

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research background and starting point, establishing the rationale for the study. The content ranging from the background to the definition of key terms is structured logically to provide a foundation for maximizing the scope of the analysis presented in subsequent chapters. Each variable highlights the importance of examining the topic and core research questions, as well as translating them into academic analysis.

1.1 Background of the Study

The prevailing perspective often distorts the true scope of literature, limiting it merely to storybooks, fables, religious parables, or slightly further to "pulp fiction" and romantic poetry. Even what is termed "High Literature" represents only the surface of an expansive literary ocean. In reality, literature encompasses far more than these rigid categories; through the reciprocal relationship between the creator, the audience, and literature as a dynamic concept, it evolves into a living reflection of human civilization. It intrinsically encapsulates political intrigue, social dynamics, and the very essence of humanism. According to Sumardjo (as cited in Solichah, 2019:7), literature is a product of society, situated in its midst and shaped by its members based on both emotional and rational impulses. Consequently, literature can and should be rigorously studied through the analytical lens of the social sciences.

When we break down the terminological roots of the word "sociology", tracing it back to *socius*, meaning a companion or friend, and *logos*, meaning knowledge, we see that this discipline is definitively the comprehensive study of society, the intricate web of human relations, and the environments that mold them. It actively seeks to interpret and uncover the causal explanations behind why people act the way they do and how those actions fit into broader contextual relationships. Flowing from this, the sociology of literature emerges as an incredibly valuable discipline that systematically unpacks and analyzes literary

texts, treating them as vivid reflections and faithful representations of a wide myriad of pressing social issues.

These literary works provide a crucial "lens" through which readers can step into another's shoes and truly empathize with the underlying formulas, hidden struggles, and complex backgrounds that construct a narrative. This specific academic discipline shines a spotlight on the strategies needed to analyze the essential "why" and "for what purpose" behind the creation of any given work, boldly addressing sweeping social dynamics, including the intricate architectures of economy and class structure viewed through critical theories.

In observing class struggles and the dynamics of resistance, Marxist criticism has long been a foundational tool. However, interpreting literature through this lens requires an evolution beyond mere economic determinism. Literature does not mechanically reflect the economy; rather, it operates within a complex ideological field where state power and subject resistance collide (Eagleton, 2002). Historically, classical Marxism heavily relied on the concept of a direct, frontal physical assault; it was the "War of Maneuver" to dismantle capitalist exploitation, a strategy most successfully demonstrated by the 1917 Russian Revolution. Yet, this revolutionary discourse was not a magic formula universally applicable across the globe. Classical Marxism, in its original deterministic form, frequently failed to adequately address the unique, deeply ingrained situational challenges present in Western nations, where proletarian revolutions consistently met with failure and collapse.

This glaring theoretical gap in understanding Western sociopolitical structures is exactly what led the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci to sharply critique strict economic determinism. Gramsci argued passionately that Western societies possessed a far more complex, intertwined, and balanced relationship between the base economy and the cultural superstructure above it. In these modern societies, the State is not merely maintained by coercive military force, but is protected by a powerful system of ideological "fortresses and earthworks" belonging to civil society (Gramsci, 1971:238). To explain this phenomenon of subtle domination, Gramsci introduced the groundbreaking concept of Cultural

Hegemony, it is a mechanism where the ruling class secures the "consent" and "obedience" of the proletariat by infiltrating social institutions so that their values are naturally internalized as "common sense." Consequently, Gramsci proposed that resistance in such heavily fortified societies cannot rely on sudden physical rebellion, but must instead take the form of a "War of Position": a strategic, long-term cultural and ideological struggle aimed at building a counter-hegemony from the ground up.

