

## THE REPRESENTATION OF MODERN GOVERNMENT IN W. H. AUDEN'S POEM "THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN"

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify modern bureaucratic government phenomenon expressed in W.H. Auden's poem "The Unknown Citizen" (UC). This phenomenon will be revealed through the use of figures of speech, symbols and imagery in the poem. This poem is chosen as the object of the study since phenomenon happened in the poem represents people's life and government practice in the modern era. Government, in the poem, seems to be very dominant. Its bureaucratic apparatus is powerful. Through its sophisticated technology, the bureau of statistics is able to detect the citizen's identity. But, ironically, it could have not identified UC's name as he lived in the world. He, then, was honored by the state by being erected the marble monument. The poem is analyzed by applying phenomenological criticism. The analysis finds that the representation of modern government is expressed through symbols emphasized by dramatic irony and supported by the use of internal sensation imagery. UC is the allegory of the average person with his bravery he sacrifices for the country. The state ought to give him an honor. In this poem Auden, actually, wants to write a parody for establishing monuments in some countries to honor the struggles of their soldiers who died in the World War I. Those monuments are really tombs since the function of a monument is a state's thanksgiving for their sacrifice.

**Keywords:** *citizen, modern government, monument, phenomenon, representation, statistics.*

### INTRODUCTION

Government was formed, basically, to give service to the community. The paradigm of administering the government is based on the rule of government which aims, solely, not at the interests of society, but at the country itself. In principles of a good governance, the government always pays attention to the needs of its citizens through policies that can make the country and citizens prosperous, have a commitment to achieve common goals. The United Nations Development Program as quoted by the Republic of Indonesia State Administration Institute formulates good governance characteristics namely participation, rule of law, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision (in Widodo, 2001: 2). These show the involvement of both parties, the government and the community or citizen.

Related to the management of government bureaucracy, a poem entitled "The Unknown Citizen" by W.H. Auden, is chosen as the object of this study. The government, in this poem, seems to be very dominant. The bureaucratic tool is very strong, through the sophistication of its technological data in the central statistical bureau to identify its citizen. Ironically, the person referred to when his life was not recognized, then was "awarded" honor, along with the other war heroes, with a marble monument erected. The 'unknown citizen'(UC) in Auden's poem maybe a soldier who died on the battlefield. When he lived, he worked in a company and

enjoyed his days with his family as well as other citizens. When the country needed its citizens to defend the country, he registered and took up arms, but when the war was over, he lived like everyone else in his country and returned to work.

The poem is chosen because the issue raised in it relates to the unappreciated rights of a citizen. In the poem, Auden communicates the relationship between the alienated modern life and the loss of personal identity affected by modern technology. The title of the poem reminds the writer about 'the unknown soldier', a person who has served the country but nobody knows who he is. Apparently, the government in the modern era does not concern with knowing who and how the lives of its citizen. If someone has been registered as a citizen, population census technology will monitor the existence of those citizen without needing to know the information behind the data.

Auden's work has been written since the beginning of the 20th century and researchers believe that many studies have been carried out on his works. Previous studies of the poem "The Unknown Citizen" below can provide a reference and show the existence of a gap between previous studies and the study that the writer conducted. The first study is entitled *W.H. Auden and the Importance of Narrative Interpretation in Medicine: A Study of "The Unknown Citizen" and "Musée des Beaux Arts"* conducted by Lisa Kerr, Ph.D. (2007). In his analysis Kerr found that personal tragedies occur when individual statements are ignored and the universal narrative of loneliness characterizes human misery. In this study Kerr uses a narrative approach supported by figurative language to find expressions related to symptoms of the disease.

The next study is the result of the analysis of the tone entitled *The Use of Tone in W.H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen"* by I-Hsin Kai (2009). He found that the speaker in the poem praised an unnamed country-citizen, addressed by the state as an 'angel', but the poet insinuated the speaker and its values clearly that even these citizens had devoted themselves to the 'great community', still losing his identity. Auden emphasizes his satire through the selection of words that carry ironical meaning between the speaker's language which represents the poet's attitude using a structural approach to poetry.

