

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains several basic general ideas of the research, including the research background, research questions, research objectives, and research significance.

1.1 Research Background

Literature has undergone many significant developments. From traditional forms expressed in writing to the emergence of digital and audiovisual media, literature continues to transform following changes in culture and technology. This development not only broadens the scope of literature but also enriches the way society understands and appreciates literary works. Literary works are no longer limited to text media but have expanded to media. From this development, two categories of literature emerged, namely popular literature and high literature. According to Santosa (2013:1), High literature is a literary work that is in accordance with certain rules or norms, which are often taught in formal educational institutions. Meanwhile popular literature according to Nurgiyantoro, (2015) is a literary work that aims to entertain readers. This literature tends to be designed for commercial purposes, with the issues raised often related to everyday life that are easy to understand.

Film is one form of popular literature. Film, as a literary work in audiovisual form, is one of the media that is able to describe people's way of life well. Sumarno (1996) emphasized that film is a mass communication medium that functions to convey messages in the context of modern society. Although it has its own characteristics and rules, film can be analyzed using literary criticism techniques because there are many similarities between film criticism and the way of studying literary works. Films contain many literary elements, such as plot, characters, themes, and narratives. According to Klarer (2023:54), "Although film has its own specific characteristics and terminology, it is possible to analyze film by drawing on methods of literary criticism, as film criticism is closely related to the traditional approaches of textual studies."

Therefore, in this study, the researcher decided to use film as the main object of the study on the grounds that literature can be studied not only through written texts but also through visual representations. Visualization provides a new way to explore literary works, where elements such as symbolism, themes, and narratives can be conveyed more directly and easily understood by the audience. Unlike texts that require a more intensive reading and interpretation process, visualization in films allows for faster and more interesting reading through a combination of visual, audio, and cinematographic elements. Therefore, film was chosen as the main medium in this analysis.

Films are often an effective medium for conveying complex narratives. For this reason, filmmakers compete to produce interesting films because of the increasing popularity of films. Genre is one of the most important elements in a film. According to Bondebjerg (2015), Genre is a design used in film theory and research that tries to classify films according to various factors, including psychological, social, cultural, and general aesthetics. This film genre is universal, as stated by Cawelti (1976:206-207); genre is a universal pattern. Fiction, action, fantasy, drama, and Western are some popular film genres. Each has its own fans. Bondebjerg (2015) explains that genre is important for academics, critics, and filmmakers. The Western genre is one genre that has a long history of popularity. In the context of film, genre refers to a category or subgenre of films that have comparable characteristics, styles, themes, and storylines. Films can be categorized and understood by audiences and filmmakers using genres that are based on similarities in many aspects, one of which is the Western genre.

The Western genre has a special place in the history of global cinema. Some experts consider the Western genre to be a genre that is almost extinct and forgotten by most people. Because at that time few people wrote and published works in the Western genre. However, this genre rose and developed in the United States (with the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers as its eastern boundaries) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the beginning of that century, Western films became popular as pulp fiction by depicting life on the

harsh and adventurous American frontier. This genre with a long history is popular in various media, ranging from novels, films, stories, dramas, radio programs, comics, to the Wild West Show. Genre, as a principle of order, is determined by the type of structure or arrangement of a particular literary work. Therefore, there are special conventions that apply to a work to form the character of the work. For example, Western works are easily recognized by the public because of their nature, which is considered classic.

Western literature has a long history of establishing patterns and adhering to strictly defined standards, including those related to its literary genre. As Cawelti (1976) stated that the Western genre is a genre that depicts the competition between society, civilization, and the Wild. In the Western genre, conflict is always associated with chase scenes between Indians and pioneers, or heroes and villains. This genre is known for its distinctive elements, such as frontier life, cowboys, gunfights, scouts, Indian tribes, settlers, and lawmen, and explores the conflict between civilization and anarchy in mythical stories about humans and the conflict between law and chaos. This standard Western formula is often considered a representation of American culture that is full of narratives of colonialism, heroism, and masculinity so that it is very close to audiences in America and even develops and becomes a popular imagination throughout the world. In other words, the Western genre has developed patterns throughout its long history so that the existing conventions become strong and tight bonds, including the conventions that apply in its literary structure. However, due to its consistent and unchanging pattern, the Western genre is considered no longer interesting to some people. Therefore, to overcome this, filmmakers innovate the Western genre through new patterns that called inventions. According to Grant (2021), formulas in popular literature are conventions that are built into a work. New patterns will be formed when filmmakers incorporate new discoveries into Western films.

