REDEFINING ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES
IN THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

Editors:
Mugijatna
Yuyun Kusdianto

English Department
Fac. of Letters & Fine Arts
Sebokas Matay University
REDEFINING ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES IN THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

Sebelas Maret University

November 9 - 10, 2010
Kusuma Sahid Prince Hotel
20 Sugiyopranoto St, Surakarta
Central Java, Indonesia
PREFACE

This manual is to provide the participants of this seminar on English literary studies in the Third World Countries: Redefining English Literary Studies in the Third World Countries, with a guide to follow the activities during the seminar.

This seminar is held for two days, November 9-10, 2010. The first day, Tuesday, will be started with registration and morning coffee from 8.00 am up to 9.00 am. In the registration the participants will receive seminar kits containing this manual, proceeding, block-note and ball-point, and a name tag. The registration and morning coffee is followed with opening from 9.00 am up to 9.30.

After opening, there will be Plenary Session 1 followed with Parallel Sessions in three different rooms. The first day will be ended with dinner from 19.00 pm up to 21.00. Dinner will be accompanied with a theatrical presentation by the students of English Department, Sebelas Maret University.

The second day will be started with Plenary Session 2 from 8.00 am up to 9.30 am. After coffee break for half an hour, there will be Parallel Session 3 and Parallel Session 4 which ends at 13.00 pm for lunch. After lunch from 13.00 pm up to 14.00 pm there will be Plenary Session 3, presenting all keynote speakers, from 14.00 pm up to 15.00 pm. Closing for half an hour will end the seminar.

The seminar committee groups the papers based on similarity in topics. But, one or two papers may be put in group with different topics. The unequal amount of papers with the same topic makes it difficult to put all the papers in the same topic.
We do hope the participants, particularly the participants from foreign countries, will have a convenient stay in Solo. The committee has worked hard to make this seminar runs well. However, there may be lack here and there. So, in case of inconveniences, don’t be hesitate to ask the committee for help.

Have a good seminar and have good stay in Solo.

Solo, November 1, 2010

The Committee
## SCHEDULE

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**Tuesday, 9 November 2010**

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So pop literature is essentially a miniature of a society that also deserves attention in the literature learning. It is something that shows the popular issues in the middle of the community and almost certainly satisfies readers with happy-ending story. Behind its happy-ending, it turns out the latent passion, ideals or desires from the author as a member of the society. Thus, it is also worth to use pop literature as study materials in English literature.

In conclusion, it is the work of ‘canon’ that precisely distinguishes English literature majoring with other majors such as English education, media studies and area studies such as American area studies at the University of Indonesia. It is English Literature that holds the authority of ‘canon’ literature as an object of research and places it as an invaluable cultural heritage in terms of high aesthetic values and its timelessness. Pop lit on the other side will complement the understanding of cultural values adopted by the largest English language users, England and America.

**Aesthetics and Popular Literature**

*Sri Kusumo Habsari*

Popular literature is often absent from literary analysis. Some scholars consider it as trash literature because it is consumed only for killing time, for enjoyment only, and it is put in bin after reading it. As part of commodity culture, the question is “could we analyze popular literature in the unique achievement of the writer, while in term of production it is collective?” Another question is “could we apply some approaches of high literature of the traditional method of humanities scholarship?” The purpose of this paper is to look at the key concepts of aesthetics and to consider the possibility of some allowance to look at popular literature in term of aesthetics.

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Aesthetics and Popular Literature

Sri Kasumo Habsari
Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta
Indonesia

Abstract

Popular literature is often absent from literary analysis. Some scholars consider it as trash literature because it is consumed only for killing time, for enjoyment only, and it is put in bin after reading it. As part of commodity culture, the question is “could we analyze popular literature in the unique achievement of the writer, while in term of production it is collective?” Another question is “could we apply some approaches of high literature of the traditional method of humanities scholarship?” The purpose of this paper is to look at the key concepts of aesthetics and to consider the possibility of some allowance to look at popular literature in term of aesthetics.

Introduction

The word popular has several meanings. It can mean people, widespread enjoyment and common. As a people’s culture, it refers to folk culture because this culture is locally produced and locally distributed. But popular also refers to commercial culture produced by industries, which seek to gain profit. Meanwhile, as common culture it can include shared values and beliefs. In term of popular literature, in this paper, it refers to its fame and the number of the readers who read. Literature, in this term, does not invoke to any folk ideals or qualities although it could have shared or common belief.

