THE REFLECTION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN THE MAJESTIC

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the reflection of American political ideology in the 1950s through a movie: The Majestic. Based on Georg Lukacs’s concept of reflection model, The Majestic has become the media that reflects American social conflicts in the 1950s, especially political ideology of communism. In the analysis, it is concluded that: first, the inter-relationship of characters (Pete Appleton, Elvin Clyde, Harry Trimble, and Adele Stanton) and situations in the film has become the vehicles to present typicality of American social groups. Second, the narrative time in the film has become the image of exact time when America faced its big issue in the 1950s. Third, the concept of three-dimensionality in the film has showed that those social groups have become the vehicles in bringing out the real of American political ideology about communism.

Keywords: American political ideology, movie, the majestic

ABSTRAK


Kata Kunci: ideologi politik Amerika, film, the Majestic
INTRODUCTION

Social conflicts that happen among society sometimes are related to some ideologies in the world, for instance the ideology of Communism. It has been considered as dangerous ideology for years because of its influences since the 20th century when it became a ghost that haunted many people around the world, such as in Eastern Europe, East and South-East Asia, and some other countries in South America. Its power also had affected and controlled United States. This country had experienced the wave of communism era in the 1940s to 1950s. House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the McCarthyism were the scandal of that era. HUAC was established to identify and judge all American communists. Congress became a powerful committee during McCarthyism in the 1950s because a lot of names had been listed as foreign spies through their action.

Actually, communism was made to create welfare society, but many people misinterpreted that doctrine. Thus, communism becomes frightening issue, which can give different perspective among society. This problem can be seen in the film, whose social conflicts are related to the American situation in facing communism era. It is obvious that Michael Sloane, a screenwriter, tried to reflect the image of the American political ideology through the story.

DISCUSSION

Reflection Model of Georg Lukacs

There are five models of Marxist approaches which are used as tools to link literature to social reality. One of the most influential models is reflection model by Georg Lukacs. It sees literature as the reflection of a reality. However, it is not as simple as a mirror that reflects the objects placed in front of it. Lukacs (Forgacs, 1993:171) identifies literature as knowledge of reality, but it is not a matter of making one-to-one correspondences between things in the world outside and ideas in the head.

The reality can be reflected in literature through the correct formed work. For Lukacs form is not itself something that connect to technical or linguistic, but a form or shape manifested through technical features, such as the settings that describe the background of a story or conflict (i.e. the time, place, or situation) and also the characters that develop the story through their characterization.

“To be reflected in literature, reality has to pass through the creative, form-giving work of the writer. The result, in the case of a correctly formed work, will be that the form of the literary work reflects the form of the real world…Form
for Lukacs is not itself something technical or linguistic...It is rather, the aesthetic shape given to a content, a shape manifested through technical features such as narrative time and the interrelationship of characters and situations in a work (Forgacs, 1993:171).”

In order to embody reality in literature, there is also a central component, which is the concept of type or typicality. It is the literary work’s character or situation, which brings the movement of history and a number of individual traits into a distinctive particularity. And, it gives the work “three-dimensionality” which has been the essence of realism (Forgacs, 1993:173). The example can be seen in Walter Scott’s novel *Waverley*, which was used to show how the novel reflected the social realism in England in the 19th century. In that novel, Waverley is located within the form (between his Tory uncle on the land, his Whig father in town, and the life of adventure of the Jacobite rebels he joins) in such a way that he draws together and reveals the conflicts between three historically significant social groups. Waverley is thus not a historically significant type in himself but a vehicle for presenting typicality, the fusion between the individual and the general in history (Forgacs, 1993:174).

Lukacs’s argument about that essence is a significant form in the triangular configuration of three historically essential social groups or classes, as the example landed aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and peasantry (Forgacs, 1993:172). It is obvious that Lukacs emphasizes on those historical social groups in reflecting reality through literary work. Thus, the literary work has become a self-contained whole and an accurate reflection of the world because of the specific objective laws’ control.