Precisely, this tension between deeply rooted cultural hegemony and the potential for subaltern resistance is what makes post-World War II English literature such an urgent subject for sociological study. To understand it, one must first grasp the historical environment in which British working-class literature of that era emerged. Britain's participation as a leading Allied power not only drained the nation's material wealth; it also triggered a significant shift within the social hierarchy. Facing postwar economic pressure, the government introduced the "Welfare State" program. This policy was claimed as a solution to a declining and unstable economic condition, although its implementation on the ground remains a subject of debate among historians of social policy. As observed by Garland (1985), the welfare state did not merely function as a humanitarian development, but also as a form of social control that sought to manage the "problem" classes through a combination of assistance and policing.

The profound socio-economic dissonance of this period eventually gave rise to a literary wave known as the Angry Young Men, a movement that voiced dissatisfaction and anxiety toward what was perceived as a gap between the establishment and wider British society (EBSCO, 2024). Within this wave, Alan Sillitoe emerged as a key figure who helped pioneer the aesthetic of Kitchen Sink Realism, an approach that stripped away idealized illusions in order to present the reality of everyday working-class life more directly (Baglama, 2017). Sillitoe's own biography helped shape this literary sensibility; he worked as a laborer in a Nottingham bicycle factory from the age of fourteen, and his formative experience amid the roar of machines and coal dust would later underpin his fiction's close attention to the texture of working-class life.

One concrete institutional manifestation of the state's response to social conditions of this era was the Borstal system; Borstal was a form of youth correctional institution that operated through a system heavily focused on character formation and the instilling of moral values. This system was established to deal with what was then referred to as juvenile delinquency, frequently encountered on the streets of Nottingham amid unstable socio-economic conditions and widespread inequality. This specific historical and institutional landscape, postwar British class inequality on one hand, and the existence of the Borstal education system on the other forms the direct context for Alan Sillitoe's novella, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959).

In approaching Sillitoe's work, it is important to note its literary form. Unlike a full-length novel or a concise short story, a novella maintains a highly focused intensity within a dense structural unity (Abrams & Harpham, 2014). This concise yet expansive medium offers Sillitoe a fitting stage to meticulously explore the internal psychological life of his main character, a young Borstal inmate named Smith, across a sustained narrative arc. The novella presents an intriguing social phenomenon worth examining: the meeting point between institutional authority and the inner life of a young subject situated within it.

Therefore, this research adopts Antonio Gramsci's theoretical framework to analyze Alan Sillitoe's novella. While previous critical perspectives have often categorized working-class narratives merely as tales of economic victimization or juvenile delinquency, applying Gramsci's concepts of Cultural Hegemony and War of Position offers an alternative, more nuanced analytical path for reading the relationship between institutions and the subjects within them. This study seeks to examine how a British social institution, officially positioned as a tool for building social welfare, operates in practice, insofar as this can be traced through its representation in the novella. Furthermore, this research places the relationship between the Borstal institution and the experience felt by the main character, Smith, as both the starting point and the foundation of its analysis, in order to understand how the reciprocal relationship between the two can be read through a Gramscian framework.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

This research is anchored in fundamental inquiries that comprehensively critique and seek alternative perspectives on rigid, deeply ingrained beliefs. Specifically, this study examines the causal impacts of post-World War II class inequality in Nottingham, Britain, from a holistic perspective. Consequently, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

1. How did post-World War II conditions in Britain shape the acute systemic class inequality and discrimination depicted in Alan Sillitoe's novella, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*?
2. How is the Borstal system perceived as an instrument of bourgeois hegemony rather than a legitimate space for the education and rehabilitation of "troubled" working-class youth?
3. How does the "War of Position" manifest as a counter-hegemonic step and demonstrate Sillitoe's consent as an "organic intellectual" showing alignment with the working class, as represented through the character of Smith in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*?

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to identify class discrimination and bourgeois hegemony in Nottingham and Britain following World War II and its various causal impacts. Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the mechanisms of cultural hegemony felt by the author through the characterization of Smith and how this research can demonstrate a counter-hegemony that is far more symbolic than the forms of resistance generally recognized by classical Marxism. Based on the problem statement above, the following are the objectives of this research:

1. To authenticate the socio-historical representation of post-World War II Nottingham's socio-economic conditions, establishing the extent to which the systemic class inequality and marginalization in Britain are authentically mirrored within the literary landscape of Alan Sillitoe's novella.

