

Watching The Seagull's Film (2018): Conflict Identification in an Analysis of Audience Reception

Della Eka Putri¹, Sri Kusumo Habsari², and Susanto³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Sebelas Maret

Email: ¹dellaekap002@gmail.com

Abstract— Film is a mass communication medium that carries messages to be conveyed to its audience. The Seagull (2018) is a film that adapts the famous drama by Anton Chekhov which is set in the conditions of general society at the end of the 19th century. Several conflicts are presented in this film so they are full of the meaning of life. This research is about audience reception studies which aims to identify audience reactions to the conflict in this film. The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive research method using an ethnographic audience approach and Stuart Hall's audience reception analysis as an analytical tool. Data was collected using the FGD or focus group discussion method. In this way, it produces an analysis that leads to conflicts or problems in the film The Seagull which causes disappointment with reality which does not match the expectations of the characters in the film.

Keywords— Audience Reception, Film, The Seagull, Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

Film is a cultural creation that is packaged very interestingly because it combines a combination of art, music, storyline and also the uniqueness of other cultures in it. According to Effendy (2003), films have great competitiveness because they have audio and visual market segmentation. This is because films often depict social life in society, so it can be said that films are one of the most effective mass media attributes for conveying messages implicitly and explicitly. In accordance with the opinion expressed by Sobur (2016) who said that viewers will receive verbal and non-verbal messages from watching films, so that essentially and substantially films have power which will have implications for communication in society (Wibowo, 2006). As a mass communication medium, films present many different genres to attract audiences with the stories or themes presented therein. A film expert from England states that there are three main genres in film, namely fiction, experimental and documentary (Williams, 1984: 121-2).

However, over time, film genres have developed into sub-genres as we know them today. These genres include action, drama, historical epic, fantasy, science fiction, horror, comedy, crime, musical, adventure and war (Pratista, 2008: 13-20). Of the several genres that have been mentioned, the comedy genre is the most popular with young audiences, while the romance genre is ranked after comedy (Anggraeni, 2022). One of the films with the comedy, romance and drama genre is The Seagull 2018 (IMDb, 2018).

The Seagull is a film adapted from the famous play script by Russian writer Anton Chekhov in 1895 with the original title *Chayka* (J Van Niekerk, 2020). This work has been produced several times in film form, one of which was produced on June 29 2015. The 2018 film *The Seagull* was directed by Michael Mayer with a characteristic modern touch but does not eliminate the cultural elements of the 19th century. On May 11 2018, this film was first released in America, then on September 28 2018 it was released in Indonesia. Several critics stated that the film produced in 2018 was different from previous productions, as stated by David Stratton "The new version of *The Seagull* by Michael Mayer is much more successful in capturing the atmosphere that was previously said to be difficult to understand (Rotten Tomatoes, 2018).

Until now, *The Seagull* still exists in the world of modern art theater. This is because the background of *The Seagull* is in accordance with the general conditions of society, so this work is very interesting to watch for both old or young people. For this reason, the issues in this film are full of meaning in everyday life in society. The issues raised in *The Seagull* are related to women. In Hollywood films, issues about women are often implied in films, as reported by a 2021 study by the University of San Diego "Center For Study of Women in Television and Film" found that 7% of films released featured more women than men. The depiction of women in this film is that by reaching the highest positions in their careers, they can fulfill their rights as women who can determine their own path in life, this is

different from the condition of women in the 19th century.

The audience is an important aspect in the film industry. As stated in research conducted by Carboni and Camilla (2007) regarding spectatorship, stating that the audience is a key component in films, in a broad generalization the idea of subjectivity is often marginalized. For this reason, in their research, Carboni and Camilla show that the subjectivity of audience studies is very important by paying attention to three main ideas, namely text structure, cultural complications, and psychological satisfaction. Apart from that, research by Martian (2015) also revealed that the quality of Indonesian films is in the hands of the audience, so that the audience is a stakeholder who influences the course of a film.

In the process of audience reception there are three different stages in the message delivery procedure. The first stage is encoding, the second stage is decoding, and the last stage is the interpretation stage to understand the audience's reaction to a film they watch. As in research by Burton (1999: 186-193) which explains that audience reception studies explain the social conditions that are specific to the ongoing reading process. Meanwhile, according to Fiske, reception is useful for supporting the study of audiences as powerful cultural agents in producing meaning from various content carried by the media, so that audiences are not considered passive (Fiske in Tri Nugroho Adi, 2008). The development of cultural research has been known in three generations of studies. Encoding-decoding in ethnographic studies of audiences marks the first development shown in the discursive or construction of media and audiences (Alaasutari, 1999: 2-8).