“His idea that literary work is simultaneously both a ‘self-contained whole’ controlled by ‘specific objective laws’ of its genre...the principal correspondence established by Lukacs’s reflection model is that between the form of the literary work itself and the structure of reality, it appears to be precisely those ‘objective laws’ of the work’s form which enable it to make an accurate reflection of the world (Forgacs, 1993:174-175).”

In summary, Lukacs’s theory is a theory of realist literature which in such a way of making a basic value judgment, such as realistic or non-realistic. And, the reality can be reflected in a work not as a simple mirror image but as an autonomous structure, something necessarily self-contained, with its distinctive resources of form: characterization, action and scene, narration and description, compositional structure and narrative time (Forgacs, 1993:177).

**Reflection Model Analysis**

This part deals with the analysis of Georg Lukacs’s theory of reflection model with the text: the plot, characters, and settings. As in chapter II, this theory is one of the most influential models in Marxist Criticism, which links the literature to social reality. Through this analysis, it can be seen how *Majestic* reflects social reality by using the
correct formed work: the interrelationship of characters and situations, also the narrative
time. Moreover, the important element of his theory is the concept of “three-
dimensionality”.

1. The Inter-relationship of Characters and Situations

Based on Lukacs’s theory, characters are one of the important formed works, especially the relationship of characters and conflicts or situations, because they can reveal the truth. Through the plot of The Majestic, Pete Appleton is considered as a major character, in which his characterization had been made to deal with all the conflicts, including his conflict with government, which became the main conflict along the story.

Pete Appleton had been accused as a communist by the American congress due to his past activity while studying in the college. It can be seen through the conflict when his agent (Leo) and studio consultant told him what was going at that time. From here, we can understand how Pete’s feeling when he knew he had lost his career. As a major character, he also had been treated unfairly.

THE COUNSEL
They say you attended those meetings while in collage.

PETE
Who’s they?

LEO
Congress, FBI, Red Channels. It doesn’t matter. They know who they are, that’s enough. Answer the question.

PETE
Meetings, meetings. How the hell should I know? It was a long time ago. I went to collage on the G.I.Bill.

THE COUNSEL
The Bread Instead of Bullets Club.

PETE
They were communist? What do I know? I couldn’t figure out what they were saying...Leo, put your agent hat on. There must be an angle you can work.

LEO
I’m out of angels...the studio suspended negotiations this morning (Sloane, 2001).

In the climax, his character had been showed as a victim, who was forced to admit as a communist. But, in the middle of the hearing, he became a brave character, who could defend himself by telling his opinion about American politics through first amendment.
…there is another amendment I’d like to invoke. I wonder if anyone here is familiar with it.

He opens the book and reads, tentatively at first.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

DOYLE
Do not presume to lecture this committee!

PETE
The first amendment, it’s what we’re about, if we’d live up to it...It’s part of the contract every citizen has this country. Even though the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are just pieces of paper with signatures on them, they’re the only contracts we have that are definitely not subject to renegotiation. Not by you Mr. Chairman, not by you Mr. Clyde, not by anyone, ever. Too many people have paid for this contract in blood. People like Luke Trimble and all the sons of Lawson, California (shows Luke’s medal). When you get right down to it, fellas, that’s Picture 24: Reading the first really all I have to say to you (Sloane, 2001).

Pete’s characterization can be seen from what he had done in dealing his conflict with the government. As an American citizen, he had right to refuse what he thought that he was innocent. Actually, that was what had happened in reality. Historically, many entertainment people in Hollywood had lost their career due to the accusation. And, what Pete Appleton did in the movie reflects the reality. As same as him, those people had been summoned to appear in the chamber for hearing and most of them refused to admit themselves as a part of communism.

The relationship also happens in minor characters, especially Elvin Clyde. He becomes the antagonist character against Pete Appleton. As a member of HUAC (the congress), he desired to arrest all communists in America. In the complication, we can see that he became paranoid of communism and desired to summon Pete.
In the climax, Mr. Doyle and he had judged Pete Appleton as a real suspect in spite of his innocence. His characterization in dealing the conflict also reflects what had happened in reality. As a member of congress, he also had a list of communists in America. Based on the history, what Elvin Clyde had done in the chamber is same what the real American congress did several years ago. They also had a list of names that would be use to accuse many entertainment people. From the evidence that they got, they tried to get something from their suspects. In the hearing, they had blacklisted many people as American communists.

