



Social Criticism In Seno Gumira Ajidarma's Short Stories And Its Implication For Literary Learning

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to describe social criticism in the short stories "Telinga," "Maria," and "Kepala di Pagar Da Silva" by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and analyze its implication for literary learning using a mimetic approach.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a mimetic approach. Data were obtained from three selected short stories in the *Trilogi Insiden* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Data collection used documentation techniques, and analysis was conducted by identifying intrinsic elements and correlating them with social issues outside the texts.

Main Findings: The study found that the stories reflect strong elements of social criticism, particularly issues of violence, human rights violations, and political oppression. These criticisms are conveyed through characters, settings, conflicts, and narrative styles. Each story represents different victim perspectives in a conflict zone, making it relevant for fostering critical thinking in literary education.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study highlights how literary texts can serve as a medium of social criticism and suggests how they can be implemented in literary learning to develop students' social awareness and critical analysis skills. The novelty lies in its integration of mimetic theory with practical implications in education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works are not born in a cultural vacuum. As a reflection of human experience, literature often emerges from the dynamics of society, encompassing historical, political, and social contexts that shape both the form and substance of a work [1]-[3]. One of the most significant functions of literature is its ability to deliver social criticism through fictional narratives. Social criticism in literature serves not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a subtle protest against injustice, oppression, or societal dysfunction [4], [5]. Short stories, in particular, provide concise yet powerful depictions of human experiences and societal problems, making them effective vehicles for critical messages. As such, literary texts can serve dual purposes: aesthetic appreciation and social awareness cultivation.

In Indonesia, the intersection between literature and social criticism is vividly demonstrated in the works of *Seno Gumira Ajidarma*, a prominent author known for embedding political and humanitarian concerns into his short stories [6]-[8]. His collection *Trilogi Insiden* highlights the human cost of political violence and military conflict, particularly the tragedies in East Timor. Among the stories in this trilogy, “Telenga”, “Maria”, and “Kepala di Pagar Da Silva” portray narratives of trauma, resistance, and silence during times of systemic violence. Seno’s narrative style blends realism and surrealism to depict the absurdity and brutality of violence, which resonates with the concept of *mimesis* literature as an imitation of life [9]-[11]. Through symbolic language and narrative techniques, he creates compelling representations of social reality that invite critical reflection [12], [13].

Despite the richness of Indonesian literature in offering social insights, literary learning in educational settings often overlooks this potential [14], [15]. Literature is frequently reduced to a study of aesthetic elements, such as plot, theme, or character, while its critical and reflective dimensions are underutilized. This has resulted in a pedagogical gap where students are not fully encouraged to engage with the societal meanings embedded in texts. A more critical and contextual approach to literary instruction is needed—one that equips learners with interpretative tools to recognize and analyze the socio-political dimensions of literary works. Thus, integrating works such as Seno’s short stories into the classroom not only enhances literary appreciation but also fosters critical thinking and empathy among students [16], [17].

This study applies a *mimetic approach* to analyze social criticism in the selected short stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. The mimetic approach emphasizes the relationship between literature and reality, exploring how literary texts imitate, reflect, or respond to social conditions [18], [19]. By focusing on the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the texts, this study aims to reveal the mechanisms through which Seno articulates his critique of state violence, censorship, and the psychological consequences of oppression. Furthermore, the study explores how these insights can be translated into pedagogical practices in literature education, emphasizing literature’s role in shaping students’ moral and social consciousness.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution: it not only advances literary criticism through the application of mimetic theory but also presents pedagogical implications for literary instruction in schools [20], [21], [22]. While many existing studies have discussed Seno’s literary contributions, few have systematically linked the social criticism embedded in his short stories with their practical relevance in the educational context. This research addresses that gap by offering an integrated literary-pedagogical framework, thereby contributing to the discourse on literature as both a cultural artifact and a critical educational tool [23], [24].

