

The Representation of Literacy as Salvation in Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society*

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Abstract

Literasi biasanya dipahami sebagai kemampuan kognitif untuk membaca dan menulis. Tema literasi sering digunakan dalam karya sastra. Literasi dapat direpresentasikan dalam berbagai bentuk, salah satunya literasi sebagai penyembuhan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana literasi berfungsi sebagai penyembuhan dan mengarah pada keselamatan. New Literacy Studies (NLS) memandang literasi sebagai praktik sosial digunakan sebagai kerangka konseptual. Tujuan dan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan representasi literasi sebagai penyembuhan pada karakter Neil dalam film *Dead Poets Society*. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pada tokoh utama yang bernama Neil Perry yang merupakan seorang mahasiswa yang tergelak dalam keluarga yang menuntut dirinya untuk menjadi seperti yang diinginkan orang tuanya. Kemudian ada salah satu guru bernama John Keating yang mengajarkan siswa tentang puisi dan pemenuhannya dalam kehidupan. Kemudian para yang berdamai pada kehidupan siswa dimana literasi sebagai penyembuhan adalah topik utama yang akan dijabarkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan New Literacy Studies Theory (Short, 2002) untuk dijabarkan dalam film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa literasi dapat menjadi penyembuhan bagi Neil Perry.

**Keywords:** Literasi, Kajian Literatur Film, Keselamatan

Abstract

Literacy is usually understood as the cognitive ability to read and write. The theme of literacy is rarely used in literary works. Literacy can be represented in various forms, one of which is literacy as a salvation. The study aims to reveal how literacy serves as healing and leads to salvation. New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective of literacy as social practices is used as a conceptual framework. The purpose of this study is to present a representation of literacy as a salvation on the character of Neil in the film *Dead Poets Society*. The focus of this study is on the main character named Neil Perry who is a student who lives in a family that demands him to be what his parents want him to be. Then there was one teacher named John Keating who teaches them about poetry and its application in life. A poetry community that has an impact on the lives of students where literacy as a salvation is the main topic that will be studied. This study uses the New Literacy Studies Theory (Short, 2002) to be analyzed in the film. The results of the study show that literacy can be a salvation for Neil Perry.

**Keywords:** Literacy New Literacy Studies, Salvation

INTRODUCTION

Salvation is the act of saving and avoiding something from danger, destruction, or an unpleasant situation (Lai et al., 2021). In general, salvation is understood by something related to Christianity. In this analysis, literacy as salvation it can be understood as a literacy practices that has a purpose. The social cultural objective (Bhatia & Perumal, 1999). Literacy encompasses more than the capacity to read and write; it also includes the ability to improve critical thinking, which is a crucial skill in today's culture (Lai et al., 2021). Literacy is activities in groups or individuals in the form of discussing, reading and writing to increase the knowledge, critical thinking as well also to improve the reading and writing skills (Bhatia & Perumal, 1999). Literacy as salvation is about making sense of the world around us. To accomplish the need for information, literacy ability is very useful to develop something to achieve the purpose.

The idea of literacy as salvation can be seen from the novel Habibi's love life. In the novel depicted that the team of doctors said Mr. Habibi experienced a psychosomatic malignant. After leaving from the team of doctors that he was suffering from psychosomatic malignant, he had to choose 4 treatment options so that he could be healthy as before. The options consist of having to go to a mental hospital, stay at home under the supervision of a doctor, consider an alternate doctor to try or by taking a journey. Habibi also said, "If you want to be healthy, there are 4 options given. First, go to a psychiatric hospital (near Hospital Second). I stayed at home when a team of doctors came. Third, consider an alternate. Consider in my mother, friends, doctors, or my friends who are doctors, or anyone else Fourth, I resolve myself when I could be my soul and myself. I never, I took the fourth option". By choosing the fourth option which is to write his love story with Amma, Habibi finally can recover from the disease. This shows that literacy can be salvation (Habibi, 2020).

Literacy refers not just to the capacity to read and write, but also to a broader awareness of what people do with a literacy & AI (2010). Literacy can take many forms and be used for a variety of reasons, one of which being subversion (Nünning, 2011). Literacy has been understood as a set of cognitive abilities of reading and writing. The New Literacy Study denies this old understanding and sees literacy as understood as a set of social practices that include reading and writing. Because this is viewed with old understanding, the view of literacy in literacy works is generally overlooked by other themes (Barton & Donald, 1999).

