Werthertracht: Literature, Fashion, and Youth Resistance in the Late 18th Century Germany

Dudy Syafruddin(✉), Octi Rjeky Mardasari, Rania F. Amirah,
and Muhammad S. Alfaraby

Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
`dudy.syafruddin.fs@um.ac.id`

Abstract. Fashion often represents the identity and resistance of a group. Meanwhile, identity and resistance often become themes in literary works. One of the literary works that show the search for identity and resistance of young people at the end of the 18th century in Germany is *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (The Sorrow of Young Werther) by the famous German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This paper aims to analyze the relationship between literature and fashion as material culture and their effects on German society at the end of the 18th century. The sociology of literature is used in this study to analyze the relationship between literature, fashion, and youth rebellion in Germany. The study results show that the literature and fashion shown in this novel significantly influenced the youth movement in Germany and Europe at the end of the 18th century. It is shown by the massive imitation of Werther's character in the novel into real life, including the phenomenon of youth suicide, which also imitates the end of the main character's life in this novel. From the analysis results, it can also be seen that there is a reciprocal relationship between reality and literature. In this study, it is shown how literary works can affect social life.

Keywords: fashion · Goethe · literature · resistance · Werthertracht

1 Introduction

Clothing and fashion are often representations of a group's identity and resistance. It can be achieved because both are closely related to the body, which is the locus of human identity, as stated by Scheper-Hughes & Lock [1]: a place where social truth and social contradiction are played, as well as a place of resistance, creativity, and personal and social struggle. This idea is in line with the opinion of Twigg [2], who states that clothing always plays a central role in establishing identity, mediating between the body and its social presentation. Therefore, clothing and fashion are concepts that undergo continuous change and become a sign of social position [3] and, of course, undergo changes according to the times.

In other words, fashion will always be in the process of being rather than the process of being. The tension between fashion as a physical form and as an idea makes the process more visible. As a physical form, it is no different from other cultural materials. However,

as an abstract idea, fashion opens various judgments and meanings in society and changes according to the tastes of the times. The way and style of dress are constructed in such a way through conventions and regulations made by human groups to show and distinguish their identity.

At first, the emergence of this convention could not be separated from the relationality of the nobles in stating that they were different from the community in other social statuses. It is argued by Braudel [3] that during the reign of King Henri IV in France, a man was not considered rich unless he possessed twenty-five to thirty arrangements of various kinds, and he had to change them daily. Different things are shown by the farmers who have little clothes as a substitute. While Jeßing et al. [4] mention that fashion comes from the socially leading class and is imitated by the lower class, which causes the upper class to strive through clothing and behavior.

The community often opposes the clothing boundaries, so they carry out covert resistance through the clothes themselves. One of the resistances recorded in history is the resistance of the peasants in England at the end of the century. Smith [5] mentions that "personal appearance is also used as part of social resistance practices involving illegal searches. The reader's use of attractiveness (a type of make-up that turns a man into a woman) and black face is not only to hide personal identity but also to challenge the convention that the peasant body is subordinate and invisible."

While Hodder [6] states that identity cannot be formed if there is no social identity that comes from membership in one or more social groups, on the other hand, it is not necessary to set priorities to be equally important when individuals seek to differentiate themselves from others who are similar. Social identity becomes what makes group behavior possible. Braudel [3] has compared the paintings in Munich's Pinakothek, namely a painting by Pieter Aertsen (1508–1575) and two paintings by Jan Breughel (1568–1625). All three describe the hustle and bustle of the market, but at first glance, the difference between traders and simple fishermen from the bourgeois customer group is apparent. It is known from the clothes worn by the people in the painting.

The representation of identity and resistance is also a theme in many literary works. One of the literary works that show youth resistance at the end of the 18th century in Europe and Germany, in particular, is Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers (The Suffering of Werther Youth) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a famous German writer. This novel was published in 1774 and tells the story of a man who experiences tragedy. After his failed career, young Werther experiences unrequited love. So Werther chose suicide to try to suppress his inner self. Baum & Baum [7] stated that the book was the best-selling book of its time. In the first year of publication, ten times the book was required to meet the reader's demand, namely in 1774 and the first half of 1775. The novel was translated into several major European languages the following year, making Goethe even more famous.

This novel became very phenomenal in Germany and Europe. Werther, the main character in the novel, appears as an individual who rebelled against the socio-cultural conditions in Germany at that time. Many readers sympathized with Werther so much that they imitated his lifestyle into reality. This phenomenon was later called the Werther effect.

