

## **MATERIAL INCLINATION TO INDICATE SOCIAL STATUS IN LAUREN WEISBERGER'S NOVEL *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA* (2003)**

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### **Abstrak**

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah (1) menganalisa sejauh mana novel ini merefleksikan material inclination, (2) menunjukkan kontribusi elemen fiksi (implied author) dalam mengungkap material inclination dalam novel ini. Data penelitian ini adalah teks tertulis yang dikutip dari novel. Kutipan teks tersebut kemudian diinterpretasi dan dianalisa dengan menggunakan elemen fiksi (implied author) lalu dikaitkan dengan konsep Consumerism yang dikemukakan oleh Zygmunt Baumann, konsep Hedonism yang dikemukakan oleh Ruut Veenhoven dan teori postmodern yang dirumuskan oleh Jean Baudrillard. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa karakter cenderung memposisikan benda-benda materi dan harta kekayaan sebagai parameter untuk mengindikasikan sosial statusnya. Hal ini terbukti dari dua karakteristik: konsumerisme dan hedonisme. Konsumerisme terlihat dari pola hidup karakter sedangkan hedonism terlihat dari gaya hidup karakter. Benda-benda materi serta harta kekayaan beralih nilai dan fungsi menjadi sebatas komoditas untuk mencapai kepuasan personal. Keberadaan benda-benda materi dan harta kekayaan sangat simbolik sebagai bahasa untuk menunjukkan status sosialnya di masyarakat

Key words: Material inclination, konsumerisme, hedonisme, postmodern, status sosial.

### **A. Introduction.**

The twenty first century is the era where life has changed magnificently. Skyscraper buildings including offices, apartments and residences were built in big cities all around the world. Shopping centers, fast-food restaurants and supermarkets spread and grow massively and become the endorser of human daily needs. Technology grows rapidly represented by the invention of supercomputers and cellphones with famous brand such as iPhone, Blackberry, Apple, etc.

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It is common nowadays to see people spending their time in a mall stretching their legs and freshening their eyes looking and searching for a self-entertainment. Allegedly, most people enjoy eating and hanging out with friends at fastfood booths or fancy restaurants. In some spots at public places, people are bowing their head to an Apple laptop or an tablet iPod supercomputer and looking busy for personal business. Moreover, it is usual to find a group of young women hanging out together in mall hunting branded fashion and apparels (such as Prada, Gucci) or looking for an expensive Rolex watch as a present for their couple.

Furthermore, a new belief or conviction has born in twenty first century. In most people mind nowadays, a classy life is often comprehended as a life that surrounded by luxurious goods and sophisticated facilities. Kaplan (2006: 179) states that today life is a life spent in pursuit of commodities where people become greedy of material goods in terms of status, purchase more and more consumer goods, must work more and more hours to afford them. As a result, material goods become the priority to reach the status itself. Moreover, Baudrillard in Poster (2005: 29) argues:

Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services, and material goods. This now constitutes a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by objects.

Quotation above clearly describe what really happen in today life. People are surrounded by consumption circumstances where material goods become the parameter of wealthy. Most people has poisoned by the premise that social status is referred into objects especially luxurious goods.

As a result, people are triggered to pursue material goods. Therefore, material goods become a requirement since it has an important role in human life. Derived from Baudrillard's idea, there is a conclusion that the tendency of people is aimed into one aim: to pursue material goods in order to indicate social status. This condition can be concluded as material inclination. Baudrillard in Poster (2005: 19-20) states:

Objects do not only facilitate material existence through their proliferation as commodities, but, generalized into signs of recognition, they facilitate the reciprocation of status among people. The system of social standing, at least, has the advantage of rendering obsolete the rituals of caste or of class and, generally, all preceding (and internal) criteria of social discrimination.

Baudrillard argues that material goods in social circumstances have a specific function: signaling class and social status among people. The concept of brand

become really important. People buy branded products to indicate their social status.

