

VONNEGUT'S HUMANIST BELIEF AGAINST THE DEHUMANIZATION OF PEOPLE IN HIS THREE SELECTED SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRAK

Dalam penelitian ini penulis menganalisis beberapa cerita pendek karya penulis Amerika Kurt Vonnegut: "Harrison Bergeron", "Welcome to the Monkey House", and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow". Ketiga teks dengan *genre science fiction* ini menceritakan keadaan bumi masa depan dimana terjadi peningkatan penduduk yang luar biasa. Konsep *Repressive State Apparatus* dan *Ideology State Apparatus* yang dikemukakan oleh Althusser digunakan untuk menganalisa cara kaum penguasa mengontrol masyarakat umum demi mempertahankan posisinya sebagai penguasa. Sedangkan konsep *Humanism* digunakan untuk memperlihatkan pemikiran-pemikiran humanis Kurt Vonnegut yang tergambarkan dalam cerita-cerita pendeknya. Melalui ketiga cerita pendeknya Vonnegut mengungkapkan bahwa penguasa memiliki cara tersendiri dalam mengontrol masyarakatnya yang kebanyakan tidak disadari oleh masyarakat umum. Secara umum pihak yang berkuasa dalam cerita membuat aturan perundang-undangan yang tidak manusiawi dengan sanksi tegas sehingga sukar untuk dilanggar. Di sisi lain, pihak otoritas membuat masyarakat berfikir bahwa aturan yang ditetapkan merupakan aturan yang paling bijaksana lewat penggunaan ideologi. Hal ini berusaha ditentang oleh Kurt Vonnegut melalui pemikiran Humanisnya yang menyatakan bahwa manusia bukanlah sekedar objek yang dikontrol.

Kata Kunci: *ideologi, Humanisme, dystopia, Vonnegut*

ABSTRACT

In this study the author discusses several short story by American writer Kurt Vonnegut: "Harrison Bergeron", "Welcome to the Monkey House", and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow". The three stories are in the genre of science fiction and tell the future state of the earth where there is a tremendous increase in the population. The concepts of repressive State Apparatus and Ideology State Apparatus by Althusser are used to analyze how the authorities control the public in order to maintain their positions as rulers. Kurt Vonnegut's concept of Humanism is also explored in short stories. In his three short stories, Vonnegut reveals that people in power control people in such a way that it often unquestioned. The people in power in the stories establish inhumane rules with sanctions and therefore they are difficult to break. On the other hand the authorities influence the people by means of ideologies. These forms of controls are rejected by Kurt Vonnegut with brand of Humanism.

Keywords: *ideology, Humanism, dystopia, Vonnegut*

1. Introduction

“Harrison Bergeron”, “Welcome to the Monkey House”, and “Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow” are Kurt Vonnegut’s short stories included in the collection of short story Welcome to the Monkey House. This is the great collection of several short stories made in the first of 20 year of Vonnegut carrier. This collection was published on August 1968. These three short stories are incredibly unique that is show futuristic story described when everyone equal, when everyone can not die. “Harrison Bergeron”, “Welcome to the Monkey House”, and “Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow” explain the way how the government control and manipulate their society through technology, laws, and ideology. These stories show how the government creates the irrational rules to control society and make society think that is not bad but the best solution for the condition happened. He/she transfers society to be a subject that he/she like. Because of that this research is conducted base on Marxist perspective purposed by Louis Althusser. On the other way around, these short stories seems to give another ideology to the reader. It shows against the leader not always a negative thing. Counter ideology is presented through humanist belief. It makes these stories become more interesting.

The objective of the research is to show how ruling class people control common society that includes the people’s perspective in those three short stories toward the control done by their leader and Vonnegut’s feeling or argument toward that control that will be explained through the main characters of this novel where they show the resistance for that rules.

2. VONNEGUT’S HUMANIST BELIEF AGAINST THE DEHUMANIZATION OF PEOPLE

2.1 Harrison Bergeron

2.1.1 The Government’s Restriction of Human Uniqueness and Ability through Technology, Law, and Media

Dystopian universe is portrayed clearly in “Harrison Bergeron”. The government creates the law that make people should live in the same condition.

“Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to them 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General” (11)

To create this kind of society the government obligates all smart people, beautiful girl, and strong person to cover themselves with mental handicap that make them look like robot.

