

Conference Paper

Marital Failure As a Social Reality in Sidney Sheldon's Novel *The Other Side of Midnight*

Hidayati, Zuindra, Arifuddin, Aflina, and Zainab MZ

Faculty of Language and Communication, Universitas Harapan Medan, Indonesia

Abstract

This research deals with literary works as a medium for conveying reality of social problems through Sydney Sheldon's novel *The Other Side of Midnight*. One of the issues depicted in the novel is marital failure. The husband, as one of the characters in the novel, has a prestigious job, a pilot; and with an appealing appearance, he easily gets beautiful women around him. There are some various causal factors as the triggers of marital failure such as infidelity, career, selfishness, social welfare, age education, and financial problems; however in this research, the causal factors of marital failure discussed are triggered by infidelity, career, and selfishness. The method used is mixed, qualitative and quantitative. The combination of both designs provides a more detailed description, information and understanding of the object of study. Quantitative method is related to numerical variables which are further described through qualitative design. The number of respondents is 40 and selected randomly in Medan city. The social and cultural background is adapted to the object of research. The results show that there are three main factors causing marital failure in the novel: infidelity, career and selfishness. The findings of the research are in line with the field research. 97.5% of respondents agree that literary work is a medium for disclosing social problems; 2.5% express support. In the case of marital failure as a social problem, 97.5 respondents state a strong agreement and 2.5% express support. In things related to the trigger of marital failure: infidelity, career and selfishness, 100% of respondents strongly agree.

Keywords: marital failure, infidelity, career, selfishness

Corresponding Author:

Hidayati

yatihida853@gmail.com

Received: 1 July 2019

Accepted: 18 July 2019

Published: 31 July 2019

Publishing services provided by

Knowledge E

© Hidayati et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons](#)

[Attribution License](#), which

permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the AICLL 2019 Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Literary work is the result of the creativity of an author combining aesthetic and communicative elements containing thoughts and ideas or messages related to stories about humans or something humanized. Thus it is clearly illustrated that literary work is a reflection of human life delivered through language media. Literature is a culture having mutual filling with human life. Therefore literature plays an important role in human life and this role is embodied in various fields of human life, economic, social, and political (Saryono: 2009)

 OPEN ACCESS

As literature is closely related to human life that is dynamic, it is not easy to provide a static understanding of literature or in other words it is not easy to provide a definite definition of literature. This is in line with what stated by Meyer (1997) that understanding exactly what literature is has always been a challenge; pinning down a definition has proven to be quite difficult. In fact, at times one seems to be reduced to saying, "I know it when I see it," or perhaps, "Anything is literature if you want to read it that way." This concept is also in line with that of Teeuw (1988) stating that literature cannot be defined definitively because essentially literature is dynamic. Literature continues to develop according to the respective era and place. Furthermore Wellek (2008) states that literature can simply be seen from its natures.

Literary works are written or created not to enjoyed by the writers, but for the society as there are ideas, advice, moral lessons to be contributed to the readers. This proves that literary works can develop culture. In other words, literary works have always been socio-cultural as the writers also feel the influence of the environment and their era in creating the works.

Damono (1984) states that literary works are cultural objects created by humans and at the same time inseparable parts of society. A literary work is basically a stimulus of freedom either for the writers as well as the readers. For this, at a certain moment the society must give tolerance to a literary work as it educates, broadens the knowledge of life, enhances the sensitivity of feelings, and awakens the reader's consciousness in its own way without the limit of time and space as conveyed by Manugeran and Hidayati (2018) that literature transcends national boundaries, time constraints, gender differences and even historical basis.

As literary works are related to human stories, all the problems in society become a major issue in literary works or in other words literary works are always closely related to social problems. This is in line with the functions of literature, as medium of entertainment, didacticism, as well as religiosity and social control in three types of genres: novel, drama and poetry.

One type of literary work is a novel. In this study the author discusses the social problems that often occur in the community, namely marital failure experienced by a pair of husband and wife named Larry Douglas and Catherine Alexander. At first their marriage went well until at one point Larry got a job as a private pilot who required him to often be away from his wife and met his ex-love affair. This is where the problem occurs in their marriage.