Social status according to Nichol, Brown and Haynes (2008:3) is a structural approaches of class analysis typically measure social class through indicators of socioeconomic status such as income, occupation, and education. Meanwhile according to Weber (1947) class is categorized into working class, lower-middle class, intelligentsia, and upper class. Similar to Weber, the stratification of classes demonstrated through Warner's class model (1949) divides classes into upper, middle, and lower.

Consumerism is one major characteristic that reflects material inclination. Todd (2011: 1) states that Jean Baudrillard claims consumerism as an extension of his idea of the hyperreal. Everything in daily world is a simulation of reality. The simulation is completed through consumption of goods. Consumerism also creating a consumer society, a society where most people consider material goods as a requirement of good life which is destined to be consumed and made it as an exclusive property. Baumann (2005: 22) states that being a consumer means speak of a consumer society, the need to pay money for things meant to be consumed. People will see material goods as the potential stuff of consumption.

Hedonism is another characteristic of material inclination. According to Bujok (2007) hedonism deals with the personal belief that pleasure is the highest good, the pursuit of pleasure, a life-style devoted to pleasure-seeking. Materialistic mind-set is the main cause that urges people to become a hedonist. In most cases, most people buy luxury goods not merely to gain symbolic status, but also to fulfill self pleasure. For a hedonist, material things are very symbolic and say much more than what people may realize. Pursuing luxury goods is merely in order to fulfill certain personal desires. What people purchase, consume and wear is not just a product, but also a piece of language that creates a sense of who they are. Every branded products that people wear and consume symbolizes who they are in the society, what kind of life they have including their position and their social status.

One phenomenon that can be taken as the example of material inclination is the way of life socialites. Many socialites make famous celebrities, artists and public figures as the role model for their life. Local celebrities such as Syahrini and international celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Lady Gaga and David Beckham are set as their role model by copying and plagiarizing their way of life including following they appearance, using the material goods they wear and copying their lifestyle. The socialites become the follower as they only concern about the glamour side of celebrities life where material goods become commodity. This condition depicts material inclination since material goods in socialites' life is purposed to indicate social status.

The phenomenon of material inclination is also can be found in literary works. One phenomenon that can be taken as an example of material inclination is in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) novel by Lauren Weisberger. The novel portrays the life of high class people who works in fashion circumstances. Consumerism and hedonism are key words that describe the lives of characters

in the novel where most characters tend to pursue material goods to indicate social status.

Material inclination in this analysis refers to the condition where the tendency of people are pursuing material goods to indicate social status. This condition happens because people tend to put material goods as the parameter of classy life. Material inclination is reflected in two characteristics: consumerism and hedonism. The presence of material goods are very symbolic, to indicate social status.

This analysis is aiming to find out how Lauren Weisberger's novel, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) portrays material inclination. In addition, it is also conducted to figure out the role of point of view (implied author) to disclose material inclination.

Lauren Weisberger is an American novelist and author. She was born March 28, 1977. Her mother is a teacher and her father is a department store president. She spent her early youth in Clark Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, a small town outside Scranton. At age 11, her parents divorced and she and her younger sister, Dana, moved to Allentown, Pennsylvania, to live with her mother.

Weisberger attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she was an English major and graduated in 1999. Weisberger began working for Departures Magazine, an American Express publication, where she wrote 100-word reviews and became an assistant editor. She also published a 2004 article in Playboy magazine.

Weisberger had written some literary works. Her first novel is *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003). Second novel of Weisberger is *Everyone Worth Knowing* (2005) based upon New York City public relations world. *Chasing Harry Winston* (2008) is Weisberger's third novel which potrays the fear of woman who are facing the horror of turning 30. In September 2008, it was announced that Universal Pictures had picked up the rights to the book. The fourth Weisberger novel is *Last Night at Chateau Marmont* (2010). Another work of Weisberger is her short story "*The Bamboo Confessions*" which is included in the anthology "*American Girls About Town*."

*The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) is her best work which won London Circle Book Award in 2010. This novel also received many positive reviews. The novel is mostly based on Weisberger's real life experience at the time working at Vogue as a writer. A movie based on this novel was released by 20th Century Fox in June 2006.