The state does not allow different intellectual among society. The government does not want there are the smarter or stupider people in society. All society should be stupid or should be smart and unexpectedly the government chooses all society to be stupid. It is proven by the way Diana moon Gramper decides the intellectual standard

of people as same as Hazel, the one who cannot remember anything for long time, the one that can forget anything that she know just in second. It said so because she is the people who live freely without mental handicap, while the others who have great intellectual should wear mental handicap in his ear.

The government compulsively asks the people to have equality in the appearance case also. There is no one allow to be more beautiful then others. All society should have the same quality in their looking. But again the government decide the beauty standard of society not the beautiful one but the worst one. It is proven by the law that requires the beautiful people to not showing her beauty freely. The beautiful girls should cover her face with a mask and should use it everywhere. Although when they should dance in the TV program where actually should present the beautifulness of woman, like what has stated in the story;

“They weren’t really very good—no better than anybody else would have been, anyway. They were burdened with sash-weights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would feel like something the cat dragged in.” (11)

The other rule is no one allows being quicker than anybody else. Not only in intellectual and appearance case, but the government also stated the rule in the physical’s ability. The government decides to not allow the society have great physical ability. Harrison who has great physical ability should wear a tremendous pair of earphones, spectacles wavy lenses. He carries three hundred pounds that make difficult for him to walk and move normally. So his great physical ability no longer exist. (12)

2.1.2 Vonnegut’s Humanist Belief: Human are Free to Develop Their Natural Ability

In “Harrison Bergeron”, Vonnegut stated “Some things about living still weren’t quite right, though” (11). It shows Vonnegut’s argument toward living condition. Human still lives in the bad condition and there is supposed to be a better condition for human to live. Through this short story, Vonnegut tries to deliver his idea that human are free to develop their natural ability.

Human has several natural abilities that should not be restricted such as intellectual, beauty, and physical ability. It is natural and not something that is created and controlled by human. Even the leader should not control it because human do not have ability to control such thing. When human try to control those natural things, some problems will happen; human will lose some of their real characteristic, then the queer society is created. Like what happened to Harrison Bergeron:

Nobody had ever borne heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses. The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him whanging headaches besides. Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds. And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red

rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random. (12)

That passage shows how Harrison should live in abnormal situation. He should wear many heavy things every time. His body is cover with many metals that make him weak. His appearance is look like a robot but his ability is not. All metals which cover his body is not the tool that make him become superpower human, but the material that will make him lose their ability as the good human.

He carries many heavy things just because he was born with brilliant quality. He never chooses to have great intellectual and ability. It has been decided to him but why the government treats him unfairly. It is the crime that is done by the government that should be seen by society.

It seems Vonnegut wants to say how not wise the government is. They cannot find the best solution for the problem appeared, and just let society suffer for the queer rule. The government makes people equal not in the case of getting food, welfare, law, education, or others thing but they should be equal in the unimportance case.

The government changes the natures of world. The people who have great ability are treated unfairly. They all should use mental handicap that was heavy and should listen to terrible noise every twenty minutes just to lose their ability. "It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains" (11). The sound from the government transmitter seems as the sign of government restriction. The government does not allow her society to develop their natural ability, to think creatively and to use their own mind. Human has natural property to think and they should be free to use it, to fulfill their own desire and to develop themselves.

Beside the necessity to develop themselves, human also need safety. Human need peaceful in their life but wearing mental handicap makes safety run away from their life. The sound of that handicap is really incompatible. "A buzzer sounded in George's head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm." (11) It is described as something that really torture. Even sleeping feels bad. It is really unfair. They do not do bad thing but why they are treated very bad.

The government seems manipulate their society to maintain the status quo. By making people live in the same intellectual where in this case in the stupid standard makes society could not fight them. There is something strange with government that should be concerned by society. Government makes people live in the same standard, bad standard; ugly, stupid, and weak. It supposes to be an indication of it. Government destroys differences in society and creates uniformity. Difference is associated with variation and variation lead to alternative voice which is not good for tyrannical government. Variation makes people do not always agree with government's decision and that what is avoided by the government. The government wants to make people forever agree with them. That is why they create uniformity in society. Uniformity associated with conformity. That is what the government wants from society, forever confirming to anything that is told or decided. So they will never need to worry about status quo because the society will always confirm their idea. There will be no alternative idea in society.