2. To propose a comparative alternative to classical Marxist determinism which posits that economic control automatically dictates social control. By demonstrating that in developed and developing European nations, the government's diffuse social hegemony takes deep root and serves as a formidable stronghold against such rigid Marxist tenets.
3. To systematically dismantle the true systemic function of the Borstal institution, contrasting its formal facade as a rehabilitative, semi-military character education facility against its actual operation as a repressive state apparatus, as experienced and narrated by the protagonist, Smith.
4. To uncover Alan Sillitoe's ideological background and authorial intent in aligning with the working class, specifically identifying how he utilizes Smith's characterization as a deliberate medium to depict a symbolic resistance (*War of Position*) against state hegemonic control.

1.4 Research Significance

This research provides substantial value by offering a specialized framework to analyze literary social realism through a Gramscian perspective. The significance of this study is categorized into theoretical and practical contributions as follows:

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

1.4.1.1 This study contributes to the field of literary criticism by providing a specialized framework to analyze social realism, specifically utilizing the concept of the "War of Position" as an analytical tool. This transforms the interpretation of the text from a mere story of "juvenile delinquency" into a calculated "Sabotage of Consent".

1.4.1.2 Methodological Innovation: This study offers innovation by intentionally discarding formalist constraints, demonstrating how narrative elements like internal monologues and symbolic refusals function as potent strategic tools for constructing a counter-hegemonic identity.

1.4.1.3 Literature as an Ideological Weapon: It reinforces the theory that literature functions as a "strategic ideological weapon" capable of infiltrating a hegemonized society with liberating values and challenging the moral leadership of the ruling class.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Sociological Verification: A major practical contribution of this study is providing a rigorous "Sociological Verification" of the post-war British Borstal system. It validates the institution depicted in the novella as a real-world bourgeois hegemonic apparatus, a disciplinary machine designed to instill ruling-class values into working-class youth.

1.4.2.2 Academic Resource for Sociology of Literature: This research serves as a practical reference for students and scholars in English Literature and Social Sciences, particularly those interested in the "Angry Young Men" movement and "Kitchen Sink Realism".

1.4.2.3 Recognition of Subaltern Agency: Practically, this study highlights how marginalized subjects can reclaim their agency within repressive structures. It positions Alan Sillitoe as a subject whose work articulates the silent aspirations of his class, providing an authentic voice that has historically been caricatured in the English literary tradition

1.5 Previous Studies

Good research is born from identifying the strengths and weaknesses of prior studies in order to establish a solid academic foundation. This review encompasses several studies that have previously examined hegemony, the subaltern, discrimination, and class struggle within literary works. Given that research, by its very nature, is continually renewed in step with the ongoing rhythm of civilization, no study is ever free of an objective research gap that a new piece of work seeks to fill.

1.5.1 Safitri, Fatimah, and Budiawan (2024) – "Hegemony in Okky Madasari's Novel Maryam"

1.5.1.1 Focus & Strengths:

This study employs Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony as an instrument to identify how state apparatuses dominate marginalized groups through systematic physical confrontation and structural violence. It accurately maps the anatomy of oppression and demonstrates that subaltern figures are often forced into consensus under overwhelming structural pressure.

1.5.1.2 Research Gap:

The primary focus of the study tends to remain fixed on external coercion and portraying the subaltern's status as a passive victim of structural determinism. Marginalized subjects are frequently placed in a position where their voice is negated, and their agency seems to dissolve under the weight of physical and symbolic violence.

1.5.1.3 This Study's Contribution:

The present research seeks to move beyond the limits of that "victim status" paradigm by consciously shifting its analytical lens toward the subject's inner, interior life. It focuses on how a subaltern subject actively and independently constructs a strategy of War of Position within his own mental space, demonstrating an intellectual agency capable of transforming everyday suffering into "Good Sense". This allows the subject to carry out a Sabotage of Consent that preserves the sovereignty of the subaltern subject even within a repressive environment.