The Harder They Fall (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018) are two recent examples of cultural adaptation and reimagination efforts in the classic

Western formula. The researcher specifically selected films related to popular literature with the Western genre. Of the many Western films available, *The Harder They Fall* (2021) was chosen because it offers a unique and different perspective compared to Western films in general. The film introduces elements of African-American culture into its narrative, which provides a new dimension to the traditional Western genre. This makes it an interesting object to study, especially in the context of how the genre is reimagined to reflect cultural diversity. Because this study uses a comparative approach, the researcher needs others films as a comparison to complete the analysis of *The Harder They Fall* (2021). In looking for a comparison, the researcher considers the relevance of the film to the local context and the vision and mission of the Faculty of Adab and Humanities which supports local cultural studies. Therefore, the researcher chose *Buffalo Boys* (2018), an Indonesian film that combines elements of local culture with the Western genre. This film has a background story rooted in Indonesian history and culture, thus providing a contrasting but complementary perspective to *The Harder They Fall* (2021). The combination of these two films allows the researcher to explore how the Western genre is adapted and interpreted in different cultural contexts.

This study was inspired by several previous studies, including the first with the title *Western Formula in Jane Got A Gun* (2015) by Nenden Siti Munawaroh. The research was motivated by changes in the characteristics of the formula in the Western genre contained in the film *Jane Got A Gun*. The study aims to determine the conventions and inventions contained in the film *Jane Got A Gun* (2015) and how inventions form new formulas in this film. The method used in the study is descriptive-qualitative. The results of the study indicate that the conversion in the film *Jane Got A Gun* (2015) is found in the setting, complexity of the characters, types of situations, and patterns of action. The invention in the film *Jane Got A Gun* (2015) is found in the setting, namely the protagonist's costume, new formula formed in the film *Jane Got A Gun* (2015) can be seen in the costumes of Jane and Frost, then in the hero played by the woman, namely Jane. and the complexity of the character, namely in the

hero. And the new formula formed in the film *Jane Got A Gun* (2015) can be seen in the costumes of Jane and Frost, then in the hero played by the woman, namely Jane.

The second is a study entitled *Portrait of Violence in the Buffalo Boys* Film by Anggara (2021). The study uses a qualitative method and uses John Fiske's semiotic analysis method. Semiotic analysis functions to understand the meaning of a symbol or sign contained in the artistic visuals, actions, or conversations in the film *Buffalo Boys*. The results show that there is a symbolic meaning in the form of a portrait of violence that shows the occurrence of forms of physical violence in the film in the form of attacks by hitting, killing, raping by force, torturing, and injuring, where physical violence is behavior that injures or destroys the physical body of others. In this film, the Dutch are depicted as perpetrators who provide various forms of physical violence using more complete weapons compared to Javanese people who have limited weapons. Symbolic violence in films is in the form of verbal communication by speaking so that it can interfere with the behavior or psyche of others. The impact of symbolic violence will only affect the target's psyche, damaging a person's psychology.

The third is a study entitled *Inventions in Western Genre: Formula Analysis in the films Wild Wild West and Django Unchained* by Andriadi (2014). This study shows that western films from 1995–2012 are still based on most conventional elements, including regularity of theme, setting, complexity of character, type of situation, and pattern of action. While the elements evolve variatively and dynamically based on the development of the era. The plot structure is based on the tastes of today's society.

The fourth is a study entitled *Eastern Western Formula in Grisse Series* (2018) by Neng Siti Kurnia (2022). The study aims to identify elements of Western genre conventions applied to *Grisse* and the inventions in the film. The analysis was conducted using Cawelti's formula theory (1980) and supported by other related theories. The results of the study show that *Grisse* uses classic Western conventions but also introduces new elements by

including local Indonesian elements. These local elements are innovations for the Western genre and are considered the forerunners of conventions in the "Eastern Western" genre, which combines local Asian values with the Western genre. Thus, these innovations are conventions for Eastern Western.