That case seems showing Vonnegut's hope that want the reader realizes to anything and any rule that has been decided by the leader. Vonnegut wants the reader to have ability to criticize anything that their government does or talks, to make the reader become critical person who will not just accept anything that has been decided for them without questioning it first. The situations in "Harrison Bergeron" describe that not all government's decisions is the best decision. There is no one can guarantee it. Sometime the bad decision is also made. It can suddenly happen because of the lack ability which is owned by the leader or just because the leader really want it. It is not impossible if the government intentionally decides the bad rule for society just because they have purpose on it. Then they try to manipulate society by making them believe that the decided rule is the best. That is why the society should be critical to anything that is decided by their leader.

2.2 Welcome to the Monkey House

2.2.1 The Government's Control of Sexual Desire through Technology, Law, and Media

Dystopian universe is portrayed In "Welcome to the Monkey House". The government creates the law that forbids sex in society. There are so many people in the world but all resources for their needs are almost depleted. In order to decrease the number of society, the government creates a rule that obligate people to take a pill to make them feel numb from waist to down and suggest people to die.

"Welcome to the Monkey House" offer similar problem with "Harrison Bergeron" where government controls society in both, RSA and ISA. The rules decided by the government are stated from the beginning of the story. Because of overpopulation the government tries to decide two laws for society.

One pronging was the encouragement of ethical suicide, which consisted of going to the nearest Suicide Parlor and asking a Hostess to kill you painlessly while you lay on a Barcalounger. The other pronging was compulsory ethical birth control. (5)

The government has created the place to kill people painlessly which is a parlor and so many beautiful women available there. Those women are Hostesses which are pretty, thought-minded, highly intelligent girls with white lipstick, heavy eye makeup, purple body stockings with nothing underneath, and black-leather boots. They are virgin and have abilities in psychology, nursing, and taekwondo. They look like a young woman even though they are 60 years old already. This happens because of anti-gerasone. The Hostesses' job is to persuade people to die. (21-22)

The other law is the compulsory ethical birth control. It is a pill that should be drunk three times a day by all society. This pill make people do not think about sex because it takes the pleasure out of sex. "He was referring to the fact that ethical birth-control pills, the only legal form of birth control, made people numb from the waist down" (21). By drinking that pill people cannot feel sex pleasure anymore because their body numb from the waist to down. There will no date, sex party, and anything that cause woman pregnant. It will decrease the birth of baby or even make there is no baby will born anymore. So the number of society will not increase but decrease because there is no birth rate but death. if not "... \$10,000 and ten years in jail." (21).

2.2.2 Vonnegut Humanist's Belief; Sexuality is a Part of Humanity and Natural

In "Welcome to the Monkey House" Vonnegut tries to say his opinion about sex and death. In this short story, the major problem is overpopulation that is thought by the government happen because of sex. So many people in the Earth and it cause many problems. In order to solve those problems, the government suggests people to die and forbid sex, so there is no next generation anymore. In the contrary, Vonnegut from the way he presents the character of Billy, wants to say that sexuality is part of humanity and natural. There is should be another wise solution for that problem.

Nancy as representative of government's people has job to persuade people to die. The government tries to suggest people to die. For sure the government fallacy is to protect his society; to make society life safely and get many things that make them follow their life comfortably. In the contrary the government influences people to die. The government tells that death is the best choice in this world.

The government has changed the meaning of dangerous. People who kill the others people are not danger anymore. The killer images have changed to be nice which are beautiful, friendly, nice, and sexy. In the other side, people who want to have sex become dangerous. There is nothing wrong with sex. It is natural and enjoyable thing but the government changes their image to be very bad.

The government changes the meaning of dangerous and makes society agree with that. Something which is actually normal become abnormal and something which is abnormal become normal. The convention about normal and abnormal is already changed. The worst thing is the changing is not to the good one but to the bad one that makes human loss several basic needs. Sex is very importance for every human because it gives human happiness. Now just because some problems happened and the government cannot find better solution for that government makes human loss their needs and even losing their life. It is really unfair for mankind.

It creates curiosity about what is the government's hidden purpose on it. Why he really wants to control sex. George Orwell in his novel titled "Nineteen Eighty Four" (1984) has idea if sexuality is controlled by the government, they can control everything. If sexuality is controlled all human desire will be controlled. Like what said by Sigmund Freud, sex is the source of all desire. It means if government controls sex they can control all human desire. So, there is no need to worry for protecting people anymore. But whatever it is, in this story Vonnegut keeps spreading idea that Sexuality is very basic or integral part of humanity, so any way in controlling it is very wrong.