The other study is an analysis of the theme entitled *Thematic Analysis of W.H. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen"* by Chanabasappa Sidramappa Mulage (2013). Mulage found that modern humans are valued according to the commercial, economic, and ideological interests of groups that have strong influence. His identity was determined by those aspects, he was denied; his freedom, his life for others who in the end, he lost everything and became nobody. According to Mulage, Auden revealed contemporary relevance and universal meaning in the poem he studied.

From the previous studies, it can be seen that the poem "The Unknown Citizen" is very interesting to study in all aspects. Auden is indeed a controversial author, on the one hand, he talks about topics that are very religious and full of moral content, on the other hand, he likes to make stories full of irony, satire, and full of political content. In the current study the writer conducts, the phenomenon of government bureaucracy represented by the word 'state' in the poem that will be examined for the role and control of the rights of its citizens.

This study will examine the extent to which the representation of government in the modern era is portrayed in the poem. This poem was written in relation to the condition when Europe was in authoritarian times, and dictatorial government occurred in several countries in Europe. Humans as rational individuals lose their position, privilege and identity. Auden, at that time, felt various injustices in his country, England, and he, later, moved to America in 1939 with expectations of experiencing more conducive conditions. He thought that America was an open country, but he felt the same way after becoming an American citizen in 1946 (Kennedy and Gioia, 1993: 455). The life of an 'unknown citizen' in this poem seems to be

limited by the dictum and doctrine of the state. The state constructs its citizen as it was originally described, in statistical terms.

The phenomenon of modern government bureaucracy can be seen from the way a country treats its citizen. How the modern world has treated people inhumane. According to statistics, a person does not need a name, instead of a code. It is merely in the government data reports and business documents. A citizen is considered not human as a person. By applying the phenomenological criticism approach, this study will be carried out to uncover the phenomenon of the modern government bureaucracy expressed in the poem "The Unknown Citizen" by W.H. Auden. The results of the study are expected to provide insights into how modern government works by using statistical machines without considering humanistic values.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The government is likened to a boat; the role of the government can be as a driver who directs the course of the boat or as a rower who paddles to make the boat move (Osborne and Gaebler, translated by Rosyid, 1996: 29). This expression seems to remind the dimension of the role of government that must always be present to provide services to its citizen. In other words, the government facilitates problem solving by moving the various forces that exist in society, but these steps are not as easy as people turn their palms. There are phenomena that need to be identified and studied before making a policy.

In the phenomenological criticism, a German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, said that phenomena do not need to be interpreted, but constructed into reasonable arguments. There are no objects without a subject and vice versa. In this case, the subject and the object are two sides of a coin. In a society where the object is seen as something alienated, apart from human goals, so the human subject will experience worrying isolation. This is an entertaining doctrine. The mind and the world are returned—at least into the realm of the mind. As a reaction, the phenomenology keeps the transcendental subject in its proper position. The subject is seen as the source and origin of all meanings: it is not part of the world, because it brings the world to the main position (in Eagleton, 1993: 57-58).

In the world of literature, the phenomenological criticism is an attempt to apply the phenomenological method to a work. Phenomenological criticism aims to read the text as a whole without being influenced at all by something outside. The text itself is an embodiment of the author's consciousness: all the stylistic and semantic aspects are understood as organic parts of a complex totality, because the core that unites them is the mind of the writer himself. To find out the extent to which the author's thoughts are only seen from the work they produce. Phenomenological criticism focuses on how the author experiences space and time in the relationship between him/herself and others, or his/her perception of material objects (Eagleton, 1993: 58). For Husserl, meaning is something that is preceded by language, because language is nothing but a secondary activity that gives a name to meaning (Eagleton, *ibid.*: 60). Therefore, the phenomena expressed through this language are later identified and interpreted in the analysis.

