Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*:
Homology between Its Structure and American Society Structure
in the Middle of 19th Century

M. Yuseano Kardiansyah

yuseano@yahoo.co.id

STBA Teknokrat Lampung

Abstract

In particular, this study focuses on assessing the world view that is contained in The Scarlet Letter, also tracing the social environment that has such kind of world view. In this case, because the language is an important medium in the creation of a literary work, the study of the work structure becomes the first step in this study. This study uses genetic structuralism theory that describes literature from the notion of homology, its correspondence with the social structure. Meanwhile, the research method used is the dialectical method that views the literary texts along with its cultural coherence. Based on the study, the homology between the structures of The Scarlet Letter and its social structure (America in the mid-19th century) is found. Imaginary oppositions found in the structure of The Scarlet Letter shows the expression of Romanticism world view in America, which consists of Transcendentalism and Dark Romantic, which in turn also explains the reason for the formation of such structures in the romance. In addition, the world view shows that Nathaniel Hawthorne was incorporated in the current group of writers who followed (at least related to) Edwardean theology, in order to balance the authority of Unitarianism and maintain the purity of the Christian doctrine from the influence of the separatists in the middle of 19th century in America.

Key Words*: American romanticism, dialectic method, genetic structuralism, romance, world view*

Introduction

The connection between literary and sociological domain is an important discussion in the world of literature study. Specifically, if attention is paid to the literary life in one of ex-British colonies, which is the United States, the studies that connect literature and its sociological aspects can be a very important discussion. Considering the number of big names and influential writers that can be presented related to the history and the development of American literature until this era, that is absolutely undoubted. Based on its long history, trend development of American literature is in line with the paradigm development of society that is occurred in the European region at approximately the same time. However, as a country which has different socio-cultural backgrounds, it makes American literature becomes very interesting to be studied further.

Such difference is caused by different background of the countries. As an example, on one side, England is a country that has a social order which is more organized as one of European countries than the Americans on the other side (VanSpanckeren, 1994: 36). England is a country that has the aristocratic social structure that tends to be partitioned (Bourgeois and Proletarian) while at the same time America tends to be relatively liquid and does not have social classes[1] within its democratic society. That phenomena is potentially interesting if it is connected to literary study

In the context of American literature during the middle of 19th century, from many novelists in that era, Nathaniel Hawthorne [2] was one of the most famous novelists at that time. In his era, Hawthorne preferred the term *'romance'* rather than novel to his works, as in the 19th century in America, romance was a story that focuses on something larger than life itself, which is fantastic conditions faced by ordinary people (Graham, 2012: xvii). Some works of Hawthorne have story background of the Puritans in New England, and one of his best works is *The*

---

[1] See also Edward Pessen (*Status dan Kelas Sosial di Amerika,* 1994) that alsodiscusses the complexity of social class phenomena in America.

[2] See: James Henry (*Hawthorne,* 1966) and Richard H Millington (*The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 2004).

Scarlet Letter[3] (abbreviated next *TSL*), first published in 1850, becoming the classic picture of American Puritan. Set in Boston about the middle of the 17th century during the early Puritan colonization period, this work highlights the public obsession toward morality, depicting gender issues, the punishment of sinners, guilt, and confession of an individual.

In this case, *TSL* is a subversive and daring work (VanSpanckeren, 1994: 37). That statement is confirmed by VanSpanckeren because she thought that it raised some issues that were usually hidden in the 19th century in America, such as issue of the impact of democratic freedom experience on individual behavior, especially on sexual and religious freedom. This is likely to be connected with Nathaniel Hawthorne who was a descendant of Puritan families who born and raised in Salem, Massachusetts (Punter and Byron, 2004: 123). The religious aspects and place where he grew could possibly inspire in this regard, even if it has not been able to give a concrete reason about the complexity of the issues raised in this novel.

