

Students' Reading Responses to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, a Novel by Thomas Hardy

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Abstract: The study explored how students responded to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, a novel by Thomas Hardy. This study was a case study of an intact class of *Prose I* at the English Department, Universitas Negeri Malang. The data were collected from 25 students, and were in the form of students' papers, written in English, which were of the students' personal responses towards the novel. The study found that the students resorted to their religious knowledge (ideology) when responding to the characters and subject matter of the novel. Students also developed certain kinds of feeling (emotion) as their religious ideology was challenged by that offered by the novel. The study also disclosed that the students' responses fell into the categories of *thematic* and *empathetic*. It follows that teachers of Literature need to make attempts to situate the students to arrive at higher level of responses: *motivational*, *predictive*, and *critical-evaluative*.

Keywords: reader-response, English Literature, teacher, *Tess of The d'Urbervilles*.

Since 4 B.C., there have been four orientations of Literature, i.e., mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective (Abrams, 1981). It follows that there have also been four differing orientations of literary criticisms. However, Tarigan

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(1991) asserts that literary criticism is always individual in nature. This endorses the notion that it is daunting to put literary criticisms in categories. Tarigan (1991) also puts that there is no type of criticisms which have their own principles so as to be distinctive between one and another. Shipley (in Tarigan, 1991) also asserts that all criticisms are individual responses to literary works. In this sense, types of literary criticisms are enormous. Pertinent to this point, Daiches (1956) contends that there is no critic able to completely discuss all aspects of a given literary work at once. Literary works are ever broader than the interpretations of the interpreter, the critic.

Regarding the points above, it is ostensibly normal that critics utilise various pieces of information from a number of disciplines (e.g., psychology and sociology) in the attempts to give meaning and/or significance to literary works (Daiches, 1956). It follows that there are a number of criticisms resulted from the critics' tendency to use certain approaches and from the differing angles the critics approach the literary works. Among the various approaches is "reader-response" (Pradopo, 1995). This kind of approach allows readers to possess a wide range of interpretations by employing their ideology (Jansen, 2001).

The present study was aimed at exploring students' ideological views when reading Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. This is of a particular significance for the researcher who is, at the same time, the tutor of English Prose Fiction needs to understand this phenomenon well in the attempts to improve the quality of English prose fiction teaching in class. The study employs reader-response approach, for, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this approach has not been utilised in, particularly, the English Department, Universitas Negeri Malang. Rather, the existing well documented one is psychological approach (Basthomi, 2000).

A number of literary studies, particularly in Universitas Negeri Malang has been focussed on those which put literary works as the objects of study. A study by Amri (1992), *Tokoh Utama sebagai Penyalur Aspirasi Politik Pengarang dalam Novel The Scarlet Letter Karya Nathaniel Hawthorne: Sebuah Kajian Sosiologi Sastra* serves as an example. As well, a number of theses by S1 (undergraduate) students fall into this category.

Along with such studies, Basthomi (2000) examined undergraduate theses on English Literature written in 1990-2000. This study found out that the majority of the students (50%) studied characters in novels and 41.7% of which employed psychological approach. Other approaches (e.g., linguistic, stylistic, ideological, social, and thematic) only comprised 4.17%.

Miall's (1996) research displayed that a number of his English students disclosed their dissatisfaction with the teaching of English they had experienced. They complained that the teaching had tended to be tainted with high frequency of tests which only touched upon superficial aspects of literary dimensions and that the students are to comply with the teacher's understanding or perspectives of a given literary work. Miall (1996) asserts that students' initial engagement with literary works takes place when they give their free, imaginative, emotional, and direct personal responses to literary works; however, this moment is frequently ripped off by teacher-selected activities, such as tests. Miall comments that Literature teachers tend to undermine students' ability to respond to literary works, whereas his belief is that effective Literature teaching cannot be achieved unless the teaching is directed to stimulate, develop, and reinforce students' responses; Literature class needs to be set up to "respect" students' responses. Miall suggests that Literature class apply inductive mode of teaching method whereby students' responses are explored, developed, shared, and modified, which, in turn, puts the students as having the authority of their own understanding and meaning of literary works. It follows that authority is not focussed on the teacher; instead, on the students. This is the spirit of reader-response undergirding the current research.