In general, the phenomenon of poetry is divided into two, namely intrinsic phenomena and extrinsic phenomena. Intrinsic phenomena refer to the reality that exists in the text, while extrinsic phenomena refer to realities outside the text that indirectly contribute to the content of the meaning of a work (Siswanto, 2010: 44-45).

Zafarghandi et al. (2012) in *Phenomenological Perspective in Literary Criticism* focused the analysis on Persian poems, and found that although Phenomenology is a philosophical school of thought, it might have extensive implications for literature, particularly to the study and criticism of mystic literature because of its own hermeneutic nature. The

philosophy is an attempt to reform the structure of cognition based upon two pillars: (a) epistemological and (b) methodological. Its epistemological concern whose forming components include love, attraction and intuition has a significant relation with the mystic literature. Further, its methodological concern is based upon suspending the mental pre-judgments. Language is just an activity but the meaning is very important.

The study of related issue concerning the extent of the influence of self-confidence, culture and government on a character is entitled *Representation of Hegemony in Akmal Nasery Basral's novel Sang Pencerah and its Implications on Literary Appreciation in High School* by Een Rochaeni (2006). Een dissected a novel *Sang Pencerah* by applying Fairclough's critical discourse theory. The conclusion of the analysis is that hegemony is not just a kind of power or domination of the state against its people but also a power or leadership relationship from an individual, culture, or country (palace) to individuals or other communities by using leadership, ideology, and culture.

## **METHODS**

This research is a literary study that explored qualitative data. The study was using phenomenological criticism as a research approach to describe all data collected. The poem "The Unknown Citizen" is the primary data source. It was supported by secondary data from books, journals, and some online sources. Data collection was done by identifying expressions of the poem written in the form of figure of speech, imagery, and symbols. After identification through the language, then the data were categorized and interpreted into phenomena related to the discussed issue described in the background of the problem. All data that have been interpreted then they were analyzed by descriptive analytical method. This method was considered the most relevant to the steps taken during data processing. The final result of the analysis was to find the phenomenon of modern government bureaucracy expressed in the poem "The Unknown Citizen" which made the citizen referred to in the poem lose his rights as individual that the government had to recognize his name.

The output of this study is a research report and arranged systematically as an article using clear method, and in the end, the result of the study is expected to contribute to the development of literary studies, especially poetry studies.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The poem "The Unknown Citizen" is the work of W.H. Auden in a European era of which people were experiencing authoritarianism and dictatorial times in some countries. Humans as rational individuals lose their position, privileges, and identity. The definition of a citizen is beaten evenly as to how he can bring himself well, how his future is, and how well he is accepted in society.

The inscription on the monument that read *To JS/07/M/378/ This Marble Monument Is erected by the State* in the passive sentence, indicates the existence of a passive condition — less initiative from the community. This is confirmed by the first and second lines which were found to be *no official complaint*, that the unidentified body (UC) was found by the state and recorded in the government statistics agency, and there is no official comparison to this problem. All of his activities are recorded in reports that UC is also a member of a large community.

Modern words of sense of old-fashioned word, *he was a saint* shows that the saint is a saint, now it is modernized to be 'honorable'. He is described as a person whose service to a high country, this is an evidence that during the war he took up arms to defend the country, but when *the war was over, he spent the rest of his life still working in a large company and was never fired*. Fudge Motors Inc. shows that UC works in a big company. During his work, he

never disappointed his boss. The word *scab* in line 9 indicates that he has never done anything in his work environment, such as treason, and so on. This is also to show that at that time, the influence of socialist or communist organizations was very strong, he was not included in the group of people in the organization (*he was not a scab*). In another context, there was a report on the results of social psychology examinations of workers that he was very popular among his friends, he liked to drink with them. UC's habits every day like everyone else, he likes to read newspapers and subscribe to them. He gives response to mediocre advertising. He also attended health insurance and was once treated in hospital. Even from the results of consumer research, he is classified as a modern consumer, he lives normally like everyone else, has a family of five children. What is certain, what he needs can be fulfilled.

