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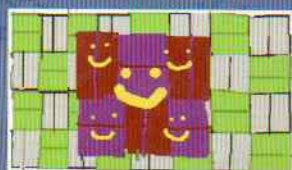
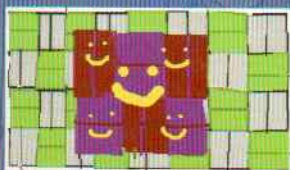
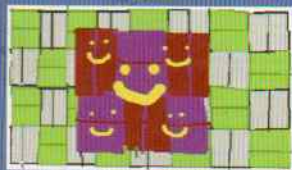
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THE TAPESTRY OF
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AND LEARNING**
IN INDONESIA

Editors:

**BAMBANG YUDI CAHYONO
UTAMI WIDIATI**



The Tapestry of
English Language Teaching and Learning
in Indonesia

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English Language Teaching and Learning
in Indonesia**

Editor

Paulus Yudi Cahyo
Utami Widati

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Malang

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Bambang Yudi Cahyono
Utami Widiati



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Making Use of Photographs to Enhance Cultural Understanding: An American Studies Approach

Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut

Making use of photography can be an interesting way to support the teaching of literature such as the novel. Photographs capture the reality of an era and can be a means to study in detail the daily human life. In comparison to films or videos, the photograph is more reliable because it is not time consuming as it quickly sets students to focus on a chosen unedited image sustaining the original literary text. Furthermore, as used in the mass media like newspapers and magazines, the photograph offers the wealth of material and realistic illustrations as an indispensable way of reinforcing and varying the written explanation.

To capture more of the representation of a particular culture's era through a novel, the American Studies approach engulfs the use of photography as an essential media in the Novel Analysis course. This chapter whose earlier version was presented as a conference paper (Dukut, 2002) aims to show how photographs as images can give a solid understanding of the American cultural identity in the Great Depression era. A number of photographs are presented and discussed to enhance the understanding of John Steinbeck's (1970) *The Grapes of Wrath*.

AMERICAN STUDIES: HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY

American Studies is an academic discipline whose main aim is to study the American experience as a whole, based on a certain phenomenon of a society or a given event. It starts from a particular (micro) to the general (macro). Its approach is interdisciplinary as it embraces and includes various other disciplines. It can look into material through the historical, sociological, political, psychological, anthropological, economic, and cultural points of view, to mention a few. Discussing

the nature of how a novel as a product of literature can be analyzed with the American Studies approach entails a review of its history and methodology. This is necessary to understand why the use of photography is an acceptable method in teaching a novel analysis course.

The embryo of American Studies first existed in the History Department in a course entitled "American Civilization" and in the English Department as "American Literature" (Muhni, 1998, p. 2). Vernon Louis Parrington with his book *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) is the first intellectual founder of American Studies. Dissatisfied with old academic formalism, Parrington is obsessed with a quest for the "American Thought" where through his "intellectual history synthesis" he sees the advantage of combining several disciplines to explain a given culture. For example, to understand why the African-Americans have a unique oral language and mastery of dancing steps, it is necessary to study its history. Although he has been refused entry to Harvard University, his synthesis is influential that it became the foundation of an interdisciplinary graduate program in the History of American Civilization department in 1936. The program was founded by Miller and Mathiesen who are known as the founding fathers of the American Studies approach (Wise, 1979, p. 311).

Following after Parrington and the American Studies founding fathers, Tremain McDowell (Wise, 1979, p. 311) integrated wholeness of American Studies. McDowell, who proposed his "synthesis of knowledge," is famous for two approaches. First, American Studies should embrace the past, present and future. Second, it must have an interdisciplinary approach to break down the conventionally walled disciplines. This means that in studying, for example, the architecture of Brooklyn Bridge like that illustrated in Allan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (1972) of Manhattan, one can at the same time make an analysis of the nature of the society who are corrupted and bureaucratic as well as how courageous and heroic is the architect and builder of the bridge.