Besides, the other minor characters (Harry Trimble and Adele Stanton) had been showed as characters that had relationship with the major character. Their characterization along the story can be seen through what they did for Pete Appleton. As a part of society, they did not really know what was happening in American politics. However, they only knew their duty as American citizen served the country. In the complication, for the first time they did not know Pete’s main conflict. When Pete still be Luke Trimble, both of them wished it could be happened forever.

HARRY

Anyhow, the situation changed when Adele Stanton got shocked of Pete’s statement. In contrast, she also became a character who encouraged Pete when she knew he was innocent.

ADELE
So, what will you tell the Committee?
PETE
…”Sorry, I won’t do it again, blah, blah.”

ADELE
You’re not serious…aside from the fact that this is a free country, and you can ever be a communist if you wanna be, leaving that aside, if someone accuses falsely. You have a duty as well as a right to stand up and suggest they drop dead…And there’s burden of proof, innocence before guilt.
Harry and Adele’s thoughts became the reflection of what American society thought during 1940s to 1950s. As ordinary people, they only wanted to live peacefully. Similarly, many Americans wanted to have peaceful country. Therefore, in reality many people supported what HUAC had done even though it could ruin many people’s life.

2. The Narrative time

Based on Lukacs’s narrative time, the setting of this movie is in 1950s, where the World War II had ended and entered the Cold War. Historically, the war had made United States as an anticommunist country with paranoid citizens. The depression of World War II had not ended yet, but the issue of communism had worried Americans. During the 1940s to 1950s, the congress had made some lists about communist spies from the college to government.

In the exposition, we can see the beginning of the conflict is when Pete and Sandy were watching cinema in Grauman’s Chinese Theater. This place has a big role in describing what was happening in America at that time. That theater was showing a documentary movie of Hollywood Ten, who had been founded guilty as American communists. It proves that how government felt paranoid of communism because it could influence society. It also shows not only government’s members but also film industry’s people who were accused as communists. It means, what had been showed in that theater was the image of reality. In that moment, the congress still wanted to summon some people, especially film industry’s people, who had been considered as a group of communists. Therefore, Pete Appleton was accused and lost his career.

Over a newsreel shot of a packed Congressional Committee Hearing Room, a title blares “HOLLYWOOD REDS GO TO JAIL!”

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER
Four years ago, in one of filmland's darkest hours, ten men, the so-called "Hollywood Ten," were called to testify before the House Committee of

On the contrary, in the 1950s many Americans still in the depression of World War II. Many people still hung the gold stars in their windows or doors. It showed how war had wounded many people’s heart. Unfortunately, government did not recognize it because they were busy in handling communism. It also happened in Lawson when the sadness memory of World War II still haunted that town. During that time, some people still hung the medal or gold stars at their home.

CLOSE - THE WINDOW
There's a small picture frame in the window. Harry reaches down, gingerly picks it up and turns it around.

ON THE FRAME
It's a single, faded gold star. One war casualty (Sloane, 2001).

They also just kept the war memorial in Town Hall Basement though Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) gave it. It seemed by watching the memorial would make them sad again.

STAN
All told, this town gave sixty two of its young men to the war…seventeen of them at Normandy alone. Even got a letter from Roosevelt. They commissioned this town a war memorial. Been in the basement of the Town Hall for years now. Folks never had the heart to put it up…(Sloane, 2001).

The narrative time is in the climax when Pete was summoned to appear in chamber. The HUAC wanted to hear his case. This was also happening in reality, many accused people had been forced to appear in the Congress for their hearing. And, they also had been intimidated to admit as communists. Some people admitted themselves as American communists, but others still insisted to tell the truth. As same as others, Pete Appleton could defend himself.