*Modern Man* was written in capital letters to illustrate that he is one of those who lived with consumption in modern times, possessing items such as radios, cars, gramophone and refrigerator. The word "*eugenist*" is used in this poem to describe that the state always controls its population. He entered the list of people who were 'noticed' in the population census. "Eugenics" is a historical term that refers to social movements believing that the human species can be improved through genetics using mechanical technology. So the development of the population and its quality can be programmed with technology. There was information from the teachers that he had never intervened in the education of his children, but at the end of the poem there was an absurd question, *was he free, was he happy*, that was what the reader had to answer.

## Language of the poem "The Unknown Citizen"

### a. Allegory, Metaphor, and Parody

In the title with the phrase "unknown citizen", in this analysis abbreviated as UC. The word UC is an allegory for citizens who are not recognized by their own country. This word is also a metaphor of the term "unknown soldier" (the body of an unknown soldier who was found when the war was over). In several allied countries involved in World War I, the unknown soldiers were rewarded with the establishment of monuments in honor of unidentified fighters whose names were citizens. The word UC is used to mock the government and the world who do not respect soldiers who have defended the country by not identifying their identities (parodies).

The phrase *marble monument* is a parody for tombstones. This monument was intentionally built to honor members of the army and citizens who died on the battlefield. The government magnificently built, even held a ceremony every year, especially during the anniversary of the country's independence. It was designed so luxurious and artistic with marble stone decorated with beautiful carvings. The state was proud to have the monument and felt that it had paid attention to the rights of respect of its citizens. But what is the meaning if it is only a sign.

Metaphor for the word *saint* (line 4); UC is compared to the word *saint* which shows that he is a holy and religious person, but this sounds ironical anyway. On the one hand, the country respects UC, on the other hand, as if the state is not concerned about the existence of UC as a citizen.

The metaphor of the expression *he was a scab* (line 9), said the scab is a pockmarked person. It can also be interpreted as a traitor, although actually UC is not that kind of person. It is ironical, in one side, he is considered as a very good person but in other side, he is (as if) accused as a traitor. This, made him 'unknown' by the state.

### b. Parody

Name, *Fudge Motors Inc.* (line 8), refers to the largest automotive company in the world, Ford Motor Company. This company is an American multinational automaker that has

its main headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. It was founded by Henry Ford and incorporated on June 16, 1903. The company sells automobiles and commercial vehicles under Ford brand and most luxury cars under the Lincoln brand (corporate.ford.com). In 1946, this company gained the peak of glory. That is why, Auden used the company as a parody to show that he worked for a big company.

*Research Producer Phrases and High-Grade Living* (line 18), is a consumer institution that surveys to plan a person's needs, a kind of consumer consultant in America. This institution surveys people with a certain level of income regarding the level of consumerism.

### c. Hyperbole

“...are everything necessary for Modern Man” (line 20), it is as if UC is a living person with a modern lifestyle depicted in the poem.

*Our Social Psychology workers found* (line 12), it is also something that is exaggerated, as if social psychologists work to monitor the development of the social life of every citizen.

### d. Personification

*Both Producer Research and High-Grade Living Declare* (line 18) that indicates two institutions are seen as humans who are able to convey a statement.

*Which our Eugenist says...* (line 26), UC seems to be a special citizen, because the American state cares for the population through the data of each family head. The word *eugenist* is personified as a government institution.

Line 3, *And all the reports on his conduct agree*, is a personification. Word *reports* is considered as human beings who can act, even though they should not agree, but state, which means 'declare'.

### e. Irony

The irony in this poem does not need to be identified one by one, because the entire content of the poem has shown obviously that UC works, has a family, is recognized by colleagues, and so on, the government considered not necessary to know his identity. It is ironical.