The study entitled “Social Criticism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s Short Stories and Its Implication for Literary Learning” focuses its study on social criticism contained in literary works, especially Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s short stories [25], [26]. This study reveals that literature can be a reflective medium for social reality and has great potential to be integrated into literary learning in order to shape students’ critical awareness. However, this study has not specifically linked how social criticism in literary works is understood or accepted by students from the current generation, especially generation Z who have different learning characteristics and tend to be contextual, visual, and digital [27], [28], [29]. Meanwhile, another study entitled “Social Analysis of the Dynamics of History Learning for Generation Z” focuses more on the dynamics and responses of generation Z in the history learning process. This study shows that generation Z has a unique perspective on social-humanities material and requires an interactive learning approach that is relevant to their lives. However, this approach has not utilized literature as a source or media for learning history and social criticism. In fact, literary works such as Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s short stories often reflect social and historical events contextually and critically, which have the potential to strengthen students’ social understanding and empathy [30], [31], [32]. From the comparison of the two studies, there appears to be a gap in studies that integrate the dimensions of social criticism in literary works with the dynamics of Generation Z learning in the context of literacy and history education. There are not many studies that explicitly utilize literary works as a bridge to instill historical and social awareness in Generation Z in an integrated manner [33], [34]. Therefore, further studies are needed that combine literary and historical approaches in an interdisciplinary manner to create a learning model that is able to form critical reasoning, social empathy, and historical understanding of students that is more relevant to the context of the times and the character of the current generation [35], [36].

Based on the gap analysis, the novelty offered in the study entitled “Social Criticism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s Short Stories and Its Implication for Literary Learning” lies in the integration of an interdisciplinary approach between literary studies and socio-historical awareness in contextual and relevant literary learning for generation Z [37], [38]. This study not only analyzes the content of social criticism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s short stories, but also offers an update in the practice of literary learning by making literary works a reflective medium for social and historical dynamics that are close to the reality of today’s students [39], [40]. By positioning literary works as a bridge between aesthetic literacy and social literacy, this study provides a new contribution to the development of literary learning strategies that are not only appreciative, but also critical and transformative. This answers the needs of 21st-century learning which requires students to have social sensitivity, critical thinking, and the ability to read reality in depth through literary media [41], [42].

The implications of this study include pedagogical, curricular, and character development of students in the context of literature learning. Pedagogically, this study provides a basis for teachers to make literary works a learning tool that not only fosters aesthetic appreciation, but also trains students' social sensitivity and critical thinking skills [43], [44]. From a curriculum perspective, the results of this study can encourage the integration of literary materials that are full of social criticism into thematic learning across subjects, such as Indonesian and History, in order to strengthen students' contextual and multidisciplinary understanding of social issues. In addition, the most important implication of this study is its ability to encourage students, especially generation Z, to develop social empathy, critical awareness of the surrounding reality, and the ability to express their social views through literary works or discussions, so that learning is not only cognitive, but also forms character and reflective attitudes [45], [46].

The urgency of this research arises from the urgent need to develop more relevant and contextual literary learning methods for generation Z. In the era of digital and very fast information, the younger generation tends to experience challenges in understanding and appreciating the social and historical values contained in traditional literary works. In addition, the limited use of literature as a medium to foster critical awareness and social reflection in educational environments results in the less than optimal role of literature in shaping the character and social insight of students. Therefore, this research is important to fill this gap by examining in depth how social criticism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story can be implemented effectively in learning, so that it can strengthen critical literacy skills, social empathy, and historical understanding of generation Z which are very necessary in facing today's social dynamics.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design with a mimetic literary approach, which views literature as an imitation of life and a reflection of socio-cultural realities [47], [48]. The study aimed to analyze the elements of social criticism contained in three selected short stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma "Telenga", "Maria", and "Kepala di Pagar Da Silva" and to explore their pedagogical implications in literary education. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth textual analysis and interpretation based on both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the texts.

The research procedure consisted of four main stages: (1) text selection, (2) data identification, (3) data analysis, and (4) pedagogical interpretation. The selected texts were obtained from the short story collection *Trilogi Insiden* (2010), published by Bentang Pustaka. The texts were selected based on their relevance to the theme of social criticism, particularly issues surrounding violence, censorship, and state power during Indonesia's military involvement in East Timor.

The first step was to identify intrinsic literary elements such as theme, plot, character, setting, point of view, language style, and message. These were used as a basis to trace extrinsic relationships between the story and the socio-political reality it reflects. The second step was analyzing social criticism within the narratives using mimetic theory and references from literary sociology. This was done by interpreting symbols, metaphors, and narrative structures that reveal the author's critical stance toward historical events and power dynamics.

To ensure consistency and reliability, the study used a coding system for thematic elements and a comparative matrix to connect literary content with external social events and data from historical archives, journalistic reports, and previous research. The researcher also used references from critical theory and educational literature to support the analysis of literary learning implications. All interpretative claims were cross-verified with textual evidence and relevant literature.