Finding students' emotional properties is significant (Miall, 1996). As teachers ask students to express their responses to literary works, complex description of their emotion comes to the fore. Even, students' responses are derived from their emotion as they read literary works. At times, students are at odds as they read, for their anticipatory knowledge cannot flow freely against new information offered by a given literary work. At this juncture, students' schemata, background knowledge, or ideology are challenged. This, in turn, directs students' exploration of the given text and their efforts to relate the work's elements to its totality. As they are trying to get a hold of the relationship between the work's elements and its totality, they make modifications of their understanding both inside and outside the text, which Riffaterre (1978) refers to as "intertexts". This occurrence is internal to the students themselves, with its own colour (Miall, 1996).

METHODS

This piece of research was a case study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), for it was oriented to gather information pertinent to a certain situation (case) of students attending the unit of *Prose I* in the English Department, Universitas

Negeri Malang, particularly, when they gave responses to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, a novel by Thomas Hardy.

There were 25 students participating in this study. They were those registered in the educational program, and those undertaking the unit of *Prose I* in the second semester of the academic year 2000/2001 in the English Department, Universitas Negeri Malang. The principal investigator of the current research was the tutor of the course. It is worth noting that the *Prose I* was the first unit pertaining to literary courses undertaken by the students. They had not formally taken literary courses (as was in the English Department, Universitas Negeri Malang) until they were enrolled in the course, *Prose I*.

The data in this study were in the form of students' responses to the *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which were articulated in English in the form of essays.

The study employed an assignment sheet guide as the instrument. The sheet contained instructions of how the students were to compose the essay on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The essay needed to include aspects as follows: (1) plot, (2) characterisation of the main character and their evaluation of the main character as informed by their belief/ideology, (3) subject matter and theme, and their evaluation of the subject matter and theme as informed by their belief/ideology, (4) personal feeling (emotion) as reading the novel, and personal strategy in dealing with the subject matter and theme.

In the next step the researchers conducted content analysis by selecting and drawing on relevant data. The researchers then recorded the relevant data by categories: a) students' evaluation of the main character, b) students' evaluation of the subject matter and theme, and c) students' ideological references employed in the evaluation.

RESULTS

The students' papers disclosed that the majority of the students wrote Qor'anic verses, Hadiths, and Proverb as their references to evaluate the main character and subject matter. Such references demonstrated that students were likely to be different from each other in judging phenomena, situations, and occurrences. This also means that they had various ideologies. However, it should be noted that not all of the subjects wrote the authentic sources of their ideological references explicitly. It follows that it was hard to determine their ideological references. What was apparent was that the terms employed by the subjects in this category were similar to those of the subjects supplying authentic ideological references.

Among the subjects referring to Qor'anic verses, there was a variety of judgements on the main character. There were 18 characteristics they attributed to the character, i.e., *obedient, honest, loyal, good, responsible, caring, tough, attentive, simple, materialistic, brave, impatient, pure, dedicated, respectful, strong, irreligious, and unchaste*. *Responsible* and *caring* emerged as the students referred to Hadiths in judging the main character. The students who referred to the combination of Qor'an and Hadiths came up with the terms *obedient, careful, and honest*, whilst those referring to Roman Proverb drew on the terms *obedient, caring, and patient*. The students who did not explicitly refer to any authentic sources selected 13 characteristics: *good, obedient, patient, loyal, strong, attentive, pure, strong-willed, passive, kind, careful, hardworking, and naive*. Students displayed varied kinds of feeling as they read the novel. Table 1 demonstrates the variety of the feeling. It discloses that *sympathy* and *antipathy* were similar in quantity (18% dan 17%). It was also true with *pity* and *anger* (15% dan 14%). In a similar vein, this phenomenon occurred with regard to feelings with binary opposition, e.g., *dislike, admiration, disappointment* and *feeling sorry* (each of 7%), and *sadness* and *happiness* (3% each). To better understand the phenomenon, it is commendable to look at factors attributable to the emergence of the feelings.

