



Legal Issues: A Study of Realism in John Grisham's Novel *Gray Mountain*

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Abstract

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This paper aims at discussing the concept of realism in Grisham's novel, *Gray Mountain*. Grisham's works are based on his profession, as an attorney. He is an interesting author, a politician and an activist. As a social activist as well as a politician, he has great concern for social justice. This paper explores the author's ideas about injustice reflected in the *Gray Mountain*. The impacts of the coal mining industry on the social, political and economic condition of the people in this region are also explored in this paper. The study shows that the events depicted in *Gray Mountain* were based on the reality of the occurrences in Appalachian society. The novel can be considered as a reflection or criticism of this community.

Keywords: coal mining; Appalachia; black lung, realism

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Introduction

John Grisham is a well-known contemporary American writer and an elite “*mega-bestselling*” author. This title has also been given to other famous writers, such as Danielle Steel, Stephen King, Michael Crichton, and Tom Clancy. Grisham also has been regarded as a number one world-wide bestselling author (Evain). His popularity is inseparable from some aspects that concern his works. These include the simple language that is easily understood, real issues, or meaningful topics in American society. The most important aspect is the selling strategy, which is partly performed by creating film or movie adaptations of some novels (Tuyevna and Turakulovich).

This author is very ambitious, especially in literary works, and labours to materialize the dream of justice through his profession as a lawyer, politician, and author. In these careers, the writer wished to raise ideas about justice and worked to help people to achieve their rights. Even after joining the parliamentary, this novelist still struggled with idealisms about justice while claiming that writing was only a hobby. To express this idealism, Grisham awakened earlier to document it as a literary work and, due to this, finished his first novel, *A Time to Kill*, in 1980 and published it in 1987. This novel was rejected by many publishers, which was the reason for publishing seven years after the completion. Grisham is an enthusiastic author that revises his writing anytime a rejection from publishers is received. After the first novel’s publication, the author began to work on another book titled *The Firm*. The film copyright was sold to Paramount at US \$600,000, while the bookselling rights were bought by Doubleday. Realizing the financial prospects in writing, Grisham decided to focus on writing and retired as a professional lawyer (Evain; Pringle, Mery beth).

Grisham’s novels are never separated from legal issues, as the author writes based on personal experiences as a lawyer, which makes the flow fast and authentic (Pringle, Mery beth). The novelist is knowledgeable about crimes that involve the government, as well as criminal offenses by companies across the United States, especially concerning coal mining. As a result, Grisham’s



novels are categorized as society's realization of literary works and have become one of the most favourite books nationally and internationally. As Grisham deals with the negative impacts of coal mining industry, it can be called also as a part of ecocriticism to get the environmental justice (Platt).

Grisham is a well-known author of *legal thrillers*, and the majority of his works are about laws in American society. Taft mentions that this reality shows in the author's novel, *The Appeal*, where Grisham as a retired attorney and a writer could positively change the law. The book criticizes the government, as well as businessmen, that often play with the law for personal gain. While the government abuses power to acquire money from businessmen, the common people often become victims of unfair treatment from these influential individuals.

Grisham wrote many novels, including *The Firm* (1991), *The Rainmaker* (1995), and *The Pelican Brief* (1992). The ability to describe the world of law and politics was inspired by his experiences in both fields. This author had been both a trial lawyer and a member of The Mississippi House of Representatives from 1984 to 1990. Furthermore, Grisham stated that his books were based on real events to some degree (Moyers).

Theoretical Framework

Literary realism is a literary movement that represents reality by describing the world and life experiences as they are. In the context of literary works, realism usually describes famous people, places, and stories, or is also associated with middle or lower-class people. Realism in literary works, actually describe the reality, therefore, realism is different from the dramatization or romantic models (MasterClass).

Realism in literature prioritizes the content of the literary work. Thus, the elements in the story such as places, characters, themes, etc., do not use imagination or figurative language (such as similes, metaphors etc). In other words, the realism model in literature, a writer does not use decorative language or sugar-coating language for the events in the story. Realism contradicts the language model used in the romanticism and idealism models. Even if, it cannot be said to be



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real, literary works are expressions of thought that are motivated by real events. Therefore, many writers cannot say that the work he has written is completely free from reality. For instance, Defoe says that his literary work is a reality, not an imagination, as is the case with other writers such as Jane Austine and Denis Diderot (Levin).

