

**THE PORTRAYAL OF SUSANNA
IN *WHAT MAISIE KNEW* MOVIE**

A GRADUATING PAPER

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the Bachelor Degree in English Literature



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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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THE PORTRAYAL OF SUSANNA IN *WHAT MAISIE KNEW*

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ABSTRACT

What Maisie Knew is a drama movie contains social issues such as broken family and gender issue. Related to women issue, this movie sets a character of Susanna who plays the role as successful career woman along with her role as a wife and a mother. Susanna is a woman but she is illustrated as dominance among others. It prompts the researcher to analyze the depiction of Susanna. Thus, the aim of this research is to find the meaning of the depiction denotatively and connotatively. In revealing the meaning of the depiction, the researcher uses semiotics theory by Roland Barthes. It explores the meaning of the depiction of Susanna and the significance it. In analyzing the data, this research uses descriptive qualitative method. As the result, the researcher finds that Susanna is superior woman through her depiction of a career woman. The superiority is taken from the representation of domination and masculinity in her, along with her physically appearance as black fashion. All of those representations represent power that emerges the superiority. It then delivers the significance that the filmmaker wants to show that woman can be superior in society along with the contradiction of being superior woman. This contradiction is illustrated as the failure in family life. Thus, the researcher finds that woman is able to be superior in society but she has to manage it to avert the failure.

Keywords: *career woman, gender issue, semiotic, superiority, What Maisie Knew*

THE PORTRAYAL OF SUSANNA IN *WHAT MAISIE KNEW*

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ABSTRAK

What Maisie Knew adalah film drama berisi permasalahan sosial seperti kegagalan rumah tangga dan isu gender. Terkait dengan isu gender, film ini menyorot karakter Susanna yang memainkan peran sebagai seorang wanita karir yang sukses bersamaan dengan perannya sebagai istri dan ibu. Susanna adalah seorang wanita namun dia digambarkan seorang yang dominan diantara yang lain. Hal ini mendorong peneliti untuk meneliti tentang arti penggambaran Susanna dalam film *What Maisie Knew*. Dengan demikian, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menggali makna dari penggambaran secara denotative dan konotatif. Dalam mengungkapkan makna penggambaran, peneliti menggunakan teori semiotik oleh Roland Barthes. Teori ini mengeksplor makna penggambaran dan signifikasi dari penggambaran itu sendiri. Dalam menganalisis data, penelitian ini menggunakan deskriptif kualitatif. Sebagai hasilnya, peneliti menemukan bahwa Susanna adalah wanita yang superior melalui penggambarannya sebagai seorang wanita karir. Kesuperiorannya diambil dari representasi dominasi dan maskulinitas dalam dirinya, bersama dengan penampilannya secara fisik sebagai wanita dengan fashion serba hitam. Sedangkan semua penggambaran itu merujuk pada kekuatan yang memunculkan kesuperiorannya. Ini kemudian memberikan makna bahwa pembuat film ingin menunjukkan bahwa wanita dapat menjadi superior dalam masyarakat bersama dengan kontradiksi menjadi wanita superior. Kontradiksi ini digambarkan sebagai kegagalan dalam kehidupan keluarga. Dengan demikian, peneliti menemukan bahwa wanita mampu unggul di masyarakat tetapi dia harus mengelolanya untuk menghindari kegagalan rumah tangga.

Kata Kunci : permasalahan sosial, semiotic, superior, wanita karir, *What Maisie Knew*

MOTTO

‘Cause every step in your life is a process

(Self Quote)



DEDICATION

Sincelery, I dedicate my graduating paper to:

My beloved mother and father, Ibu Retno Dumilah and Bpk Digda Wardana

My beloved sister, Titi Ratna Wulan

My big family



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This paper is not a perfect one; I gladly and warmly welcome all the critics and suggestion to improve this paper.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Literature has been strongly attached to human life. According to *ALA Glossary of Library and information science*, literature is a reading material used in variety activities both intellectually and recreation (1983). This activity makes literature is used for amusement at once education that able to open person's mind through science, knowledge, and moral value in it. Literature itself is not only in written but also in non-written. For example is a document formed audio-visual work such as film. Film is interpreted as moving picture or shortly called as movie.