Table 1 Students' Feelings as Reading the Novel

No	Feeling	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Sympathy	11	18 %
2.	Antipathy	10	17 %
3.	Pity	9	15 %
4.	Anger	8	14 %
5.	Dislike	4	7 %
6.	Admiration	4	7 %
7.	Disappointment	4	7 %
8.	Feeling sorry	4	7 %
9.	Sadness	2	3 %
10.	Happiness	2	3 %
11.	Surprise	1	2 %
	Jumlah	59	100 %

With regard to the sources and factors (in the form of the characters) attributable to the emergence of the feelings, there were both the same and different factors. The same factors might induce the same as well as different

feelings between the students (see Table 2). Table 2 shows that the factors, characters, occasioning positive feeling only on the part of the students were Maria dan James. Conversely, Angel dan John engendered negative feelings only, i.e., *angry*, *antipathy*, *hate*. and *dislike*.

Table 2 Sources or Factors of the Emergence of Feelings

No	Source of Feeling	Feeling	Type of Feeling	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Tess	Sympathy	+	6	14 %
		Pity	+	4	9 %
		Sorry	-	3	8 %
		Antipathy	-	1	2 %
2.	Char	Happy	+	1	2 %
		Sorry	-	2	5 %
		Hate	-	2	5 %
		Dislike	-	2	5 %
		Sad	-	1	2 %
		Disappoinmet	-	2	5 %
3.	Alec	Sympathy	+	1	2 %
		Hate	-	4	9 %
		Angry	-	5	12 %
4.	Angel	Angry	-	1	2 %
		Antipathy	-	2	5 %
		Hate	-	2	5 %
5.	Maria	Admiration	+	1	2 %
		Pity	+	1	2 %
6.	John	Dislike	-	1	2 %
7.	James	Admiration	+	1	2 %
Jumlah				43	100 %

As with the other characters, all brought about both positive and negative feelings. Tess, the main character, also bid positive and negative feelings, i.e., *sympathy*, *pity*, *sorry* and *antipathy*; yet, in terms of quantity, the positive ones were greater. The emergence of the feelings indicated, on the one hand, that the students' ideology were confronted with that available in the literary text, the novel. On the other hand, it connoted the state of engagement of the students, as readers, in the reading process. The students' expressions of their feelings indicated that their involvement in the reading was emotional; they tended to be engulfed in the story. The emotional engagement can be inferred from the following sample expression, "I dislike John very much," whilst the engulfment in the story is implied in the following expression: "If I were

Tess, I would...", an expression indicating that the students identified themselves to certain characters in the novel. Another expression also indicates the engulfment on the part of the students: "At first, I did not want to read the novel. But, because it was one of the assignments given by the lecturer, I read it. But when I read it, I did not want to stop until I finished reading it."

The variety of the feelings as the students came aboard to reading the novel is normal. Yet, as to why the students came to possess varied feelings is interesting to pinpoint. When the students read a given literary work, possibly they underwent interruption/discrepancy, that is, when their ideology stood against that of the text, which might be different. As the students' ideology serves to interpret and organise their world, and that the text's ideology "challenges" their ideology, there were ideological gaps inducing the emergence of the students' feelings, which were subjective (Mandler, 1990). The subjectivity means that their feelings were individual and personal. Therefore, it is normal that the students developed various feelings (Warga, 1983), which, in general, might be categorised into positive and negative. Warga (1983) classifies emotions (feelings) into five principal categories, i.e., feeling afraid of something, love, anger, sadness, and joy. Classified into Warga's categories, the current research subjects' feelings fell into the last three categories.