Several analyzes regarding audience reception cannot be separated from the audience's perspective in interpreting the film, as stated by NHG Kosker (2020) in his research regarding the objectification of women's bodies in the American Silent Movie *Love 'em and Leave 'em* (1926). In his research, Kosker analyzed men's perspectives on women's bodies as objects in a film. Apart from that, a similar thing was also expressed by Sara L. Friedman (2008) in her research "Watching Twin Bracelets in China: The Role of Spectatorship and Identification in an Ethnographic Analysis of Film Reception". This research was carried out by examining audience comments on a film, so Sara revealed that audience involvement with media texts and the relationship

between current and past life is a form of representational.

The large amount of research regarding audience studies that has been described above makes researchers interested in conducting research in the same domain. However, from these studies, there has been no research directly related to the study of audience reception of the 2018 film *The Seagull*, which in fact is a film with a background of conflict that often occurs in the general public. Thus, this research will identify audience reactions to the conflicts in the film *The Seagull*.

II. METHOD

An example of what should be written in the Literature Review is as follows. This research is a qualitative descriptive research in the field of cultural studies. Basically, cultural studies seeks to shake up established thinking about reality in everyday cultural life (Ida, 2004: 3). This type of qualitative descriptive research is used to obtain a comprehensive picture of the person being studied. This research approach uses an audience ethnography approach using audience reception analysis and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory as analytical tools. There are two data sources in this research, namely primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source comes from information from informants during FGD activities. Meanwhile, secondary data sources come from document and literature studies to support primary data arguments. In taking informants, researchers used a purposive sampling technique, which means this technique includes people as informants who are selected based on criteria determined by the researcher taking into account the objectives of the research (Kriyantono, 2007: 154).

To obtain data, researchers used data collection techniques using the FGD (Focus Group Discussion) method and document study. After the data is obtained, the next step is analyzing the data. The data analysis technique in this research uses the model from Miler and Huberman.

The steps for analyzing data are: (1) Data collection, (2) Data reduction, (3) Data presentation, and (4) Drawing conclusions. Using Stuart Hall's theory of audience reception, the results of the data will be divided into three categories, namely, dominant-hegemonic position, negotiation position, and opposition position. The results of the data analysis will be presented narratively in the form of paragraphs and statements.

III. RESULT

A. Synopsis of *The Seagull's Film*

The *Seagull* is a well-known work by one of the great writers in Russia, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov or commonly known as Anton Chekhov. Chekhov was born in Taganrog, South Russia on January 29, 1860. The *Seagull* was first written in 1895 in Russia and then produced in a theater performance in 1896. In its first performance at the Alexandrinsky

Theater, St. Petersburg, Russia on October 17, 1896 was recorded in history as the biggest failure, because at this first performance, *The Seagull* received a poor response from the audience.

Russian people, who usually watch theater performances with the comedy genre, were disappointed because the genre shown by Chekhov was the opposite. But after the second and subsequent performances, *The Seagull* received a positive response from the audience, so this made *The Seagull* one of the famous works in the world of theater performances.

Due to its influence in the world of literature, *The Seagull* has been adapted into films several times. The first production was on December 22, 1968 in the United States and directed by Sydney Lumet. Second production on 14 February 1972 in Russia by Youli Karassik.

Then the third production was on January 5 1975 in the United States, directed by John J Desmond. In a relatively long time gap, *The Seagull* was produced again on May 11 2018 in the United States and was directed by Michael Mayer. In this fourth production, *The Seagull* gets a more modern touch from the director. Michael Mayer is considered to have succeeded in breaking the stigma about *The Seagull* which was considered too monotonous for young people.

The Seagull tells the story of an old actress named Iriana Arkadina. She is a widow who has a son named Constantine. Together with his girlfriend, Nina Zarietchnaya, Constantine pursues his dream of becoming a famous novelist. Meanwhile, Nina has the desire to become a theater actress.

Constantine always supports Nina in her dreams. However, when Constantine created a stage because of Constantine's emotional, sensitive and unstable nature, Nina broke off her relationship with Constantine. Not

long after, Nina met Boris Trigorin, a famous novelist who was also Arkadina's lover. This made Constantine jealous and almost committed suicide. As time goes by, Nina and Boris get closer and have a child with Boris. When she was in contact with Boris, Nina managed to become a famous theater actress in Moscow.

However, at the end of the story, Boris leaves Nina and returns to Arkadina. On the other hand, knowing this, Constantine tries to invite Nina to reconnect with him. But Nina refused and made Constantine even more frustrated, in the end he decided to shoot himself.

B. Favorite Characters of *The Seagull's Film*

In the film *The Seagull* there are several figures or characters. These figures are Iriana Arkadina, Nina Zarietchnaya, Constantine Trepleiff, Boris Trigorin, Peter Sorin, Eugene Dorn, Ilia Shamraeff, Paulina, Masha, and Medviedenko.

