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CHILD ABUSE IN THE USA IN “PRECIOUS” MOVIE SCRIPT

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Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan peran karya sastra dalam mengungkapkan kritik pengarang terhadap fenomena sosial, khususnya kekerasan terhadap anak di Amerika Serikat yang tercermin dalam film “Precious”. Penelitian menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan menggunakan teori pengetahuan negatif oleh Theodor Adorno. Sumber data adalah sebuah film berbahasa Inggris dengan judul “Precious”, karya Geoffrey Fletcher. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pertama, tokoh utama dalam film adalah Precious karena intensitas keterlibatannya dalam membangun keseluruhan cerita. Kedua, latar dalam film ini adalah kekerasan terhadap anak, seperti kekerasan fisik, kekerasan psikis, kekerasan seksual, dan ketidakpedulian. Ketiga, peran karya sastra, khususnya film dalam mengungkap kritik pengarang terhadap fenomena kekerasan terhadap anak di Amerika Serikat. Dengan demikian dapat disimpulkan bahwa karya sastra sangat berperan dalam mengungkapkan fenomena sosial, kekerasan terhadap anak yang terjadi di dalam kehidupan masyarakat.*

Kata kunci: *kekerasan fisik, kekerasan psikis, kekerasan seksual*

Introduction

Child abuse occurs when adults hurt children or young people under 18, either physically or in some other ways. Usually, the adult is someone the child or young person knows well, such as a parent, relative, or friend of the family. In the United States, 3.3 million reports are made every year in connection with child abuse and almost 6 million children are suffering from it. Surprisingly, the report of child abuse is made in every 10 second and this phenomenon is the cause of the deaths of more than 5 children every day in the United States.

Children are suffering from a hidden epidemic of child abuse and neglect. Every year 3.3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States involving nearly 6 million children (a report can include multiple children). General Statistics: (a) a report of child abuse is made every ten seconds, (b) more than five children die every day as a result of child abuse, (c) about 30% of abused and neglected children

will later abuse their own children, continuing the horrible cycle of abuse (<http://www.childhelp.org/pages/statistics>, diakses June 19, 2013).

Child abuse ruins the victim's life. According to some references, an abused child will have more difficulties to live the child's life than a non-abused child. The child can feel ashamed, have low self-esteem, or develop abusive behavior. Moreover, an abused child tends to turn to alcohol and drugs more easily because the child finds it difficult to solve problems or build happy relationship with people in the future.

Based on the explanation above, this research is to analyze child abuse in the movie script because this threat is in our society's daily life and to prove how the author criticizes child abuse that happens in the society through "Precious" movie script using the Negative Knowledge theory by Theodor W. Adorno.

In negative knowledge model, Adorno views literature and reality stand at a distance from each other and that this distance gives 'the work of art a vantage-point from which it can criticize actuality' (Jefferson, 1982). For Adorno, this critical distance comes from the fact that literature (his word is art, but he means it to include literature) has its own 'formal laws'. He does not spell out precisely what these formal laws are, but he gives two indications of the kind of things he means. Firstly, he talks about 'procedures and techniques' which in modern art 'dissolve the subject matter and reorganize it' (Jefferson, 1982:153). Secondly, he says that art is the 'essence and image' of reality rather than its photographic reproduction. An image in a work of art comes for Adorno from the artist (the subject) absorbing in the creative process what he perceives in reality (the object); 'In the form of an image the object is absorbed into the subject' (Jefferson, 1982:160). Adorno takes reality not as the empirical world we see through our eyes or through the camera lens but the dialectical totality, a structure which can only be perceived by a process of thought linking things together and seeing how they effectively are.

In addition, for Adorno, a great modernist work is precisely that which manages to reveal the contradiction between appearance and reality. He stresses

the distance between the work and reality by saying that 'art exists in the real world and has a function in it' and yet it is 'the antithesis of that which is the case' (Jefferson, 1982:159).

The literary work does not give us a neatly-shaped reflection and knowledge of reality but acts within reality to expose its contradiction. Adorno says 'art is the negative knowledge of the actual world', but 'negative knowledge does not mean knowledge of nothing, non-knowledge. It means knowledge which can undermine and negate a false or reified condition (Jefferson, 1982: 160). Adorno makes this knowledge a negative rather than a positive one and places a central emphasis on the antagonistic, critical role played by the literary work which respects its formal laws. Adorno opens up modernist writing to Marxist literary theory by showing that a different kind of relationship between the text and reality is possible; one of critical distance and negative knowledge rather than reflection. He stresses that all art stands a distance from reality.