Peter Weir was born as Peter Lindsay Weir on August 21, 1944, in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Australian film director and screenwriter are famed for their singular, emotional dramas that frequently explore character relationships and the social background. He was a popular player in the renaissance of Australian filmmaking and directed a number of well-known Hollywood pictures. Weir grew up in the Sydney suburbs. In 1963, he traveled to Europe after short study at the University of Sydney. When he returned to Australia the following year, he had decided to pursue a career in entertainment. Weir began his career as a stagehand for a television network, in which he and his coworkers would shoot short film for entertainment.

In 1968, he began working as a cameraman and director again for Commonwealth Film Unit, which was supported by the government. Weir, which was several film directors and now by his own account Vain's Last Exercise (1967), *Hemlock* (1971), *Michael, Three in One* (1971), *Incredible* (1972), *Blues* (1972), *Harpoon* (1972), *Green Valley* (1973), *The Cars That Are Purer* (1974), *Pine* (1975), *The Last Show* (1976), *Gallipoli* (1981), *The War of Living Dangerously* (1982), *Witness* (1985), *The American Coast* (1986), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Green Card* (1990), *Fouries* (1993), *The Way Back* (2000).

According to Jim Jagodzinski entitled *The Truman Show: A Drip of Life Time's On a Card for an Escape Attempt!* understand why is today's postmodern consumer social structure "ready subversion" has become so common. This pervasiveness is understood through a Lacanian reading of its redemptive fantasy, which is based on Lacanian Psychoanalysis theory and focused on the film *The Truman Show* in particular. The essay concludes with an impossible question: how far can the fantasy of "ready subversion" be pushed? (Jagodzinski, 2005).

In 2011 through the article entitled *Escaping the Panopticon: Debris, Regimes, and Performance in Peter Weir's The Truman Show* by Dorey Levine. Showing how thinking about social places might help us understand Truman's situation as an uninvited prisoner/performer. As a result, we have an ambiguous, postmodern, dystopian picture of mass media and the power that could be held through the act of watching (Levine, 2011).

The previous research papers were written by Jyote Habgrini entitled *Constructing cultural landscapes*

and spaces in Peter Weir's *Five Pine in Hanging Rock* (1975), based on Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel with the same title in 2013 explore the connections between nature, culture, and cultural spaces in a rural Australian Victorian setting, with references to Joan Lindsay's novel *Five in Hanging Rock* (1967) and Peter Weir's film adaptation of the novel (1975). The attention of the analysis of the film, first five scenes will be on the fascinating and horrifying notion of scenic and human history, as well as the several repeating and parallel places that define the book and film structure. Joan Lindsay and Peter Weir have demonstrated an incredible ability to incorporate a variety of components into textual and visual mediums that capture us both cognitively and physically and stay with us long after we've finished reading the text page and seen the last scene.

Two of previous studies use psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, and post-modernism theory. In Joan Lindsay's novel *Pine in Hanging Rock* (1967) and the film based on the novel directed by Peter Weir (1975), the relationship between many cultures and cultural sites is explored as a rural Australian Victorian setting, with a focus on the narrative cultural landscape. None of these previous studies which talk about literacy as a subversion. This study will be the first which discuss about literacy as a subversion in Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989, 2013).

The first previous study is *The Representation of Literacy as Power and Danger in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2010) by Atyiah Maghlehbi describing that literacy is more strongly represented as a threat than a power in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, since most characters regard it as a danger than as a power. This study using New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory. Only Harry Potter sees literacy as a source of power; in this case, literacy's power is reflected by the development of his magical, the rise in social class, and the development of amusement. Literacy capital, which allows Harry to acquire additional capital by applying literacy practices and artifacts, is strongly related to literacy power (Maghlehbi, 2010).

In addition, previous study is *The Representation of Literacy as Self-Improvement in Betty Smith's A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (2010) by Dorey Levine. This research uses the New Literacy Study (NLS) to analyze how literacy is portrayed as a tool for self-improvement in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. Literacy can take many forms and be applied for a variety of objectives, one of which is self-improvement through literacy activities such as reading a newspaper. The representation of literacy, as well as how reading transforms Francis' identity are among the results (Levine, 2010).

