

### REALISM IN SUSAN ELOISE HINTON'S THE OUTSIDERS

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# Raymond KATINDI KISULU

Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Lulingu(ISP), RD Congo <u>katindiraymond92@gmail.com</u>

Résumé: La présente étude vise à examiner le réalisme dans le roman intitulé The Outsiders. Le souci majeur reste celui de vouloir connaître la doctrine ci-haut mentionnée. En ce sens, ce concept fait de nous le centre de la présente étude. En littérature, le réalisme nous sert d'outil nécessaire. Car, c'est une doctrine d'après laquelle l'art ne doit pas chercher à idéaliser le réel, mais exprimer la réalité, contemporaine ou historique. Par exemple dans le roman, The Outsiders, cette œuvre artistique de Susan Eloïse Hinton fait un mouvement des faits imaginaires à la vie actuelle ou à la vie réelle. Ce mouvement se justifie en faisant allusion à l'inégalité sociale (pomme de discorde) entre les gangs, socials (les enfants venus de familles nanties) et les greasers (les enfants issus de familles prolétaires). Bien qu'actuellement ces défauts se font toujours constatés, les parents sont appelés à faire le maximum possible de manière à s'approprier l'éducation de nos jeunes. Pour remédier cette inégalité sociale à la jeunesse réelle, il convient de signaler que nous éducateurs devons remuer ciel et terre de façon à trouver de solution adéquate en rapport avec ces défauts. Si non, ces jeunes resteront de plus en plus délinquants.

Mots-clés: Réalisme, Socials et Greasers

**Abstract**: This article aims at investigating on the novel named The Outsiders by Susan Eloise Hinton. The goal of this research is to investigate on realism. The narrative focuses on social inequality between 2 teenager's groups among which: the Greasers (children originated from ill off or families) and Socials (children from well off families). At first, it analyses the imaginative facts found in the work. Finally, it makes or draws the link between the imaginary life with the real one. Even though the same practice is still remarkable today, parents are called not to give up. So, adolescent children would then be lead in a good way so as to help them be successful in their future life. Otherwise, they will retain more and more disobedient and delinquent.

**Key concepts**: Realism, Socials and Greasers

**Geoffrey and Short** (1981:151) allege that realism is closely connected to verisimilitude, credibility. This is the livelihood and, therefore, the believability of the fiction as potential reality, given that we apply our expectations and inferences about the real world to fictional happenings

Furthermore, **Hawthorn** (1885:27) asserts that realism refers to a literary movement which started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and flourished in the later part of the century. The names of the novelists most associated with this movement are those of Balzac, Stendal and Zola. These writers made enormous efforts to ensure that factual details in their works were correct-that is to say, capable of being checked against an external reality by empirical investigations.

Also, **Lodge** (1977:22) argues that "realism" (or realistic) is as problematical term as literature/literary, and for much the same reasons. It is sometimes used in a neutrally description sense and sometimes as an evaluative term, the particular instances to which it is applied will vary from one period to another and from one person to another, and it is not exclusively aesthetic in application.

**Socials**, (Susan Eloise, 1983: the synonym of the socials brings in mind the abbreviation of the jet set, the West-side or simply the rich kids. In other words, children originated from well off families. Some other times, the Socials are called Socs, Socy (used as adjective related to the Socials **see the poetic license**).

**Greaser** (*Susan Eloise*, 1983:6) it is used so as to class all greasers (greasy as adjectives about the Greasers **see the poetic license**) on the East Side. That is, kids or children that came from poor families.

## Introduction

Literature is intrinsically linked to the human societies. By introducing the concept of realism in literature, writers make a move from imaginary facts from their literary works to real ones found in daily life situations the human beings. In *The Outsiders*, Susan Eloise Hinton does not diverge from this goal. She shows that realistic characters in their daily life have both virtues and vices. This fact can be observed through the lives of human by representing the good qualities and the bad ones.

Hence realism will be elucidated to let readers know that in realistic novel, characters exhibit both their positive and negative sides. That is, what they really are in their daily life without any hypocrisy.