Popular literature is often absent from literary analysis. Some scholars consider it as trash literature because it is consumed only for killing time, for enjoyment only, and it is put in bin after reading it. Some considers it as subliterature and it is vague to apply much critical analysis. Researches to popular culture have focused on the application of “wide range materials the historical and critical methods of traditional humanistic scholarship” (Cawelti, 1972: 115) As part of commodity culture, the question is “could we analyze popular literature in the unique achievement of the writer, while in term of production it is collective?” Another question is “could we apply some approaches of high literature of the traditional
method of humanities scholarship” or “could we apply traditional modes of aesthetic analysis to popular literature?” The purpose of this paper is to look at the key concepts of aesthetics and to consider the possibility of some allowance to look at popular literature in term of aesthetics.

Aesthetics and Literature

Aesthetics is conventionally connected to philosophy of art and beauty although this concept is ambiguous, complex and constestation. It refers sensory perception. Its roots and theory was from ancient philosopher, Plato. Beauty, in Plato’s formulation plays a very positive role as it serves an archetype of “the ideal Forms associated with truth and the good”. Beauty is also considered as “the inspiration and the goal of philosophy”. It can be “the clearest, most understandable Forms” or “a master of Erotics who ascends from the love of beautiful bodies to the love beautiful deeds and discourses, and finally a vision of Beauty itself from which he himself can give birth to the beautiful”. (Shusterman, 2006 : 237)

Meanwhile, arts in Plato’s notion are considered as imperfect imitation or representation of “the forms of the phenomenal world which for him are themselves but a distorted imitation of the ideal rational Forms that constitute true reality”. Art is criticised ontologically and epistemologically as “imitation of an imitation that distorts the truth it pretends to present”. If art attracts to the lower emotional part of the soul and encourages passion to move, art prevents the rational psychological order that should control and it could reduce the morality and lead to improper behaviour. (Ibid)

Aristotle objected Plato’s theory on aesthetics by showing cognitive value of mimesis. In Aristotle’s opinion, arts imitate the essential and only superficialities. In his doctrine of catharsis, the ability of art to arouse passion can be a good thing since it is only within the protected context of art experience. The concept refers to various elements including “the object represented, the means of representation, and the manner of representation (i.e. respectively plot, character, thought; diction and melody; and spectacle)” to demonstrate “the usefulness of independent, compositional criteria for evaluating art that were not reducible to ontology, epistemology, psychology, morality or politics.” (Ibid, 238) This belief, which is
related to the properties of form, expression and quality, is significant in the
development of modern theories of aestheticism (Ibid: 238).

Literature in Davies’s notion is a medium of reception and production of
work of art with aesthetics as the main goal. To create literature with aesthetics
intention, firstly is to present the readers with an understanding of the material and
the form of the appreciation. It works through an awareness to discover the
significance of each detail to find out the nature of the representation, the expression
and the features’ exemplar. Davies also argues that literature is important resources
of life and literature provides a medium to understand knowledge such as to look at
an issue or a skill to do empathy. (Steckers, 2007: 350).

Quite differently, Lamarque argues that literature should not be correlated to
aesthetics. He agrees the existence of aesthetics in poetry, however he objects that
literature is identical with aesthetics, especially contemporary aesthetics. In
Lamarque’s opinion if aesthetics is relevant to literature, the features of aesthetics
appreciation could be applied widely to recognise the uniqueness of literature as art
form. Besides, aesthetic appreciation in most other contexts is related in some way with
perception or sensory experience or the “appearance” of object. This is not the
characteristics of literature. (Lamarque, 2007: 29)

Lamarque also argues that aesthetics does not exclusively connected to
eauty, as it develops in 18th century. Aesthetics is not always or the only way to
valuate work of art, It could imply how literary work appears, what impact it
produces, what qualities in it and what deserve praise of aesthetic attention. (Ibid:
0)

The problem of aesthetics in literature, as argued by Lamarque, is on the
form, the meaning, and the narrative realism. One of the efforts to describe literature
in aesthetics area is through equalising literary work, such as drama, prose and
poetry with fine writing or ‘belle lettres’ such as history, philosophy, letter or speech.
Fine writing is more easily recognised than defined. However, he agrees that
aesthetics enjoyment should be discoverable either in belle letters or literary works.
He also mentions that good literary work is not the means of the writing itself but the
means to some further ends or the effect. (Ibid: 32)
Narrative in fiction, Lamarque further states, should avert stresses on three areas: “intrinsic textual properties, on the priority of meaning and on reductive views of plot and character”. Aesthetic elements on literature are not on the choice of beautiful phrases and expressive imaginations but it should be on the quality that appears when the attention is focused to the literary work, which produces enjoyment. It does not mean to reduce the aesthetic meaning when narrative is correlated to literary works. Literary works are defined as works that invite and reward symmetries and unity and connectedness from the readers. The mode of response makes literature a suitable object for aesthetic appraisal (ibid: 39)