1.5.2 Mildawati, Juanda, and Jährir (2025) – "Forms of Social Class Discrimination in the Short Story Collection Saksi Mata"

1.5.2.1 Focus & Strengths:

Applying a classical Marxist framework, this study sharply highlights how the upper class carries out strategies of exploitation and alienation against the lower class to sustain entrenched, systemic inequality. The ruling class is depicted as holding absolute control over material resources, trapping the proletariat in a difficult subordinate position.

1.5.2.2 Research Gap:

This study reveals a theoretical limitation of classical Marxism, which tends to regard the lower class purely as passive victims whose fate is entirely determined by economic determinism. As a result, individual agency within this traditional narrative frequently appears to dissolve before a material structure.

1.5.2.3 This Study's Contribution:

The present research consciously distinguishes itself from this deterministic viewpoint by introducing Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. The analytical focus is no longer fixed on the physical suffering caused by poverty, but on how the protagonist possesses the intellectual agency to construct a powerful counter-hegemonic narrative within his own inner life. This shows that working-class resistance manifests in a symbolic form, where the subaltern deploys "critical consciousness" to sabotage the moral legitimacy of bourgeois institutions from within.

1.5.3 Sahertian et al. (2024) – "Chudori's Thought of Resistance Against the Grip of Power in Laut Bercerita"

1.5.3.1 Focus & Strengths:

This study offers a robust framework concerning how literature operates as an ideological weapon deployed to combat the State Ideological Apparatus. It sharply dissects the mechanisms of hegemony by positioning the author as a subject possessing a vocal sovereignty capable of laying bare the rulers' narratives.

1.5.3.2 Research Gap:

The study confines the application and explanatory power of the organic intellectual concept entirely to the boundaries of authorial biography and the historical figure of the author.

1.5.3.3 This Study's Contribution:

Building on this foundation, the present research consciously expands the application of the organic intellectual concept by transposing that attribute directly onto a fictional protagonist. It illustrates how a formally uneducated working-class youth possesses the intellectual capacity to cultivate a sharp "Good

Sense" from his own practical experience. This demonstrates that counter-hegemonic agency does not live solely within the mind of the author, but is boldly manifested symbolically through a subaltern character.

1.5.4 del Valle Alcalá (2015) – "Sketches of Autonomy: Capitalist Subsumption and Working-Class Resistance in Alan Sillitoe's Early Fiction"

1.5.4.1 Focus & Strengths:

Examining the exact same novella (*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*), this study utilizes the lens of Italian workerist and autonomist Marxism to read the protagonist's refusal to win as an act of working-class "self-valorization". It provides a rigorous, historically grounded account of resistance as an assertion of autonomous, uncompromising class difference.

1.5.4.2 Research Gap:

Operating within an autonomist Marxist framework, this study tends to read the resistance primarily as an act of pure negation and anti-institutional rejection. It offers a comparatively limited account of the ideological architecture and mechanism by which that resistance is actually constructed and sustained over time.

1.5.4.3 This Study's Contribution:

This research strategically emerges to fill the academic gap left by previous studies, which tended to portray the working class or subaltern groups solely through the lens of economic determinism or as passive victims of oppressive power structures. The primary focus of this study is to provide an alternative lens emphasizing that resistance does not necessarily have to manifest in the form of anarchic physical confrontation, mass riots, or other destructive actions. On the contrary, this study seeks to prove that resistance can exist in a vast variety of ways and often appears in a form that is far more essential and carries profound symbolic meaning.