*The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) novel written by Lauren Weisberger indicates the perspective of material inclination. Material inclination is the tendency of human that directed into one aim, accumulate material goods to indicate social status. This condition triggers materialistic mind-set since human is determined by what they wear and what they consume. People tend to pursue material goods to indicate social status. Therefore, material inclination in this novel can be explored through two characteristics: consumerism and hedonism.

Consumerism emphasizes on material possessions which reflected through buying and consuming. The meaning of consumerism is implicitly stated

through Miranda's daily life habits. It is exposed through character's actions buying fashion stuffs, properties and consuming foods. Those actions are spending a lot of money buying a very expensive *Chanel* dress and *Hermes* scarves and many clothes, paying cash for a new release *Porsche* car, delivering dozen bottles of wines and champanges and consuming fast food from *Starbucks* restaurant daily every morning. She is blinded by desire of buying and belonging any latest fashion products.

Hedonism is emphasized on lifestyle that interpose the pleasure and satisfaction where material goods become the stimulus. The meaning of hedonism is implicitly revealed through Miranda's lifestyle. Through implied author, it is exposed that the character lives an extravagant and very luxurious life where material goods and properties becomes the measurement of pride, pleasure, and happiness. The evidences of hedonism is depicted through her activities included character's lifestyle such as: spending many times for vacations around the world, organizing many parties by inviting many famous and rich people, having private island, spending money to order personal plane tickets and wearing *Hermes* scarf everywhere she goes. Her lifestyle is the way she symbolizes who she is in the society.

There are two studies that give contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. The first study is a paper written by Roy Y.J. Chua and Xi Zou entitled *The Devil Wears Prada? Effects of Exposure to Luxury Goods on Cognition and Decision Making* (2009). This paper analyzes plot in *The Devil Wears Prada Novel* using personal desire theory by Kemp. The author reveals the motives beyond the desire of belonging luxury goods and for what purpose that people are desired to have luxury goods. Chua and Zhou argue that people pursue luxury in part to fulfill certain personal desires. In other words, the basic reason of belonging luxury goods is personal satisfaction. Buy luxury goods not merely to impress social others or gain symbolic status, but also to fulfill self-directed pleasures or gratification for themselves. What people pursue in having luxury products is basically not only the function or the value of that products itself but also another motives such as personal desire, pleasure, satisfaction, or gaining status. Luxury goods in not a basic human needs, but become a progressive need caused by some motives that mentioned above. This paper also analyzed the presence of implicit motives between the notion of people's mind and luxury goods. Chua and Zhou believes that luxury goods are more effective case to distance people in society rather than money. All in all, this study gives a contribution to material inclination topic that there are many motives related to the tendency of people belonging luxury goods in today's era.

The other study that gives contribution to this study is a journal written by Leaf Van Boven, Margaret C. Campbell and Thomas Gilovich entitled *Stigmatizing Materialism: On Stereotypes and Impressions of Materialistic and Experiential Pursuits* (2010). This journal analyzes the negative stereotypes of materialistic people. The author used social relationship theory by Kasser and Lane. According to this journal, materialistic people tend to be more selfish and self-centered than experiential people. Indeed, people who are highly materialistic, believing that happiness can be obtained through the acquisition of

money and material possessions, have poorer social relationships than people who are less materialistic. In this journal, Van Boven, Campbell and Gilovich believe that most Americans tend to be materialistic, who pursue happiness through material purchases, in contrast to experiential people who pursue happiness through experiential purchases. In short, this study gives a contribution to material inclination topic that most people's decisions in pursuing happiness through material possessions really occur in social contexts.

The analysis of this novel deals with the concept consumerism and hedonism. Consumerism according to Norton (2009:1) deals with a very large extent on the level of personal consumption, particularly on the purchase of material goods. Consumerism itself emphasizes on material possessions. Martin (1993:3) states that consumerism is the cultural relationship between human and consumer goods and services, including behaviors, institutions, and ideas. Consumerism deals with taste, style, social competition, and the emotional pleasures of acquiring material objects. Moreover, Norton (2009:1) argues:

The United States is an example of a hyper-consumerist society. People are constantly bombarded with advertisements which are urging them to buy things. Such advertisements promote not simply specific products, but also a vision of "the good life" and what it takes to be happy. Shopping is experienced by many people as an exciting recreational activity. People go deeply into debt in order to buy things beyond basic necessities: a larger house, a giant television, a fancy car. These are all the hallmarks of a society within which consumption is at the center of life.