2.3 Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

2.3.1 The Government's Violation of Natural Order and the Restriction of Freedom of Speech

Dystopian universe is portrayed In "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow". Cramps as the leader of the family creates the rule that make people cannot express their idea freely. He also does not give chance to his generation to be a leader in their family.

Cramps makes his generation follows all his order because he is the only one that own everything in the house. There are no materials needed to support humans live anymore so really difficult to find bed, chair, car, and the others things. Only the old person who lives before anti-gerason is found has it. So only old people have

materials needed for live while the others should wait until the others one die for getting theirs.

Cramps rule are very strict that does not allows people express their idea and giving comment, even just to the TV's program. When Lou unexpectedly say his comment to Em while watching television together with Cramps and other generations put his self in the dangerous zone. "Next one shoots off his big bazoo while the TV's on is going to find his self cut off without a dollar—" (145). Only say the comment that only about nothing and only talk to his wife in whisper will take his heritage one dollar. It shows that the law in that family is very rough.

There is no freedom of speech. Anything related to it is restricted. There is only the oldest person who have heritage, the leader in every family, have freedom of speech. It makes Cramps the oldest one in that family become a dictator leader. If the generation does the bad thing, Cramps will make them not only do not receive the heritage but also will throw them out from the apartment. "it'd be murder. Besides, if he caught us tinkering with his anti-gerasone, not only would he disinherit us, he'd bust my neck. Just because he's one hundred and seventy-two doesn't mean Cramps isn't strong as a bull." (143). The law that has been decided by Cramps is very strict and strong and very difficult to be broken.

Cramps has changed the natural order in society. One people could not be a leader all the time. The leader should be changed every specific time. But in this case Cramps want to be forever leader that never give time to the others generation to lead the family. Being forever leader is one big crime done to his generation.

2.3.2 Vonnegut Humanist's Belief: Freedom of Speech and the Acceptant of Natural Order

In this story, Vonnegut shows his idea that human should have freedom of speech and should accept the natural order. Vonnegut does not like dictator leader because in the most of the story Cramps is described as a bad person such as leading as he like. "Cramps Schwartz, his chin resting on his hands, his hands on the crook of his cane, was staring irascibly at the five-foot television screen that dominated the room." (145). Cramps never allow his position to be replaced by his generation. Naturally every specific time or period the leader of any society change. In society, the leader changes through specific times that have been decided in Law. In family, the leader changes when the first leader is already old or not strong enough or just because the leader die and then the others generation will replace his position but it not happen in "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow". Just because anti-gerasone is already found, Cramps does not want anyone replace his position. Anti-gerasone makes him always stay young, strong, and cannot die and he makes it become his reason for not being replaced.

Human is not a robot. By not letting people to say or express their idea and just ask them to do what leader asks them to do is very dehumanize. Human should be free to choose their own behavior rather than reacting to environmental stimuli and reinforcers. Human are inherently good. As a result it does not need to be so tightly controlled by leader. The rule of the leader is to control the undesirable consequences of human behavior.

There is supposed to be something wrong beside this. Why Cramps does not want to accept the natural order and really want to break it. Naturally human are changed and now leader forbid it. Changing mean dynamic and leader hate it because changing makes people will have alternative ideology and create many voices in society. Leader wants to make his society become static so there will be no alternative ideology and restriction to the leader. By making people become static make the leader can do anything they want to do without getting fight from their people. The static people will never criticize what government does. They will always confirm all government decision. That is why Cramps make his generation static by avoiding them to replace his position as the leader in that family and does not allow people to express their idea, because by expressing their idea freely make people develop.

3. Conclusion

The entire stories show the leader who controls human basic need. In "Harrison Bergeron" they control differences in society. They try to make all society uniform and uniformity associated with conformity. That is what government actually wants from their society. Agree for any decision that is made by the government. In "Welcome to the monkey House" the government controls sexuality. Sex is the human basic need. Controlling sex means controlling all human's desire because sex is the source of all desire. Do not let human has sex means do not let human to have desire in their live, so thatthey just follow government's desire in their live. In "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow", leader forbids natural order. Natural order is dynamic but government wants to create static society. To make people become conformist, government should make people static. Static means no change. That is why they are not allow natural order run as it is. So, government wants to make people forever follow them and make people always conform to them even though their decision will destroy society.

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