Film is one of literature which has its own way to convey the message that can be easily understood through the story and presentation. Until the present time, film becomes one of the most popular branches of literature. This popularity becomes the reason for the researcher to choose film as the object of the research.

Based on its genre, there are several kinds of film. Those are horror, drama, romantic, colossal, thriller, fantasy, comedy, mystery, action, and science fiction. Here the researcher chooses a drama film. Film with drama genre usually tells the story about human life conflict that is deeply attached to life as well as social

problems. It has social criticism of social issues that seems to be conveyed by the filmmaker. Soerjono, a social expert argues that social issues can be interpreted as a mismatch that occurs between elements of culture or society, where such discrepancy can endanger the life of social groups. Its problems are such as poverty, crime, violation of community norms, violation of human rights, and women's issues (2003).

Hence, the researcher takes a drama film which contains women's issues entitled *What Maisie Knew*. The researcher takes *What Maisie Knew* as the object of analysis because the researcher is attracted to the presentation of the film. This film is presented by maximizing its conflicts without over dramatization. For example is in the scene when Maisie gets unattended from both parents then she has to be in a strange place with strange ones. In that scene, Maisie sheds the tears. While in the whole film, she is depicted as a steadfast girl and never cries. In this scene, the filmmaker shows deeply the frightened of Maisie in that situation without over dramatization.

What Maisie Knew contains deep social critic. It features a variety of life issues that are interesting to be discussed such as broken family and women's issue. Meanwhile, the researcher focuses on women's issue. "Women's issue is defined as a topic perceived to be of particular interest or relevance to women" (<http://en.oxforddictionaries.com>).

What Maisie Knew is a film directed by duo directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel. It is adapted from an old novel with same title in 1897 by Henry James. The setting of the novel is in London in the early 19th century which is attempted to be moved by the filmmaker into New York today. This film delivers the main character Onata Aprile as Maisie and Julianne Moore as Susanna entered the nomination of several awards such as *Women Film Critics Circle Awards* 2013, *Fantasporto Award* 2014, and *Seattle International Film Festival* 2013 (<http://imdb.com>).

In addition to Maisie as the main character, the filmmaker accentuates the figure of Susanna who is Maisie's mother. The whole story tells about a broken family where a child becomes victim of the parent's problem. However, the researcher draws an attention of Susanna's character which is related to women's issues. Susanna is depicted as a successful career woman but unsuccessful in personal life. She is illustrated as a breadwinner but precisely gets difficult in family's life because the family is not running well. Hence, the researcher is interested to put the character of Susana in term of her role as a career woman into the main discussion of this research.

Furthermore, this research tries to dig out the meaning of Susanna's portrayal as a career woman. It reveals how a career woman is portrayed by New York's culture in literary work. The researcher tries to explain how the filmmaker represents career woman in *What Maisie Knew* and finds the meaning of the portrayal.

“Culture comprises the processes of making a sense of our way of life. Cultural studies theorists, drawing particularly on semiotics, have argued that language is the major mechanism through which culture produces and reproduces social meanings. The definition of language developed in this tradition of thought goes well beyond that of the normal definition of verbal or written language” (Turner, 1999: 52).

Furthermore, Turner argues that “semiotics offer us access to such activity because it allows us to separate ideas from their representation in order to see how our view of the world, or a film, is constructed” (1999: 56). Thus, semiotic theory is suitable to seek the constructed meaning of Susanna’s character in *What Maisie Knew*. In this case, the researcher applies semiotics theory by Roland Barthes. Barthes’s semiotics theory acquaints two orders system of meaning; first order meaning or denotative meaning and second order meaning or connotative meaning. Hence, this research attempts to interpret the denotative and connotative meaning which is presented in the portrayal of Susanna and the significance of it.

