

The Ambivalence of Sexual Orientation in H. G. Wells'

The First Men in the Moon

Rifki Dermawan
rifki.dermawan92@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

Skripsi ini mengungkapkan ambivalensi orientasi seksual manusia yang tergambar dalam novel fiksi ilmiah *The First Men in the Moon* karya Herbert George Wells. Fokus penelitian adalah melihat pertentangan orientasi seksual dalam diri Mr. Bedford, tokoh utama dan narator novel, dari sudut pandang psikoanalisis. Penelitian menggunakan teori psikoanalisis dari Sigmund Freud yang mencakup konsep Id, Ego dan Superego, simbolisme mimpi dan citra seksual. Metode penelitian terdiri atas tiga tahap, yaitu pengumpulan data, analisis data dan penyajian hasil analisis secara deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya ambivalensi pada orientasi seksual Mr. Bedford. Selain itu, penulis juga membuktikan bahwa ambivalensi pada orientasi seksual Mr. Bedford menyebabkan tokoh tersebut menghadapi kebimbangan dalam memberi keputusan penting menyangkut masa depannya.

Kata kunci: ambivalensi, psikoanalisis, orientasi seksual, karakter

ABSTRACT

The article reveals the ambivalence of human's sexual orientation reflected in science fiction novel *The First Men in the Moon* by Herbert George Wells. Focus of the research is to look at the contradiction in Mr. Bedford's sexual orientation, the main character and narrator, from the perspective of psychoanalysis. The research applies the psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud encompassing the concepts of Id, Ego and Superego, dream symbolism and sexual imagery. The methods of research consist of three stages; collecting the data, analyzing the data and presenting the result of analysis descriptively. The result of analysis indicates the ambivalence in Mr. Bedford's sexual orientation. Besides, the writer proves that the ambivalence in Mr. Bedford's sexual orientation leads to the character's hesitation in giving important decision regarding his future.

Keywords: ambivalence, psychoanalysis, sexual orientation, character

1. Introduction

When people talk about science fiction (sci-fi) genre in literature, they undoubtedly cannot deny the immense influence of H. G. Wells or Herbert George Wells. Many adore him as the Father of Science Fiction. During his life, Wells has produced plenty of works, including sci-fi and non sci-fi. *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) are some great contributions of H. G. Wells for the literary realm (European Graduate School EGS).

Like other notable science fiction works, H. G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* receives a warm welcome from reader. It still becomes a major discussion among sci-fi fans until today, not to mention, the novel has been adapted into movies for four times. As one of the finest classic science fictions that ever exists, Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* will be a primary object in this research. The novel explores an impressing odyssey to the moon by Mr. Cavor, a scientist and Mr. Bedford, a former businessman.

After reading the novel thoroughly and carefully, the writer notices that *The First Men in the Moon* actually contains the ambivalence of Mr. Bedford's sexual orientation. Bedford is the narrator and the main character of that novel. Underlying that assumption, the writer has a thought that Freud's emphasis of psychoanalysis will be an appropriate tool to examine the novel as a whole. Therefore, this article is entitled "The Ambivalence of Sexual Orientation in H.G Wells' *The First Men in the Moon*: A Freudian Psychoanalysis".

2. Background of the Research

In general the novel *The First Men in the Moon* discusses the journey of two men -Mr. Cavor and Mr. Bedford- from earth to the moon. Examining the work from Freudian psychoanalysis' point of view, the writer realizes that *The First Men in the Moon* contains the issue about the hostility of Bedford's sexual orientation. Hence the writer intends to examine that *The First Men in the Moon* is not merely about an ordinary journey to the moon, but it includes psychological problem i.e. homosexual issue. The writer starts the research from basis of psychoanalysis, i.e. analyzing the unconscious and conscious side, including the three human's psychic zones which specially focus on the main characters; Cavor and Bedford. Besides, symbols and

images in *The First Men in the Moon* are also interpreted based on Freud's theory. After amassing the data that leads to an analysis of Mr. Bedford's sexual orientation, the writer is going to discern whether he has ambivalence to decide his sexual orientation or not.

There are three important steps that the writer carries in writing process of the thesis: collecting the data, analyzing the data and presenting the result of analysis. The first step is collecting the data using library and internet research. The writer commences by exploring the concept which is related with the object of the research – *The First Men in the Moon*– and theory that will be employed; Freudian psychoanalysis. In analyzing the data, as the second step, the writer practices qualitative analysis that puts an interest in meaning, perspective, and understanding, an emphasis on process, and inductive analysis and also grounded theory (Trochim 2). Getting the conclusion of the research, the writer takes the last step that is presenting the data descriptively.