### **Problem Statement**

In *The Outsiders,* the big concern of this paper is to make the gulf between imaginary life and real one. It has been observed the social inequality between the 2 rival groups of gangs. These adolescent children go astray in their lives. The Socials neglect Greasers and vice versa. The two make stupid mistakes that do not honour the society in which they live in. So, they all of them have bad and good behaviour. But, the bad behaviours go beyond the bad ones. Yet, bad attitudes are to give up in life for the objective of being successful.

## **Research questions**

The research addresses questions:

- 1. Does *The Outsiders* convey and highlight the way people live in their places?
- 2. Can the reading of this paper enable the audience understand the bridge between the imaginative facts and real ones found in the narrative?



## Research methods

A research is reliable when relevant methods are applied. To carry out the present study successfully, a number of methodological approaches have been used. First of all, I have resorted to sociological approach. It portrays the full description of the society being detailed. Secondly, I have used the psychoanalytical approach. It is concerned with what is going in the mind of the character's minds. Thirdly, I have used the intrinsic approach. It consists in drawing quotations from the fictional work for the purpose of backing up some points. Fourthly, I have applied also the extrinsic approach. It consists in relying on quotations from external sources in order to show the inextricable link between this topic and the existing literature. Fifthly, I have used the thematic approach. It has analyzed a piece of art in order to get its controlling ideas. Also, I have resorted to formalist approach. This approach has examined all the elements of style, form, figures of speech, etc. that the narrative contains. In addition, I have made recourse to reader response approach. It has made an attempt to describe what happens in the reader's mind while interpreting a text. Finally, I have used the biographical approach. Hence, it has helped me better understand the narrative.

#### 1. Virtues

The present part of my paper is going to develop virtues that characters represent. Abrahams (1994:114), asserts that virtue is in accordance with moral principles; in conformity of behaviour or thought with the structures of morality; good moral conduct.

Furthermore, virtues of this section is stressed on features that characters have when they act, react, interact and even behave in a particular way. Here are virtues that are going to be scrutinized in this part of the paper: perseverance, remorse, hospitality and honesty. In so doing, I will complete this study in the following way: I will provide definition for every virtue and then I will talk about how a character represents a given virtue.

#### 1.1. Perseverance

Perseverance is another vital virtue that characters have in *The Outsiders*. Ponyboy is a persevering character. He has been left alone at the church. Johnny has happened to go to look for some food supplies. When Pony notices that he is alone, has started panicking. But he endures up until Johnny Cade has come back. Certainly, he ,Ponyboy, endeavours. The narrator makes clearer:

"Suddenly I realized that Johnny wasn't there. "Johnny?" I called loudly, and that old wooden church echoed me, onny, onny(...) I looked around wildly, almost

panic-stricken, but then caught sight of some crooked lettering written in the dust floor. Went to get supplies. Be back soon. J.C''. (Susan Eloise, 1983: 61-62)

Johnny and Ponyboy are seen as persevering characters in the novel. Their perseverance is observed when the church started burning. The following passage highlights:

"(...) through the church (...) The cinders and embers began falling on us, (...) I remembered wondering what it was like in a burning ember (...)". (Susan Eloise, 1983: 82)

To sum up, a considerable number of characters that act and even interact in the novel; show the continuing in the course of action without regard to discouragement, opposition or previous failure.

### 1.2. Remorse

Remorse is a further crucial quality that a character embodies in *The Outsiders*. Johnny Cade is the remorseful character in the narrative. This is noticeable when J.C and Ponyboy are living in Windrixville. Johnny cuts up Pony's hair. After that process, Ponyboy looks miserable. And he notices that when he has taken a mirror. In so doing, Johnny recognizes what he has done to Ponyboy. He has been guilty. The narrator comments:

"Johnny let me in the old cracked mirror we'd found I a closet. I did a double take. My hair was even lighter than Sodapop...I was miserable(...) "I'm sorry I cut your hair off, Ponyboy".(Susan Eloise, 1983: 64-65)

In one word, some characters show penitent attitude in the narrative.