The Other Side of Midnight is a novel written by Sidney Sheldon, an American writer who was born on February 11, 1917, in Chicago, Illinois. He started his career

as a screenwriter and eventually moved to television. Most of the novels written by Sheldon are filled with alluring plots and equally complex protagonists. Books move at a dangerous pace with the climax of quietly chasing the story. His books are a complete package of drama, romance, and thriller. The way he scores stories and presents them to readers is very interesting. Also the way of writing is simple and easy to understand.

Forms and types of social problems are not limited and social problems always exist as long as humans interact. Of the many social issues that have become the topic of discussion, the problem of marital failure, which is the topic of this study with three causal factors: infidelity, career and selfishness in the novel *The Other Side of Midnight* by Sidney Sheldon, can always be found in every community regardless of time and space.

2. Literature Review

This study deals with the social problems in the novel as a reflection of those in society; therefore an appropriate approach to this study is the sociology of literature. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972) states that there is a close relationship between literature, society and authors. In the corridor of the sociology of literature, an author does not die in his work and does not dominate the whole range of events in literary works, but serves to bridge the three interconnected compositions of society, literary works and authors.

Literature is a reflection of social phenomena written in accordance with the relevant times and places and thus the norms or rules contained in the related society will appear in literary works because the author is also a citizen. This is in line with what Wellek and Werren (2008) say that the literature is an expression of society. Here it is illustrated that everything the author presents in his literary work can be found in society.

The main issue of this research is the marital failure. Marriage is a social institution in which there are rights and obligations of the related spouse. If the rights and obligations are not running in harmony, the survival of domestic life will be disrupted and even can end. Nwoye in Ogwokhademhe and Ishola (2013) states that marriage is the legalizing of a relationship between a man, and a woman to which the society gives its approval. Marriage places each partner under legal and social obligations to oneself and to the society. Marriage is a union of a man and a woman who agree to live together as husband and wife.

The purpose of a marriage is to form a harmonious family. A family is the smallest unit of social group that exists in a society that has its own functions and roles. A family

consists of people with blood, or marital relationships. Here it is illustrated that marriage is the product of a community and the legality of a marriage is not only based on the laws of the state but also on the norms and customs of society.

Marriage is a very popular institution in society, but it is not an invulnerable institution. Marriage as a unit continues to promise a lasting allegiance and cultural preservation and the fulfillment of interpersonal needs. No one can guarantee that a marriage will run well; everything is back to the couple concerned. The unity of a marriage is the responsibility of the husband and wife together.

Marital failure can be caused by various factors such infidelity, career, selfishness and some others as presented by Jahan, et. al. (2017) that some factors are expectation gap, difference of opinion and psychological deprivation, break in communication, sexual incompatibility, unemployment, childlessness, differences in interest, or age at marriage.

3. Research Method

Mixed methods of research are used in this research: Quantitative and Qualitative. This approach is used to get a better understanding of marital failure. Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V in Roslyn Cameron (2011) states that Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

The quantitative design is used for number of respondents, 25 persons, aged between 30 – 50, inclined to obtain the numerical variables; those involved in the marital failure and the causal factors making them fall into such a failure. The respondents are married couples, taken randomly in Medan City. Structured instruments such as questionnaire and interview support the quantitative design, from which the percentage of responses are calculated. The questionnaire covers the respondents' understanding of literary works as a media of exposing social matters, marriage and marital failure, as well as causes of marital failure. The interview covers the same issues. The data obtained from the interviews are recorded in two versions and then compared and agreed. The qualitative design is then used to make a description of the experiences of the respondents involved in the marital failure and the numerical variables of responses.