By the 1960s, however, some American scholars believe that the analysis of *Moby Dick* has not given an interpretation of the American society as a whole because the study of the minority group has been left out. Wise (1979, p. 319) stated that by the 1970s members of the American Studies Association's Radical Caucus expressed their concerns by widening the boundary to include "black studies, popular culture studies, folklore studies, women's studies, ecology studies, film studies, material culture studies, ethnic studies, education studies, youth studies, Third World studies, and Native American studies, among others". It is for this reason that American studies is seen as a "parasite" (Wise, 1979, p.315), which lives off from the creation of others. Consequently, in analyzing literature as a

“mental evidence” (Muhni, 1998, p. 5) one can draw autobiography and structuralism, cognitive anthropology techniques of fieldwork and the remnants of culture-personality analysis. By the 1980s and up to the moment, most Americanists still believe that American Studies is interdisciplinary (Kwait & Turpie, 1980, p. 14) and pluralistic in approach. In other words, a literary work can be thought of like “a piece of cloth that is made from many strands of thread” which may involve many different disciplines to analyze it (Dukut, 1999, p. 13). Making use of photography as a micro culture of America to capture the macro culture in enhancing the understanding of a work of literature is, therefore, an acceptable way of putting to practice the American Studies approach.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE NOVEL ANALYSIS COURSE

Teaching a novel analysis course is a challenging task for most Indonesian lecturers because they have to devise a variety of interesting methods to avoid the monotonous activity of reading the assigned literary texts per se. Ideally, the in-depth reading of literary texts such as the novel should be done mostly in the students' individual time, so that class session could be used for an active discussion of the textual content of the novel. Applying the American Studies approach enables the usage of photography as an interesting way to support the teaching of literature such as the novel. One of the reason is, the photographs capture the reality or phenomena of an era and can be a media, which studies in detail the daily activities of human life.

As a “visual literacy” the photographs reinforce and vary the written explanation through their “realistic illustrations” (Stange, 2001, pp. 91-92). In comparison to the cinema, the photograph is more reliable, trustworthy and is unburdened by the need to commercialize its product to meet the needs of the public. The scenes captured by the photographer are usually not tampered by the public's demand. What is shown in the photograph is what the reality shows. It is not surprising then, that a number of historians come to rely on its wealth of original materials. Because the images that photographs transmit can become a story in its own way, newspapers and magazines sometimes rely on their whole page full of photos to tell the original story of an event rather than have a reporter write up an article. The reason for a full-page photography is, there is the possibility of endangering the article by the subjective opinion of the reporter himself. A simple misplaced text can “drastically alter the meaning of an objective image” (Levine & Trachtenberg, 2001, p. 20).

In his lecture on “Popular culture: photography,” Trachtenberg (2001) gives his opinion that photographs are qualified enough to stand on their own since they can

“define the world” and “is more credible than that can be received in literary texts”. In addition, the photographs can show a heightened awareness of the importance of controlling one’s own image and the images that represent one’s group. Therefore, in connection to the teaching of a novel analysis course, making use of photographs as a supplementary material can help students understand better the literary text assigned. This is especially true when the reading text presented through the novel concerns an understanding of a very specific culture. There are two main reasons for this, one is because “language and culture are inextricably linked” (Tang, 2002, p. 1) the other reason is because “it is through reading that students learn of the civilization associated with the target language” (Lessard-Clouston, 2002, p. 2).

Indonesian students of an English Department’s novel analysis course often complain that they cannot fully grasp the intention of the writer because besides the difficulty of reading the English language as a foreign language, the setting or plot of the novel is culturally different from their original background. For example, an American student can understand the value of the smoking chimney for a family who depended on the game of meat a father captured from the woods on a winter season. Indonesian students, however, may not fully understand this cultural transfer because their houses may not have chimneys; thus, fail to understand the function of a “smoking” chimney. In addition, Indonesians do not experience the winter season so they fail to see how dangerous life would be if the man of the house could not come home with a beast in his arms, i.e. the children may not withstand the cold weather and eventually die of hunger.

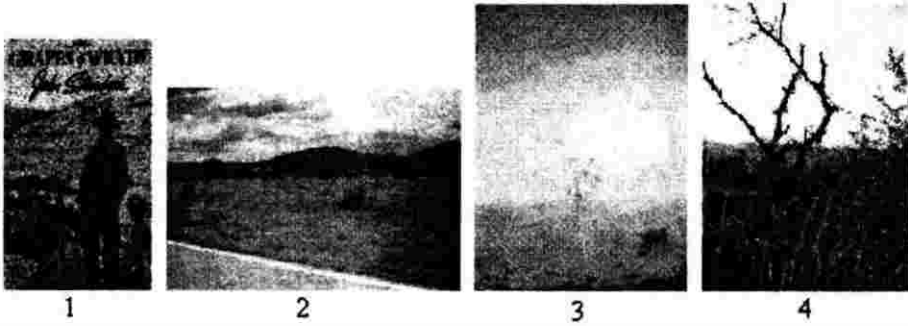
In contrast, when an Indonesian student reads the following reading excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1970):