# 1.3. Hospitality

Hospitality is the further virtue that characters possess in the narration. In the narrative; Sodapop Curtis, Darry Curtis and Ponyboy Curtis are hospital young boys in the novel. It is universally known that somebody hospitable may sometimes be rewarded. In a way to say, he/she can receive something in return. So, she can happen to harvest some fruits from his/her hospitality. It appears that, this rewarding act always comes back to generous person in a way or another. And it often happens to that person in an unexpected time. This is what exactly happened to these young boys, Sodapop, Darry and the main character Ponyboy Curtis. Indeed, they are hospitable in the sense that they welcome everybody at their dwelling place. To illustrate, Two-Bit and Steve Randle have come to their living place and lived together with them. The narrator highlights the idea as follows:

"Anybody home?" a familiar voice called through the front screen and Two-Bit and Steve come in. We always just stick our heads into each other's houses and holler. 'Hey' and walk in. Our front door is hacked off at his parents needs a place to lay over and cod off". (Susan Eloise, 1983: 93)



In the narrative, some characters embody the charity of welcoming guests.

# 1.4. Honesty

To exemplify this, Dally appears as being the honest character in the novel. This happens when Dolly is in competition of riding horses. Indeed, Dally, has won others in this competition honestly. Dally always does things in a dishonest way. But for this competition, he did things as honestly as he could. The narrator makes clearer:

"You might have fraught it was Dally who fixed those races buck, being a jockey and all, but it wasn't. The last guy to suggest it lost three teeth. It was the only thing Dally did honestly". (Susan Eloise, 1983: 55)

To sum up, within the narrative; some of the characters have the good habit of telling the truth.

## 2. Vices

A number of characters in *The Outsiders* have vices. People in the novel have a flaw or deficiency. Likewise, it is an evil or immoral behavior in somebody's character. Hereafter, are listed the vices among which, drunkenness, smoking, fight and embezzlement.

## 2.1. Drunkenness

Drunkenness is one of the vices that I have examined in *The Outsiders*. A considerable number of characters in the narrative get drunk almost every time. Two-Bit is an alcoholic young boy in the novel. He gets drunk very often. For this reason, he is comic enough. After having drunk, Two-Bit could have a sense of humor to people. He also apes people's voice to make his friends laugh. The narrator states:

"I was planning on getting boozed up tomorrow night," Two-Bit said (...) He was good at voice imitations (...)".( Susan Eloise, 1983: 27)

Another drunkard character in *The Outsiders* is the father of Johnny. Indeed, Johnny's father enjoys alcohol. And this is what the narrator proves form the lines here below:

"I didn't know what I meant, but I was thinking about Johnny's being a drunk (...)" (Susan Eloise, 1983:40)

Moreover, Ponyboy and Johnny are drunkard characters in the narrative. They have happened to drink together with the Socy boys at the drive-in. Yet; the two groups do not like one another. They happen to drink while fearing each other. Socs and Greasers scarcely seat at the same place and exchange ideas. But through the influence of alcohol, both of them are found together. The narrator comments:

"I looked quickly at Johnny, an idea drowning me... just because we got a little drunk last time... too many things could happen while you're drunk". (Susan Eloise,1983: 41)

Drunkenness brings people to treat others in an unfair way. This is what happened to Socy and Greasy boys, specifically Johnny and Ponyboy. These two opposing groups have met at the park. Anybody can control what he is doing. Likewise, none of them controls his act and reaction. Basically, Johnny has killed Bob, the socy boy. Socials on their part, they have made Ponyboy undergo the drowning. This crime has occurred when all of them are drunk. The narrator explains:

"Five Socs were coming straight to us, and from the way they were staggering I figured they were reeling spackled ... you five to two and were drunk... 'I killed him' he said slowly. 'I killed that boy' Bob, the handsome Soc,...they were drowning you, Pony. They might have killed you. And they had a blade...they were gonna beat me up...". (Susan Eloise, 1983: 49-52)

Moreover, drunkenness sometimes makes people especially drunkard not to fear. As such, it has been observed a greasy boy, Ponyboy, when drinking bear in Steve's car. They have forgotten that they are near people who do not like them. Being drunkard, these greasy boys happen not to think of their adversaries anymore. And yet, they are people who have killed Bob Sheldon, the brave and best fighter of the socials. The narrator comments:

"I was sitting on the fender of Steve's car, drinking Pepsi while he and Two-Bit were inside talking to some girls...I just sat there and looked at the Pepsi. I wasn't scared...I didn't feel anything. Just zero. 'you're the guy that killed Bob Sheldon,' one of them said." (Susan Eloise, 1983:148)

In short, drunkenness pushes people to act, react, or interact in an unfair way.