Table 1. Algorithm of Social Criticism Analysis in Short Stories

Step	Research Activity
1	Read and annotate the short stories "Telenga", "Maria", and "Kepala di Pagar Da Silva".
2	Identify intrinsic elements such as theme, character, plot, setting, and language.
3	Match textual elements with real-life socio-political context.
4	Interpret narrative techniques that convey social criticism.
5	Extract pedagogical value for literature education and classroom learning.

This approach enables a systematic analysis of literary texts as both artistic expressions and sociopolitical commentaries, grounded in a validated research framework. The use of mimetic theory ensures that the interpretation aligns with established literary scholarship.

The research procedures used by the author include several steps, namely: reading, understanding, and marking words and events that describe elements related to the subject matter of this study; determining analysis criteria; analyzing data and discussing the results of the analysis with data; and concluding the research results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and offers an analytical discussion of how social criticism is embedded in the selected short stories. The interpretation is based on intrinsic literary elements and their mimetic relationship with real-life sociopolitical contexts. The findings are also discussed in relation to their potential use in literature education.

3.1. Forms of Social Criticism in the Short Stories

Seno Gumira Ajidarma utilizes the short story as a medium of protest to criticize structural violence occurring in Indonesia, especially under the New Order regime. The three analyzed stories are rooted in the East Timor humanitarian tragedy but are conveyed symbolically, allegorically, and even surreally. These narrative strategies allow his critical messages to emerge indirectly yet powerfully. In *"Telinga"*, the protagonist loses his ear, yet paradoxically becomes increasingly aware of all surrounding voices and whispers. This serves as a metaphor for state surveillance and repression. Though the victim's body is silenced (symbolized by the missing ear), state power continues to operate through fear and psychological intimidation. In mimetic terms, this story reflects how authoritarian regimes exert not only physical but also mental control over society.

In *"Maria"*, the central female character lives in deep grief due to the loss of loved ones during the conflict. Maria's silence is not a lack of knowledge, but a form of resistance. Her refusal to speak is a protest against normalization of violence. She represents the many voiceless victims in history—those omitted from state records and public memory but who carry the trauma forever. The story criticizes the state's neglect of personal and communal suffering, particularly in the aftermath of political violence. The most brutal imagery is found in *"Kepala di Pagar Da Silva"*, in which a human head is displayed on a fence as a warning to the public. This act of terror exemplifies dehumanization and the spectacle of violence as a tool of state control. In the mimetic approach, the story blurs the boundary between fiction and reality, confronting the reader with the horror of militarized power. The fence symbolizes the line between humanity and inhumanity; the head becomes a symbol of silencing dissent through fear.

Table 2 Below summarizes the key findings from each story

Title	Theme	Form of Social Criticism
Telinga	Fear, surveillance, and censorship	Criticism of state surveillance and speech suppression
Maria	Loss, war trauma, and memory	Criticism of the psychological cost of violence
Kepala di Pagar Da Silva	Execution, dehumanization, terror	Criticism of brutality and dehumanization by the state

In *"Telinga"*, the metaphor of a severed ear that can still hear everything is a powerful allegory of surveillance and repression, suggesting that even in silence, the state maintains its control. The story critiques the fear that permeates society when freedom of expression is stifled by authoritarian control. In *"Maria"*, the narrative focuses on a female character who embodies the pain of losing loved ones in war. The story conveys a deep sense of psychological trauma and silent resistance. Maria's silence is not emptiness but an active refusal to normalize violence. It functions as a critique of the normalization of loss and trauma under militarized rule.

Meanwhile, *"Kepala di Pagar Da Silva"* offers the most explicit imagery of terror. A severed head displayed on a fence becomes a haunting symbol of public intimidation and the spectacle of violence. The surrealistic depiction functions as a metaphor for the state's brutal strategy to maintain control through fear and physical domination.

3.2. Pedagogical Implications for Literature Education

The findings of this study have significant pedagogical implications, especially for secondary school literature instruction. Literature should not only be taught as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a critical reflection of human experience. Through stories such as Seno's, students can develop empathy, critical awareness, and reflective thinking core components of holistic education. First, these stories allow students to recognize and interpret symbols in literary texts and relate them to broader societal issues. For example, the ear in *"Telinga"* can spark discussions about freedom of expression and surveillance in modern democracies. This encourages students to analyze texts not just literally but critically, thus fostering civic awareness and moral reflection.