Method

In conducting this research, I apply descriptive qualitative and library research methods as cited in the *Qualitative and Quantitative Research* by John Anderson, Qualitative research is conducted by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. (Anderson: 2006)

A library research usually takes the form of the literary review. There are steps taken in conducting the research: Choosing the movie script the object of this research; watching the movie and reading the whole movie script; deciding the problem as author's criticism of child abuse based on the movie script "Precious"; collecting data related to the object of the research; deciding the Negative Knowledge to reveal the author's criticism of child abuse based on the movie script "Precious".

Result And Discussions

1. Main Character

Main character is a character that has a central position in a story. Main character is also the center of what the author wants to tell in her/his work. Main character is character that mostly appears in many events of the story. (Nurgiyantoro, 2009). Main character can be defined as an important character in a story. It determines the plot of the story because it is mostly exposed and connected to other character/s in the story. It can be a subject of an action or even the object of it. (Nurgiyantoro, 2009) The main character in "Precious" movie script is Precious. She is the central part of the movie and dominates every part of the events in the movie from the beginning until the end of the story.

The following events prove Precious is the main character. (1) Precious is sexually abused by her biological father; (2) Precious delivers her first child; (3) Precious is abused by her mother; (4) Precious is pregnant with her second child ; (5) Precious is suspended from school; (6) Precious gets into a new school; (7) Precious tells a social worker about her awful family life; (8) Precious gives birth to her second child; (9) Precious is almost killed by her mother; (10) Precious finds an encouraging and helpful figure; (11) Precious is HIV infected; (12) Precious is encouraged to survive; (13) Precious joins a group of incest survivors; (14) Precious is ready to have a new better life.

Based on the above events, it is clearly seen that Precious is the main character in this movie script as she has the highest intensity involvement in events from the beginning to the end of the story that builds the story. It means that without Precious's involvement in the story, the movie script will not be possible.

2. Social Setting

Social setting shows how the characters live in the story. It can be the way they think, their habits, beliefs, or even the culture of the place where the story takes place.

“Latar sosial menyanan pada hal-hal yang berhubungan dengan perilaku kehidupan sosial masyarakat di suatu tempat yang diceritakan dalam karya fiksi... dapat berupa kebiasaan hidup, adat istiadat, tradisi, keyakinan, pandangan hidup, cara berpikir dan bersikap ...”
(Nurgiyantoro, 1995:233)

“Precious” movie script describes the way the abusive parents treat their child. There are four types of child abuse: physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

Physical abuse was shown by one of Precious’s neighbors, Sheila, who hit her child’s eye and made it black.

Sheila : Do you want me to knock your other eye out! Just sit there and shup up then! I’m going to talk to this lady before my shit gets cut off!
(Sheila heads up the stairs toward the offices)

Psychological abuse was seen when Sheila also comitted psychological abuse by threatening to knock Ruby’s other eye out if Ruby failed to obey her command to sit and wait outside. A threat can cause a feeling of insecurity in a child. Another psychological abuse was experienced by Rita, a friend of Precious. Her mother was killed by her own father before her every eyes. Her father did not care how his action could effect his child. Needless to say, this murder impaired Rita’s emotional development to grow normally. Unable to understand and accept the murder, Rita started soliciting for prostitution at the age of twelve.

Precious (V.O): Rita’s daddy kill her muhver in front of her eyes and Rita been out on the street selling herself since she 12

Another kind of abuse in the movie script was sexual abuse sustained by Irene, one of the incest survivors whom Precious met in the group’s meeting. Irene was fondled by her family member when she was a very young child. When she got older, he had intercourse with her more than once a week.

Irene: Hello and welcome to our Tuesday night beginner’s meeting ... My name is Irene. I am an incest survivor. It started when I was about 4 or 5 years old with him fondling me. By the time I was 12, he was having intercourse with me 3 or 4 times a week.

Jermaine, a friend of Precious was expelled from her house when her mother found out that she was different from other girls. Jermaine's mother had committed physical neglect for not providing shelter for her child.

Precious (V.O): Jermaine say mens beat her and then rape her for what she is. Muhver throw her out of the house when she find out that she is different from other girls.