# 2.2. Smoking

Another vice that characters manifest in *The Outsiders* is smoking. As everybody is young in their respective groups, they all make use of smoking a lot. In way to say, almost all the youngsters smoke cigarettes.

As can it be observed, smoking is one of the predominant activities that some greasy boys practiced in *The Outsiders*. Given that fact, smoking is the manner through which Johnny and Dally do appease their tension. They get pleasure and enjoyment from the tobacco. Break time or free time for them stands for having cigarettes to smoke. This is the reason why the narrator evidences the idea in these lines below:



"Good behavior...Dally lit a cigarette and handed it to Jonny. Everyone sat down to have a smoke and relax. A smoke always lessens the tension. The cigarette was calming me down" (Susan Eloise, 1983:14)

Two-Bit is the additional smoking character in the narrative. He even influences others to be smoking the cigarettes. Now here Dally is caught by the socials. He has been beaten to death. However, Two-Bit with his sense of humor, he has been laughing and smoking his cigarette. Meanwhile his gang's member has been suffering. The narrator makes clearer:

"Dally was getting kicks. He got caught. He pays up. No sweat '(...). Baby.' Two-Bit grinned and lit a cigarette. 'Anyone want a weed?' (Susan Eloise, 1983:29)

Two-Bit is seen again as being a smoking character in the novel. As it has been said previously, Two-Bit is the funny young boy. He is seen not only like a funny boy, but he is also someone who often prefers smoking cigarettes. He smokes if he wants to be severe enough to some people. That is why he has bugged himself in order to listen what has been going on in the room where the trial is being done. The narrator argues:

"Then he did a funny thing. He came...and started smoking a cigarette. He hardly ever smokes, except when something is really bugging him or when he wants to look tough". (Susan Eloise, 1983:149)

Ponyboy is another character that smokes in the narrative. Indeed, he is smoking character. Even though Ponyboy Curtis is too young, this fact does not stop or prevent him from smoking cigarettes a number of times. Johnny on his part has been prohibiting Pony from smoking. He does so not only because he loves him but because he knows that later on such an activity can generate or develop sickness. Abiding in the church, Johnny is the only person to provide Ponyboy with pieces of advice. The narrator highlights:

"I was smoking a lot more there than I usually did- I guess because it was something to do-although Jonny warned me that I would get sick smoking so much. We were careful with our cigarettes- if that old church (...)". (Susan Eloise, 1983:70)

In addition, Pony has grown up in an unfair environment. It is the place where almost everybody smokes. As such, Ponyboy is influenced by his peers. His surrounding has not enabled Ponyboy to be physically, morally, socially and psychologically developed well enough. The narrator makes clearer:

"Everyone in our neighborhood, even the girls, smoked. Except for Darry who was too proud of his athletic health the risk a cigarette, we had all started smoking since he was nine, Steve started, at eleven... I was the weed-friend in my family-soda smokes only to steady his nerves or when he wants to look tough". (Susan Eloise, 1983:86)

To sum up, it has been observed that many young boys especially greasy ones like smoking cigarette. Sometimes young boys are influenced by their environment to be familiar with the tobacco.