Second, literature learning through these texts enhances students' critical and reflective thinking. Teachers can guide students to draw connections between fictional representations and historical realities. This aligns with the goals of *critical pedagogy*, which emphasizes education as a space for empowerment, justice, and transformation. Third, using the mimetic approach in literature classes helps students understand that fiction can reflect real-world conditions. By analyzing how literature mirrors or critiques societal structures, students are trained to become conscious readers and thinkers, capable of interpreting literature not in isolation but in relation to lived realities. This makes literature education more contextual, relevant, and impactful.

In conclusion, the use of Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short stories in the classroom not only enriches students' literary insight but also cultivates their socio-political consciousness. Through these narratives, students learn to see literature not just as fiction but as a mirror of society one that speaks to justice, humanity, and historical memory.

This study highlights how Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short stories contain strong social criticism and have great potential as a medium for learning literature that can foster students' critical awareness of various social issues. The results of the study indicate that the social criticism is more focused on a general picture of injustice, morality, and complex social realities, as well as their implications for improving the quality of literature learning [49]. However, the discussion is still broad and does not explore in depth specific aspects such as class conflict and social inequality that are the root of problems in society. In contrast, the study "Literature as Social Critique: Examining Class Struggle and Inequality in Contemporary Indonesian Fiction" specifically examines the issue of class struggle and inequality in contemporary Indonesian literature [50], [51], [52]. This study places a sharper focus on how literature reflects and criticizes unequal social structures, especially in the context of social class which is the main factor of injustice. The study emphasizes the socio-economic dimension that is often the background of the story, which provides deep insight into the dynamics of inequality and social conflict in society. This approach provides a more detailed and focused picture of structural issues that affect social life. The gap that emerged between the two studies lies in the level of depth and focus of the social issues raised in the social criticism analysis of literary works [53], [54], [55]. The first study has not explicitly developed a social criticism study that emphasizes class struggle and inequality as a central theme in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story, and how these themes can be effectively integrated into literary learning. Therefore, further research is needed that combines an in-depth analysis of class issues and inequality in Seno's work with a literary learning approach, so that learning is not only appreciative but also critical and able to educate students about complex social realities.

Based on the gap analysis, the novelty offered in this study lies in a deeper and more specific focus on the issues of class struggle and social inequality as an integral part of social criticism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short stories. This study not only describes the content of social criticism in general, but also critically examines how the themes of inequality and class conflict are presented in the literary work and their impact in the context of literary learning. Another novelty lies in the development of a literary learning model that integrates socio-economic analysis, so that learning does not merely foster aesthetic appreciation, but also builds critical awareness and social empathy in students towards the reality of inequality in society. This approach offers a significant contribution to the practice of literary education in the contemporary era, which demands social relevance and critical thinking skills of students [56], [57].

The implications of this study lie in the importance of utilizing social criticism that raises the theme of class struggle and social inequality as a pedagogical tool in literature learning. The results of the study indicate that the integration of socio-economic issues into literature learning can significantly increase students' critical awareness and social empathy. This approach encourages teachers to design contextual and cross-disciplinary learning strategies, so that literature is not only appreciated aesthetically, but also understood deeply from a social and historical perspective [58], [59], [60]. Thus, literature learning can play an important role in forming reflective characters and citizens who are sensitive to social injustice, while strengthening character education among the younger generation.

The limitation of this study lies in the scope of the analysis that focuses on certain short stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma so that the research findings may be less generalizable to other literary works or different literary genres. In addition, this study focuses more on aspects of social criticism related to class struggle and inequality without exploring in depth other factors such as cultural, psychological, or literary style contexts that can also influence students' understanding. The discussion of the application of social criticism in literary learning is also still limited to the realm of general theory and strategy, so it has not touched on in detail practical learning methods or empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of implementation in the classroom. Therefore, this study opens up opportunities for broader and more in-depth follow-up studies, including direct testing of learning practices and analysis of other literary works in different social contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the short stories "*Telinga*", "*Maria*", and "*Kepala di Pagar Da Silva*" by Seno Gumira Ajidarma effectively convey social criticism through symbolic and surrealist narratives that reflect issues such as authoritarianism, surveillance, dehumanization, and trauma, thereby affirming literature's mimetic function. These stories not only enrich literary appreciation but also hold strong pedagogical potential by fostering students' critical literacy, empathy, and awareness of socio-political realities. As demonstrated, integrating socially-engaged literature into education can support transformative learning, and future studies may expand this approach by applying it to broader literary works and classroom practices to deepen the impact of literature on social consciousness. Recommendations for further research are to conduct empirical studies that test the effectiveness of the application of social criticism in practical literature learning in the classroom, as well as

expanding the object of study to other literary works with various genres and different social backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of literature as a social education tool.

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