CLYDE
(holds up a piece of paper)
…It’s the attendance roster for the “Bread Instead of Bullets Club” an university California of Los Angeles and it was dated October 3rd, 1945. Referring to line thirty seven, does your name and signature appear
there? …Mr. Appleton, tell us about the
“Bread Instead of Bullets Club”.

PETE

If the committee will note line thirty six of the
document.

CLYDE

Lucille Angstrom?

PETE

I was courting Miss Angstrom at that time. I
attended the Meeting only to be with her.

CLYDE

Are you asking us to believe you attended a
meeting of a communist organization because
of a girl? …I’m having trouble reconciling
your testimony here, Mr. Appleton. Now we
told you prepared to purge yourself of
communist Ties. Yet, when questioned, you
claim not to have gone as a member.

PETE

I didn’t (Sloane, 2001).

Below is a table that shows the narrative time reflects the reality of American
history in the 1950s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Time</th>
<th>American History</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>1950s</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. After World War II, Lawson people still hung the medals or gold stars.</td>
<td>1. Depression of World War II: People hung gold stars in homes throughout America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pete Appleton (a screenwriter) was accused as an American communist.</td>
<td>2. McCarthyism: Many Americans, including film industry, were accused as communists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The committee (HUAC) judged Pete as a communist.</td>
<td>3. HUAC: The committee that investigated some un-American and subversive activities.</td>
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3. The Three-Dimensionality

The concept of type or typicality is the important component in Lukacs’s theory.
It is implied within the three-dimensionality, which can bring the movement of history
and a number individual trait into a distinctive particularity. The three-dimensionality
means three characters that historically as significant social groups, which are involved in
the same conflicts. Based on American history, the groups that antagonized each other are
America and Russia. Both superpowers wanted to change the world according to their
will. The impact of their war was communism became one of the great problems in the
world, including America. It changed to controversial issue in that country. Some people
regarded it as good solution to change the world, however, others thought it in different way. There are two biggest parties in American government, the conservative Republic and liberal Democrat. Since several years ago, both parties were in the opposite position. When the New Deal had been announced by FDR, Democrat Party divided against itself. The southern wing disagreed and doubted FDR’s program and had aligned with Republicans on several issues.

Through the analysis of interrelationship between characters-situations and the narrative time, there are three social groups that have been drawn together to reveal the real conflict. They are the congress (HUAC), film industry (Pete Appleton), and Lawson people. Elvin Clyde and Mr. Doyle are the representation of the state (HUAC), which had power or authority in accusing and summoning people. Together with other members, they did some hearings for the suspects. All of them believed that many film industry people had become communists through their works. It happened because they were afraid their works could give society bad influence.

As a part of film industry, Pete Appleton has a function of bringing into contact with others. In the plot, his idea of the crisis had been expressed clearly. As an American citizen, Pete had another answer of his conflict. In the climax, he explained his thought of what was happening with America, and also his right of freedom, which had been stated in first amendment. What he had done in solving the conflicts had become the reflection of what others did in reality. Many people had tried to defend themselves when the accusation entered and ruined their life. The congress could not condemn him when Pete told the truth. They felt embarrassed of his explanation.

Then, another social group is Lawson people, as the representation of American society. As ordinary people, they did not really know about politics or what precisely was happening in their country. However, they only knew how to serve their beloved country. Many young Lawson people died during the World War II had proved it. Based on the story, they only want to live happily and peacefully. The depression of war had united their heart emotionally. It is obvious that those social groups have been involved in the same conflicts. Even though Lawson people did not involved directly with Pete’s problem, their thought of making peaceful country had made Pete was in dilemma. It happened because communism had become big and frightening issue that could destroy the state.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, The Majestic as media that reflects the condition of American political ideology in the 1950s through its social conflicts. And, there are some explanations of the conclusion. Firstly, the interrelationship of characters and situations has been showed clearly by the story characters (Pete Appleton, Elvin Clyde, Harry...
Trimble, and Adele Stanton), which becomes a reflection of American social groups. Through their actions and attitudes in dealing the conflicts, we can find the link between what had happened in the movie and what was happening in America (1950s). Those characters are the typicality of American social groups, which brings the movement of history through their traits. As the major character, Pete Appleton is a vehicle to present typicality of Hollywood entertainers who were accused as communists during the 1940s to 1950s. Then, Elvin Clyde is a vehicle to present typicality of HUAC’s member who listed some communist names and tried to judge them. The last, Harry Trimble and Adele Stanton (Lawson people) are a vehicle to present typicality of ordinary society who were in the depression of World War II and wished to live peacefully.