4. Results and Discussion

To begin with, the plot revolves around Larry Douglas, Noelle Page and Catherine Alexander. These three people are romantically related; but this study is focused only on Larry Douglas and his wife Catherine Alexander. The couple seems to live in harmony and have no problem whatsoever. At the beginning of their marriage, they support each other to run their household until Larry Douglas finally gets an opportunity to work as a pilot. Here is the beginning of their problem. As a pilot coupled with his fine look, Larry is always in touch with beautiful women, especially flight attendants, and one of them is Helena. In fact, Larry is not only related to one woman but with several ones. No wonder the women cannot refuse: a fighter pilot with handsome features, sculptures and demonic-possibly-careful demeanor; a grown man. Basically there is shadow of internal problem in their marriage life as Larry has a talent for cheating. At the peak of their problems, Catherine finally asks for a divorce as she is no longer able to maintain their marriage. Their marriage breaks down caused by the following points.

4.1. Infidelity

One very significant factor in marital failure is infidelity. Infidelity is a personal relationship outside marriage, which involves at least one married person. Infidelity does not always mean a relationship involving sexual contact. Although there is no sexual contact, but if there is a sense of mutual interest, mutual dependence and emotional fulfillment that can already be categorized as an affair or infidelity.

This is then supported by Ogwokhademhe and Ishola (2013) saying that extramarital affair or infidelity is thus described as the emotional adultery that culminates in physical sex or a long-term love affair. This view reaffirms that infidelity is not only related to sex but also the interdependent relationship between two people, generally a man and a woman, each or one of whom has been tied to marriage institution.

Infidelity in the novel is illustrated by an event experienced by Catharine. At that time she went shopping to prepare Larry's favorite food, the husband. Her husband told Catharine that he had an important business outside the city and would return in two days. As Catherina came out of the shop, she saw a taxi pass right in front of her and clearly saw her husband Larry sitting in the backseat of a car with a woman. Larry's right hand curled over her shoulder. Initially Catharine denied in his heart that it was not Larry, but she could not deny her sight ... (Sheldon, 2000: 275)

Another event related to infidelity in the novel is when Catherine tidied up Larry's uniform. At that time she found Larry's handkerchief spotted with dry semen and there was also a lipstick mark on his shorts. Catherine began to realize and assured herself that Larry had committed an infidelity, probably not with only one woman (Sheldon, 2000: 254).

Infidelity is often associated with an attitude of disloyalty to a spouse. In this case Larry is totally unfaithful to Catherine. Infidelity is a form of betrayal on a spouse. When the drama of the affair is uncovered, it breaks the knots of the sacred bond of marriage. This is also felt by Catherine who has already got a plan to ask for a divorce from Larry.

If a husband or wife is having an affair while his or her a partner is good, and full of responsibility and love, then the person concerned is unable to make himself or herself happy personally and express what he or she wants in a responsible way. Larry is a picture of a partner who is always dissatisfied with the situation. This kind of infidelity is always found in society and the victim of betrayal is not always a woman.

4.2. Career

Drigotas et al in Zare (2011) says that bahwa social context is one of the reasons of marital failure. Social contextual factors often are related to education level, personality opportunity, attachment style, income level and employment, race and culture.

Career as the originator of marital failure is reflected in the novel. As a pilot, Larry was rarely at home; even in one month he could not necessarily meet Catherine and Catherine also realized that she had lost all the time rhythm with her husband. Catherine was miserable; she felt she lived only by following the rotation of time and Catherine began to feel that their marriage was at the end of the road and she had thought well that the only way to solve their problem was a divorce (Sheldon, 2000: 324)

Someone who is absorbed in work is basically a person who is very selfish. In marital life, each partner must realize that everything should be shared, including their togetherness. Career is not the originator of marital failure; the real cause is related to those who cannot organize or sort out a career with a marriage life. Everyone wants a career and everyone wants to succeed in career; but it does not mean that there are other things or other parties that must be sacrificed with the achievement of a career.

4.3. Selfishness

Selfishness must be eliminated in a marriage life because it has a great potential to frustrate a marriage. People who have selfishness usually do not have tolerance to others because for them, they are always right and they must be prioritized. This happens as they cannot control their emotions so they tend to look bad. Indeed everyone has a selfish nature; the problem is that the level of selfishness must be balanced with other positive things so that such nature can be neutral and direct someone towards positive things.