3. Review of Related Literature

As the starting point of research, the writer fetches several sources to be the comparators. Those sources consist of article, journal and literary criticism related with the object of this inquiry, the novel *The First Men in the Moon*, and the theory that is going to be applied, which is the Freudian psychoanalysis. The first critical review is written by Ted Gioia, entitled "Conceptual Fiction: *The First Men in the Moon* by H. G. Wells." In his writing, Gioia mainly compares Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* with a phenomenal novel of Jules Verne, *From Earth to the Moon* (1865). He emphasizes that both works are basically built with a foundation alike. The second review is John C. Wright's "Very Belated Book Review: *The First Men in the Moon*." The review begins with categorization of the novel as part of the First Age of Science Fiction. Mostly the works in the First Age are purely an imagination that is far from the reality of science itself.

An article entitled "Imperial Transmissions: H. G. Wells, 1897-1901" by Aaron Worth becomes the third review for this research. In this *Victorian Studies* journal, Worth reveals how the progress of information technology alters the concept of Late-Victorian regarding imperial system, which is portrayed by H. G. Wells' writings. The writer, then, takes the fourth review, an analysis of Nathaniel's

Hawthorne “Young Goodman Brown” from psychoanalysis perspective, obtained from *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* by Wilfred L. Guerin et al. This text demonstrates *Young Goodman Brown* as a psychological adventure of the main character, Brown, based on setting, time and place of the story.

The fifth review is an application of Freud’s psychoanalysis, notably, the tripartition of human psyche in literary work. It is Henry A. Murray’s essay “In Nomine Diaboli” which analyses *Moby Dick*, the first-class work of Herman Melville. Murray proposes that the characters; they are White Whale, Captain Ahab and Starbuck as symbol of id, ego and superego owned by human.

4. Analysis

The following discussion presents the result of analysis on H. G. Wells’ *The First Men in the Moon* which is divided into a) Id, Ego and Superego of main characters, b) existence of sexual imagery and dream symbolism, and c) sexual orientation of Mr. Bedford.

a) Id, Ego and Superego of main characters

- Id, Ego and Superego of Mr. Bedford

After meeting Mr. Cavor and knowing about possibility to get lots of advantages through Cavorite, Mr. Bedford only concerns on the mechanism of how to utilize the Cavorite. It seems that Bedford’s Id is his strong desire to come and conquer the moon for financial reason. But it is not. The writer finds that his Id is a special intention to get along with Mr. Cavor. It has a firm correlation with Bedford’s sexual orientation.

At one point, the opposite of Id power, so-called Ego, commences to make a move. Bedford’s Ego tries to block his wild desire. The vagueness of upcoming adventure to the moon distracts Bedford’s intent: “I [Bedford] do not remember before that night thinking at all of the risks we were running... The strangeness of what we were about to do, the unearthliness of it, overwhelmed me” (Wells 23). However, that dialogue expresses the contradiction between his Id and his Ego.

Meanwhile, the moment when Bedford meets and then asks people opinion to help him making a decision is an action of his Superego. Bedford endeavours to see the issue of journey to the moon by considering suggestions or advices from other

people. It already becomes a common thing for human to accept and to rethink the argument from other's perspective.

- Id, Ego and Superego of Mr. Cavor

In the novel, one simply knows that Id of Cavor is acquiring new knowledge through various scientific experiments. First thing that he does is developing a new anti-gravitational substance called Cavorite. His excessive Id brings him to take an immense risk and leaves the earth. As a counter attack for the wilderness of Id, Cavor's Ego comes to the surface. His Ego causes him to realize about the negative effect of his experiment, especially during the making process of Cavorite. Its consequence is widely spread around his circumstance.

Landed in the moon, Cavor comes upon plenty of novel stuff like native creatures and material substance. On the moon, his Superego takes place through his activity. Cavor's Superego makes him doing something in relation with his responsibility toward society. He teaches English for two moon creatures, Phi-oo and Tsi-puff, which aims to provide them a way to have better interaction: "As soon as Phi-oo was assured of the meaning of a word, he repeated it to Tsi-puff, who remembered it infallibly. They mastered over one hundred English nouns at their first session" (141).

b) Existence of sexual imagery and dream symbolism

- The Sphere Rocket

The sphere rocket is a unique vehicle used by Bedford and Cavor for taking an unusual trip to the moon. It is covered by Cavorite—an anti—gravitational substance. As clarified by Sigmund Freud, a flying machine that appears in dream often refers to male genital. He also emphasizes an interpretation for any perplexed machine: "All complicated machines and apparatus in dream are very probably genitals, in the description of which dream symbolism shows itself to be as tireless as the activity of wit" (71).