These characters are played very well by each actor or actress who is responsible for playing these characters. Arkadina is an old theater actress who is arrogant but cries easily, played by Annette Carol Bening, a famous American actress. Nina is a young girl, someone who is ambitious but does not support her parents, she is played by a Russian actress, Saoirse Ronan.

Then Constantine, a young man who is ambitious but easily depressed, is played by Billy Howled and Boris, a famous novelist aged approximately 37 years, and is also known as a character who likes to spread charm, played by Corey Stoll.

Of the several characters, Nina's character has its own charm according to the audience. This is because the characteristics are in accordance with the conditions of the general public. Nina is a girl who has good self-confidence, which really helps her to achieve what she dreams of.

"... I think an interesting character is Nina. Because he is confident to pursue his career. His dreams come from himself, and not encouragement from other people."

Nina's self-confidence was formed thanks to encouragement from the people who love her. This was proven by the encouragement of her lover, Constantine, who made her a mini theater for Nina's first appearance in front of Constantine's family.

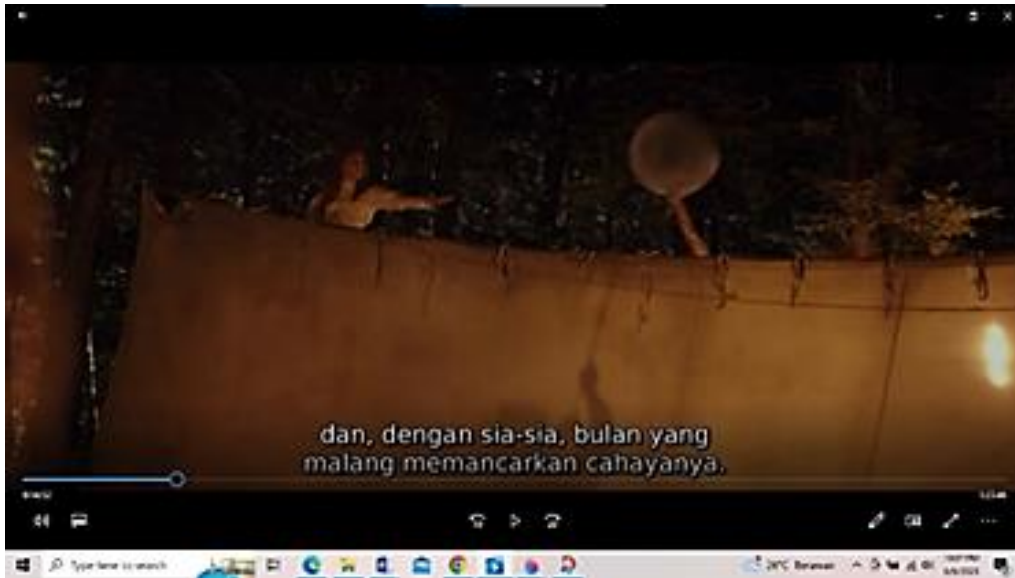


Image.1: Nina's Monologue

To achieve her dreams, many people or other figures became references for Nina. Like Arkadina who is a famous theater actress. She admires Arkadina who has received many awards and has also played roles in many theaters. Apart from Arkadina, the figure of Boris is also a reference for Nina. He is a famous Novelist.

"... If it's interesting, it's Boris. Because he is a figure who can be a reference for Nina. Nina is really ambitious, like I want to be like Boris like that, right? Nina can try as hard or as hard as possible to become a famous actress because she sees Boris as a reference so that can influence Nina like that."

In this case, Boris is a figure who can be a reference for Nina to become famous. As is known in the film, Boris is a famous novelist in Moscow who is also active in the world of theater arts. Boris always writes things he sees spontaneously, this is also proven in the scene in the film *The Seagull* where Boris is writing what he sees spontaneously. There are 4 main figures or characters who are the main highlight of the story in this film, namely: Arkadina, Nina, Constantine, and Boris. Of the several characters that the audience has watched, the character Nina is the most interesting character according to the audience, so it is often mentioned by the audience.

IV. DISCUSSION

The 2018 film *The Seagull* is a film adapted from a drama literary work in 1895 written by a famous Russian

writer, Anton Pavlovich Chekov. *The Seagull* was directed by Michael Mayer and released by Sony Picture Classics. The *Seagull* trailer was first released on YouTube in 2018, to date the trailer has been watched 1 million times. This film is considered quite successful by several film reviewers because it succeeded in turning old literary works into works that can be enjoyed by young audiences. This film is interesting not only among older people, but also among young people. This film is interesting to watch. Several informants said they were interested in this film because it was set at the end of the 19th century, where in that century they never encountered classic things today. However, finding informants who like and are interested in this spectacle is quite difficult to do. Most young people today prefer modern things. However, the 2018 film *The Seagull* carries modernity, so that young viewers do not have much difficulty understanding the meaning of the film.