During the course of the storyline, finally Larry left Catherine without trying to improve their relationship. Actually, Larry knew that Catherine was a kind, patient and loving woman, but unfortunately driven by selfishness, Larry could not judge all the qualities Catherine had (Sheldon, 2000: 356)

In this study, questionnaire questions are measured using the Likert scale to obtain a consistent answer score chosen by respondents (All: 2010 and Markusic: 2009) The framing of the questionnaire covers 3 indicators: the roles of literature in exposing social problems, marital failure as a social problem, and the dominant causes of marital failure. All items in the questionnaire are measured on a scale of 1- 5, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

This study involves 40 respondents taken randomly in various places in the city of Medan. They are between the ages of 30-50 years. All respondents are married and have got experiences in marriage failure. All respondents answer all the questions given.

No.	Indicator	Result			
		Strongly Agree		Agree	
		Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
1.	Literature: Social Problem Exposure Medium	39	97.5%	1	2.5%
2.	Marrital Failure: Social Probelm	39	97.5%	1	2.5%
3.	Marital Failure Triggers: -Infidelity -Career -Selfishness	40	100%	0	0%

The results of the study show that respondents give varied responses towards the three statements given in the research questionnaire. 97.5% of respondents strongly agree at the statement that literary work is a medium of exposing social problems and one of which is a matter of marriage and they strongly agree that marital failure is also a

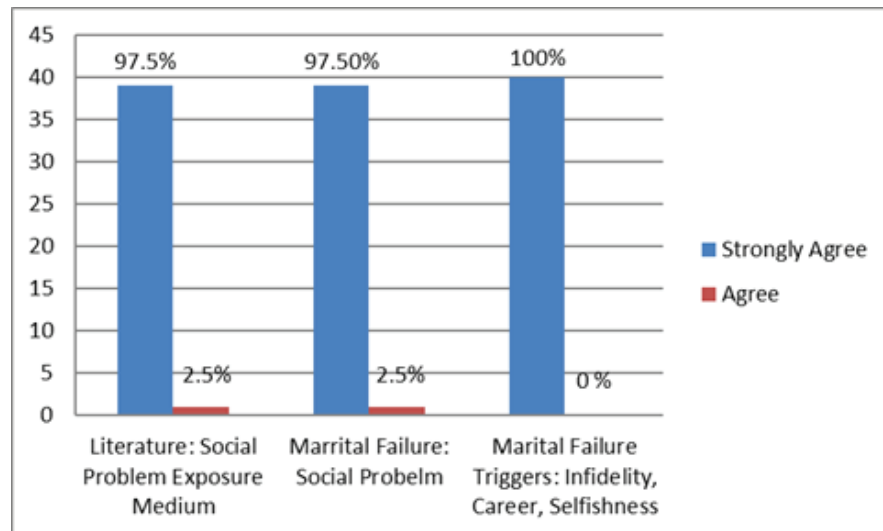


Figure 1: Note: Totaliy and percentage for Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree is 0 for the three statements and not presented in the chart.

social problem that is the object of literary work. 2.5% of respondents agree; and none of the respondents express disapproval of this statement.

In addition, 100% of respondents strongly agree at the triggering factors of marital failure: infidelity, career, and selfishness and no respondent does not agree at the statement. This proves that the three statements above constitute social reality and have been experienced by married couples in marital failure. Marital failure can be found both in society and literary works.

5. Conclusion

Literature as a work of art having language media can provide a sense of comfort, happiness, and emotion for the readers. Literature becomes one of the sources of information that reveal the various realities of human life pictured in a community. Literature is not only a social reflection but rather represents an idea of a world or an idea of sociological reality.

Sidney Sheldon’s *The Other Side of the Night* is a novel with a plot focusing on the problem of marriage failure involving a husband and a wife, Larry Douglas and Catherine Alexander. Catherine is the victim of her husband’s betrayal because Larry Douglas is a feature of an unfaithful husband and could not accept the fact that his wife is a kind and loving woman. Larry cannot control himself in matters of romance.

The problem of marital failure triggered by infidelity, career and selfishness in the novel can also be found in the community and this is reflected in the results of the field

research showing that the percentage of respondents who answered that literary works as a medium of social problem exposition have exceeded the standard criteria.