To the red country and part of the grey country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth... The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the grey country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover ... (p. 1).

the student can imagine the setting and situation more vividly because the rainy to dry season portrayed in the novel is similar to the season experienced in Indonesia. As an example, the following book cover of Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*’s setting (Picture 1) and American summer panorama (Picture 2), can be compared to the Indonesian panorama of a dry plantation (Pictures 3 & 4) as follows:

Thus, if a lecturer can bring into the course some photographs to show the panorama of the United States and Indonesia like exemplified above, the Indonesian

student can comprehend better why the writer painstakingly takes his time to describe the colourful surrounding of Oklahoma country. Moreover, the student can also sense the cultural identity the writer intentionally or not intentionally transmit in his novel.



Note: Picture 1 is Walker Evans' photo, taken from the U.S. Library of Congress web site "America from the Great Depression to World War II" collection; Pictures 2, 3, and 4 are from the present author's private collection.

AMERICAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

Culture is "not only a reflection of a social setting but also a reproduction of meaning" (Tang, 2002, p. 2). It not only reflects the past but also refers to the practices, products, and ways of thinking of present human beings. Whereas, identity is "who or what somebody or something is" (Crowther, 1993, p. 448).

Cultural identity, according to Hall (1990, p. 223) can be defined in two ways. First, it deals with the oneness of a shared culture, a collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Thus, as an example, Francis' photograph of "The Black Triangle" of the blacks in Africa, the Carribean, the US and the UK actually wants to reveal the underlying unity of the black people who experienced colonisation and slavery that have been distributed across the African heritage (Hall, 1990, p. 224).

Second, cultural identity is a matter of "becoming as well as of being" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This means that, it belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identity comes from somewhere and has a history. But, like everything else, which is historical, it undergoes constant transformation. Far from being

eternally fixed in some essential past, cultural identity is subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure the sense of oneself into eternity, identities are the names given to the different ways people are positioned by, and position themselves within, the narratives of the past.

Cultural identity, therefore, is the point of identification, and the unstable points of identification, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Thus, to understand what the text of a novel has to offer, whether intentionally or not, a reader has to transform his original cultural identity into the identity portrayed by the novel. This is in line with Tang (2002) who believes that “a person’s mind is in a sense the centre of his identity, so if a person thinks in French [or English as the target language] he has taken a French [or English] identity” (p. 2).

As a product of the American cultural identity, therefore, in analysing a novel such as *The Grapes of Wrath* written by John Steinbeck, the lecturer is challenged to make Indonesian students think in the American way and assume an American identity. It is suggested that in the teaching of English as a foreign language, the lecturer could supplement the American cultural identity found through the novel as a mental evidence, through a media such as the photograph. Students might have been familiar with Indonesian farm scenery (Picture 5). Photos such as scenes of, for example, the clothing and properties used by the characters of the novel (Picture 6) and the American Midwest ranch area (Picture 7) can be shown to students for a clearer understanding of the plot.



Note: Pictures 5 and 7 are from the present author’s private collection; Picture 6 is from The Hulton Getty picture collection (Yapp, 2000, p. 547)

In this modern era of Internet technology, lecturers may also search the website for photographs such as from the U.S. Library of Congress “America from the Great Depression to World War II” collection such as used in this study. However, in selecting and using materials from the Internet, lecturers have to be

aware of Copyright issues. An alternative is to make a joint relationship with the American Embassy in Indonesia to obtain the ideal photography so that the question of copyright can be justified. If this is not possible, then a lecturer must be creative enough to bring in photographs of the Indonesian scenery that could match closely with the setting of the novel in mind. It is for this reason that *The Grapes of Wrath*, which deals with the dry season of Oklahoma state is chosen for the novel analysis course rather than novels which deals with the winter season.

IMAGES OF THE AMERICAN GREAT DEPRESSION IN *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

As already put forward in the previous paragraphs, reading *The Grapes of Wrath* essentially means reading the American cultural identity, which in this case experiences the Great Depression. To give a sound understanding of what the American Great Depression is about, a lecturer can firstly give the background before dealing with the plot, like that described by Gordon (1984, p. 375) about the cause, differences with previous depressions, and depth of the 1930s Great Depression as follows.

In 1929, the American industry over expanded its production facilities that as a consequence consumers lacked sufficient income to purchase the total output of the industry. Farmers in particular, had low incomes following the World War I because of the agricultural depression. In other words, the worker's wages failed to keep pace with the increased productivity. Thus, these farmers experience a great depression.

