

**THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITION IN AMERICA IN EARLY
1900s AS REFLECTED IN O.HENRY'S FOUR SHORT STORIES**

A THESIS

*Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
of the Degree of Sarjana Sastra*



BY:

SAGITA AYUNDA

04 985 027

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT-FACULTY OF LETTERS

ANDALAS UNIVERSITY

PADANG

2009



ABSTRAK

Skripsi ini membahas tentang krisis ekonomi yang terjadi di Amerika pada awal tahun 1900an yang tercermin dalam beberapa cerita pendek karya O.Henry dan penulis juga memaparkan tentang pengaruh dari sistem kapitalisme yang terdapat dalam karya sastra tersebut.

Penelitian ini menggunakan teori dari ahli bernama George Lukacs yang terkenal dengan teori refleksi. Di dalam teorinya, Lukacs mengatakan bahwa literatur secara sadar atau tidak merupakan sebuah refleksi dari kehidupan sosial.

Dari hasil penelitian ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa karya sastra dari O.Henry merupakan refleksi dari kehidupan Amerika pada awal tahun 1900 dan di dalamnya terdapat proses dan pengaruh dari sistem kapitalisme. Dalam karya O.Henry ini juga terlihat jelas bahwa terdapatnya dinding pembatas antara kelas atas dan kelas bawah. Kesimpulan terakhir adalah empat dari karya O.Henry adalah refleksi dari kehidupan sosial ekonomi Amerika pada awal tahun 1900.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study.

When we talk about Marxist, what comes to our mind is socialism. It is true that development of Marxist philosophy cannot be separated from socialism.¹ Marxist ideology stands in the opposite of the capitalism that concerns with individual property. According to Charles E. Bressler in his book *Literary Criticism and Introduction and Practice*, marxism is a school of thought founded by Karl Marx, a German philosopher known such as *Das Kapital (Capital)* (1867) and two works he wrote with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).²

In the capitalism society, Marx claims that people's action and belief will be determined by their economical conditions. If there are a few people who are rich (bourgeois) and the others are the working class, the individualism will be dominated. People will not think about the others, in this case low social class or

¹ Quoted from discussion with Septria Yanto, secretary of Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI) Cabang Padang at August 3rd, 2008. He said, "marxisme tidak bisa dilepaskan dari sosialisme, karena marxisme itu sendiri adalah sebuah paham yang menginginkan terciptanya masyarakat tanpa kelas, dan untuk mengimplementasikan (mewujudkan) masyarakat yang tanpa kelas itu hanya dapat terwujud dengan adanya sistem sosialis. Jadi disini jelas bahwa, marxisme hanyalah sebagai sebuah pisau analisis. Jika dianalogikan maksud pisau analisis disini misalnya, kita punya se-ekor ayam, dan untuk melihat apa-apa saja yang terdapat didalam se-ekor ayam itu maka dibutuhkan sebuah alat untuk membukanya tubuh ayam tersebut (pisau). Setelah tubuh ayam itu dibuka, maka barulah kita tahu ayam itu isi tubuhnya seperti ini, hatinya ada ditengah, empedunya di dekat hati dan seterusnya. Begitu juga jika kita kembalikan kepada maksud dari marxisme sebagai pisau analisis tadi, dengan marxisme kita bisa melihat realitas kehidupan sosial, budaya, politik dan ekonomi masyarakat."

² Charles E. Bressler, 1999, *Literary Criticism an Introduction to Theory and Practice*, New Jersey: Prentice Page. Page. 212-213.

working class will be the items because the bourgeois are concerned with their property and benefit. In such of system, the rich people become richer while the poor people become poorer and more and more oppressed.³

In this research, the writer applies the reflection theory by George Lukacs. George Lukacs is one of the expert who concerns his thought in Marxist criticism. Lukacs's (The Reflection) which said, literature is reflection, conscious and unconscious, of the social reality of surrounding it—not just a reflection of a flood of realistic detail but of the essence of a society.⁴ Lukacs uses of the term reflection is characteristic of his work as a whole. In every social organization, the prevailing mode of production gives rise to inner contradictions which are expressed in class struggle.⁵