Nevertheless, this work still has the potential to show the level of development in the sphere of social and intellectual of its era. In this case, the existence of literature will not be separated from the intellectual developments of social environment in its period. The intellectual aspects will relate directly to the awareness of phenomena or social issues that are addressed through *TSL* romance. In the other word, in this novel Hawthorne with his intellectual capacity was working to respond to the social phenomena and issues at that time. In this case, social factor is the most possible main driver of such romance creation. Structures created and values contained in it could have come from the author's response to the empirical experience seen or felt. Each response is commonly performed by each individual because of the influence from social background where the individual lives in. That is because the collective experience or ideology embraced by individual's social group will greatly affect the standpoint of an individual in responding to any phenomenon that occurs in social life. In this stage a person will have what is called as world view (*vision du monde*) (Lucien Goldman, 1967). As the author of *TSL*, Hawthorne certainly had his own scope in which his social ideals as a person grew and developed. Therefore, if this romance was a form of response to the empirical experience of its author, this romance will load ideology or world view of its author as an individual who lives in a particular social group.

In this case, a sticking point is what kind of world view that is contained in the *TSL* so that this romance has such content of story. Moreover, that problem becomes more complex because of the author's social group cannot be clearly identified if it is directly correlated with this work. This is because on the one hand, this romance has a background and social allegory that depicts the community in the mid of 17th century, while on the other hand this work was created in the mid of 19th century. Information about Hawthorne's family background previously is certainly not sufficient to determine his social environment. There should be a step further analysis to gain an understanding about the social group of this writer. Based on this, further investigation is absolutely necessary to know the important facts about the social environment that had affected Hawthorne in the creation of *TSL*. Here, things that might be logical is a fact about the author's social group will be known, if his world view has known first, because in general, world view is a characteristic of a particular social group.

If that knowledge is about to be searched, of course the investigation will not be separated from *TSL* romance itself as the concrete work of its author. A literary work will always be associated with aspects of language that becomes part of collective consciousness of the author. Therefore, the non-empirical aspects of literary work (in which worldview is included) in the form of meaning will not be separated from the empirical aspects of the written text, just like signified and its signifier. In this case, meaning is a form of collective consciousness and it is established based on the intentions of the author of a work (Faruk, 1988: 24). The structure that is formed in a work, in this case is a consciousness that contains a certain intention of the author, in which in another word, there is ideological content inside of a work structure. Related to that notion, another problem arises where the structure of this work becomes important to be studied further. To achieve or understand the meaning of world view in this romance, it must be started by understanding the structure of this work first. Most possibly, when the structure of this work has been peeled, then other aspects such as Hawthorne's world view and social groups could be easier to find.

Based on that, the existence of *TSL* romance as a literary work becomes very interesting to be studied further in order to obtain an answer from the problem that have already identified. In this case, the relationship between literary work and its sociological aspects seems to get a linkage which makes the study cannot be separated each other. Therefore, this study will involve textual aspects of literary work and contextual things like background and social history of the communities in which *TSL* belongs to.

---

[3] The work that is used as material object in this research was reprinted on 2012 by Barnes & Noble.

Theoretical Framework and Research Method

From various literature reviews (Azi, 2013; Hakim, 2012; Sigarlaki, 2005; Wang, 2010) that have been done related to this study, it is decided that *Genetic Structuralism* [4] developed by the French sociologist Lucien Goldmann is the most relevant one for this research. In this case, this theory is relevant to support the foundation of thinking in order to obtain the answer from some problems that have been explicated previously. Here, in general this theory has a basic concept that is able to explain the meaning of the literary work from the perspective of homology, the correspondence to its social structure. Moreover, this theory is also supported by some important concepts, such as the concept of humanitarian facts (including literature), the figure of the author as a collective subject, world view contained in the great work of literature, and the structure of the literary work as a manifestation of a social group which is believed to be able to support in answering the research problems being faced.