In addition to the farmer's circumstances, bankers of America made unsound loans, which ultimately resulted in bank failures that wiped out the savings of many depositors. "Get-rich-quick" speculators also bid up the price of real estate and stocks to unrealistic levels that international trade declined. The high protective tariffs had also interfered with the flow of goods between countries that the stock market of October 1929 experienced a great crash.

In comparison to the earlier depressions, the 1929 depression was the most severe in American history because Americans no longer had the frontier with its economic opportunities, the economy had become primarily industrial whilst more Americans were affected by business variations, and the depression was not limited to the United States but was worldwide.

By 1932 production, prices and profits were substantially down so that business bankruptcies were numerous. As much as 5000 banks had failed, wages

had been slashed, and some 13 million workers, or 25% of the labor force were unemployed. The decreasing number of full-time workers employed in the U.S. Steel Corporation was instructive. In 1929, 224,980 people worked in this corporation. In the following year, the number decreased into 211,055. A dramatic decrease of working people occurred within the next year when there were 56,619 workers. In 1932, only 18,938 people worked (Levine & Trachtenberg, 2001, p. 19).

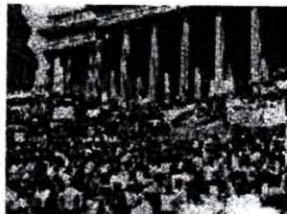
In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt then decided to attack the depression by deficit budgeting and public works, banking reforms, investment reforms, production controls, encouragement of consumption, and optimism. This attack, known as the New Deal, aimed to increase the productivity and profits, employment, and a general feeling of hopefulness. Fortunately, as Gordon (1984) stated, Roosevelt succeeded in escaping the depression by asserting that "the nation was basically sound" (p. 376).

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

After students have an image of the American Depression like that elaborated by Gordon and Levine (2001) above, they are ready to be given a summary of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which is basically a story about the hardships experienced by the American farmer in the depression era. Written in 1939, it presents the oppression and misery the U.S. immigrants experience in the depression years. According to Levine and Trachtenberg (2001, p. 25), *The Grapes of Wrath* gives evidence of a typical depression era story as it contained the images or icons of the age, i.e. migrant farmers (Picture 8), sharecroppers, hoboes, unemployed men (Picture 9), desperate mothers (Picture 10), and ragged children. How do these people look like? Like that suggested previously, it is advantageous to make use of photographs as a supplement of the novel to explain the cultural background.



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Note: Pictures 16 and 17 are from The Hulton Getty picture collection (Yapp, 2000, p. 520 & p. 241).

When the autumn rains began, their camp was overflowed and made their old car useless. Under these all but impossible conditions, Rose of Sharon gave birth to a dead baby. In their walk, the family finally found a barn where a boy and his starving father lived. In appreciation for a temporary place to live Rose of Sharon decided to nourish the starving old man with the milk from her breasts. The end of the story portrayed the Joads, although experiencing so many miseries still tried to keep each other alive during the depression years.

CONCLUSION

The illustration above shows that the images of the Great Depression, such as the worn migrant faces, torn clothing, dirty skin, and dead eyes are deeply locked into the American mind that Steinbeck tries to relive it by sharing his images through the story of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Being considered an expose of capitalist excesses as well as a distorted call to revolution (Magill, 1981, pp. 449-450), Steinbeck's novel also seem to depict the social injustice of the ownership of land, which is morally edifying to a man. Men in the agrarian society is shown to retain a close, nourishing tie to the soil, where farmers dwindle psychologically as they are separated from the land, and the California owners become oppressors as they substitute ledgers for direct contact with the soil. Thus, it is understandable that men as exemplified by Jim Casy would picket to fight for their human and land rights.

The American experience of the Great Depression like that exemplified by the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath* and photographs that complement it shows a unique cultural identity that are only found in American history. The effects of the Great Depression are deep and enduring. However, the following lines declared by Ma Joad "We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on – changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on" (Steinbeck, 1970, p. 467) shows how Americans value the future. Just like the novel – the Great Depression photographs never denied the problems Americans faced, yet it is this dark past that helped the people reaffirm the American dream and the value of optimism.

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About the Book

The Tapestry of English Language Teaching and Learning in Indonesia addresses various aspects of English language teaching and learning which have developed dramatically in Indonesia. It presents theoretical, empirical, and practical studies situated in the contexts of English as a foreign language in this country and as an important means for global communication. This volume will be useful as a textbook for students of English departments, English teachers and lecturers, ELT researchers, and anyone interested in EFL pedagogy in Indonesia.

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