Furthermore, previous study is *The Representations of Literacy in Peter Markus Zavad's 'The Book Thief'* (2010) by Nur Adyan. Following the New Literacy Study (NLS) theory, this research explores how literacy is portrayed in Markus Zavad's *The Book Thief* through the acts of reading and writing, as well as how the novel depicts the characters' notions of power. The studies reveal how literacy events in *The Book Thief* use

portrayed as strength in many elements of a character's life, as well as how tests can provide varied interpretations of power interactions by various characters (Adigun, 2016).

The previous studies that discussed the above similar issues all have their own perspective and approach. All previous studies revealing literacy as power and anti-theory New Literacy Studies (NLS). There is no study which has a topic literacy as a salvation. This study will be using the topic literacy as a salvation. This study aims to explore how literacy in the film *Dead Poets Society* by Peter Weir is demonstrated through the action of reading and composing poetry, as well as how the New Literacy Study and studies of literacy and strength as a core principle are used to reveal the concepts of power among characters in the film *Literacy in Peter Weir's Dead Poets Society* is represented as a salvation in many elements of the lives of the characters.

To support this theme, the characters uses literacy in an explicit way by writing poetry. Neil Perry is the main character in *Dead Poets Society* who struggled with standing up to his father to achieve his dream. The character John Keating is here teach about literary studies at Welton Academy which he was absent of that academy and introduced to his students the community called Dead Poets Society. What is known in this film that some students who have their respective problem. There are many problems such as a problem with lack of confidence to parents because their parents do not support what they want. While some have their own interests in a field that they want to learn deeply. Mr Keating as their teacher in here teach not only about academics and scores but also teaches a bit about the values of life. How they can be useful for themselves and others.

*We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And the medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for* (Weir, 1989).

The above quote is taken from Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* film. The story depicts the new English teacher at Welton Academy which have unique method for the students. John Keating begins his lecture by comparing the students that life is short and that they should seize the day to make it count, leaving a legacy of "carpe diem". It makes the students interest with the Mr Keating. With this teaching method, students are very interested in the learning provided by Keating. From the above quotation explains that reading and writing poetry has an impact on human life. Reading and writing activities are included in literacy. Literacy is more than just the ability to read and write, it may also help with critical thinking, making it an important skill for people to have.

In the process of representing salvation in the Neil's character in *Dead Poets Society* related to self-actualization. There are five levels of self-actualization will be explained according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. These levels are physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Sivara, 2018). This process will be a bridge to analyze literacy as a salvation to Neil's character in *Dead Poets Society*.

This study concerns on how literacy has many impacts in life especially teenagers. This importance by Peter Weir depicted that literacy works as an increase critical thinking and how literacy itself can help the teenagers' problem by write and read poetry. The students make a community named Dead Poets Society. In this community they have literacy event such as writing and reading poetry. This study will use the topics of literacy as a salvation. The theory used is old ones New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Shor, 2003). The aim of this research is to show how Neil Perry's character in Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* depicted literacy as a salvation.

In this study, the writer focuses on revealing how the characterization of Neil Perry in Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* depicted how literacy as a salvation. Therefore, at the theoretical level, future researchers are likely to gain from this research, especially those who are interested in several works that raise the theme of literacy. In this study is also expected to increase public awareness about the importance of literacy for adolescents, which directly leads to the impact of literacy. The findings of this study are likely to contribute to a better understanding of literacy's effects.

This study focuses on the representation of literacy as a salvation on Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society*. Focusing the discussion on how literacy works as a salvation will be directly conveyed through Neil's character who have personal problems with his parents.

This study will analyze the way literacy can help Neil save himself and understand the meaning of life. Since literacy delivered by characters in this film this study will analyze as literacy practices through the characters through the dialogues and quotations by the film.

#### METHOD

This is a literary study that employs a psychological approach to literature. In particular, this study aims to reveal how literacy serves as healing and leads to salvation. New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective of literacy as social practice is used as a conceptual framework and how literacy practices such as reading and writing helps healing in concept of psychology.

The analysis is using literary work film as the object to be analyzed. The data for this research comes from Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society*, and it takes the shape of many narrations, storylines, quotations, conversations, or monologues by the characters to explain their ideas, feelings, and actions. It can be said that this study also employs a textual analysis. *Dead Poets Society*, a 1989 American drama film directed by Peter

Wear and written by Tom Schellman, is used in this study.

John Keating is played by Robin Williams. Neil Perry is played by Robert Sean Leonard, and so on. The data of the study are in the form of monologues and dialogues between the characters as well as phrases and sentences that describe the plot and characterization, including poetry.