Baum and Baum [7] also emphasize that Goethe's literary success story is not only writing a successful novel in the market but also—at the same time—becoming a very successful fashion designer. Literary, historical, and social studies in Europe in the late 18th century simultaneously suggested that, after the advent of Werther, nearly every young European male with the "Sturm und Drang" affinity was gripped by "Werther fever" and wore what was called "*Werthertracht*" or Werther uniform, which is a men's attire consisting of a blue tail coat with brass buttons, a yellow vest, yellow leather pants, top boots, and a gray round hat. Jack (2014) mentions that the Werther Costume was widely imitated and worn by the court in Weimar when Goethe visited in 1775. It is even said that Napoleon was a huge admirer of the novel and had read it seven times. He and Goethe discussed it when they met in 1808.

In addition, pictures of the main characters in the novel have appeared in various media, such as porcelain decorated with novels (made in China) and fans; the silhouette of Lotte (the female character in the novel); perfume named after the main character (Eau de Werther); and Werther's costumes can be seen in the pages of fashion books. The presence of social phenomena that accompanied the publication of the novel die Leiden des Jungen Werthers is interesting to be discussed in more depth, especially to answer the question of how the relationship between literature and fashion as material culture and its influence on German society at the end of the 18th century.

2   Method

Literature has long been associated with sociology. Swingwood [8] mentions that, like sociology, literature is also very concerned about the social world of humans, their adaptation to it, and their desire to change it. While Nooy [9] stated that the sociology of literature focuses on the relationship between society and literature, using the metaphor that literature reflects society.

Váňa [10] mentions that fiction writing includes aesthetic devices such as metaphor and allegory, which can refer beyond concrete experiences and thus can mediate a deeper understanding of the social landscape in which these experiences occur. Furthermore, Váňa [10] mentions three critical things in the sociology of literature: First, when referring to social experience, both sociological and literary texts use aesthetic devices to mediate the reader's understanding. Second, in the literary genre, the understanding of social experience depends more on the reader's emotional involvement through the reading process facilitated by this aesthetic device. Third, to benefit from a lyrical understanding of literary-mediated social experience, cultural sociologists must be especially sensitive to the subtleties and ambiguities of aesthetic-mediated meaning.

This study uses these three aspects to see social and literary phenomena in the novel die Leiden des Jungen Werthers. Furthermore, an in-depth reading of the novel and the social influence of the novel's presence is carried out to achieve the goal.

3   Findings and Discussion

3.1   Literature, Material Culture, and Resistance

Shanks and Tilley [11] define material culture as "socially mediated symbolic forms" that form "a system of shared meanings which at the same time involves the relocation

of signs along the axis that determines the relationship between one sign and another. Other signs." At the same time, Watson [12] argues that the concept of material culture is accompanied by the assumption that, like language, the material is social. Saussure's concept of langue and parole is Watson's analogy for seeing material culture.

Regarding this matter, Marx [12] asserts that in commodity theory, the relationship between objects is inseparable from the relationship between humans. It implies that the world of things is the social world. The social structure includes not only class relations and different social positions but also gender relations, written and unwritten rules, the use of objects in everyday life, and the significance given to objects implicitly or explicitly, and consciously or not.

Thus, making the text in literary works a material culture is necessary, primarily because literature can reflect the era's soul through language. However, in addition to social life influencing culture, the opposite often happens; literary works affect society's social conditions. Through reading literary works, social movements often appear that broadly impact society. For example, the drama Die Weber by Gerhart Hauptmann, a 19th-century German author, led to a massive workers' revolt in the Schlesia region. The drama inspired the workers to rebel and demand better welfare from the factory owners.

However, a different view emerged from Hodder and Hutson [11], who stated there was a difference between material culture and text. According to them, the difference between material culture and text is that material culture is often "simple but more ambiguous" than language. It further states that material culture is "more permanent and durable."

These differences in views do not rule out the possibility of a study of material culture based on literary texts by seeing its manifestation into the reality of life or vice versa, likewise with the emergence of the social impact of the presence of the literary work Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers. Jeßing et al. [4] refer to the Werther effect as a reaction triggered by Goethe's novel, especially among middle-class youth. A complete imitation of the novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther's* main character is people dressed as Werther in blue coats and yellow vests. The youths also imitate the main character's actions, a sensitive bourgeois youth running through the forest in melancholy imitation of solitude. Werther's remarks were transformed into proverbs, his enthusiastic manner of speaking directed at measured forms of bourgeois interaction, into the tone of youth conversation, the language of passionate love.

Although Jessing et al. [4] cast doubt on other effects of the Werther effect, such as anti-bourgeois uprisings and youth suicides for impersonating the main character, some critics also believe there is a connection between the novel and youth rebellion and suicide. Weis [13] mentions that Werther attracted the attention of middle-class youth, which led to a series of suicides related to the novel die Leiden des Jungen Werthers. Others imitate their idols optically through the way they dress. The fact that the city of Leipzig banned wearing the Werther costume in 1775 shows that Goethe's contemporaries also believed in the rebellious potential of the outfit.