Furthermore, in this theory Goldmann specifically develops a method which is called as dialectical method. In this case, the dialectical method directs the focus of research in concerning to literary texts in conjunction with cultural coherence. Here, the dialectical method has two pairs of concepts, namely "whole-part" and "understanding-explanation", which stresses that a literary work should be understood as an overarching structure. Understanding literature as an overarching structure will lead to the explanation of relationship between literary work and the socio-cultural aspect, so that literary work has meaning. Besides, the literary text itself is a part of a larger entity, which makes it a meaningful structure, because basically every fact or idea of the individual has meaning if it is placed only in its entirety. Instead, the whole can only be understood by increased knowledge from the partial facts that establish the whole itself (Faruk, 2012: 77). Therefore, the whole cannot be understood without the parts and part cannot be understood without the whole, the process of achieving knowledge through dialectical method becomes a sort of continuous circular motion.

Meanwhile the concept of understanding and explanation are not two different intellectual processes, but a process that simultaneously applied to two different reference frames (Goldmann, 1975: 163). In this case, the results of the structure analysis toward a particular work (*TSL* romance as example) will be helpful in understanding the world view expressed in that work, besides the results of understanding the world view can also help to explain the formation of structure in the work. Next, the result of understanding the world view will be functional in understanding the author's social group that has particular world view (in this case social group of Nathaniel Hawthorne becomes the focus of the study), and of course the understanding of that social group may also helpful in explaining the formation of world view expressed in the literary work.

Data Sources and Data Analysis Technique

The primary data source of this research is the text of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *TSL*. The primary data including; *TSL* romance text that describes the relationship between a character to other characters and relationships between characters with the surrounding environment also the visible problems faced by each character. In addition to the primary data source, this study is also supported by secondary data in the form of written sources describing the background of the social life of the author and social events in the United States that are closely related to the work. These data include aspects of Nathaniel Hawthorne's social life associated with this work, as well as historical background or social events that condition the creation of the work, and also Hawthorne's view about his society.

Meanwhile the analytical techniques used in this study can be described as follows; First of all, this study uses a technique of analyzing significant linguistic units in the data source on the basis of theoretical concepts used. The data in this study will be connected to each other with the dialectical method that applies at the level of literary work by synchronizing the part and the whole until forming a structure with maximum coherence, especially the binary opposition patterned structure. In addition, the technique used in this study also observes secondary data in the form of the results of the history and social studies. The dialectical method is also used to analyze the relationship of analysis result that will be done by placing it in the whole social structure related.

---

[4] See: Ahyar Anwar (*Teori Sosial Sastra,* 2010), A. Teeuw (*Sastra & Ilmu Sastra*, 2003), Faruk (*Strukturalisme Genetik & Epistemologi Sastra*, 1988; *Metode Penelitian Sastra*, 2012; *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra*, 2012), Lucien Goldmann (*Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, 1975; *'Genetic Structuralism' in the Sociology of Literature,* 1967; *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*, 1977), and Mitchell Cohen (*The Wager of Lucien Goldmann*, 1994).

Discussion and Result

Imaginary Structure of *TSL* Romance

The first analysis is done toward imaginary structure of the material object studied, which is *TSL* romance. This analysis is required to step into the next analysis that will be done to find the world view expressed in this work. Here, the analysis conducted includes facts of story [5] like the characters and backgrounds that appear in the imaginary universe of this work. The results gotten will be used as the basis for determining the oppositional relationship that is formed from in *TSL* romance.

Based on the analysis conducted, it is found that this work has an imaginary universe that forms three oppositional relationships. The first opposition is in the form of social opposition that describes the opposition between urban Puritan society and primitive peoples who live in the wild. In this regard, this finding provides belief that the author of this romance has interest and concern for the natural environment at that time.