There are several steps to collect the data. The first step is finding some certain theories which is literary that are related to the topic in order to support the data. The second step that needed is to analyze or each scene that may related with the topic of this study and follow by the theory. Then finding the literary aspect in this study the dialogues, monologues, and quotations. This study will be used. The theory of New Literary Studies to analyze literary as salvation sheet. 2003.

#### DISCUSSION

##### Literary

In the part of the discussion it will be figure out about literary practices can be a salvation to Neil's character as *Dead Poets Society*. Neil is a student at Welton Academy. This school is a school that is well-known for its high discipline and obeys to the motto of Tradition, Honor, Discipline and Progress. New English teachers changed their perspective about every aspect in life. The teacher John Keating, who is also the Welton Academy's student. The teaching method used by Mr. Keating is different from the other teachers at Welton Academy. With these different methods, students are inspired by the learning process taught by Mr. Keating, one of which is Neil, who has an interest in literature and acting.

Until one day Neil and his friends find John Keating's old school records and discover that John Keating had a secret club called the *Dead Poets Society*. The club whose members love to read poetry and always have different thoughts from the others in the inspiration for Neil and his friends to form the same club. Gradually Neil and his friends' thoughts were open because of learning process control out by Keating. Furthermore, they were given a new term, *Career Days*, which means "write the day" in English and has since become a new motto in their life. Especially Todd, the shy teenager among his friends who gradually becomes brave, expressive, his heart thanks to Keating's mindset that always inspires and supports him.

Activities in their community are reading and writing poetry. With these activities Neil can develop his talents in literature which was his desire from the start. Not only that, in this community Neil found what he wanted and proved the theater at his school.

Salvation is the act of saving and avoiding something from danger, deprivation, or an unpleasant situation (Lar et al., 2012). Salvation (also known as deliverance or redemption) in Christianity is the "saving of human beings from sin and its consequences, which include death and separation from God" through Christ's death and resurrection, as well as the justification that follows (Murray, Michael J and Bell, 2020). In this analysis salvation is understood not in the way of Christianity but helps healing from existing problems.

##### Literary as salvation

In this part of the discussion it will be figure out how literary can be a salvation through activities carried out in his community called *Dead Poets Society*. Students with literary practices, including reading and writing poetry.

Neil had such deep aspirations that it seemed as if he could not live without achieving his dream as an actor. Neil's mind is intellectual when his father strongly opposes and refuses to compromise. Neil's fragile personality is not strong enough to face these obstacles, so he takes a shortcut to end his life. It can also be known that parents should not ignore their children on children who have different interests or life dreams from their parents. Neil's case is the most appropriate example to illustrate a person's process of forming identity. Neil, his background is an only child and from an ordinary economic level so that his father passionately orders Neil to follow his father's heavy burden between wanting to defend his life and being in a difficult position to oppose his authoritarian father. But when he met Mr. Keating, it seemed like he had found the right model to describe what he should be like. He was the first to speak a comeback to resist the *Dead Poets Society* as a means for escaping from the prison of the school system and the demands of parents. In this hidden community that he gradually understands that he has found the right role for himself, namely as an actor and he is "successful" in this stage. Neil is in the process of achieving the problem of Identity Achievement.

Mr. Keating teaches his students to understand poetry as a way to express themselves and make it a mission in life. This is one of John Keating's words:

*"Medicine, law, business, engineering, those are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we may call grace. We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion."* (Weir, 1980).

Mr. Keating always invites his students to think freely. In *Dead Poets Society*, young men are described as very attractive. They are not just a bunch of guys whose heads are just girls. But they also have hormones that are making around. As hard as the desire to challenge life. So Keating's invitation may be a trigger for them to be more expressive. Even Todd Anderson, who is described as very quiet, finally could not help but follow his heart. And most importantly, these young people learn about life. In a dormitory with strict regulations, it turns out that they can feel the true meaning of life. By Peter Weir as director, *Dead Poets Society* is also a mirror for the treatment of parents towards their children. There is always such a thing as a gap generation. That the old is almost always at odds with the young.

*Dead Poets Society* is a poetry reading club initiated by Keating when he was at the academy. A club that is illegal and banned in the academy. This club was

continued by Keating's students later such as Neil Perry, Todd Anderson, Charlie Dalton, Knox Overstreet, etc. They all often hold their meetings in a cave located not far from the academy.