Based on Freud's tenet, the writer takes the conclusion that the sphere-rocket is a symbol for Bedford and Cavor's genital which is utilized to fulfill their appetite. Their desire in this story is paying a visit to the moon and they use that sphere-rocket as a tool to reach their contentment. This also typifies the process of fulfilling main characters' Id.

- The Little Boy

The little boy is a kid who accidentally drives the sphere rocket to the moon by himself. It happens by the time Bedford returns from the moon, which he lands at the seashore in Littlestone. Seeing the image of a little boy in this story, the writer can make such an interpretation by using Freud's theory. In *Dream Psychology*, Freud explains the position of children in a dream denotes the symbol of genital—since in reality, men as well as women refer their genital organ as the “little one” (71). It can be interpreted that the little boy acts as symbolic representation of Bedford's genital. Indeed, his genital symbol—the little boy—unintentionally goes to the moon, a place where Bedford's desire are stored. That boy is heading to a satisfied spot.

- Caverns in the Moon

Caverns in the moon are becoming such an important place for moon's creature. Wandering in that place, Cavor starts to realize that moon has cavernous form along with atmosphere within and a sea lies on the centre of the caverns (Wells 67). From the view of Freudian psychoanalysis, any stuff which has the bowl-shaped such as caves, vases, and hollow is symbolizing the women (Guerin et al 132). In regard to the existence of caverns in the moon, the writer believes that those caverns are analogies of female.

It has been proven that the cavern which lies in the moon is becoming the storage of Bedford and Cavor's desire. Taking it as analogy, it is very normal for the men, Bedford and Cavor, to have a sexual attraction toward a woman which is symbolized as the moon in this story. That's what makes them so eager to come to and colonize the moon.

- Flight to the Moon

The flight to the moon is one of astonishing travels in the human history that successfully conducted by Bedford and Cavor in *The First Men in the Moon* novel. In the psychoanalysis theory proposed by Sigmund Freud, several actions that exist in dreams like dancing, riding and flying represent a process to acquire sexual satisfaction (Guerin et al 132). That argument turns to be a foundation for the writer to create an interpretation of Bedford and Cavor's action—a flight to the moon. Their journey actually has a hidden meaning about symbolization of a process to fulfill sexual desire or Id. To conclude, those interpretations indicate the hostility between

the moon which full of desire and the earth that possesses the awareness of main character.

c) Sexual orientation of Mr. Bedford

After completing the analysis of Id, Ego and Superego, sexual imagery, and dream symbolism, the writer sees that there is a distinguishing thing concealed in Mr. Bedford sexual orientation. At least, there are three evidences leading the writer to conclude that Mr. Bedford has uncommon sexual orientation. First of all, *The First Men in the Moon* novel does not make a clear depiction of Bedford's family life. Reader cannot find information regarding his wife/girlfriend or kid, yet the story discusses the other personal info, such as occupation—including the previous one, place of living and hobby. This argument put the writer to make assumption that Mr. Bedford is a lonely gay.

Second of all, his excessive desire to have an escapade to the moon is the force of his Id. The writer believes that, he plans to take that journey due to his special desire toward Mr. Cavor. Third of all, some symbols and actions in the novel that have been analyzed with Freudian psychoanalysis reveal the issue of homosexuality. Those symbols and actions have strong correlation with sexuality stuff. However, this finding strengthens the assumption of the writer that Mr. Bedford is a homosexual man.

5. Conclusion

Science fiction novel and Herbert George Wells are two things that cannot be separated. The writer, then, has a special interest to explore *The First Men in the Moon*, a distinguished science fiction work written by H. G. Wells. Utilizing Freudian psychoanalysis, the writer analyzes the novel to reveal the ambivalence that happens within that work. The main research consists of three sections; they are the analysis of Id, Ego and Superego of main characters, interpretation of sexual imagery and dream symbolism and Mr. Bedford's—the main character and narrator—sexual orientation. As the final conclusion, the writer has a thought that *The First Men in the Moon* is not merely a story of ordinary journey to the moon but contains the issue of homosexuality.

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