Educationally, the point concerning the engulfment of the students in the story, situations, and identifications to the characters in the story meant positive. In other words, there was an indication that the students were interested in reading the literary text set for them. This is an initial step significant in the teaching of literature. Otherwise, literature teaching would only tap on the surface, the technical knowledge of literary sphere. Had this occurred, literature teaching would have been a "torture" for the students, similar to that found by Miall (1996) in Canada. The current study did not find the notions of actions on the part of the students as to modify or assimilate their ideology (Mandler, 1990). Probably, this was due to the fact that ideological modification or assimilation tends to be bound with time, and the data collection was only conducted once. The limited space (essay) for the students to express their responses might also be attributable to the phenomenon.

DISCUSSION

In general, the students can be said to be consistent in utilising their ideological references. When they drew on Qor'an, Hadiths, or Proverb as references to judge the main character, they also referred to the same sources to

evaluate the subject matter. Regarding the feelings emerging, the students tended to admit that the feelings were triggered by the interruption/discrepancy or blockage as the characters, the characters' traits, the characters' fate, and the subject matter did not comply with the norms idealised in their ideology. This means that their feelings (emotions) were initiated with their mastering cognitive knowledge about, their religious ideology. They then cast their cognitive knowledge, which formed their ideology, on the phenomena they found in the given novel. As this casting could not flow easily, the students' feelings or affective aspects of reading came to the fore (Gribble, 1983). The following expression indicated the phenomenon: "I don't like that who raped Tess. He must be sentenced to death. To rape is strictly forbidden in Islam, therefore, he is against Islamic teachings" (it should be noted that accuracy in the use of English was not attended to). The students' cognitive knowledge about the prohibition of rape (as idealised in their religious ideology) was employed to judge the phenomenon which was against their ideology. As this confrontation occurred, the students' emotional state was interfered.

Apparently, the students' emotions, to some degree, drew them to be "in" the story, the fictive world, making identification with the characters, which made them unable to stand "detached" from the story. It follows that they could not make critical comments on the given novel. Therefore, that they gave credit to the novel was due to the capacity of the novel to draw them to be "in" the story.

The students' tendency to point at religious ideology in giving responses to the literary work suggests that the students had limited variety of angles to look at and give responses to literary works. This also suggests that their religious ideology is more readily available for reference than other kinds of ideological storage. As well, this endorses the notion that background knowledge (schemata) is always active in students' mind to take its role when they read literary works (Jauss, 1992; Jeffries, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1938/1968; Semino, 2001). As regard to religion, this suggests that the students were more familiar with religious teachings than other kinds of ideological concepts. Quite probably, it is due to this that the students immediately referred to religious ideology in giving responses to the set novel. Probably, religious teachings through all levels of education (from primary school to higher education) in Indonesia is significantly determinant in making this happen.

It is also interesting to note that the students had the tendency to draw on an easy method, i.e., to employ "black or white" categorisations for judging. Seemingly this also pertains to their religious ideology; religions tend to pro-

vide "right/wrong" frame of thinking and evaluation. This is easier than going aboard to "grey" areas. This situation also suggests that the students tended to put the fictive world (happenings, characters) as created in the novel to be the same as that factive in the factual world. Duly, the students immediately applied their religious ideology to the fictive characters in the novel, which were created by the novelist.

As with the students who did not write authentic sources of ideological reference, this might be due to their unfamiliarity with the authentic sources. Their responses to the novel as well as the terms they used to make evaluation of the characters and situations in the novel allows us to believe that they had been familiar with religious ideology; even, this ideology, as true with the others, was readily available to be employed to make judgements of the characters and phenomena in the novel. Therefore, some of them admitted that they referred to their religion even though they could not supply with authentic sources of the reference.

Such a phenomenon endorses Rosenblatt's (1938/1968) point stating that students of Literature are inseparable from their general concepts about life as they read literary works; therefore, Literature teachers are advised to activate such concepts, even, to challenge the concepts. By so doing, the students are expected to make (psychological) efforts to review their ideology (background knowledge, schemata). It is this process of challenging students' ideology which makes Literature teaching have significance (Rosenblatt, 1938/1968).