The second opposition is the cultural opposition between culture of divinity and culture of profane that is bridged by Hester and Dimmesdale characters, between patriarchal culture and matriarchal culture, and also between cultures that look at the "A" symbol negatively in one side and positively in another side. Based on the analysis that has been done on the relation of this opposition, some important facts regarding to the meaning of *TSL* structure are found; the first fact is the figure of the author has particular attention to individual and intuitive ideas. In addition, there is also perception about positive and negative sides under the conflict over the exterior and interior of human beings and also their symbolization. It becomes a specific characteristic upon the style of depicting image and characterization of characters in the story. The last fact is about Hawthorne's attention to the empowerment of women in his conception of thinking, in which it is proved from the image of heroine in *TSL*. Meanwhile, the last opposition is the opposition of human that describes the opposition between old religious leaders and young religious leader, and also opposition between men figures who are weak and emotional against a strong, courageous, and rational woman character. Based on the interpretation toward this opposition, it can be interpreted that this work seeks to reveal that there is no kind of human being as a whole who is able to stand on one side only, because there are still other sides exist inside a human being, whether it is the positive or negative sides, whether it is women or men.

The World View of *TSL* Romance Author

The novel or romance in this case, is a form of story on degraded search to find authentic values in the world in which it is degraded. In this case, Goldmann emphasizes an important feature in this kind of literary work where there is problematic hero in it. In this case, this hero is the one that conducts a search of the authentic values. This confirms that the hero or main character in a story having a problem because trying to fight for the values that are considered ideal, and therefore should face the other figures as the realization of other social groups. In this regard, the problematic hero in *TSL* is Hester Prynne as main female protagonist character, and also the main male protagonist character which is Arthur Dimmesdale. Therefore, study of the imaginary structures in *TSL* has been done before will be further continued to the problematic existence of those two heroes in it.

Hester Prynne's characterization as a problematic hero in this work also indirectly images Nathaniel Hawthorne's world view characteristic that tries to get out from the thoughts of people who are conservative and conventional. In this case, Hawthorne seeks to demonstrate new human traits that do not want to be bound by the conventions of Puritan society at large in that era. However, he also does not want to be separated entirely from those conventions that can be seen from Hester image that still holds the values of divinity believed by Puritan society. The most striking thing in this regard is the potential of goodness (divinity values) is imaged on Hester figure as one of the hero in this romance.

Meanwhile, the figure of Arthur Dimmesdale also indirectly images Nathaniel Hawthorne's world view characteristic that tries to get out from the thoughts of people who are conservative and conventional upon religious aspect by providing a dynamic and tolerant manner. In this case, Hawthorne has an attempt to show a change in leadership style of religious leader who tend to be more fresh and soft. However, this change results a negative things, because in this story such style encourages humans to sin, and thus triggers the dark side of human self. It shows that Nathaniel Hawthorne's perception still holds a conservative value upon religious view.

Based on that, it has been found that the specific characteristics of Nathaniel Hawthorne's view on one side tend to try to get out of the conventions of society which is conservative. However, on the other hand he does not want to get out from the conventions as a whole. By exploring the individual and intuitive view, Hawthorne

---

[5] The concept about facts of story is discussed in Robert Stanton (*An Introduction to Fiction,* 1965).

tries to give a view towards change and seeks to show the existence of positive potential in the changes. However, as for the change that has started to proceed, Hawthorne even tends to show the negative potential of the change. By doing so, Hawthorne has made the process of assimilation and accommodation in the same time through this work.

In addition, other characteristics which are also important and necessary to be associated with previous characteristics are the presence of Hawthorne attention to natural environment at that time, and Hawthrone's perception which always shows the presence of the positive side of every negative thing pictured on one side, and also there is a negative side of everything that is viewed positively on the other side. Most probably, such things are the hallmark of a world view of particular group that was living in America around the mid of 19th century, when the work was created.