An expression that seems to lift UC's prestige is actually only meaningful to bring down, because in reality, he is not what is meant in the subject. The irony that plays a role in this poem is a dramatic irony because, dramatically, the UC is not identified. His individual rights have been turned off so that the family cannot take care of them. Individual rights seem to have been silenced by the establishment of a luxurious monument that overlaps—namely honors and respects for soldiers who become "heroes" of war.

### f. Symbol

The phrase *Bureau of Statistics* (line 1) is a symbol that represents government or bureaucrats. In the poem, the body of UC was discovered by the statistics bureau and reported in the form of codes or statistical languages.

*Greater Community* (line 5) symbolizes a great nation. UC is a citizen of a large country which means part of a large nation.

### g. Images

Visual: This visual image is found in the Inscription section, *This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State*. This expression gives an impression on sense of sight that there is a monument standing majestically.

Lines 20-21, *everything is necessary to the Modern Man, a phonograph, a radio, a car and a Frigidaire*, show that helives as a Modern Man, with his luxurious items.

Line 25, *he lived and married and gave five children*. This gives the impression that UC has a happy family and there are future generations after him.

#### **h. Auditory**

“... *there was no official complaint* (line 2), is an auditory imagery that gives impulse to the sense of hearing. This image contains a message that there was no official protest to the government. It also means that the society did not complain about the existence of UC and his family.

*And that his reaction to advertisements...* (line 15), the word *reaction* is considered to give an impression to the sense of hearing, because it seems that it is the UC's response to advertisements from the newspapers he read. The reaction is more verbal than written because it is usually spoken spontaneously.

In *Both Producer Research and High-Grade Living declare* (line 18), the word *declares* is usually also expressed in the form of oral utterances. It means that the research institution is also stating anything about UC's life.

Line 26, *which our Eugenist says*, the word *says* also gives an oral impression, and if people say words they can hear, because it can also be heard.

#### **i. Internal Sensation**

Line 4, ... *the modern sense of old-fashioned word*, sounds beautiful that an ancient word can be interpreted in a modern way. This expression gives an impression that the meaning of the words contains classic sense, but if it continues with the next phrase, it is actually a piercing allusion to the call of a holy person.

The phrase *never got tired*, gives a negative impression to a worker/laborer, it should be able to change into '*he was great in his work and his boss liked him*'. The negative impression might build a mental image that he is a good laborer, but because at the end of the line must be rhymed, it is used suffix *-ed* (*retired - tired*). This style is often used in writing poetry to fulfill musical effects.

Line 8-9, *But satisfied his employers. . . / Yes he was scab or odd in his views*, also give an internal sensation that UC was able to satisfy his boss in the company and he is not the type of person who likes to deviate from company regulations, or likes to betray.

Line 13, that is popular with mates and likes a drink, a marker of internal sensation is in *liked a drink*, which means that UC likes to drink but not over. The word *a drink* shows that limitation. This gives the impression that it is as if he is someone who likes spree by drinking unlimited drinks.

Line 19, *He is fully sensible to the advantages of...*, that he felt the benefits of a consumer consulting institution that regulated the planning of purchasing goods in installments for him. The internal sensation feels like UC is a person who likes to shop, to the extent that he needs a consumer consultant.

Line 22, *Our researchers into Public Opportunities are content*, shows that there is an internal sensation that UC is satisfied with his achievements as a large company laborer, he lives well and can have luxurious goods.

### **Modern Government Representation Reflected in the Poem Central Role of the Statistics Agency**

From the use of language in the form of figurative languages such as symbols, imagery, etc., the poem "The Unknown Citizen" shows a dramatization of power of the dominant government bureaucracy. The right of a citizen is truly neglected, as can be seen through the expression that claims what the government does is correct is proven by the absence of the official protests from the community (line 3). In this case, the government must be open and

transparent in carrying out its main tasks, functions, and authorities (Widodo, 2001: 38).

