SOCIAL CRITICISM OF BOB DYLAN’S SONG LYRICS: A
SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Hafid Muhadi A 320 090 160. SOCIAL CRITICISM OF BOB DYLAN’S SONG LYRICS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE

This research paper aimed to show visible image of Bob Dylan’s song lyrics which are analyzed by using a sociology of literature. The objective of the research are to analyzed the lyrics based on the structural element and to analyze the lyrics based on sociology of literature by indentifying from relationship between social historical background of United States in The Middle of Twentieth Century. This research paper belongs to qualitative research. Data of the research is the text from and it has taken based on the theme, thereabout consisting fifteen lyrics thematically. The primary data of the research is the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics from www.azlyrics.com and secondary data of the research are biography of the author written by Jeremy Robert entitled “Bob Voice of a Generation”, websites and other source about the lyrics, the social background of American society that support the analysis. The method to analyze this data is descriptive analysis. The researcher comes to the conclusion as follows. Based on the sociological analysis, it is evident that in his lyrics, Bob Dylan reflects the social society of the America social since the sixties in which the American society experienced a big change socially and culturally. In addition, in his lyrics, Bob Dylan also criticizes the government and society that he perceived to have marginalized the poor.

Keyword: Social criticism, Songs, and Sociology of Literature
I. Introduction

A. Background of the Study

*The Lyrics of Bob Dylan* is a lyrics collection by website www.azlyrics.com. There are 15 songs found in an album fourth ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’ was realized at 1964, fifth entitled Album: "Bringing All Back Home" was realized 1965 and sixth entitled "Highway 61 Revisited" was realized 1965 at Columbia. It was taken from 34 albums of the Bob Dylan’s works.

Bob Dylan was a singer and famous musician with his protest song that told more about politics, social, culture or war. His protest songs made by him were very famous and the songs influenced a lot of American in the tradition of radical political movement. This case could be aware for youth generation about their civil rights as American citizen (http://www.redpepper.org.uk/The-Politics-of-Bob-Dylan/). In the most of his songs, he told about poverty, teasing allusion to religion, government agency, the violence in war, the law whose sell-buy, races, gender different, the problem in family, and a culture behavior of society whose negative. Besides that, He also wrote the theme songs of regret and love which is truth brutally. He criticized his condition and surrounding around as widely. Through his works, he expressed what he felt in his song.

Based the explanation above, the works of Bob Dylan contain of social critic’s values. But, to know more deeply about his song, the researcher will take same Bob Dylan’s songs in sixties decade, because the albums of Bob Dylan at the years contain of critical value. There are some songs contain of critic’s themes about government, family, war, race, the power of dominance, the story of sad at past time, job, life, arts, politic, religion, surrounding around, and culture.
Besides the adding of knowledge about music, the songs of Bob Dylan also are interest in language style that he applies in the lyric's content. In lyrics of Bob Dylan song’s also contain the story which is interesting to be studied by researcher. Because, there are humanism values and lesson which are in a part of each event. Based on the explanation above, the writer interested to analyze about song, with title “SOCIAL CRITICISM OF BOB DYLAN’S SONG LYRICS: SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE”.

B. Literature Review

After the searching on several literary studies in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta and Sebelas Maret University in Central Java, the writer has not found research about *Song lyrics of Bob Dylan’s*. However, there are articles and research paper from other Universities, literary books, and internet which study about *Song lyrics of Bob Dylan’s*.

The research was written by, Student of English Teaching Learning Program (TBI), The State of Islamic College (STAIN) Pamekasan, Madura, Najibul Khairi, Akhmad (2012) has conducted his research The Social Problem in Bob Dylan’s Song Album in Soejono Soekanto’s Perspective, this study deals with social problems in Bob Dylan’s song and how the social problems in Bob Dylan’s song. In the theoretical approach employed in this study is the Soejono Soekanto’s perspective.