In the cave, one by one Neil and friends tried to find a space where they could actualize themselves freely. Through poetry, they can say what was previously unsaid in their life experiences and they can do something new. Through the forum Neil tries to actualize himself in the character he plays. But more than that, the kids try to give meaning to the lives they lead each day of the necessary and ends that through Wilton Academy.

In the film *Dead Poets Society* we can see how Neil Perry's parents demanded that son graduate and attend medical school. Neil was prohibited by his father from doing any activities deemed to interfere with his academic activities. Neil was never given the slightest bit of space to do whatever he wanted. He has to bury deep his dream as an actor. When Neil's father found out that he was involved again in activities that were deemed useless, and took an ultimatum to return to his concentration on his school. Neil actually had the strength to refuse by maintaining his role of doing it secretly. It's just that the father when caught for the second time and getting a harsher warning to change his mind, he acquiesces a momentary condition while Neil's commitment to sticking to the decision to become an actor's ultimatum.

Finally, he realized that after the pressure was on and he did not have the ability to resist his father's decision, he was influenced by the opening poem of the Dead Poets Society community:

*"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived"* (Wick, 1989).

This piece of poetry implies that when Neil is unable to actualize himself for his life and is always in the shadow of the school's vicissitudes.

In the film *Dead Poets Society* we can see how Neil Perry's parents demanded that son graduate and attend medical school. Neil was prohibited by his father from doing any activities deemed to interfere with his academic activities. Neil was never given the slightest bit of space to do whatever he wanted. He has to bury deep his dream as an actor. At the end of the film *Dead Poets Society*, one of Keating's students named Neil ends up committing suicide. He was a bright student, but he loved acting, and that was not what his father liked.

Todd Anderson, unlike Neil Perry's literary as inspiration story, is an introverted freshman sent to Wilton Academy to, perhaps his older brother, Todd appears to be unable to express his desires in front of his parents. He gained confidence in public speaking after being asked to read his own poem in front of the class. Neil decides to reach out to Todd and encourage him to defend himself. Todd also joined the Dead Poets Society to develop his talent and do what he wanted. Literary in Todd's story is not only a salvation, but also a way for

him to convey his inner anxiety that has been unable to be expressed.

Writing poetry is the most literary activity as Keating. He creates a poem in the effort to win the heart of someone he likes, Chen. Knox is a member of the Dead Poets Society, which backs Mr. Keating, but he spends most of his time disbelieving about Chen, his rational. Diverse ideas from Chen's bulletin board find Chen. Mr. Teacher Keating provides him the strength to look up with Chen. These are ideas that literary can bring happiness.

#### CONCLUSION

Literacy as a salvation for several characters, especially the character of Neil Perry, when they conducted reading and writing poems in the Dead Poets Society quietly in Wilton Academy. First, reading activities influence the psychology of the Todd Anderson character which is shy to be more confident and he is able to talk about his anxiety in front of many people, especially to his parents. Then the writing activity became a medium for Keating's character in conveying his heart to someone he loves. Moreover, this reading and writing activity brings hope for Neil's character to play theater. Literary practices as kind of a way of learning from the problems he faced. Neil can develop and become himself to do something that really suits his interests and talents even though at the first he was required to be what his father wanted and was not allowed to be an actor.

Through poetry, they can say what was previously unsaid in their life experiences. Through drama Neil tries to actualize himself in the character he plays, that more than that, the boys try to give meaning to the monotonous and restrictive daily life they live at Wilton Academy. In *Dead Poets Society*, we can see how Neil Perry's parents demanded that their son graduate and study medicine. Neil was forbidden by his father to do any activities that were considered to interfere with his academic activities. Neil was never given the slightest room to do whatever he wanted. He had to bury deep his dream as an actor. Todd finally committed suicide because of frustration with the restrictions of his parents. But one thing is important, Neil managed to do what he wanted before he died.

Next, this study have discussed the representation of literacy as salvation in *Dead Poets Society* in various poems. Nevertheless, this study is still far from perfect. The writer does not generalize that every literary work has some points of view. Due to the limitation scope of research and time available, many aspects of literary have been left out of this discussion. Because my analysis did not cover other representations of literacy in *Dead Poets Society*, such as literacy as salvation, this study opens up several possibilities for future researchers. Despite the fact that this work of literature provides several evidences on the topic, literary as salvation was not well-matched in this study.

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