The fifth is a study entitled *Analyzing Cultural Reimaginings and Global Chinese Power in CCTV's The Legend of Bruce Lee* by Melissa Meilin Chan (2022). The study examines Bruce Lee, a martial arts star whose screen image has endured for decades after his death, and this is due to the many clones that emerged after the star's premature death in 1973. These clones and various spin-offs of Lee's works gave rise to a phenomenon known as "Bruceploitation." Bruceploitation's popularity waned over time, but in recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Bruce Lee's life, as evidenced by the many TV shows and films that have attempted to chronicle the actor's life, particularly those involving his family. These more contemporary Bruceploitation films do not appear to exploit Lee in the same way that their predecessors did, which sought to exploit Lee's reputation for financial gain. In more recent works, Bruceploitation specifically sought to use the martial arts star's story to connect his character to various ideas. However, the researcher argues that *The Legend of Bruce Lee*, a more recent television series from China Central Television, actually continues the tradition of Bruceploitation because it redefines Bruce Lee's image in a Chinese national context and is based on the act of exploitation rather than simply making money without the star's consent. The CCTV series uses Lee's image for ideological purposes, although it may not have financial gain as its primary goal by continuing the story.

In this study, the researcher took the title *Cultural Reimaginings of the Classic Western Formula in the films The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018) because the researcher saw the addition of cultural elements that were different from the usual or classic Western formula conventions in both films. According to Birukou et al. (2013), several writers define culture as "traditional behavior" that is passed down from one

generation to the next. While the word reimaginings refers to the process of “re-creating” or “re-imagining” something with a new perspective, often by modifying or updating existing elements. So cultural reimaginings refer to the process of adapting and reinterpreting conventions in classical Western formulas by incorporating or adding cultural elements that differ from the usual conventional Western representations.

The researcher compares two Western genre films to determine of cultural reimaginings of the classic Western formula used in both films. The objects of study chosen by the researcher, namely *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018), are permitted and valid in comparative literature studies. Because both literary works come from two different countries and have different cultural backgrounds. This is reinforced by the statement of Remark in Damono (2015:1) “...*Secara singkat sastra bandingan membandingkan sastra sebuah negara dengan sastra negara lain dan membandingkan sastra dengan bidang lain sebagai seluruh ungkapan kehidupan*”. Although the two films come from different countries, there are similarities in the formula used in the two films.

This study aims to analyze how the Western formula is used in the films *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018) the narrative formula theory developed by Cawelti is used as an analytical framework. In addition, this study will also explore how the two films re-imagine their local culture and history through the lens of the Western genre, thus creating a more inclusive and diverse narrative. To know what are cultural reimaginings of the classic Western formula in the film *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018) Cawelti emphasizes that formulas in a genre function not only as narrative patterns but also as ways in which a particular culture reflects and expresses itself so create narratives that are more inclusive and relevant to their respective social and cultural contexts. Thus, the adaptation of the Western formula in these two films can be seen as a form of cultural dialogue, where local identities and histories are combined with more universal genre conventions. This study will explore formula elements such as setting,

characters, and plot, and how the two films adapt the formula to emphasize different themes such as racial identity and resistance to oppression. This study is expected to contribute to the study of genres in film.

1.2 Research Questions

From the background in this research above, the researcher concludes that there are two questions that will be the main focuses on this research, they are:

1. How are the representations of the classic Western formula in the film *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018)?
2. What are the cultural reimaginations of the classic Western formula in the films *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018) through the lens of different cultural perspectives?

1.3 Research Objective

Based on the formulation of the research question above, the researcher is intended:

1. To find out the representations of the classic Western formula in the film *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018)
2. To find out the cultural reimaginations of the classic Western formula in the film *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018)

1.4 Research Significance

This research has significance for the researcher and in the context of broader academic studies of the cultural and literary studies. For the researcher, this research is a strategic step to dig deeper into the concept and implementation of the Western formula, a narrative framework that has been an important basis for the Western genre. By utilizing this formula, the research not only explores how typical Western narrative patterns are used but also how these patterns are adapted or reconstructed in various different cultural contexts. This provides insight into the flexibility and appeal of the Western formula in reflecting the dynamics of global and local cultures.

In addition, this research is relevant in studying certain cultural objects, especially in the context of the culture represented in the two films that are the

objects of study, namely *The Harder They Fall* (2021) and *Buffalo Boys* (2018). The importance of this study also lies in the exploration of the cultural reimaginings carried out by the two films. This research also makes an important contribution to the study of local culture, especially in understanding how local Indonesian culture is represented in *Buffalo Boys*. This study is an opportunity to show the potential of local culture in competing in the global arena while emphasizing the importance of preserving traditional cultural elements through popular mediums such as film.

This is in line with the mission of the Faculty of Adab and Humanities to develop science based on local cultural values that are globally oriented. This research is expected to be a real contribution in strengthening Indonesian cultural identity amidst the flow of international cultural exchange, as well as becoming an academic foundation for the development of contextual, critical humanities studies, and rooted in local wisdom.