Expressions in poetry that indicate the function of information technology in producing data are Bureau of Statistics, *Eugenist*, and all reports. Of the three government tools, the functions of government control can be implemented. The Statistics Agency is very instrumental, because the data from the research result, surveys, observations, all are entered there. The amount of data is so numerous that it is uncountable, it is easy to use computer network systems. With a system that has been programmed in a computer, the control and monitoring functions are carried out easily, even if necessary, the data base of people can be recalled and displayed on a computer monitor. Such is the way the modern bureaucracy works very effectively and efficiently, which in its process, actually, 'turns off' the individual rights, silences, and misrepresents society. Statistical data are able to represent the presence of people, especially if the code is clear. Tables and graphs can tell a lot about certain phenomena through statistical measures (Huang, 2015).

The ironic expression is very dominant which reflects how bad the treatment of modern government is for the people. The satire used in the title and inscription is an expression that lifts but is actually to drop. Other phrases such as stated in lines 2 and 3, 21, and 22, are very insinuating him as a citizen. It is as if the UC is an important person that needs to be considered by the government. In fact, he was a laborer, ordinary people but had a great soul, so that when the country needed his energy to go to war, he also departed. If it is thought deeply, who actually the UC is, only a small people who serve the country in the poem called *greater community*.

What is depicted in Auden's poem "The Unknown Citizen" is that the bureaucratic apparatus works on a system, so there is no need for knowledge about what causes something to happen. The reasons behind the results can never be clearly revealed as long as those who work are only systems that have been programmed on the computer or those that have been set forth in the regulations. Efforts to ensure the quality of public services are not visible. Facing the demands of public services, the government's general policies must be clearly formulated (Haryatmoko, 2015: 16), not just in statistical language. This is the dramatic irony that occurs in poetry.

### **Policy-Based Survey**

In poetry, there are several survey institutions that contribute to the government in determining policies, including Social Psychology, Research and High-Grade Living Producers, and Public Opinion. These institutions are survey institutions and can be said to be representative of the government, because from their reports the government makes policies. Actually, from this survey the UC identity can be found, but ironically, the data cannot find his name.

In the book *Reflexive Modernization*, Ulrich Back states that modern society does not need to know the name well as long as the intended figure does not have a major contribution to economic development (1994: 54). This means that it is in line with what is expressed in the poem "The Unknown Citizen". The development of survey institutions greatly assisted the government in making important policies, including the awarding of honor to the spirits of soldiers who had fallen on the battlefield, "The Marble Monument" erected by the State. UC does not contribute economically, but his sacrifice, sincerity and spirit to fight for his country cannot be calculated economically. Therefore, at the end of the poem, there is a big question whether he is free, or happy, is an absurd question and what has happened to UC is not a private secret, but it has become an open secret.

### **CONCLUSION**

"The Unknown Citizen" referred to in Auden's poem is to remind the readers to "The

Unknown Soldier", namely a soldier whose body was found after the war was over and whose name was not identified.

The most dominant figurative language used in poetry is irony, which is more specifically, a dramatic irony, because from the title to the last line, this poem is very ironic. While other language styles, such as parody, personification, metaphor, hyperbole are used in a balanced manner. Likewise, the image, the most widely used in poetry is internal sensation, because expressions that are ironical in meaning mostly give an impression on feelings. Whereas visual and auditory imagery are almost the same, namely to give an impression on the senses of vision and hearing. The symbol used in poetry is an important expression in this study. The Bureau of Statistics and Greater Community are two phrases that are representations of modern government. It is called modern, because to find out all information, a government agency that handles statistics plays a very important role. If technology has a role, human intervention is not very meaningful. In terms of knowing someone's identity, the code can speak. Because that name is not really needed.

The representation of modern government in the poem "The Unknown Citizen" is expressed in symbolic form supported by the figurative language and imagery. UC is the representation of a figure, who, with large souls, dares to sacrifice for the sake of the country. This kind of person deserves an award. But in this poem, Auden actually only wants to make a parody of the erection of monuments in several countries to reward the struggle of soldiers who died on the battlefield in the World War I. The monument is actually a tombstone, because the actual function of the monument is a sign of the country's gratitude at the expense of the soldiers.

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