Based on the context of the mid of 19th century in America, the trends that have been presented as a result of understanding *TSL* imaginary structure is a pattern that is identical to the view of Transcendentalism[6] and view of the Gothic or the so-called Dark Romantic[7] or Anti-Transcendentalism. Here, the root of these two views is Romanticism. Within the romance, on the one hand Hawthorne expresses Transcendentalism view by describing the positive components of individual existence along with its intuition. Besides, he also gives an overview of union with nature as a representation of the deity. On the other hand, Hawthorne also expresses Dark Romantic view by describing the components of negative or dark side of individual existence as well as its intuition. With this, along with an understanding of the world view expressed in this romance, of course, an explanation of the reason for the formation of imaginary structure in such a way has been well understood. It can be concluded that the world view of Romanticism is the main supporter of the above aspects upon the formation of structure in the imaginary universe of *TSL*.

The Social Group of *TSL* Romance Author

The result of previous analysis is used for coming into the next step in the analysis, which is to understand the social group that has such a world view in the context of socio-cultural in America[8] during the mid of 19th century. Based on this phase of analysis, it is known that the structure of this romance is homologous with community structures formed at the time when *TSL* was created. The structure includes a group of elitist and religionist who belong to Unitarianism, groups of workers such as farmers, craftsmen, and mechanics who created the separatist movement, and in the middle of these two groups are groups of writer or poet, theologian, and so on. In this case, the transcendentalist and Dark Romantic are incorporated in the Edwardean theology. Here, Nathaniel Hawthorne who has consciousness toward transcendentalism and Dark Romantic belong to this group along with other figures.

The structure of such a life can at least be looked at *TSL* romance that is created. As discussed in the previous analysis, the two hero characters created in the imaginary universe of this romance are the representations of Dark Romantic and Transcendentalism view. Hawthorne consciousness toward the two views is of course identical with what is conceived in the Edwardean theology. Here, the positive side in the aspects of the intuitive, humanity, and democracy is inherent in transcendentalism represented by Hester Prynne character. Meanwhile, the negative side in the weak human soul that is threatened by its environment as external factors is inherent in the Dark Romantic represented by Arthur Dimmesdale character. Both of these figures can counterbalance some figures like authoritarian Governor Bellingham and the Reverend John Wilson, which in other words is a representation of elitism. In addition, the two main characters can also do the same thing toward Mrs. Hibbins which can be regarded as a representation of the Separatists. Therefore, it has been known that the structure of this romance has much in common (homologous) with *TSL* community structure formed at the time of its creation.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the discussion and the results that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the linkage between literature as a cultural product and social context cannot be separated one to another. Through this study, the homology between the structure of a literary work, which in this case is *TSL* romance, and its social structures, which is the United States in the mid of 19th century, can be seen clearly. However, regardless of the significance

---

[6] See Jerry Phillips dan Andrew Ladd (*Romanticism and Transcendentalism,* 2006).

[7] See Dincer Figun (*The Light and Dark Romantic Features in Irving, Hawthorne and Poe,* 2010).

[8] See: Jonathan Atkins (*The Jacksonian Era 1825-1844,* 2001), Henry Bamford Parkes (*The American Experience,* 2010), and Lewis Perry (*Intellectual Life in America,* 1984).

of the results from this study that has been able to reveal homology between *TSL* structure and its social structure, there are some problems remaining to be studied further. The most fundamental issue is related to the complexity of the social class in American society during the period, in which it led this study is only able to identify the structure of American society in the mid of 19th century based on the social group. In this case, the cause of the complexity toward that social class becomes a big question that seems worthy to be studied further.

In this case, the existence of social classes within a particular social sphere is like two sides of a coin. On the one hand, the concept of social class is able to balance people's life in a particular social sphere, but on the other hand it is also able to provide inequality. The inequality in general is due to the efforts to dominate and perpetuate the existence of a social class that gets benefit from such social structure. However, that effort will not be able to eliminate the potential for social change, because basically, another social class would still try to fight back and take over the power of the dominant class. That is what basically able to create a new social structure along with the new environment as well. Based on this understanding, there are two possibilities that could happen. First, the complexity of the social class that occurred in America in the mid of 19th century is a result of the resistance by the dominated social class, or rather the result of efforts to strengthen the power carried by the dominant class. Two such possibilities that is basically essential to be studied further. In this case, the complexity of the social class that has a potential to be a manifestation of an ideology that is greater than what has been presented in this research.