References

- [1] All, Shane. (2010). *How to Use the Likert Scale in Statistical Analysis*. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/139904607/How-to-Use-the-Likert-Scale-in-Statistical-Analysis> on 2 February 2019.
- [2] Cameron, R. (2011). Mixed Methods Research: The Five Ps Framework. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* Volume 9 Issue 2. Retrieved from www.ejbrm.com on 22 July 2018.
- [3] Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [4] Damono, Sapardi Djoko. (1984). *Sosiologi Sastra: Sebuah Pengantar Ringkas*. Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa.
- [5] Esten, Mursal. (2006). *Kritik Sastra Indonesia*. Bandung: Angkasa Raya.
- [6] Hidayati. (2018). *Local Wisdom of Kembar Mayang in Wedding Tradition of Jawa Ethnic*. *Language Literacy*, Volume 2, Number 1, June 2018 e-ISSN: 2580-9962 | p-ISSN: 2580-8672 DOI: 10.30743/. Retrieved from <https://jurnal.uisu.ac.id/index.php/languageliteracy/article/view/552/pdf> on 23 July 2018.
- [7] Jahan, Yasmin., et.al. (2017). Factors Involving Extramarital Affairs among Married Adults in Bangladesh. *Research Gate*. Retrieved from DOI: 10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20171506 on 21 July 2018. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Mixed+Methods+Research+%3A+The+Five+Ps+Framework+Roslyn+Cameron+Central+Queensland+University+%2C+Gladstone+%2C+Australia&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>
- [8] Laurenson, Diana T and Swingewood Alan. (1972). *Sociology of Literature*. New York: Harper Collins.
- [9] Manugeran, M and Hidayati, (2018). Universal Concept in Literary Work through J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* in *The 1st Annual International Conference on Language and Literature*, KnE Social Sciences, pages 484–493. DOI 10.18502/kss.v3i4.1958. Retrieved from <https://knepublishing.com/index.php/Kne-Social/article/view/1958/4372> on 23 July 2018.
- [10] Manugeran, M.et.al. (2017) *Local Wisdom in Hindu Tamil Ethnic Wedding Tradition in Medan*. RET Academy for International Journals of Multidisciplinary Research. Vol 5, Issue 7. Retrieved from www.rajimr.com on 23 July 2018.

- [11] Markusic, Mayflor. (2009). *Simplifying the Likert Scale*. Retrieved from <https://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-ed-law/13507-likert-scale-questionnaire-format-and-sample-questions/> on 3 March 2019.
- [12] Meyer, Jim. (1997). *What is Literature? A Definition Based on Prototypes*. Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session. Retrieved from http://arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/work-papers/_files/docs/1997-meyer.pdf. on 17 July 2018.
- [13] Ogwokhademhe Maureen and Ishola C. A. (2013). Factors responsible for Extramarital Affairs as Perceived by Married Adults in Iagos, Nigeria. *Problems of Psychology in the 21st Century*. Vol 6. Retrieved from http://www.scientiasocialis.lt/ppc/node/files/pdf/37-46.Ogwokhademhe_Vol.6.pdf on 21 July 2018.
- [14] Saryoni, Djoko. (1997). *Pengantar Apresiasi Sastra*. Malang: IKIP Malang.
- [15] Semi, M. Atar. (2008). *Anatomi Sastra*. Bandung: Angkasa Raya.
- [16] Sheldon, Sidney. (2000). *The Other Side of Midnight*. New York: Harper Collins.
- [17] Teeuw, A. (1988). *Sastra dan Ilmu Sastra: Pengantar Teori Sastra*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.
- [18] Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. (2008). *Theory of Literature*. California: Harcourt.
- [19] Zare, Bahareh. (2011). *Review of Studies on Infidelity*. 2011 3rd International Conference on Advanced Management Science IPEDR vol.19. Singapore; IACSIT Press. Retrieved from <http://www.ipedr.com/vol19/34-ICAMS2011-A10054.pdf> on 22 July 2018.