Realism describes the life story exactly as it is. As happens in everyday life, the lives of characters, places and themes are like what is in the community itself. Romanticism emphasizes actual life and truth in everyday life. The purpose of using realism in literary works is to emphasize reality and morals in people's lives with are relative and intrinsic in nature (in themselves) by the community or society (Devices).

In America, realism is known as a genre not only in literature, but also in music, art, and architecture. The realism movement in literature began in the mid-19th century and became a trend in the field of visual art in the early 20th century. American realist writers try to define or describe the condition of New York City as it is. In the early 20th century, a new generation of painters, writers and journalists emerged: Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Winslow Homer (1836-1910), Frederick Wilde Hassam, and William Merritt Chase (1849-1916). They describe a mere interesting suburban life in the United States as if it were entering a new century (Hiesinger).

In the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the United States underwent major changes in the industrial, economic, social and cultural fields. The wave of change was due to the influence of immigration from Europe and the increase in international trade, as a result of the increasing welfare in America. Through artistic work and artistic expression (painting, literary works, and music), American realism tries to portray the weariness and joy of culture as well as the lives of ordinary Americans at home. Artists use the feeling, texture and feel of a city to influence colour and shape or appearance in their work. As a result, the authors told new stories about the American people; in real terms, American men and women who can grow and develop. Get rid



of the fantasy elements and focus on what is happening right now. American realism offers a new gateway or a breakthrough introduction to modernism.

United States is regarded as a the most democratic country (Hardoyono and Windhani). Democratic system which is occurring in this country influences the way of the people to express their ideas, including the author. Many of contemporary issues deal with sensitive social problems are not regarded as taboo to be discussed in their literary works, film, and other cultural product. Some examples of the sensitive issues are about racism and government unfair treatment to the poor. In other countries, especially in Indonesia, these problems are regarded as dangerous issue to be raised in literary works. Therefore, not many authors who are brave to deal with this kind issues. If the author deal with this issue, the writer will face the government's effort to encounter their ideas. There are some writers that oppose the government by presenting about injustice and inequality such as Pramudya Ananta Toer (1925-2006), Willibrordus S Rendra (1935-2009), Gunawan Muhammad (born 1941), and Wudji Tukul (1963). As a consequence of their ideas about injustice and inequality, they have to face the government. Some of them were sent to jail for several months (Endraswara).

In the United States, these kinds of controversial issues become popular topic of literature. In addition, the literature which deal with the controversial issues become phenomenal and get responses from readers. Furthermore, the winner of the prestigious award in the world, Nobel Prize given to the author who are fighting for the social and political justice. Noble prize recognises that this kind of controversial issues is regarded as the most influential literary works. There are some famous writers who get this prize such as Toni Morrison (1993). She is a brilliant black American writer who raise the issue of inequality between African-American and the white. In addition, William Faulkner also deal with the issue of racism in the United States in the colonial era, especially in the novel *Intruder in The Dust* (Raditiyanto).

According to some critics, law fiction developed in the early twentieth century. Many authors were interested in handling law or judgment, including *Apologia* by Plato, *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare, *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *Der Prozess* by Kafka. The



judge and attorney were not the main characters but instead played additional roles, which was probably because the writer was neither of these by profession. Although some writers had law education backgrounds, they did not present lawsuits as completely as Grisham. These authors include Charles Dickens, Alexander Dumas, Goethe, Walter Scott, Leo Tolstoy Flaubert, and Henry James. These writers were legal education graduates but did not handle related issues as the main themes (Kurniawan).

Literature concerning legal issues was in existence since before the century. Plato wrote *Apologia* in 399 BC, and it was regarded as the beginning of literature about legal or judicial issues. In *Apologia*, Plato judges Socrates, an Athens philosopher that rejected the existence of the gods and influenced the young generation not to believe in them. Meanwhile, *Bleak House*, written in 1853 by Charles Dickens is regarded as a classical work and categorized as a legal fiction. In this novel, Dickens discusses the rights of an illegitimate child and the murder of a lawyer.

This paper tries to explore some important points about Grisham's views concerning legal issues, which were particularly reflected in the novel *Gray Mountain*. Some of the issues discussed include how Grisham presented the legal issues regarding coal mining companies in Appalachia and how law enforcement in the United States deals with the common people.

Research Method

Descriptive and qualitative methods were applied in this study, while the data were extracted from two sources. The primary data were procured from *Gray Mountain*, while the supporting data were taken from various sources related to the research topic. Furthermore, the theory of literary realism, which regards literature as not merely fiction but as the reflection of society, was employed. Because of this, all information concerning the socio-politics in Appalachia were properly studied and examined.