That kind of knowledge is believed to be essential for further investigation. Therefore, the author suggests that the next study which will be done by the other researchers or even the author's own self to focus on that issue. There are two important functions from that study; the first is to complete the knowledge that has not been able to be given by this thesis, and the second is as a medium for clarification or even revision of some knowledge that have been disclosed in this thesis. The author believes that there is no absolute knowledge. Therefore, such sustainable concrete steps are needed to reach better knowledge in the future.

References

Anwar, Ahyar. 2010. *Teori Sosial Sastra.* Yogyakarta: Ombak.

Atkins, Jonathan. 2001. The Jacksonian Era, 1825-1844, dalam William L. Barney (ed), 2001, *A Companion 19th-Century America*. Massachusetts & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Azi, Rahmawati. 2013. *Spiritualitas Postmodern Dalam Novel Stardust Karya Neil Gaiman (Tinjauan Strukturalisme Genetik)*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Cohen, Mitchell. 1994. *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann*. Princeston: Princeston University Press.

Dincer, Figun. 2010. *The Light and Dark Romantic Features in Irving, Hawthorne and Poe*. The Journal of International Social Research, Volume 3/10, pp. 218-224.

Faruk. 1988. *Strukturalisme Genetik Dan Epistemologi Sastra*. Yogyakarta: PD. Lukman.

_____. 2012. *Metode Penelitian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

_____. 2012. *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra, dari Strukturalisme Genetik sampai Post-Modernisme*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

Goldman, Lucien. 1975. *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*. London: Tavistock Publication.

_____. 1967. 'Genetic Structuralism' in the Sociology of Literature, dalam Elizabeth dan Tom Burns (eds), 1973, *Sociology of Literature & Drama*. Middlesex: Penguin Book Ltd.

_____. 1977. *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Graham, Annisa M. 2012. Introduction and Notes, dalam Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Barnes & Noble.

Hakim, Lutfiyah. 2012. *Pandangan Dunia Ali Ahmad Bakatsir Dalam Novel Sallamah Al-Qas, Analisis Strukturalisme Genetik Lucien Goldman*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. 2012. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Barnes & Noble.

James, Henry. 1966. *Hawthorne*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Millington, Richard H. 2004. *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parkes, Henry Bamford. 1955. *The American Experience, An Interpretation of the History and Civilization of the American People*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Perry, Lewis. 1984. *Intellectual Life in America, A History*. New York: Franklin Watts.

Pessen, Edward. 1994. Status Dan Kelas Sosial Di Amerika, dalam Luther S. Luedtke, *Mengenal Masyarakat Dan Budaya Amerika Serikat*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.

Phillips, Jerry dan Andrew Ladd. 2006. *Romanticism and Transcendentalism*. New York: Facts On File, Inc.

Punter, David dan Glennis Byron. 2004. *The Gothic*. Malden, Oxford, & Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Sigarlaki, Stephani Johana. 2005. *Citra Wanita Dalam The Scarlet Letter: Sebuah Tinjauan Kritik Sastra Feminis*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Stanton, Robert. 1965. *An Introduction to Fiction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Teeuw, A. 2003. *Sastera Dan Ilmu Sastera*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.

VanSpanckeren, Kathryn. 1994. *Outline of American Literature (Revised Edition)*. Published By the United States Departement of State.

Wang, Yamin. 2010. *A Representative of The New Female Image-Analyzing Hester Prynne's Feminist Consciousness in The Scarlet Letter*. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 893-897.