# 2.3. Fight

Another vice that the narrative analyzes is fight. Sometimes the fight opposes one person to another, one group of people to another etc. As it has been said earlier, greasy and socy boys often fight almost everywhere they meet. And some other times they kill their adversaries. Such a case has been seen when Johnny and all the greasy boys who have gone to watch the fight. It has opposed a greasy boy to the Mexican hitchhiker, the socy boy, at the drive-in. Greasers likes to see how their gangster will be victorious at the drive-in. The narrator adduces the idea in the line below:

"We knew about everybody there. There was a pretty good fight while we were there between a big twenty-three- year-old greaser and a Mexican hitchhiker". (Susan Eloise, 1983: 20)

Two-Bit is the character who likes fighting in the narrative. His life is full of comedy and fighting. He complicates his youth by getting involved in fighting issues. Nobody knows the reason why he likes the fight. This bad quality has led him forget about studies. He hardly has an initiative during his young hood. Here below the narrator comments:

"He liked fights, blondes, and for some unfathomable reason, school. He was still a junior at eighteen and a half and never learned anything. He just went for kicks". (Susan Eloise, 1983:12)

Dallas Winston is a further character who enjoys fighting. Despite of his imprisonment that he has undergone, he manages how to fight at all cost against socy boys. He has been looking for where he can fight or observed other people whom are fighting. The narrator argues:

"He went hunting some action-booze or dames or a fight. I hope he don't get failed again. He just got out. He'll probably find the fight". (Susan Eloise,1983:28)

Socy boys are also characters who relish the fight in the novel. The present gangsters' groups get involved into fighting problem. Being children from rich families, that condition of living does not forbid them from fighting against greasy boys, children from poor families. Some socy boys have been for the idea of fighting and others have been against. As time goes on, socials happen to be divided into two different groups of socials. The narrator states:

"Socs were always behind a wall of aloofness, careful not let their real selves show through. I had seen a social-club rumble once. The Socs even fought coldly and



practically and impersonally. That's why we're separated,' I said''. (Susan Eloise, 1983:36)

As far as Socy boys are concerned, Randy Anderson is also a character who is fond of the fight. He is supposed to be everywhere people can struggle. For that reason, he has been present at the park when his friend Bob Sheldon has been stabbed by Johnny Cade. This idea is explained in the following passage from the narrative:

"He's not scared. He's just sick of fighting...I remember the time we, socials, fought against the East side. Without any, Johnny killed my friend Bob using his knife". (Susan Eloise,1983:112)

In conclusion, both Greasers and Socials got involved in fighting. Almost every young boy adores the fight.

#### 2.4. Embezzlement

A further vice developed in *The Outsiders* is embezzlement. Characters have that fraudulent conversion of property from a property owner. Human beings misbehave in such an illegal way. This is a bad quality that people embody in their daily life as well. Such a fact is what exactly happened to Two-Bit Mathews in the novel. He is an embezzler character. He embezzles and goofs things in several stores that are found in town. Two-Bit is good at stealing people's property. The following lines evidence the passage:

"And Two-Bit he doesn't really want or need half the things he swipes from stores. He just thinks it's fun to swipe everything that isn't nailed down". (Susan Eloise, 1983:17)

Moreover, Dally and Johnny represent embezzlement. They have this bad behavior of stealing things. While going to Sutton, these greasy boys have happened to enter a drugstore where they have embezzled some drugs. After the pharmacist has noticed, he tells them to vacate the place. The narrator states:

"Dally was waiting for Johnny and me under the street light at the corner of picket and Sutton, and since we got there early, we had time to go over to the drugstore in the shopping center and goof around...that were lying out in the open until the manager got wise to us and suggested we leave. He was too late, though, Dally walked out with two packages of Kools under his Jacket". (Susan Eloise, 1983:20)

All in all, the narrative has characters that represent misappropriation.

# 3. The building of a new society

Relating to literature, no author can write without a goal in mind. For this reason, Hinton has had maximum of time to first of all observe and analyse her society. And lastly, to find solution or overcome the problems that she has found in her own society. Here below are some of the facts that inspired her to take the pen:

Firstly, Susan Eloise Hinton was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which she used as a setting for most of her books. She wrote *The Outsiders* at the age of fifteen, inspired by her frustration and the lack of quality fiction that is realistic for teens. Another inspiration for the book is the gang conflicts she witnessed in high school. Her inspiration for writing came from reading. No wonder famous writers advocate for reading extensively and often if you want to become a good writer. She was influenced by how much reading helped her when she was young, it always kept her going no matter what was happening in her life.

Secondly, Susan Eloise Hinton, the author of the popular book, *The Outsiders* influenced many of today's works on young adult literature. Her first book showcased the diversity between rich and poor and how it affects the youths. Being a teen when she wrote it, she perfectly captured the thoughts and emotions of adolescents.