Resistance and struggle are often identified with the tension between the lower strata of society and the dominant culture created by the upper strata of society. Clarke [14] mentions that wherever resistance is always on the spectrum of tension between the upper and lower communities. Resistance is always intensely active, always in opposition in

a structural sense. The lower classes lead him to the 'theatre of struggle,' a repertoire of strategies and responses to resistance. Each strategy in the repertoire mobilizes material and tangible social elements.

3.2 Fashion as Material Culture

Adopting the view of Wiessner [15] on style, it can be said that fashion is a means of communication where people negotiate their personal and social identities and those of others. Fashion can serve to project a particular image, cover aspects of identity, or raise questions about one's identity. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we choose a style/fashion that will communicate our identity.

Koeppen [16] mentions that the relationship of clothing to culture can be considered constitutive insofar as clothing as embodied cultural practices contribute to the birth and display of culture and as reconstitutive insofar as they, as cultural products and images, take on a historiographic or 'mnemotechnological' function. These relationships and functions are related to the nature of clothing as objects, objects, and signs. They also emerge from the many performative dimensions of fashion language, which are based on its dual semiotic function as systems and events. As a symbolic system, clothing can serve interpellation and discipline to signify the place of an individual's body in social, economic, or sexual order.

While McNeil et al. [17] mention that fashion is the "idea," the non-real, with desires, dreams, and idealizations as its counterparts and companions and as its main driving force—Fashion is also fictive. Fashion, then, is a species of fiction. The same thing is also stated by Wilson [17] that clothing can be understood as fiction because it functions as a narrative and self-expression. If fashion is about idealizing, and striving for perfection that will never be, then clothing is about presenting the true self, which is always a type of self-construction.

Wearing clothes means obeying the imaginary law of dress and making the body "public": a kind of "law of likeness" that produces the image of clothing as a storehouse of difference. Calefato [18] mentions that clothing is where the body's identity gets confused; worldliness is the dimension in which clothing, style, image, and appearance transcend fashion while retaining some essential aspects.

Concerning material culture, Wiessner [15] states that fashion has several implications. First, fashion will provide a behavioral basis for viewing all aspects of all cultures. Second, the role of history and cultural context cannot be ignored because cultural and symbolic structures describe people and fashion as comparable. Fashion data must be interpreted after many past cultural contexts are understood from other data classifications. Finally, due to the role of history, the study of fashion will yield better results when directed at looking at changing patterns.

Third, if fashion is seen as a means of negotiating personal and social identities, this supports the use of fashion to provide information about groups, boundaries, and interactions. The most crucial factor here is an artifact's social and symbolic role - changing patterns of fashion variation through time and space can be generated by the social landscape.

Thus, it is clear that fashion as a marker of identity can be a reference to see culture at a time. Likewise, fashion is recorded in literary works. For example, through the style

of dress shown by Werther's character in the novel Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers, we can explore the identity of the resistance that Werther wanted to show as a representation of young people in Germany at the end of the 18th century.

3.3 Werthertracht: A Symbol of Identity and Resistance in Literature

In the novel Die Leiden Des Jungen Werthers, the character of Werther can be seen as a representation of young people at a time known as Sturm und Drang (circa 1760–1780). Hill [19] mentions that the term "Sturm und Drang," usually translated as "Storm and Stress," has two meanings. First, in a nonspecific metaphorical sense, it denotes an outburst of youthful energy. However, it specifically refers to a particular period or style in German literary history that developed in the 1770s.

In general, this era is characterized by criticism concerning the lives of the luxurious royal families (the bourgeoisie), criticism of the middle-class society that only pursues profit, and a vast gap between the rich and the poor [20]. Werther's character considers himself an autonomous subject who wants to manifest himself. Therefore, he considers passion and feelings are vital. This view of life was against the rules prevailing in society at that time. The aristocrats occupy the highest hierarchy in society, below which the bourgeoisie is getting stronger [21].

Werther's character in the novel comes with the thought of Sturm und Drang who, on the one hand, wants autonomy but, on the other hand, also has feelings as expressed by Goethe in the poem Prometheus.

Here I sit, fashion men.
In my image,
A race after my liking,
A race that will suffer and weep,
And joy and delight with heads held high
And heed Your will no more
Than I!

The figures of Sturm und Drang are here to convey the message that genuine individuals are individuals who are not only concerned with ratios but also feelings. Therefore, at this time, the works of this period are often themed about attraction to nature, love, and friendship.

Werther represents the middle-class society of the 18th century, which is independent of the nobility and the church and is still struggling to find its identity. He could live in luxury because his parents were very well off. Nevertheless, Werther became sad when he saw that humans work only to gain a living existence. Therefore, he wanted to avoid following their style. The world of the nobility was closed to him.