Another interesting point is that some students made use of the same sources of reference, yet, came up with different conclusions of what make up the subject-matter of the novel. This is probably due to different angles of the ideology attended to by the students. Pertaining to this, and as literary works are multi-interpretable, the students might pay attention to various sides, which attracted them at the time of reading. That is why they came to different conclusions about the subject matter of the novel even though they consulted the same sources of ideology.

Daiches (1956) asserts that literary works are ever broader than the interpretations of the readers. It follows that the dimensions of the literary works which drive the students to an ideological discrepancy are duly borderless. Therefore, although some of the students used the same ideology, they viewed the subject matter of the novel differently. Pertaining to this, Rosenblatt (1938/1968) and Miall (1996) make a sound point when they propose that the students of Literature are to be accorded with opportunities to activate

their ideologies, to initiate appreciation on the basis of dimensions of literary works which capture their attention, which are varied. As the aspects which bring about ideological confrontations are quite probably those interesting for the students, it is commendable that Literature teachers be accommodative of this point and, conversely, not determinative in imposing their own perspective on the students.

Referring to the classifications set forth by Protherough (1991), the students' personal responses to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* fell within two categories: *thematic* and *empathetic*. Thematic refers to the students' expressions about the subject-matter of the novel, whilst empathetic denotes the students' expressions pertinent to their being "in", absorbed in the story, situations of the characters as well as the happenings. The students did not appear to have arrived at *motivational* and *predictive* categories. Motivational means responses concerning what undergird characters' reasons for doing their activities, whereas predictive is concerned with the students' ability to guess, anticipate, infer, draw conclusions, and project their responses beyond the printed texts. Moreover, the students' responses did not touch upon the category of critical-evaluative which is based on certain literary criteria.

These suggest that Literature teachers are advised to situate and drive students to arrive at attempts giving responses which fall within the categories of *motivational*, *predictive*, and *critical-evaluative*. This ostensibly is not an easy task; therefore, it is safe to assume that the unit of *Prose I* is not adequate to allow the students and teachers to further develop the students' ability to arrive at *motivational*, *predictive*, and *critical-evaluative*. It follows that the students need be granted with more units which allow them to reach the three categories.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The chief finding of the current research is that the subjects (students) tended to utilise religious ideology when reading literary works. Despite the seemingly limited ideological reference, the students' ideology is necessary to be utilised in the teaching of English Literature, for the ideology is inherent within the students and significant in the initiation of the students' engagement in literary works (Miall, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1938/1968). As the religious ideology tended to be immediately ready for use, this suggests that the students' religious ideology is a potential which Literature teachers need to attend to, instead of overlooking it.

Since the students showed that they had arrived at thematic and empathetic and had not arrived at motivational, predictive, and critical-evaluative categories. Literature teachers are advised to attend the attempts to empower the students to reach the motivational, predictive, and critical-evaluative categories as set forth by Gribble (1983) and Protherough (1991). This being the case, Literature teachers need to review their teaching goals so that they can set necessary scaffolding of their teaching. This suggests that Literature teaching materials also need to be reviewed. Besides, Literature teachers also need to pay attention to students' responses or feedback concerning the teaching goals, materials, as well as activities conducted to reach the goals and cover the materials. As the teaching activities are likely to be decided by the teachers (Barkhuizen, 1998; Spratt, 1999, 2001), the teachers need to wisely review this point, for students have proven to be able to give responses to literary works. This means that the students are quite probably also capable of responding to the teachers' selection of teaching activities.

The current research bore limitations (weaknesses), particularly, pertaining to the instrument employed. Therefore, similar pieces of research which employ additional instruments such as interviews are highly commendable. Naturalistic observations are also desirable for use to address similar topics. This study overlooked the linguistic constraints due to the English mastery of the subjects who were asked to write essays in English. Future research, therefore, might be conducted by asking the subjects to write the essays in Indonesian (L1).

As discussed earlier, this study did not find the students' actions (assimilation or accommodation) following their responses. Action research, therefore, is advisable to be conducted. Action research might also work to herd the students to arrive at responses falling within the motivational, predictive, and critical-evaluative categories. Cross-sectional as well as longitudinal investigations might also be of a great significance to address the notion of students' actions.

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