And other is Student of Communication Faculty of Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Riddle Bette, Laura (May 2010) has conducted her research Bob Dylan Pete Seeger And The Movement Persona, of those fighting for social change in 1960s America using Aristotle’s concept of ethos and Edwin Black’s theory of the second persona, This study deals with a textual analysis of three songs of Bob Dylan and three songs of Pete Seeger serve as the artifacts for her thesis.

Then, Christopher Ph.D (2011) has conducted his research Hispanicised Dylan Reflection on the translation of Bob Dylan’s
**Chronicles, Volume I Into Spanish.** This study deals with the target audience of Spanish translation, there are some problems: what are particular translation cruxes and difficulties in Dylan’s text, especially for Hispanophone readership and finally, how much in the text of Chronicles is ultimately untranslatable. The target translation employed in the study is the nature of chronicles as text requires comment, since a successful translation strategy will necessarily be predicated on the characteristic of the source text, among them genre, style and intertextuality. In this case conducive to use of concepts developed by Translation studies such as foreign section or documentation or does it subvert those concepts. From the literary review, the researcher makes different in this study. The researcher uses the analysis as the data source.

**C. Underlying Theory**

This study analyzes the structural elements in the Song *Lyric of Bob Dylan’s* by Sociological analysis approach. Sociology is explained that most literary study of companionship quoted in Burns and Burns (1973:56). Other conception came from Wellek and Warren (1956:102-103) describes the most common approach to the relations of literature and society is the study of works of literature as social documents, as the portraits of social reality. Therefore, literature can be made to yield the outlines of social history if it is used in social document. It portraits many aspects of social structure, family relationship, class friction, and so on. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972:169) state sociology of literature is one of literary approaches which can be applied in the study of literary work. Sociology of literature is basically aimed to analyze literary works in terms of the author’s social status, the availability of the markets, the stipulation of type of publication, and also the structure of the readers.

Sociology is the scientific study of human behavior in society or social forces that influence that behavior. It focused in influenced of social relationship, as filed the study sociology has extremely broad scope. It was
that concerned about love, discrimination, community, feeling, and culture and confirming. From the goal of sociology is as an instrument in social relationship of human life and to the literary work.

From the Song lyrics of Bob Dylan’s, there are many approaches and concept of sociology and literature as theory and perspective in sociological approach. In literary book, or critics more than theory to proposed about sociology of literature and sociological approach. According to Laurensen and Swingewood (1972, 13-21) explained that the sociology of literature have a classification: (1) sociology of the society or community; this is a study of historical social condition from literary text and it focused on view of society in literary work. (2) Sociology of the writer, especially to the social situation of the author. It focused about the literary work between position where author’s life and historical background of the author. (3) The sociology of the reader; from this perspective is study about the literary work and opinion of the reader attitude after reading the literary work. In the basically of the sociology of the society is a literature as perspective of human society. It explained that the social structure or social condition of the society on the periodic when the literary work was made.

The study analyze from the Song Lyrics of Bob Dylan’s by using sociology of the author. Rene Wallek and Austin Warren (1972 : 92) state that the social allegiance, attitude, and ideology of the writer can be studied not only on his writing, but also, frequently, in biographical extra-documents. Other conceptions sociology of the author by Lucien Goldman (in Swingewood and Laurensen, 1972 : 20) state that the case of great writer is the purely sociological condition are surmounted and transcended so that the meaning within the text are unrelated to the market condition of authorships.

From the sociology approach, the Song lyrics of Bob Dylan’s have been made in Middle of Twentieth Century of United States. The historical background in American at the time will be covers social aspect, economic
aspect, politic aspect, religious aspect, and science aspect and technology aspect. American society is divided into three classes generally, "Arguably these constitute a class divided into working models, middle and upper classes based on job status, income, capital and (sometimes) birth " (Mauk and Oakland, 242-243 : 1997).