Knight, in some ways agrees to Lamarque that concentration to the beauty of the language expression could put away the concept of literary work as literary philosophy and literary criticism. He agrees that many literary works do not have beautiful language expression. However, he objects Lamarque’s idea that autobiography, history, philosophy, and theology could not be approached from the aesthetic point of view because of its language expression and meaning. Knight argues that Lamarque’s opinion indirectly objects the involvement of philosophy in literary works. Lamarque, putting in another words, differentiate literary analysis through its canon which in Knight’s opinion reduces the aesthetic appreciation to literary works. (Ibid:43)

Looking at the debates about the relationship between aesthetics and literary works, the question arises is then whether we could appreciate popular literature from aesthetics point of view and whether there is aesthetic elements in popular literature.

Aesthetics and Popular Literature

Unlike literary works, popular literature, as it has been previously mentioned is collective production. As part of commodity culture, the main purpose of its production is to entertain, for widespread enjoyment. It is read to kill time when the readers do not want to contemplate seriously the meaning behind the story. However, to satisfy the readers or socially desirable, popular literature should respond to and express the demands of the readers. The cultural content offered should provide aesthetic satisfaction, information as well as entertainment. As to
amuse, popular literature does not present philosophical ideas to contemplate. It does not express its simple ideas in such beautiful language expression. Without beautiful language expression, mostly found in poetry, aesthetic analysis, understood as contexts related to perception or sensory experience, could not be applied. However, popular literature “also reflects the extraordinary creativity and ingenuity of grass root artists and intellectuals” (Lipsitz, 1990: 626).

Michael Charlton’s investigation to German novel readers shows that most readers read novels to entertain and relax (Petterson, 2008: 61). Meanwhile, Miissen’s report from the study of Dutch novel readers shows that they read “to experience feelings of beauty, to stimulate one’s imagination, to be surprised, to entertain oneself, to learn more about others, to get a different view of things, to sharpen one’s intellectual capacity, to read real-life stories, and to have a clear view of how to”. (Ibid, 62) These show that readers’ satisfaction is dominant. Then, could the readers get satisfaction when they read they should discover the significance of each detail to find out the nature of the representation, the expression and the features’ exemplar? What is the aesthetic enjoyment?

Lamarque argues that aesthetic enjoyment is the experience in the process of judging the aesthetic value and the constraints in characterizing that experience. The process of reading takes an experience of interacting with the work and a grasp of the meaning if the work through interpretation. Pleasure in the process of reading is not only in the form of passive enjoyment, subjective position or personal kind. Some could do it in a complex imaginative intellectual engagement with the reading. Enjoyment could be intuitive. However, people with different experiences see the work with different perspective, although in the process of reading they do not learn any objects to help them evaluate the work. It shows that the aesthetic experiences are not contextually free. Time and space influence the perception. (Lamarque, 1998: 66-69)

The good news is the concept of beauty and the idea of the aesthetics as manifestation of unique mode perception and experience dimension recently obtain a revival in aesthetic theory with contemporary trends which acknowledges “the art of living, the idea of living beauty and Michel Foucault’d term’aesthetics of existence’. This opinion challenges the notion of aesthetics autonomy of modernism, which
compartmentalizes art and the aesthetics from ethics, politics and scientific thought. It also challenges the idea to see art narrowly in terms of fine art belonging to elite culture. This notion shows the spirit of postmodernism of the aestheticization of life. (ibid: 240) Modernist indeed refuses the existence of popular literature because of its characteristics which tends to entertain, mainstreaming artificial objects and do not consider deep meaning. Besides, popular literature tends to manipulate mind with imaginations of ideal life without logical arguments. Thus, popular literature is considered as not educating the readers to be critical in looking at life.

In contrast, the postmodernist deconstruct the binary opposition of high and popular literature. Subject in postmodern culture is trapped in mass culture, experience disintegration in euphoria intensity, fragmented, and cut off from life, either in experiences or subjective texts and it does not have substance and coherence, which are the characteristics of modernism. Postmodernists look at popular culture as sketch and fragmented culture. Postmodernist intervention on art is often considered as a reaction against modernism, realism, and aesthetics of modernism. The modernists consider that narrative in popular literature is subordinate of the narrative conventions and story telling because audiences are entertained with the story, the familiar narrative, character, plot, convention and message. Popular literature is created following certain formula, which is “a conventional system for structuring cultural products” (Cawelti, 1972 : 119). Lack of aesthetics is the object of the modernists’ criticism to popular arts although it does have its own aesthetics (Kellner, 1992: 145).