Quotation above gives a clear illustration about the example of consumer society: United States. Consumerism has become the center of life. People are urged to buy things although in fact the things itself is not a basic necessity to be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, Bauman (2005) states that a consumer is a person who consumes, and to consume means using things up: eating them, wearing them, playing with them and otherwise causing them to satisfy one's needs or desires. Bauman (2005) argues that since in our part of the world it is money which in most cases 'mediates' between desire and its satisfaction, being a consumer also means that the things destined to be consumed: buying them, paying for them and so making them one's exclusive property.

The imagination life is referred into a wealthy life surrounded by luxurious goods. People follow market ideology and exist in consumer society in term of social status. Baudrillard (2004: 64) states:

Today's life is the era of the exaltation of an object by an image, the exaltation of buying and of consumption through the sumptuary spending of advertising, it was a mirror held out to the universe of political economy commodity for a moment of glorious imaginary.

Quotation above describes that today life is dominated by buying and consuming. This kind of life has become a proper way of living nowadays. For some people, it is not only an imagination, but also become a real necessity that must be fulfilled.

Hedonism according to Bujok (2007:20) deals with the personal belief that pleasure is the highest good, the pursuit of pleasure, a life-style devoted to pleasure-seeking. Hence, according to Veenhoven (2003:1) hedonism is a way of life, characterised by openness to pleasurable experience and long-term happiness. Hedonism is reflected through lifestyle that interpose the pleasure and satisfaction where material goods become the stimulus. Moreover, Bujok (2007:45) argues:

It can be argued that nowadays consumers often not go just shopping but 'go entertaining'. Then, the concept of hedonism is connected with a unique 'consumption experience' which is more and more often desirable by consumers and associated with 'fantasies, feelings and fun.

Quotation above clarifies that consumption has a closeness relation in reaching pleasure and happiness of hedonism. Shopping as the example, implied the entertaining of consumption (joy, fun and pride).

Veenhoven (2003:1) states that hedonism term 'hedonism' is used to denotes the view that a good life should be a pleasurable life, pleasure seeking is a main motivator of human behaviour and a way of life in which pleasure plays an important role. Veenhoven (2003:1) argues that hedonists are people who are positive about pleasure and who pluck the fruits of pleasure when possible. The reverse is asceticism, which involves the moral rejection of pleasure and abstinent behaviour.

## **B. Methodology.**

The analysis of this novel will be done through text based interpretation by focusing on the point of view (implied author). Implied author is the key in disclosing the meaning in this analysis through a comprehensive reading to get the meaning that do not appeared in the text, but implied behind the text. This analysis is also supported the concept of consumerism and hedonism.

## **C. Analysis.**

The meaning of material inclination do not emerge in surface (manifest text) but implicitly left behind the text. Material inclination is implicitly revealed through Miranda's actions in daily habits and lifestyle. The evidences that exposed in the text depicts that the character is trapping in consumption, where much of her happiness, pleasure and life satisfaction is referred into the possession of material goods. Hence, it is uncovered through two characteristics: consumerism and hedonism.

Consumerism emphasizes on material possessions which reflected through buying and consuming. The basic characteristic of consumerism is highlighted

by over limit buying and consuming. The meaning of consumerism is implicitly stated through Miranda's daily life habits.