II. Research Finding

A. Sociological Approach Analysis

1. Social Aspect

Social criticism reflected in the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics includes of social structures (upper class, middle class, and lower class), social status, gender roles and status, and emigration.

a. Social Structures

Social structures mirrored in the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics can be seen on the structure of social community portrayed in the lyrics. In the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics, people in high economic level are portrayed as the authority towards other community; the working class reflected as the community that have typical to the people in high economic level and still better than the rest society; while community in low economic level reflected as the people who lived in the poor living condition, so they were placed in the lowest level.

1) People in high economic level

In the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics, Dylan explains that high economic level which is contained by the rich who is named William Zazinger. He is someone has a tobacco farm of six hundred acres and his welfare parents are protect by him. So, his com from in the group is placed on top level in the society.
2) The working class

Other social criticism in the *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics mirrored from Dylan’s way in portraying the character. From the lyrics, the writer finds the working class as the community existed under the bottom level has reflected. Bob Dylan mention the name of work which is included on the group of the working class, but he just portrays the human’s behavior that reflects that kind of work. In here, Dylan represented that an old woman who has many children is still working as an helper. And, any other that are Dylan represents that a woman have to quit of school because he should marry.

3) People lived in low economic level

In the *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics the low economic community is also clearly reflected through the words chosen by Bob Dylans in writing the lyrics. In the lyrics, the low economic condition is reflected by the people who lived in the poor living condition. in here, Dylan tells that the discrimination of human right to fulfill the life’s need.

b. Social Status

Social status in the *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics mirrored through the differentiation between the rich and the poor which is portrayed in the lyrics of Bob Dylan’s song. In here, Dylan reflects that an arrogant act of rich people that kills the poor people. So, Dylan represents the two social statuses in the American society; they are the rich and the poor.

c. Gender Roles and Status

Other important social aspect from the social criticism reflected in the *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics is gender roles and status. The lyric clearly reflects to the differentiation of role between
male and female. Its talk about them can be seen on the lyrics “She speaks good English/ And she invites you up into her room” (Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues: LL 19 & 20). In here, Dylan represents that a woman who is fluent in speaking English is an easy going for dating and is an easy to get job.

d. Immigration

Social criticism in the form of immigration aspect have not much been found in the lyrics of Bob Dylan’s song. In this case, the writer arrests one lyric talk about it titled Ballad Of Hollis Brown. The lyric “He lived on the outside of town, Hollis Brown.” (Ballad Of Hollis Brown : LL 1). In here, Dylan describes the immigration of Americans as a result of urbanization in the America.

2. Economic Aspect

Social criticism in the economic aspect that reflected in the Bob Dylan’s song a lyric includes the bad economic condition that the most of them are portrayed the needles, hunger and poverty. In here, Dylan reflects that an arrogant act of rich people that kills the poor people. And, the discrimination of human right to fulfill the life’s need. Then, the lyric reflected us that hunger has attacked them, when the felt hungry they have to fight with to brother to get some food. And the condition about the starvation mirrored, Dylans tells us that street walkers say that the man is a poor man.

3. Political Aspect

The Bob Dylan's song lyrics also reflect to the social criticism in the political aspect. In here, he portrayed that someone who makes the medicine is named Johnny. He is one of people who has class in the government, and he has made a mistake because he gives the high price of medicine it is not reachable for the people to get it. And, any other
Dylan explains that he doesn’t agree that the existence of discrimination of the skin’s color. It means the white people have the higher class than the black people (negro). Then, he explains that President of United States has shameful, because he hides goodness in behind of gate.

4. **Science and Technology Aspect**

Social criticism in the form of science and technology aspect in the *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics are reflected through the kind of tools that mentioned in the lyrics. These tools were reflection from the result of technological development. In here, he described that America has the ‘nuclear weapons’ that is ready to be exploded anytime. And, he explains that a ‘highway’ used by the gambler who uses sense to get something by fortune. Science and technology aspect can be seen from the tools that are mentioned in the story of lyrics such as the word “highway and weapons of the chemical dust”. Because the words of science and technology aspect it reflect that the condition at the time such as ‘age of technological inhumanity’ and ‘nuclear energy’.