In postmodern concept, imagination is not part of narrative interest because of the new view and feeling: signifier is freed and imagination takes over the position of narrative, as undeserved narrative, but it is very expressive and it is an imagination, which is aesthetically unrealistic. However, it creates a fascination, a tempting enjoyment, a very far transformation and intension of aesthetic experience. (Ibid : 146)

Kellner agrees that postmodern texts are fundamentally flat and one dimension. It means that it does not provide intensity and space for special moments. It is without substance and meaning, thus it is shallow. Literally, it is very superficial to reduce the expressive energy and individuality of characters in modernism. (Ibid)
With no distinction between high and popular, it is possible to apply aesthetic analysis in terms of aesthetic enjoyment and the quality that appears, as it is argued by Radway. To support her argument, she begins from studying how meaning is made by the readers. Her theory develops from her reading to Merleau-Ponty’s on the Phenomenology of Language. She argues that “literature can be thought of analogically as language system, capable of invidual speech acts in form of texts, and then connection becomes clear”. Literature as language is a system of varying levels of organization with its own fundamental units and traditional norms. To read text, it should rely on previous knowledge to recognize the organization of textual units. When the text is not familiar, the process of reading is still on specific expectation and norms in mind. It means the ability to understand text is limited, based on the experience of the readers. Without recognizing the previous knowledge in text, the reading enjoyment is not achieved. (Radway, 1978 : 92-93) In line with Radway, Cawelti argues that popular literature needs formula as a principle for the selection of certain plots, character and setting. Through recognizing the narrative structures and how that particular patterns synthesized with traditional norms and expectations, the readers will be able to compare and relate their experiences with the culture in the text. (Cawelti, 1972 : 123)

Radway’s argument shows the democratic experience between the readers and the authors. The readers have a right to appreciate the work. The readers do not have any burden to find the author’s intension. In contrast, the readers are selective, constructive, reflective and creative when doing the process of reading. The readers can relate their own experiences to the reading and do the process of evaluation. Through this way, the readers have cultural authority. They could agree or disagree to the message of the text, related to their experiences. They do not simply accept. They can resist. They could also experience fantasies of realism because of its personality based interpretation. (see Long 1992) The readers experience fascinated, appealed, and entertained feeling in the process of reading. Thus the aesthetic enjoyment is achieved, not through the beautiful expressive language or the ideal message received, or “the object represented, the means of representation, and the manner of representation” rather in the readers’ authority to interpret the text personal way. To conclude, popular literature could be analysed in terms of its
aesthetics, however the concept of aesthetics does not take the idea of the traditional method of humanities scholarship or traditional modes of aesthetic analysis. Popular text has aesthetic elements because of its creative expression with respect to traditional norms and familiar conventions. In such notion of creative and empirical expression, the readers could experience aesthetic enjoyment which is very individual

References


It is not wrong to study and learn English Literature (despite constant warning that it can be used as a colonising tool and a tool to homogenise all cultures and peoples). What is wrong is to offer it as the only language that we cannot do without and what is even sinful is to teach it (English Literature) as an exclusively eurocentric or american-centric subject which in the end will culturally alienate or culturally displaced our local students. (Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, Malaysia)

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The focus has been shifted to compare works in other languages to that of English to make it livelier, create an awareness among students, and make it more interesting. There has been a lot of pressure on the English departments to strive towards this goal. This makes it more competitive for the students as they would now have to refer to both the English works as well as the works of other languages. To do this the students would have to be aware of all the Indian writers and their works and finally involve in the critical analysis with that of English writers of India. (Kambhampati Rajesh, India)

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The wave of globalization in the emerging world order has continuously presented a focus on issues that grow out of it hence the need for the issues that attend to that experience to be addressed. Globalisation thrives in its ability to enhance movement of people, spread knowledge and technology, encourage a rise and perpetuation of inequality, erodes independence, encourages financial liberalisation and blurs differences that exist between contending cultures thereby creating room for one of them to ascend over the other. Though it creates the impression that it encourages multi-cultural existence, it actually perpetuates the erosion and eventual dominance of one culture over the other. (Alexander Kure, Nigeria)

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It is worth wondering whether cultural hybridity can be considered as an effective strategy to make British society more tolerable and open to ethnic differences and diasporic communities in the future. Cultural clash, race discrimination, and the threat of religious fundamentalism still haunt British society. Finally though, as a debatable concept, cultural hybridity is always open to redefinition and reinterpretation. (Yusri Fajar, Indonesia)