*"... Yes, it's good. In my opinion, the film *The Seagull* is good and the story is detailed, so we get every detail, how do we play a role in the film, it involves everything, it's like the emotions keep running out, what's more, it's basically a mixed feeling, like like that. In my opinion, overall it's good and a solid recommendation to watch."*

The Seagull is considered a good film and succeeds in bringing details to the original script. Then the background of *The Seagull*, namely from the end of the 19th century, adds to the appeal of this film.

"...The Seagull actually has his background in the last 19th century, the last 19th century, like that, means he actually raised an issue which was about women. "Actually, The Seagull is full of meaning, because what his name says is like criticizing women in that century."

This film presents a spectacle that is not only a medium of entertainment, but also a medium for introducing western culture through film. This cannot be separated from the main function of films, namely as an entertainment medium and a means of disseminating information, both implicit and explicit. In this way, this film serves as a means for the audience to find out more about western culture, especially Russia in the 19th century.

Stuart Hall's audience reception was used in this research to identify audience reactions to the conflict in the film *The Seagull*. Hall explains that audience reception is a theory for viewing audiences in interpreting a text through their background, social and cultural background (Betrand & Hughes, 2005). This theoretical model can be used by the general public to understand the message conveyed in a text. In reception studies there is a process, namely encoding-decoding. According to Stuart Hall (1997), encoding-decoding is the process of sequentially conveying messages from social events in which there is an implied ideology.

Stuart Hall (1997) stated that there are three stages in the message delivery procedure, first encoding, second decoding, and third interpretation. Based on this, the encoding-decoding process produces several conflict codes mentioned by the audience. These conflicts are related to self-confidence, career, dreams or aspirations, love, hard work, fame or notoriety, ambition, and freedom. These conflicts were then interpreted and resulted in the conflict presented in the film *The Seagull* not only coming from one character, but from each character having their own conflict. These conflicts are interconnected from one character to another, so that it will make a film come alive with conflict. However, sometimes the conflict that appears in a film is not just one type of conflict, but can be more than one conflict.

"...Nina was in love with another character but who was the man who committed suicide, oh Constantine, it seems like she can manage herself to become a complete woman. She continues to work with her opinion and yes,

that is what women's rights mean. As a woman, yes, even though there are two men who actually, if you could say, are like obstacles, but in the end she is still an actress, even though she has to lose these real people who love or love her, it means something because "That's fulfilling her rights as a woman, so isn't Nina high enough to have her own freedom and not have other people interfere with her choices".

In this case, Nina is considered a woman who can fulfill her rights. This right is the freedom to determine what choices to make in her life, namely to become an actress. Apart from that, he can also manage himself to prepare for the consequences of his choices. The consequences that Nina faces are also related to her desire to be famous.

Nina is said to be an ambitious woman. Her ambition is in terms of pursuing her dream of becoming a theater actress. Based on KBBI (2008: 69), ambition is a psychological drive to achieve a goal. Ambition is created because there is a goal or target within a person for the future. The creation of ambition cannot be separated from the social environment of society which wants us to be ambitious (Osho, 2010). Environmental factors also pushed Nina to become an ambitious person. It is known that Nina is Constantine's girlfriend and comes from a family background of a famous actress and producer, so this influenced Nina's desire to become a famous actress.

Because her dream is to become an actress, and she realizes that becoming an actress is not easy. Nina puts aside love which means she has to lose the people she loves, like Constantine. She must accept these consequences because she made this choice by herself, so that this causes disappointment in himself. She had to let go of several things from her life, so that in the end disappointment crept into Nina's mind.

V. CONCLUSION

After conducting research using the FGD or focus group discussion method with viewers of the film *The Seagull*, it can be concluded that the audience's reactions to the conflicts in the film *The Seagull* are very diverse. Each character brings conflict to their lives. These conflicts are interrelated and cannot be separated. The *Seagull* reveals the struggles and disappointments of a group of artists with the people they love. In the end, it makes

them trapped in their own fears and insecurities. It is characterized by unrequited love and unfulfilled desires.

However, there is a unity in their understanding of the conflict in this film. This conflict originates from one character who is the common thread, namely Nina Zarietchnaya. The audience thinks that Nina is the character who is at the center of the conflict in this film. For this reason, in general, the problems faced by the characters in the film *The Seagull* are their inability to achieve happiness, which then leads to disappointment in reality which does not match expectations. These expectations are about ambition for love and fame.

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