1.2 Research Question

Regarding to the background of study, this research aims to find the answer of the following question: How is the portrayal of Susanna in *What Maisie Knew*?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Based on the question above, the objectives of study is to reveal the implied meaning of Susanna’s portrayal in *What Maisie Knew*.

1.4 Significance of Study

Significantly this research is expected to give any contribution for English Department. Theoretically, this research uses semiotic theory. It can be used to understand the implicit meaning of how the filmmaker interprets the woman character in literary works. It can also give explanation how to apply semiotic theory in analyzing literary work.

Practically, this research can help the reader to understand more about the life of a career woman in society. It can also be the reference for further research and make people are interested to reveal more about women character in literary work. In general, this research hopefully can make people realize about being career woman in social practice.

1.5 Literature Review

There are several researches which are relating to this research in the term of theory and issue. First, a research entitled “*Reading Religion through Manchester United Anthem and Epithet*” which is written by Irfanosa Kusumandaru in 2016. This research aimed to reveal the anthem and epithet of Manchester United football club which contains religion message by the main words Glory and Devil. For analyzing the research, Irfanosa applied semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. As the result, he found that the anthem and epithet of Manchester United football club are not only media for supporting the club, but also have greater purpose. By using religious

symbolism, Manchester United wants to gain as many as possible the attention of society that the club is a place or something to believe that provides happiness or comfortableness.

Second, a research entitled "*The Portrayal of Totalitarianism in George Orwell's Animal Farm*" which is written by Fuad Khoirul Umam in 2016. This research aimed to reveal the totalitarianism in *Animal Farm* novel. For analyzing the novel, he used semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. As the result, he found the pig characters are depicted has greedy and unclean characterization, the horse is depicted as a strong and freedom, a donkey is depicted has ignorance and stubborn characterization. Each characterization represents the characteristic of totalitarianism.

Third, a researcher entitled "*The representation of Woman Equality as Seen in Elysium Movie*" which is written by Ayu Karomah in 2016. This research aimed to portray women equality that is represented by the character of Delacourt in *Elysium* movie. For analyzing the research, she applied liberal feminism theory and film theory. As the result, she got the equality of opportunity between men and woman through the character of Delacourt.

The last is a research entitled "*The Representation of Miranda Priestly in the Devil Wears Prada Movie*" by Tri Utami Widayati in 2014. This research intended to find the representation of Miranda Priestly in *Devil Wears Prada* and the construction of the representation. It focused on women superiority. For analyzing, she used

representation and film theory. As the result, she found superiority in the character of Miranda Priestly.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

1.6.1 Semiotic Theory

Since this research intends to find the meaning of the Susanna's portrayal, the researcher considers that semiotic theory is appropriate to be applied. Barthes was interested in applying the method of semiotics into the reading of everyday life phenomena and in particular, popular culture since he was convinced that objects and events always meant more than themselves, they are always caught up in systems of representation, which add meaning of them (McNeill: 1999). His semiotic analysis of popular culture included the decoding of signs in areas such as fashion, literature magazine, music, and photography. Barthes believed that semiotics would provide an appropriate reading of modern culture since unlike liberal humanist studies of culture, it is 'a science of signs that not only possesses a notion of ideology against which the truth of science can be measured, but it promises a scientific way of understanding popular culture' (Strinati, 2004: 97).

Roland Barthes semiotics' theory is the application theory of Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotics theory. Roland Barthes still uses the basic concept of semiotics such as sign, signifier, and signified. Signifier is the word or image, for example 'roses', while signified is the concept of roses; passion, romance, love. Then, sign is

the relation of equivalence; passionate roses (Allen, 2003: 42). The sign is a result after the relation between signifier, signified, sound or mark, and concept. The concept is the relation between signifier, signified, and sign. The concept is called first order system of meaning. The denotation acted on already exist sign, whether they formed in text, photographs, film music, building, or garment (as cited in Allen, 2003: 50).