5. **Cultural Aspect**

Social criticism in the cultural aspect reflected in the *Bob Dylan’s* song appeared from the lyrics that talk about art, life style, behavioral facts, and ethnicity.

Art, pleasure, sex, and behavioral, in the lyrics of *Bob Dylan’s* songs prefers to be inspiration, even it were found in the American. And he tells that An old woman sees the people in pairs in a place without limitation gender. But, exactly people who are in pairs audacious to the old lady. Any other, he explains that a leader of a family is finding the work and pleasure only (hobbies).
6. Religious Aspect

Social criticism in the religious aspect reflected in the *Bob Dylan's* song lyrics can be seen from the chosen words in the context of sentences used in the lyrics. In here, he explains that he is less in receiving the religion that confided by his girlfriend. And, he tells that the American who believe Christ is not friendly because he is not a prophet for them. Then, he explains that his beloved’s grandmother prays to a photo in the wall.

III. Discussion

Based on the classification of sociology of literature, the correlation between the theme of *Bob Dylan’s* song lyrics and the social background of American society are very close. Dylan’s reflected the theme in social realities pointed to the social and cultural aspect. In the realities of the social aspect, Dylan wants to tell the social stratification existed in America in the midle twentieth century, they are upper class, middle class, and lower class. While in the cultural aspect, Dylans wants to show the popular art, life stile, and behavioral facts which become phenomenon for the whole people in the worldwide. Dylan in economic aspect of social background describes the bad economic condition of America in the midle twentieth century.

There are many terms that become attention to Dylan in writing *Lyrics*. Simply, in the economic aspect Dylans wants to show the bad condition of America when he live in that time and write the lyrics, it is the time when the starvation, colonization, famine, and poverty. In political aspect Dylans wants to show the discriminations race and skin color between Blacks and Whites in the America, and also political violence in the authority system that existed in America in the midle twentieth century. Dylan shows political system which the majority class oppresses and dominates the minority class of American society.
Beside that, Dylan uses certain science and technology for the aspect of America society, supporting the character of Bob Dylan’s song lyrics reflected to the America’s social criticism. In the religious aspect, Dylan wants to draw the religious aspect pointed to the style and ritual activity of America society that reflected in the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics. He shows that in America there was a ritual ceremony.

In a total, the writer criticizes all about the analysis above. Both of structural elements and social historical background reflect the social criticism of Bob Dylan’s song lyrics. The Bob Dylan’s lyrics tend to use the speaker, rhyme and theme to portrait social criticism. Moreover, cultural aspect also is shown by author to portrait the social criticism in Bob Dylan’s song lyrics that all of them reflect to the art, life style and behavioral facts.

Having analyzed the lyrics based on sociology of literature, the researcher concludes that there is a relation between the lyrics of Bob Dylan and the social background between the lyrics of Bob Dylan and the social background of America society in the midle twentieth century. Thus, the researcher can find the answer of the problem of the research that is how social criticism are reflected in the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics. Thus, the portraits of social criticism of the lyrics can be traced from the synthesis among the speaker, spoken to, figurative language, rhythm and rhyme, imagery and symbol, and theme drawn by Bob Dylan. Moreover, it can be seen from the unity of several aspects such as social, economic, politics, science and technology, cultural, and religious aspects.
IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the sociology of literature, it can be seen from the social realities, social and cultural aspects are prominently reflected in the Bob Dylan’s song lyrics. In social aspect Dylan wants to show the discrimination of race and skin color, which creates social stratification, they are upper, middle, and lower class. While in cultural aspect Dylan wants to show the popular phenomenon occurred in the midle twentieth century, the time when the lyrics are made, they are; art, life style, behavioral facts, and ethnicity. These problems cannot be separated from the theme and the social background of Bob Dylan’s song lyrics.
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