The evidence of consumerism is implicitly revealed when the character buys a brand new *Porsche* car. The following quotation will support it:

I started by calling Miranda's nanny, but her cell phone went straight to voice mail. The housekeeper was next on the list and, for once, a big help. She was able to tell me that the car wasn't brand-new and it was in fact a "convertible sports car in British racing green," and that it was usually parked in a garage on Miranda's block, but she had no idea what the make was or where it might currently be residing. Next on the list was Miranda's husband's assistant, who informed me that, as far as she knew, the couple owned a top-of-the-line black Lincoln Navigator and some sort of small green Porsche. Yes! I had my first lead. One quick phone call to the Porsche dealership on Eleventh Avenue revealed that yes, they had just finished touching up the paint and installing a new disc-changer in a green Carrera Cabriolet for a Ms. Miranda Priestly. Jackpot!

Once again, I made the round of calls, but this time Miranda's nanny picked up on the second ring.

"Cara, hey, it's me."

"Hey, what's up? Are you on the street? It sounds so loud."

"Yeah, you could say that. I had to pick up Miranda's Porsche from the dealership. Only, I can't really drive stick. But now she called and wants me to pick up someone named Madelaine and drop her off at the apartment. Who the hell is Madelaine and where might she be? (Page 6)

The text depicts that the character buys a brand new *Porsche* car only for following the trends since *Porsche* is released for the first time. Buying a brand new car, for her, is just like buying a peanut, not a big thing. As a famous and wealthy person, she tends to consider herself as the person who needs to buy a brand new car when its first released, although the car is not really needed. In fact, she has already had a luxurious *Lincoln Navigator* car in her garage. Moreover, the text implicitly exposes the indication of social status. All brands of car that mentioned in the quotation above (*Porsche*, *Lincoln Navigator* and *Carrera Cabriolet*) are very expensive, and well known as a luxurious properties. This is the symbol of her economic status as a high class person. Having a lot of luxurious indicates that she is very rich and wealthy. Hence, all of that cars are only a commodity to show her prestige and luxuriousity.

Consumerism is also exposed by the character's action in spending every morning breakfast by consuming fast foods that she subscribed from *Starbucks* restaurants. The following quotation shows it:

Breakfast number one would be on its way to 640 Madison in seconds, and the chances were good I'd have to throw it out. Miranda ate four slices of greasy, fatty bacon, two sausage links, and a soft cheese Danish every morning, and washed it down with a tall latte from Starbucks (two raw sugars, remember!). As far as I could tell, the office was divided on whether she was permanently on the Atkins diet or just lucky enough to have a superhuman metabolism, the result of some pretty fantastic genes. Either way, she thought nothing of devouring the fattiest, most sickeningly unhealthy foods—even though the rest of us weren't exactly afforded the same luxury. (page 127)

Through implied author, it is revealed that the character is addicted with fast food. It is proven by her habit consuming *Starbucks* fast food every morning. *Starbucks* is well known by its luxuriousity. That is the reason why she consider herself as a high class person because of consuming *Starbucks* fast food. Contrastly, fast food is lack of nutrition and harm for health, but she does not care about it. She only cares about the prestige of the brand *Starbucks*. The utterance *Miranda ate four slices of greasy, fatty bacon, two sausage links, and a soft cheese Danish every morning and washed it down with a tall latte from Starbucks* implicitly gives an image of luxuriousity that exposed through words *soft cheese Danish* (a very expensive cheese). Phrase *most sickeningly unhealthy foods* clearly exposes that the fast food is not healthy, but she still consumes it every morning without considering how it will affect her health. The continuity of consuming *Starbucks* fast food is a clear evidence that reflects consumerism.

The second characteristic, hedonism is emphasized on lifestyle that interpose the pleasure and satisfaction where material goods become the stimulus. The meaning of hedonism is implicitly revealed through Miranda's lifestyle. Through implied author, it is exposed that the character lives an extravagant and very luxurious life where material goods and properties becomes the measurement of pride, pleasure, and happiness.

The life of the character exposes that she put personal satisfaction as the main purpose. It is revealed through the place she visits during the vacations, the accomodations and the activities during her everyday life. Those all are a tool for her to reach personal satisfaction.