Different from Saussure, Barthes defines a further concept. It is called as connotation. The connotation concept derived from the sign which build signifier and signified in first order meaning (denotation). The first order meaning represent as signifier and add with cultural meaning. The cultural meaning can be understood as signified. The signifier and signified are combined and become new sign. The new sign is called as connotation (Barthes, 1968: 90-91).

Based on Roland Barthes semiotics theory, “all the meanings of thing in the world cannot be solved just with denotation or first order meaning, but should be solved with connotation or second order meaning” (Allen, 2001: 50). Thus, Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory is appropriate on this research to explain the denotative and connotative meaning of Susanna’s portrayal that is illustrated in *What Maisie Knew*.

1.6.2 Film Theory

Film theory is aimed to reveal the *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, lighting, and story structure. This theory is used to support in analyzing this research because the main data is a film. *Mise-en-scene* is word from France means put on scene. *Mise-*

en-scene is everything we see in a movie, all of which appear on the screen such as settings of place, costumes, makeup, lighting, expression of figures and movements. Simply meaning that *mise-en-scene* can be defined as the act of putting some things into the frame of the movie, such as arranging objects to be filmed or set the camera position (Turner, 2006: 69). In this case, the filmmaker as a storyteller is a person who creates *mise-en-scene* in the film.

The shot of the scene can also describe the picture or scene. There are several types of shot based on distance between camera and the object. According to Villarejo (2005: 38), framing depends on other cinematographic choices. Every placement of the camera can be analyzed in terms of the distance between the camera and its object(s). Film analysis has evolved an anthropocentric taxonomy for describing distance that is using the human body as the reference point for each designation:

- a. The extreme long shot (ELS), in which one can barely distinguish the human figure.
- b. The long shot (LS), in which humans are distinguishable but remain dwarfed by the background.
- c. The medium long shot (MLS), in which the human is framed from the knees up.
- d. The medium shot (MS), in which we move in slightly to frame the human from the waist up.

- e. The medium close-up (MCU), in which we are slightly closer and see the human from the chest up.
- f. The close-up (CU), which isolates a portion of a human (the face, most prominently).
- g. The extreme close-up (ECU), in which we see a mere portion of the face (an eye, the lips).

The film theory especially can give more explanation about what figure or expression of the character or the situation so the purpose and messages of the film can be accepted well. This theory supports in analyzing the character of Susanna in the movie.

1.7 Methods of Research

1.7.1 Types of Research

This research uses qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the human or social cases whether individual or groups, then making interpretation of them (Creswell, 2009:1). Thus, the researcher intends to explore the life a career woman in society which is illustrated in *What Maisie Knew* then tries to dig out the meaning by using semiotic theory.

The strategy of inquiry in this research is a case study. According to Stake, a case study gives the detail description of setting or individual (Creswell, 2009:184). Thus, this research shows the detail description of the life of a career woman in society in the film aided by textual dialogue.

1.7.2 Data Sources

In this research, there are main data and supporting data. The main data is *What Maisie Knew* movie especially in the character of Susanna. The data forms in this research are images and dialogues. The images and dialogues are from the appearance of Susanna and other characters that are needed for explanation. For supporting data, the researcher fetches some references from such as books, journals, and websites that support the main data.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

In collecting data of analysis, the researcher uses the documentation method. Here are the steps of the implementation of this research. First, the researcher watches the film continually and intensively to discover the intrinsic element of *What Maisie Knew* and gets a deep understanding of the film. Second, the researcher classifies data based on images and dialogues of Susanna, and other characters that support the analysis into some classification related to the depiction. Then, the researcher chooses the data that are appropriate to take into analysis. After that, the researcher explains the data and the relation of the data. For the last, the researcher draws conclusion.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