Secondly, the narrative time in that movie has become the image of exact time when America faced its big issue in the 1950s. By that time, many Americans felt paranoid of communism. Thus, the government named many people and accused them as American communists who had relationship with Soviet Union. Hollywood was one of their targets in handling that case. As a place of entertainers, it was considered as a location of communist sympathizers. In spite of a frightening issue, some citizens still in the depression of World War II and did not really care of it. That fact can be seen in the movie, where Pete Appleton was accused as one of sympathizers and became a blacklist screenwriter. Then, what Lawson people did in their town and how they treated Pete had showed how they still lived in war’s memory. They did not really know and care of what was happening in America until FBI and other congress’s members came to arrest Pete. The time or setting of the movie has been described clearly in order to link its story to reality.

Thirdly, the concept of three-dimensionality in Lukacs’s theory is implied in that story. Through the analysis, there are three social groups that have been involved together, whether directly or indirectly. All groups have become the vehicles in bringing out the real of American political ideology about communism. Both Pete Appleton and Lawson people are American citizens, who became the image of Democrat Party. As a part of film industry, Pete Appleton had become a victim due to state’s paranoid of communism. In the conflict, we can see how Pete disagreed government’s solution in facing that problem. He thought even though he joined Communist Party (CP) in his college, it could not prove he was one of its supporters. Then, in the climax he had told his mind about American government’s political ideology, which he considered not open-minded. His action was showed obviously against the state, thus he became the reflection of Democrats. On the contrary, Lawson people as a part of Democrats had become the southern wing of that party due to their internal conflict that happened indirectly after the war. Roosevelt (FDR) had given them memorial to honor Lawson soldier. However, it was put in the Town Hall Basement and nobody wanted to look at it anymore. It seemed they had doubted and blamed indirectly what Roosevelt (FDR) had done in their town and people. Moreover, they also blamed Pete and felt betrayed when they discovered his real conflict and identity though Pete had showed his goodness. What they had done, thought, and felt reflect southern wing of Democrat Party. As same as southern wing,
they remained ambivalent about what Roosevelt (FDR) had done. Besides, Elvin Clyde is the reflection of the state, especially Conservative Republican who assumes many film industry people support communism. Based on the history, in the 1940s to 1950s the state worried of communism and testified many Americans in the chamber. As HUAC’s member, Elvin Clyde had a power or authority to testify many people. He also had right to list some names and accuse them as American communists. In the climax, we can see that he still forced Pete to admit himself as a communist although Pete was innocent. Elvin Clyde also did not really care of first amendment as the legal American Constitution, which restricted the power of congress. Elvin’s action and thought have reflected American Republican Party because during that time, the Republicans supported HUAC and tried to renegotiate the Constitution.

_The Majestic_ has become a media in reflecting the condition of American political ideology in the 1950s. During that year, three social groups are involved in issue of communism. One group, Liberal Democrat believes that what McCarthy (Republican) did in handling that issue is only to reach publicity and defeat Democrat in president election and what HUAC did is unfair for many Americans. Second group, the southern wing of Democrat Party still doubted and disagreed what their party did and had been aligned with Republicans on several issues. Meanwhile, Conservative Republican believes that many Democrats were involved in passing state documents to Soviet Union. Those different political ideologies have influenced society. Most of them felt paranoid and support HUAC in arresting the suspects although they did not know the truth.

It seems that Michael Sloane and the others had good reasons in making this film because what they created throughout the story had become the reflection of reality. Perhaps, they wanted to tell the audience how American government controlled their society in handling communism and how their different political ideologies can destroy the state.

REFERENCES