To support the research understanding, information from newspapers, magazines, websites, and YouTube, that discussed the legal issues in Appalachia were explored. Some details were also



obtained from media regarding topics on poverty, unemployment, health, and the black lung disease that usually occur in the Appalachian society. These issues were easily acquired from online media and were important in analysing the novel's context.

After getting the data: primary and secondary data, the researcher analyses the data in the way of describing and interpreting the issues or phenomena based on the object of study. According to Haradhan (2018) the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret the social phenomena and to generate new concepts or theories (Haradhan). By interpreting the data, the researcher enables to present comprehensive issues deal with the socio-political phenomena based on the *Gray Mountain* Novel.

Gray Mountain

Gray Mountain is an interesting novel that discusses the legal issues in Appalachia, which were particularly caused by coal mining industries. This region has the largest coal industry in America, and this has raised many social issues regarding the environmental impacts of mining activities. The existence of this industry is unbeneficial to society and causes negative effects, such as flooding, black lung disease, as well as water and air pollution.

It is assumed that the story narrated in the novel is centred on true events and the setting, as well as the topic, are based on real occurrences. The depiction was very similar to the happenings in Appalachia. One of the comments written on the book review web site, goodreads.com:

This is one of Grisham's best works. I grew up in the area this book is about and saw what he wrote about first-hand. It is very accurate, and though some stereotypes of uneducated people in the area were discussed, the book does not belabour the issue and shows that there are also educated persons. Also, the general personality of the area was displayed to be one of love and mutual care. The novel shows how absentee owners were raping the land to obtain and sell coal to acquire the biggest profits at the expense of the people's health and the region's environment. It is so sad that many of these people need mining jobs to survive. Also, these people are being forced to destroy their health and environment, neither of which will ever recover (<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/20707959-gray-mountain>, accessed on February, 5 2020 at 7:30).



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The main character of this novel is Samantha, a junior lawyer that faces a very difficult situation because of an economic crisis strike in the United States. She worked for Scully & Pershing, and was given a difficult choice to volunteer at a legal aid clinic outside the city. Because of the crisis, numerous companies closed and retired many employees. Although Samantha was lucky and not completely fired, she was furloughed and had to work at a legal aid clinic (LAC) for a year. While waiting for a better condition, she was required to work at this organization without a salary. Although she still received health insurance from Scully & Pershing, the aim was not only about the insurance guarantee but also the possibility to return to her position after the economic crisis ended.

The LAC Samantha worked for was focused on helping poor people facing legal problems. This organization assisted poor people experiencing difficulties with their families, debt relief, housing problems, health issues, education, and also helped with compensation for those suffering from black lung disease (p.47). Although Samantha worked without salary in this organization, she acquired numerous experiences, especially with legal cases faced by the poor people in the Appalachian coal mining area. While performing her duties of advocating for the people close to the industry, Samantha discovered several miners that suffered from the black lung disease caused by the company's dust. Regardless of this condition, the firm was unbothered about the risk and paid no attention to the employees' health issues. This made the workers suffer from discrimination caused by the inexistence of health insurance for them. Hence, the legal aid Samantha worked for ensured that the rights to be saved were fulfilled for all the Appalachians living around the region.

Samantha was a young lawyer that had graduated from George Town University with *Magna cum laude* in the department of political studies. As the daughter of a senior lawyer, she had many connections to find another job. Her mother, Karen Kofer, was a senior lawyer in the justice department in Washington, while her father, Marshall Kofer, was also an attorney in the field of safe flights.



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The protagonist faced numerous obstacles after being asked by her office to work as a volunteer. She was caught by an illegitimate police officer, Romey, after driving more than the speed limit. Then, Samantha was brought into a fake jail and met Donovan due to the situation. Donovan, a professional lawyer that fought for society's welfare due to the bad impact of the coal industry, helped secure her release from jail. He was about 35-40 years old, had good social networks, and was prosperous. With a life full of luxury, he is close to several top company management and leaders in the region.

Interestingly, Romey had arrested many people illegally but had never been forbidden or prevented by any police officer. He was never punished by the authority, as he had a brother that worked as an officer in the region. This is interesting evidence for the United States, which is regarded as the most democratized country in the world. Consequently, the officials in this region did whatever they wanted, including disturbing the freedom rights of the citizen (p.67).