In analyzing the data, the researcher uses five steps. First, the researcher reads all the data to find general sense and credibility of the data. Second, the researcher analyzes the depiction of Susanna as a career woman denotatively by the illustration

in the film. Third, the researcher analyzes the depiction of Susanna connotatively based on the interpretation which is related to the culture. Fourth, the researcher covers the significance by the law of causation in the film. Fifth, the researcher concludes the implied meaning of the portrayal of Susanna.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research consists of four chapters. Chapter one discusses about background of study, problem statement, objective of study, significances of study, literature review, theoretical approach, method of study, and paper organization. Chapter two discusses about the intrinsic element of story of the film such as theme, plot, summary, setting, character, and characterization. Chapter three is discussion about the analysis of the data using semiotic theory and film theory. For the last, chapter four is conclusion and suggestion.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research is to reveal the portrayal of Susanna in *What Maisie Knew*. After analyzing the data, the researcher finds that the portrayal of Susanna as a career woman brings the meaning of superiority. The researcher gets superiority as the connotative meaning of career woman by the portrayal of Susanna in *What Maisie Knew*. It is obtained from the interpretation of Susanna as dominance and masculine woman. The significance of Susanna's portrayal is the message in portraying Susanna. Through *What Maisie Knew* movie, the filmmaker intends to convey about the life of a career woman and the consequence of it.

The depiction of career woman carries connotation of superiority. A career woman actually is identified as a superior woman. As the illustration in *What Maisie Knew*, Susanna is depicted as a superior woman. She is an important woman and stands in higher status. Hence, the superiority of her is as the result of the representation of domination, black fashion, and masculinity. Those representations are all referring to strength and power. Meanwhile those matters can support someone becomes superior.

From the interpretation of Susanna, the filmmaker wants to show that she has quality of being superior. She is dominant among others and gets higher income than

her husband. From this case, the filmmaker wants to share that woman is able to be active for reaching her fame and being successful by exploring the ability and developing the potential. A woman can be powerful and can be in high position in society.

Furthermore, the superiority of Susanna comes along with the effect. It is as the consequence of being superior woman moreover a woman who is a wife and a mother. The effect is interpreted as the failure of family's life. In *What Maisie Knew*, Susanna fails in both relationship and her role as mother. In the case of relationship, she fails twice with Beale, her unmarried husband and Lincoln her husband. It occurs because Susanna too dominates her husband. Susanna fails also in the role as mother. The successfulness of her career with the band brings herself into a super busy woman. It certainly hinders the perfection of being a mother. The daughter becomes unattended and lacks of attention from her. Hence, the researcher finds the interpretation of Susanna as a superior woman but she cannot manage the superiority that causes the failure in her family. Both men and women, if they are too dominant, the result is not good. It is proven by the depiction of Susanna who is too dominant over her husband which causes the failure of her family. Her higher income than her husband does not also guarantee the successfulness of her family. Thus, the filmmaker wants to share that a woman has to manage herself when she is in high status so the failure of life can be avoided.

In the case of self management, the Quran has discussed in Al-Hashr verse 18.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا

اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“O you, who have believed, fear Allah. And let every self look to what it has put forth for tomorrow - and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do” (quran.com/59).

The verse explains that person who believes and fears Allah must think of what he/she deeds. Every self has to do evaluation in order to the betterment for both worldly and hereafter. In addition to every deed is acquainted by Lord Allah and be considered in hereafter, it affects in the relation of a person to others (social interaction). It is because people are social creatures not individual. People are needed each other in both physical and spiritual. Thus, evaluation and management of self in action is really important and affection in social life.

Hence, the researcher finds that being a successful career woman is the dream of every woman in which she is able to be superior woman, be in high social class, be an adorable woman, and gets all of needs. However, it does not guarantee a person to achieve happiness if they cannot balance the superiority. Furthermore, the researcher finds the interested meaning of the interpretation that is being a successful career woman does not guarantee the happiness of life.

4.2 Suggestion

What Maisie Knew contains social phenomena such as broken family and women's issue. Here, the researcher analyses one of the characters in the movie by using semiotic theory. This research describes about the meaning of Susanna's portrayal. Furthermore, the researcher thinks that there is still another way to reveal her character. It should use representation theory to dig out more deeply of how the filmmaker represents the character of Susanna.

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