Lukacs says that literary works can be a tool to criticize the capitalist system. The literary form that Lukacs had in mind is realism; a type of literary aesthetic which flourished during the 19th century. It is determined by the description of a real life and takes the point about the society and everyday life. Lukacs believes that realism, by reflecting objective realities, also reflects the totality of socio-economic condition under capitalism. Totality here means all aspects of society especially its contradiction, conflict between different classes, the movement of history, and the negative effects of capitalism. In short, literature of realism gives us the total picture of real condition of society under capitalism.⁶

³ *Ibid.* Page: 212-213

⁴ Wilfred L.Guerin, 1999, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press. Page. 328-329.

⁵ Raman Selden and Peter Woddowson, 1993, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky. Page. 76-77.

⁶ <http://www.tolerance.org/images/teach/activities/2004>, accessed at September 15, 2008.

There are some genres of literary work such as poem, drama, novel and short story. Actually the writer tries to analyze short stories written by O. Henry which are entitled The Gift of the Magi, Two Thanksgiving Day Gentleman, The Caliph, Cupid and The Clock and The Cop and the Anthem. The writer use Lucacs theory to analyze short stories because the writer wants to prove that the real condition in America in the early 1900s are reflected in O.Henry's four short stories and the writer also wants to show the effects of capitalist system that reflected in that four short stories. It can be seen in these short stories that the effects of capitalist system are obviously seen such as, the domination of the upper class, class struggle and materialism. Money is considered as everything for upper class to control the lower class society.

1.2 The Statement of the Problem.

Based on Lukacs's theory, literature is the reflection (conscious or unconscious) of the real society. Some of O.Henry's short stories are reflecting the society when the author writes his works. From the literary work, the writer finds that the situation in these short stories are the same as the real condition of America in early 1900s. From the literary works, the writer is also able to see that there is a gap between the upper class and the lower class people as the result of capitalist system. Only the upper class people can arrange what they want from the lower class and they use their money and their power to rule the lower class people. This case shows that there is a gap between the upper class and the lower class people. In this research, the writer wants to prove that some of O.Henry's works reflects the social economic condition in the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

By applying Lukacs theory "the reflection theory", the writer finds that O.Henry's short stories are the reflection of the real life of America in early 1900s. In early 1900s, America having crisis and many people who move to the city become jobless and homeless because they do not have skill to get a job. The people who move to the city think that city is a holy land and they also think that they will get better life if they live in the city. In fact, they starve to death because they can not fulfill their needs and some of them live in slum area. These real conditions of America reflected in O.Henry's short stories. O.Henry describes these conditions according to the situation and the people who can not have the place to stay and they can not fulfill their needs because they are unskilled. O.Henry also describes how poor people struggle in their life and how rich people oppress them.

The writer also infers that she finds the impacts of capitalist system in these four short stories, that impacts are social classes, domination of the upper class toward the lower class people and materialism. Materialism here means people think that money is everything. The money in these three short stories becomes a great role to control their life. The lower class people only accept what the upper classes do in their life and they can not against the upper class people because they do not have money become a power.

The writer also concludes that O.Henry always puts two different classes as the impacts of capitalist system, they are the upper class and the lower class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and The Critical Tradition*. London: Oxford University Press. 1976.

"America In Early Twentieth Century" 17 January 2009.
<<http://www.bookrags.com/america/earlytwentiethcentury/>>

Barnet, Sylvan, and William E. Cain. *A Short Guide To Writing About Literature*. United States: Ninth edition. 2003.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism an Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1999.

"Economy of the United States" 15 September 2008. <
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_United_States/>

Guerin, Wilfred L. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999.

Henry, O. *The Gift of the Magi and Other Stories*. Washington D.C.: United States Information Agency. 1988.

Iramanto, Ira. *Frederick Engels tentang Das Kapital Marx*. Jakarta: Hasta Mitra. 2002.

Magnis Suseno, Franz. *Pemikiran Karl Marx; dari Sosialisme Utopis ke Perselisihan Revisionisme*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama. 2003.