The evidence of hedonism is exposed at the time the character takes vacation abroad. This situation can be seen in the quotation below:

By some stroke of dumb luck, I would be working for nearly a month before Miranda was back in the office. She took her vacation every year starting a week before Thanksgiving until right after New Year's. Typically, she'd spend a few weeks at the flat she kept in London, but this year, I was told, she had dragged her husband and daughters to Oscar de la Renta's estate in the Dominican Republic for two weeks before spending Christmas and New Year's at the Ritz in Paris. I'd also been forewarned

that even though she was technically “on vacation, she’d still be fully reachable and working at all times, and therefore, so should every single other person on staff. I was to be appropriately prepped and trained without her highness present. That way, Miranda wouldn’t have to suffer my inevitable mistakes while I learned the job. Sounded good to me. So at 7:00A .M. on the dot, I signed my name into Eduardo’s book and was buzzed through the turnstiles for the very first time. “Strike a pose!” Eduardo called after me, just before the elevator doors swept shut. (page 35)

Implicitly, the text exposes that vacations becomes a routinuity for her every year. The destination of her vacations are varied across countries. In the text revealed she stayed in three places: *the flat she kept in London, Oscar de la Renta’s estate in the Dominican Republic, Ritz in Paris*. The two places; *Oscar de la Renta’s estate* and *Ritz* are well known as a very luxurious place that only certain people will allow to stay there. This condition implicitly reveals luxuriousity. She must get a first class accomodation along her vacation by staying at luxurious hotels. Staying at those places during vacation gives pleasure and satisfaction to her. This condition reflects hedonism. Furthermore, material inclination is implicitly uncovered as those places symbolize her status as a high class people.

Hedonism is also implicitly revealed through character’s habit having parties. Those parties are very private and held in exclusive places. This can be seen in the quotation below:

Well, I thought there wouldn’t be anyone famous here tonight,” she said, referring to Miranda’s past parties at the Met. Since she was a huge contributor, Miranda was often granted the very special privilege of renting out, oh, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART for private parties and cocktail hours. Mr. Tomlinson had had to ask only once, and Miranda was scrambling to make her brother-in-law’s party the best the Met had ever seen. She figured it would impress the rich Southerners and their trophy wives to dine for a night at the Met. She was right. (page 267)

From quotation above, it can be seen that the character often having private parties. Those private parties are used to get the attention from famous and wealthy people. This condition means that those parties itself is only a tool for her to smoothen her relation with other wealthy people. Phrase *rich Southerners and their trophy wives* and *cocktail hours* represents the quest and the situation of the party. By surrounded with rich people, it gives pride, prestige and satisfaction to her. This condition reflects hedonism. Moreover, material inclination is exposed since those parties are intended to show her social status as a very rich person. The parties and the rich quests symbolize her social status.

#### **D. Conclusion.**

*The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) novel written by Lauren Weisberger uncovers material inclination. The meaning of material inclination is implicitly revealed through implied author. It revealed in two poles: consumerism and hedonism.

Consumerism is implicitly uncovered through the life habits of the character. The evidences of consumerism is reflected by character's actions spending a lot of money buying things that basically she does not needed. Her actions and behaviours are implicitly shown that she is a hyper consumer. She only cares about getting new things although must paying a lot of money for it. Much of material goods are used as commodity by her without considering the function and the value of it. It is bought and consumed only for prestige and luxuriousity. In fact, all of material goods that she buys and she consumes implicitly purposed to indicate her social status.

Hedonism is implicitly revealed through the lifestyle of the character. She lives in a very wealthy life that surrounded by extravagant properties. It is exposed through her activities, the place she destined for vacation and the accomodations she conducted. For her, luxury goods and properties is merely purposed in order to fulfill certain personal desires. Her lifestyle is a language that creates a sense of who she is in the society. In fact, all of her lifestyle is purposed to achieve personal satisfaction, pride and prestige. Her wealthy is used as a tool to indicate her status.

Material inclination is found in real life. In twenty first century era, material inclination is the reflection of specific people that tend to pursue material goods in order to indicate their social status. People are triggered to get more and more material goods since it becomes the priority to reach the status itself. The satisfaction of life is comprehended by the presence of luxurious things. Furthermore, material goods become commodity since it bought and consumed not for its value and function, but only for its trends and prestige.

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