3. Child abuse in the USA revealed in "Precious" movie script

Through this movie script, the author tries to criticize child abuse that many children suffer from. Below is the author's criticism of child abuse in the movie script "Precious". There are four major types of child abuse: physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect (Donnellan, 1998)

Physical abuse is nonaccidental physical injury ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death as a result of, among others : punching; kicking; biting; shaking; throwing; hitting (whether with a hand, stick, strap, or other object); and burning. Psychological abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self worth. This may include: sarcasm; constant criticism; threats; rejection; withholding love, affection, support, or guidance. Psychological abuse (also known as verbal, mental, or emotional abuse) is almost always present when other forms of abuse are identified. Sexual abuse occurs if a parent or caregiver forces a child or young person to take part in any kind of sexual activity. It includes activities such as : fondling a child's genitals or breasts; making a child fondle an adult's genitals; penetration; incest; rape; sodomy; exploitation through prostitution; asking a child to look at a pornographic picture or material; oral sex; and intercourse. Regardless of the child's behavior or reactions, it is the responsibility of the adult not to engage in sexual acts with children. Sexual abuse is never the child's fault. Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide a child's basic needs. Neglect is a very common type of child abuse. Neglect may be: a) physical: a failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision. b) medical: occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment needed by the child. c) educational

is a failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs. d) emotional: inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs (Donellan, 1998).

Henry Kempe and Ray Helfer (1980) in their writing "The Battered Child" also described the four types of child abuse as follows.

- a. Physical abuse. Children sustaining physical abuse commonly have marks or bruises. They are abused by being paddled, slapped, bitten, pinched or pulled by the earlobe. Physical abuse is almost always related to punishment.

"inflicted bruises occur at typical sites or fit recognizable patterns (e.g. human hand marks, human bite marks, strap marks, or bizarre shapes) ... Bruises that predominate on the buttocks, lower back, and lateral thighs are almost always related to punishment (i.e., paddling) ... bruises on the cheek are usually secondary to being slapped ... Children who are pinched or pulled by the earlobe usually have a matching bruise on each surface ..." (Kempe, 1980:130)

Abusive parents also hurt their son's genital. They pinch their son's penis, tie it off with a rubber band, or even the worst, they amputate it.

"Likewise, genital or inner-thigh bruises are usually inflicted for toileting mishaps. Injuries to the penis may include pinch marks, cuts, abrasions, a deep groove from having it tied off with a rubber band, or amputation." (Kempe, 1980:130)

Children in the United States also suffer from burns. They are physically abused by being held under flowing hot tap water or immersed in tubs of drawn hot water. Besides using hot tap water, children are likely to be abused using a burning cigarette.

"Thus, an unsafe situation is created in most United States homes where exposure to hot tap water is likely to result in severe abuse. Abused children are often held under flowing hot water or immersed in tubs of drawn hot water" (Kempe, 1980:149) "A separate group of contact burns is seen in our cigarette-smoking culture. Adults often have burning cigarettes on hand during times of frustration and may inflict deep, circular cigarette burns upon their children. These burns are often grouped an multiple, most often involving the hands and arms" (Kempe, 1980:155)

- b. Psychological abuse. Psychological abuse which some reference calls verbal abuse, happens when parent hurt their children through words. Saying

unkind things like 'stupid', comparing a child to someone else, and embarrassing him to many people are some ways of hurting a child's feeling. There are ten categories of verbal abuse, they are (1) rejection or withdrawal of love, (2) verbal put-downs, (3) demands for perfection, (4) negative predictions, (5) negative comparison, (6) scapegoating, (7) shaming, (8) cursing or swearing, (9) threats, and (10) inducing guilt (Hetherington, 1999: 503)

- c. Sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is likely to happen in form of incest and rape. It usually takes years for incest to be revealed in public and only happens when dramatic change occurs in the family, such as adolescent rebellion, pregnancy, venereal disease, or sudden family quarrel.

"Sexual abuse includes pedophilia (an adult's preference for or addiction to sexual contact with children), all forms of incest, and rape. Incest is usually hidden for years and only comes to public attention around a dramatic change in the family situation, such as adolescent rebellion or delinquent acts, pregnancy, venereal disease, a variety of psychiatric illness, or something as trivial as a sudden family quarrel" (Kempe, 1980:199)