To strengthen this narrative, the present research introduces a more holistic Gramscian framework to examine how an act of "non-action" or symbolic refusal constitutes a mature political proclamation. While prior studies primarily inquired into *what* the subject refuses, this research focuses on *how* that refusal is

ideologically constructed, sustained, and directed through critical consciousness or "Good Sense". This understanding is vital because when resistance is not manifested through violence, it does not mean that the quality or degree of the resistance is diminished compared to physical rebellions that are merely reactive and temporary in nature

1.5.5 Summary of the Research Gap

Taken together, these four studies reveal a composite research gap that the present study is designed to address directly. Safitri et al. (2024) and Mildawati et al. (2025) detail class domination but position the subaltern as passive; this research addresses that by foregrounding active, self-generated agency. Sahertian et al. (2024) confines the organic intellectual to the author; this research directly extends that concept to a fictional protagonist. Finally, del Valle Alcalá (2015) operates within a framework of pure negation and refusal; this research reconceives the War of Position as a constructive ideological strategy rather than an act of pure negation. In this way, the formulation of each research question in this study responds directly to a gap identified in the existing body of scholarship.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

In order to align theoretical understanding and avoid conceptual ambiguity in following the trajectory of this research, the following are the operational definitions of the key terms as applied within the boundaries of this study.

1.6.1 Cultural Hegemony

This concept refers to the mechanism by which the ruling class, or bourgeois group, sustains its dominance of power, no longer relying on physical violence or military coercion alone, but through the creation of a "consensus," or intellectual and moral consent, from the oppressed class (Gramsci, 1971). In practice, the values and ideology of the ruling class are subtly infiltrated into the institutions of civil society, schools, media, and literature among them, so that they are internalized by the working class as an unquestionable "given," or natural order (Hall, 1982). This allows those in authority to tame the militancy of

marginalized groups through a form of social control that appears neutral but is, in fact, saturated with the interests of the ruling class.

1.6.2 War of Position

In contrast to a frontal assault or direct physical rebellion (War of Maneuver), the War of Position is a long-term strategy of struggle that operates on the terrain of culture and ideology in order to build a counter-hegemonic foundation from below (Gramsci, 1971). In this research, the cross-country running undertaken by Smith is analyzed as an arena of tactical struggle in which the subaltern carries out the deconstruction of the ruling class's moral hegemony.

1.6.3 Organic Intellectual

This term identifies a group of scholars who do not stand in a neutral space or an ivory tower, but who are born directly from the womb of the lived experience and suffering of the oppressed proletarian class (Gramsci, 1971). The principal function of the organic intellectual is to provide critical consciousness, to forge a homogeneity of identity, and to give vocal articulation to the political interests of their class in order to resist the dominant narrative (Hitchcock, 1989).

1.6.4 The Borstal System

Historically, Borstal was a youth correctional institution in England, designed as a "machine of discipline" to transform working-class youth labelled 'antisocial' into law-abiding citizens through a rigorous regime of physical and mental training (Bailey, 1987). This institution operated as an apparatus of state hegemony, employing methods of scientific governance to measure and predict inmate behaviour in the interest of capital-market stability (Mannheim & Wilkins, 1955). Borstal therefore functioned as a sophisticated instrument of social control, seeking to manage "problematic" classes through a combination of provision and policing (Garland, 1985).

1.6.5 Subaltern

This refers to a social group or lower class occupying a marginalized position, one in which their sociopolitical rights are disregarded and their voice is systematically negated by the dominant power structure (Gramsci, 1971). Subaltern groups are frequently portrayed as passive victims of structural

determinism and of the physical violence carried out by state apparatuses (Safitri et al., 2024). This research, however, places its emphasis on the subaltern's potential agency in reclaiming the sovereignty of their identity through acts of resistance that are symbolic and autonomous (Solichah, 2019).

1.6.6 Good Sense (Critical Consciousness)

This is the core of critical thought (*buon senso*) that is born from the practical experience and everyday suffering of the working class as they begin to recognize systemic exploitation (Gramsci, 1971). This critical reasoning acts as the antithesis of Common Sense, the ruling class's reason, and functions as the initial intellectual capital for the formation of a broader counter-hegemonic resistance (Baglama, 2017). Through Good Sense, the subaltern individual becomes capable of undergoing a molecular transformation, rejecting the identity imposed by the state and building the sovereignty of their own inner self (Hentu, 2020).