The meeting with Donovan left Samantha with various problems because, as a high-class lawyer, he had many enemies. Since the cases that he faced were quite large, his life was at enormous risk, and this happened to the protagonist as well. As a volunteer at a legal aid organization, which was close to Donovan, Samantha was thought to know many of this lawyer's secrets. For this reason, she became the next target of the police and hired people from the coal mining company.

Donovan struggled to defend the Appalachian society by fighting the coal company to pay attention to the civil rights of the people. Unfortunately, since the company protected their interests, they neglected their obligation to society and strived to obtain maximum profit at all times. According to Donovan's statement, "There is nothing black and white in my world. My enemy violates all written rules, so the fight is never fair. If you play by the rules, you lose, even if you are on the right side." (p.161).

Donovan had faced a big challenge having to deal with the hired lawyers that were owned by the coal mining company because they were paid handsomely to protect the company's interests.



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One law firm that had a big role was Casper Slate. “Casper Slate is a bunch of thugs in expensive suits hiding behind the guise of a firm, headquartered in Lexington and with offices all over Appalachia, ...they defend companies that dump chemicals into rivers...” (p. 283-284).

Donovan’s struggle to defend the people of Appalachia got tougher as he experienced resistance from the company. Also, the local community did not appreciate his efforts, as the lure promised by the company incited them. Coal industries were considered to be the largest job providers in the area, nevertheless, these jobs were only accessible to a limited number of people, mostly blue-collar or field workers. “I know everyone in Brady, and I guess half might hate me. Like I said, I sued the coal company, which is the biggest employer in all of Appalachia.” (p. 73)

While working with Mattie Wyatt, Samantha also had thorny problems that threatened her dependability. Family disputes over the distribution of inheritance were not commonly expected by the family of the heirs. Parents wanted to inherit the land owned by someone else, while the children demanded the expropriation of the land. Consequently, Samantha was accused of committing crimes by the heirs of the land she handled. Many people wanted to sell their lands before they became objects of quarrel among their children so that they could get much money from the coal company. However, they did not consider their children’s futures.

Families like these were the victims of the coal mining company in Appalachia. While working at the legal aid agency, Samantha met a lot of new people. From her friends, she finally experienced life’s crucial problems, both work-related and not. She developed close relationships with Mattie Wyatt, Donovan, and his younger brother, Jeff, and together they completed Donovan’s unfinished job. From him, she discovered many secrets of the legal issues handled by his brother concerning the coal mining company and after Donovan’s death, Jeff exposed various problems he had known. Hence, Samantha learned why he had received some threats from coal companies while alive.



Discussion

This novel opens many eyes to the law profession, legal institution, work procedures, findings of complex issues, as well as investigative job. There were many interesting matters regarding the writer's opinion about legal issues, especially in Mississippi, United States. As non-American readers, many of us wonder how there are still extensive manipulations of law in a country which is regarded as a country with a developed democratized system. Collusion, corruption, and nepotism were spread in every aspect of the government, as well as in business institutions.

As a writer of realism, Grisham depicts the real conditions that occur in American society, particularly in Appalachia. It was a beautiful, hilly, and an agriculturally fertile area where many coal mining industries existed. However, after the discovery of the coal, much attention was attracted from businessmen that were eager to dig it from the lands. Since then, this district has been filled with coal mines, which bring along the impact of natural destruction. Although the existence of this industry detrimental to the people, the firms have enough money to make the exploitation unstoppable. The coal companies buy lands from settlers and since selling these properties is an easy way of getting money, many people are motivated to do so. As a result, the people around this district became poor since they owned no properties. Although the coal company promised to provide jobs once the firm had settled in the district, many received insufficient salaries from the work. Apart from the low income, working in a coal mine is difficult, and the conditions are unsafe for the employees. The areas are filled with dust, resulting in black lung disease, which is the most common health issue in this industry.

The 'difference' in Grisham's work is that this novel discussed the real condition of American society. Although the places, industries, and events were real, the names, characters, as well as occurrences were configured based on literary work. All issues depicted in these novels were based on reality, evidence that the writer performed research before documenting any issue in the book. Therefore, information concerning legal matters reflected in this literary work is true, and the names of some scenes were unchanged. Grisham only provided the names of different characters, while the cases that were conveyed either seemed real or had happened in American



society. This form of writing made finding sources of contemporary issues that are related to the problems faced by the Appalachian community easier.