- d. Neglect. Neglect is one of child abuse types. According to Kempe and Helfer (1980:183), a number of neglect cases are higher than those of any child abuse type. Physical neglect happens when parents do not give supervision such as leaving their young children at home by themselves, putting them at risk of drowning in a bathtub or starting a fire. Infants are neglected when they are left alone at home without parent's supervision and under the care of a young child. Physical neglect also happens when parents let their infants lie for a long time in the crib, causing him/her to suffer from malnourishment. Medical neglect happens when parents do not give medical help needed by a child. If the medical help needed is neglected, it means parents put their child's rights in endangerment. Medical help is also needed to avoid imminent danger. Educational neglect is shown when parents do not stimulate or educate their child, so the child has developmental delays such as delays in motor skills, social skills, and especially in language skills. When it comes to language delay, it can result in the child not understanding simple statements. On top of that, educationally neglected child can end up

not knowing the names of common objects when he/she starts school. Emotionally neglected child does not get interest from their parents because those parents do not even look at and talk to their child. They also forget their child's presence quickly when they are talking to another adult. Children left alone at home are not only physically neglected because of the absence of supervision, but they are also emotionally neglected because they do not see themselves as valued. Moreover, they may end up not coming home because no one cares about their presence at home (Kempe, 1980)

In the film script, Precious was physically abused when her mother was upset with her. Mary had no scruples about hitting or throwing things like an ashtray or shoe at Precious. This was shown when Precious did not bring the cigarettes she had asked earlier.

Mary : You get my cigarettes?
(Precious freezes. Her HEART BEATS loudly)
Precious : No Mama, I dropped some of my things on the way to school (Mary –incredibly large, oily skin, ill-fitted wig and house dress sits on the couch with her back turned to Precious. This woman looks as if she is one with the furniture. A cigarette smolders between her fingers as she watches “THE PRICE IS RIGHT” on television)

Precious, still waiting for the other shoe to drop, looks momentarily relieved and returns to the dishes until.

CRACKKK!

A thick glass ashtray smashes into Precious' head. Precious falls and lands ...)

Not only did Mary throw things at Precious, but she also doused Precious with two gallons of water when Precious was lying on the floor. Mary also tried to hit Precious on the head with a frying pan.

Eyes closed with ashes and tears on her face., Precious lays still on the floor. Her hands are still wet from the dishes. GOOOSH! 2 gallons of water splash down on her. Her eyes spring open. Mary stands over Precious with a large dripping pot in her hands. She drops it on the floor and returns to the couch to watch another program. ...

There is silent movement behind Precious. Mary approaches quietly wielding a skillet. Mary swings for a head shot but Precious easily sidesteps the blow. The refrigerator takes the hit and a new dent. Precious stares calmly at her mother. Mary looks ashamed. Still aglow, Precious grins absently at her mother and then leaves the kitchen.

Psychological abuse was shown when Mary humiliated Precious and discouraged her wish from taking dance lessons. Mary said she could not afford to pay for the lessons, adding that no one would want to see Precious dance.

Precious (V.O) : My name is Precious Jones. I wanna take tap dance lessons. Mama said we can't afford it. Plus she says who wanna see me dancing anyway

Mary always called Precious with bad words, terrorizing her in order to get what she wanted. She called Precious names such as 'piggy', 'bitch', and 'fat', only to have Precious cook for her. Mary also called Precious 'stupid' when Precious failed to do things properly.

Mary (O.S) : Tell them assholes to stop ringing my bell
(Precious presses TALK on the intercom)
Precious : Stop ringing the goddam buzzer motherfucker!

Precious : Stop it!
Mary : Press listen stupid
(Precious sighs and press LISTEN)
Mary : What she want?
Precious : I don't know
Mary : Ask her stupid

Precious had been raped by her father, Carl, repeatedly since she was three years old and got pregnant twice. Instead of protecting Precious from dangerous things, Carl himself did immoral and barbaric things to his own child.

Mary : When? I don't know when it starts. When I remember it? She still little. Yeah, around three maybe. I bottle her, tittie him. Bottle more better for kidz. Sanitary. But I never git dried up 'cause Carl always on me. It's like that you know. Chile, man – a woman got bofe. What you gonna do? So we in bed. I put her one side of me on pillow, Carl on other side of me
(Ms. Weiss looks as if she's stopped breathing)

I think that's the day IT starts. So he on me. Then he reach over to Precious! I say Carl what you doing! He say shut your big ass up! This good for her.

Int. Mrs. Lichenstein's Office – Day

(Precious waits among plants, plaques, pictures and file cabinets while Mrs. Lichenstein sits across from her reading from a file.

Mrs. Lichenstein closes the file and sets it on the desk between them)

Imrs. Lichenstein : Are you pregnant? You're sixteen, still in junior high school and pregnant with your second child. Correct Claireece? Claireece are you pregnant again?

