expressed by the other poets both coming from his era and other eras also need exploring. Therefore, it is suggested that his other literary works and the literary works written by other poets should be explored as well to enrich the treasure of research in literary works in general and the literary works written by Rendra in particular. This attempt is intended to make the world of literature close to the public. Literary works will become animate objects instead of inanimate ones in the middle of community.

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