He criticized the nobility emotionally. Werther did not care about social strata, but he criticized the efforts that prevented him from living freely, free from the bonds of the rule of the nobility and the mainstream of thought at that time. He then showed this by dressing in an "eccentric" manner, which was different from the rules of fashion and decency at that time.

It was a tough decision to leave the simple blue suit I wore when I danced with Lotte for the first time, but now it does not fit anymore. Besides that, I have also made a new one, just like the old one: the neck, the pleats, another yellow vest, and pants. However, it achieved a different result. I do not know — maybe, eventually, I will like this one more. [22]

The costume worn by Werther shows a form of self-identity that wants to break away from the confines of tradition. He wanted to leave his simple blue suit and replace it with a new type and style of clothing that was seen as coming out of the clothes at that time which tended to imitate the French court dress style [23]. While, Baum & Baum [7] also mentions that in England, this clothing style shows someone's opposition to the royal court and some of King George III's controversial policies.

Through the Werthertracht, Werther Goethe's character offers a statement of social protest, essentially the anxiety and feeling of futility that pervades many young people in his day. That is why his style of dress became so popular so quickly that Baum and Baum [7] note that Goethe, in his own words, describes Werther's vest and pants as a "ledergelb" color, leather yellow, not just yellow. In English, the color is "blue and buff," which is the color tone of uncolored cowhide. If calfskin is not generally used for trousers or vests, a piece of soft yellow fabric can replace it.

In addition, through Werthertracht, Goethe wanted to participate in the social protest against the bourgeoisie at that time. Through clothes that mix and match, Werther tries to criticize social life, which he considers dry "taste." That was why he could not integrate himself into the aristocratic and bourgeois society. There is no room for "heart." Society values his thoughts and talents more than his heart/feelings, the only thing he is proud of [21].

Werthertracht has a critical role in the novel. One of the main scenes shows this when Werther states he wants to be buried in these clothes.

"With this dress, Lotte, I want to be buried; you have touched and flattered it; I have also asked your father. My spirit hovers over my coffin. Do not search my shirt pocket. This pink ribbon, which you wore over your chest when I met you for the first time among your sisters — Oh, kiss them a thousand times and tell them the fate of their poor friend. Those I love! They swarmed. Oh, how I depend on you! I can't leave you from the first second!— This ribbon will be buried with me. You gifted it to me on my birthday! It's indescribable how I swallowed all of this!— Ah, I didn't think my life's path would lead me here!— — Calm down! Calm down, please!— [22]

It later became a reality when it was told that Werther had died by suicide in the next scene: "*He was sprawled under the window helplessly, fully clothed, wearing boots, a blue coat, and a yellow vest.*" [22].

From several scenes on the Werthertracht, the character believes that his clothes reveal valuable information about his deepest self and even decides which clothes he wants to be buried in after his suicide. Clothing is one of the media for the author to convey social protest because clothes are worn directly on the body. These clothes are suitable for showing attitudes and inner views to the outside world. Wilson [17] similarly states

that clothing communicates "more subtly than most objects and commodities, precisely because of that intimate relationship with the body and ourselves." Weis [13] says that what is worn on the body no longer has something private or intimate but will become a public acknowledgment. Its dense social symbolism makes fashion one of the essential playing fields. Clothes often symbolize youth's resistance to the older generation or old social conditions. Furthermore, Weis [13] mentions that since the beginning of the bourgeois-majority society, young people have a counter-morality to official morality and anti-fashion.

The depiction of the Werther character, on the one hand, shows a picture of young people in Germany who are ready to violate rigid rules but also dare to demand their rights and lead a passionate life [24]. Resistance to social rules and the violation of conventional boundaries become touchstones for young people passionate about changing things. Often these characters become autonomous individuals who later become agents of a counterculture to the old-fashioned and rigid culture.

The depiction of the suffering of the main character in the novel Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers which is excessive, either in love or in response to suffering, is believed not to show the faults and weaknesses of the character but as a form of criticism of social conditions that are no longer suitable for young people. The counter-culture shown by these young people is not passive but has an alternative offer of life that is believed to be better through radical but comprehensive changes.

This novel shows a reciprocal relationship between social life and fictional stories in literary works. Not only is literature influenced and inspired by real life, but also literary works can permeate people's lives and influence the existing culture.

4   Conclusion

Literary works allow being used as a source of material culture excavation. On the one hand, literature reflects the social reality of its era. On the other hand, it is also an inspiration for social movements and societal changes. Werthertracht and Werther-Effect have become movements in Europe as an identity of resistance to culture and social life and a form of protest against the establishment of the nobility.

The style of dress is part of the youth counterculture. Clothing is also synonymous with resistance because it is physically attached to the body and can show the attitude and inner view of the wearer. The style of dress that came out of the standard was also intended to show an autonomous personality at the time of Sturm und Drang who was no longer bound by old traditions.

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