Thirdly, Hinton did not plan to publish *The Outsiders*. She originally wrote the first book for her reading enjoyment, not to share with anyone. However, the mother of one of her friends read a draft and thought otherwise. She said the book needs to be read by more people, and she contacted an agent she knew in New York, and soon Viking Press signed Hinton for a \$1000 advance. So, she preferred much the reading activity.

In addition, she used her initials to avoid unnecessary favoritism towards her gender. According to a report, it was Hinton's publishers who suggested that Hinton uses her initials instead of her full name due to concerns that readers and reviewers alike would automatically dismiss a book about teenage boys written by a teenage girl. The strategy worked, and also Hinton kept her public and private lives separate. There was a reason Hinton wrote for boys. S. E. Hinton wrote from a male point of view in the first place because it reflected her own sensibility. According to her, it was also strategic as male characters were the easiest. Being a tomboy with many male friends, it was easy to relate to boys and their feelings. So, she was capable of easily relating the behaviors of the teens of her time.

Fifthly, Hinton did not write the screenplay when *The Outsiders* was adapted into a film, but she remained closely involved in the production by serving as a location scout and even making a small cameo as a nurse. During the filming of *The Outsiders*, Hinton's charming storytelling was so attractive to Coppola that they both collaborated on an adapted screenplay for one of her books, Rumble Fish. In a 1983



interview, Coppola praised the author's involvement, saying she was a permanent member of the company.

Lastly, Hinton wrote *The Outsiders* while she was still a teen. Susan Eloise Hinton was a 15-year-old girl when she started writing the novel and was just 17 when it was first published. Hinton felt moved to write after she became exasperated with the lack of literary works that aptly captures youth at the time. She mentioned that she couldn't find a book about teenagers that dealt with real-life issues and not just romance and horses. When she could not find any, she wrote one herself.

As far as the solutions are concerned, she found a way out related to problems in link with the teens of her living days. Among them, the following may be retained:

S. E. Hinton brought to light the world of teenage problems and conflicts through her novels, especially the first one, *The Outsiders*. She is considered the most successful novelist for the junior high and high school audience, credited with bringing out the Y.A.(Youth Authority) genre and creating realistic young adult literature. That is to say, teenagers that are to show good behaviors to people and community. In one word, teens that are well educated and usually behave well (ladies and gentlemen).

The Outsiders was one of the most frequently challenged books of the 20th century. The Outsiders was criticized at the time of its publication for its candid representation of gang violence, underage drinking, smoking, delinquency and strong language. It was placed at No. 38 on the American Library Association's "Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of the 90s" and was even banned in some schools. Fortunately, though, the book has become a part of many schools' curricula.

The Outsiders helped change the way literature was taught in schools. The emergence of a real, relatable teen novel with real-life youth issues helped teachers reach students who had grown bored with the use of traditional English textbooks. Some teachers went to Library Association conferences and noticed that people were clamoring for something different. This made them realize there was a real market for books like *The Outsiders*.

To end with this section, S. E. Hinton's life as an author is a direct result of a passion she had developed since she was a child, a passion for helping adults understand the world of teenagers.

### Conclusion

This research has analyzed realism in *The Outsiders*. It has shown how the outnumber of young characters embody real fact in their daily life. Characters have exhibited the dualism; virtue and vices in their societies. On one hand, virtue is

characterized by a particular good quality or habit of characters in the narrative. This revealed how characters had the formal behaviour or attitudes that show and even demonstrate high moral standards in the narrative. On the other hand, vice is realistically featured by an attitude or immoral behaviors of characters manifest within their societies. That is to say, narrators encompassed various crimes in link with alcohol, smoking weed, embezzlement, fighting and drunkenness.

Looking at the real youth, the same fact is observable. And yet, the educators are not called give up the maintenance of the discipline with regard to teens. So, educators, would then learn the real youth more about vices to avoid and virtues to take or get used of. On the side of the youth of today, it would therefore welcome and even appropriate such a practice for the betterment of its life of tomorrow.

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