(Precious stares at the file without responding)

Mrs. Lichenstein: Do you have any thoughts about your situation?

(Precious shrugs her shoulders)

The abuse which her parents had committed led Precious to believe that she was an unloved and worthless person.

(Precious erupts hurling her journal sharply across the room. It bounces hard off the blackboard and stops abruptly on the floor facedown)

Precious : Fuck you! You don't know nuffin what i been through !
Never had no boyfriend! My daddy say he
Gonna marry my
But how he do that, fucking me illegal? I
Never been no
Child! Not even one day!!!

(Precious huffs cynically)

Nobody love me

Ms. Rain : People do love you Precious

Precious : Please don't lie Miz Rain! Love?! Me?! Love rape
me, beat me, call me animal, get me sick and make
me feel wurfless. I had enough love.

Instead of cooking for ther child, Mary had Precious cook for her. She spent her time doing nothing but watching TV. Mary had no scruples about asking Precious who just arriveed home from school to cook some food. Mary also neglected little Precious by not giving he supervision. She did not care how Precious appeared by letting her go to school in an untidy and dirty appearance. Precious's hair was messy and her dress was dirty. Her appearance made the other students mock her.

(a young precious with uncombed hair sits with her back to us in a bright pink dress. She is at the very back of the classroom. ... As we continue drifting, the playground voices of other young children echo out ...)

Girl #1 (O.S) : What that on your dress Precious?

Girl #2 (O.S) : She don't say nuffin. She don't talk to anybody

Girl #1 (O.S) : She nasty

Girl #3(O.S) : When the last time yo head was combed?

(Precious mumbled something to herself)

Girl #4 (O.S) : What?! Shut up Precious. You talk funny. You was better when you was on mute.

Precious needed immediate medical assistance when she was going to deliver her first child. Yet instead of taking Precious to the hospital, Mary let Precious lie on the kitchen floor of the house and suffer from the pain without any help. In that urgent situation, she even still abused Precious by kicking her on the head.

Precious : ... Whole class scream 'prenatal' at me. They don't know I had my first baby on the kitchen floor wif my muther kicking me upside my head. I mean, who would believe?

(Precious snickers reminiscently a moment and then turns to Ms. Weiss)

Precious : Them the kind of thangs you mean when you say talk about whatever come into my mind?

(Ms. Weiss looks up and nods through a perplexed daze)

As a sixteen-year-old girl, Precious had poor ability in reading. This shows us how careless Mary was about Precious's education and it made her child ignorant. Undoubtedly, the pursuit of Precious's education is hampered by Mary's neglect to give her proper education.

(Ms. Rain points to the letter A. It is the first word on the page)

Ms. Rain : Do you know what that is?

Precious : Yes, A

(Ms. Rain points to the next word)

Ms. Rain : Do you know that word?

Precious : No, I don't

Ms. Rain : Do you know the letters?

(Precious nods. Ms. Rain points to the letters ...)

Precious : D,A,Y

Ms. Rain :

Do you know that word?

(Precious shakes her head)

Ms. Rain : Day. That word is day.

Mary did not show her love to her child when the sexual abuse happened for the first time. What Mary did as the mother of her own daughter was not enough, because she only said 'stop' and did not fight to save her powerless three-year-old child from her barbaric boyfriend. We could also see how Mary did not love Precious after the incest happened. Mary should have prevented her boyfriend from coming to her house and raping Precious again. Yet she still let Carl come, making him rape Precious repeatedly until Precious got older. By doing nothing toward Carl's barbaric action and not giving protection and love to her child, Mary had neglected her child emotionally.

Int. Precious' bedroom – night ...onto a bed completely naked

Carl kenwood jones, a large and naked man much more than twice her age falls on top of her and gyrates. Moments laer...

Precious (softly): Daddy?

(An enormous hand muzzles her)

As a child who had never felt love and affection, Precious became an antisocial person. She did not socialize with other students at school and always sat in the back row of the class. But someday Precious wanted her life to change because she did not find herself normal like other people.

Int. Classroom-day

(precious sits in the last row behind 26 children half her size, 3 years younger and mostly african american. Noise and projectiles fill the air)

Precious (v.o): Everyday i tell myself something gonna happen, like i'm gonna break through or somebody gonna break through to me – i'm gonna learn, catch up, be normal, sit in the front ... Someday.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, now I come to the conclusion as follows. First, the main character is Precious because of her intensity in building the whole story. Second, the social setting describes the child abuse, such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Third, the movie script "Precious" described child abuse as the writer's criticism.

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