The problems that occur in Appalachia have always been sensitive issues in American Politics. Since the 1980s, this area has given rise to various social problems related to community welfare and the detrimental impact of coal mining on workers. President Clinton also visited this area to observe the lives of the people in this area first-hand. He found it strange that amidst an increasing American economy, this region was experiencing a decline in welfare. Clinton also visited several areas that had coal mines, including the Mississippi Delta, Pine Ridge Indian, East St. Louis, and Los Angeles (Duncan).

Duncan studied poverty and societal change in three rural areas during the 1990s, which were the poor Appalachians whom he called “Blackwell,” the poor Mississippi Deltans termed “Dahlia.” This researcher also investigated more stable areas with varying economic levels in New England labelled “Gray Mountain,” how this poverty continued from one generation to another, and how the Appalachians are experiencing difficulties in escaping it (Duncan).

To analyse the problems of Appalachia, *Gray Mountain* clearly describes how their economic problems are very much influenced by local government policies. This is because these policies are greatly affected by the behaviour of entrepreneurs who often bypass government laws. As a result, the people become victims of injustice committed by the authorities and entrepreneurs who use every means to run their businesses. Often, there is a cooperation between these owners of capital that is very detrimental to the people.

Chester said: “That’s a favourite coal mining trick. The company mined coal then declared bankruptcy to avoid payment and reclamation requirements. Sooner or later, they will reappear under another name. The same bastard, just wearing a new logo.” (98).

Asides from breaking up the names of the companies, the owners frequently use violence to protect their interests. Thugs are often paid handsomely to smooth over any efforts so that their



plans will work out their way. With the money they have, they can buy anything to secure their interests in Appalachia, including hiring professional lawyers.

“... Suing a coal company is difficult. They play hard. They lie, cheat, cover-up, and hire big firms like yours to block everyone who has a claim. Donovan won and lost, but he never stopped attacking.” (p.99)

Environmental Impact

One of the most obvious impacts of the coal mining industry in Appalachia is the impact on the natural environment, which has changed drastically, resulting in various damages. The victims of the negative impacts of mining are members of the population. Meanwhile, polluted air and water, the threat of flash floods, landslides, as well as black lung disease are the real consequences of coal mining in Appalachia. Based on the data published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2011, several environmental impacts have been caused by mining in Appalachia. These include the permanent loss of springs and flow, increased concentration of chemical ions downstream, decreased water quality, elevated selenium concentration, and reduced micro-invertebrate and fish communities.

Furthermore, mining the top of the mountain also has an impact on forest area damage, fragmentation, as well as habitat conservation, or the loss of various animal species (EPA, 2011).

Coal companies use all means to obtain maximum profit, and their excavation activities often do not consider the safety or sustainability of the environment or life.

“...On the top of the mountains are forests, then topsoil, followed by rock, and finally, coal layers. It can be six meters thick. The coal company gets the permit to execute open-pit mining and would attack the mountain with all kinds of heavy equipment. First of all, they will cut down the trees and deforest without trying to leave any hardwood trees. Then, they will continue to bulldoze while the earth is flayed. They do the same with thinned topsoil (p. 74)

After the deforestation of hills, coal washing creates a black sludge containing toxic chemicals and heavy metals, which has resulted in water pollution in the Appalachian region. Residents’



well water is contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and toxic substances, such as vinyl chloride (p. 216). Therefore, it is difficult for the residents to obtain clean water, and they are unable to consume water in the areas where they live. Also, muddy waste pollutes the water in the ground and threatens the safety of the population (Seth Gustafson, Nik Heynen, Jennifer L. Rice, Ted Gragson). If this mud dam is hit by heavy rains, the threat of mud floods causes water pollution to become more widespread, and the houses that are downstream of rivers or valleys will be threatened. “They keep forever, and no one cares. They were saved until the dam broke and a wave of toxic substances flowed down the mountains, into homes, schools, and cities, destroying everything” (p. 76)

Ironically, even with the destruction of nature, as well as the huge social impacts, the happenings in Appalachia are often ignored by the media. This is due to the collaborative efforts of entrepreneurs or coal company owners with the local government and media owners, which have been silenced with hush money. “Because it happened in Appalachia. Coal companies destroyed the mountains and city of our culture and our lives, and that’s not news.” (p. 77).

Another psychological and sociological impact is the frequent occurrence of family quarrels because residents around the coal mines have to sell their gardens and homes. They are unlikely to occupy a house that is threatened with various environmental impacts due to mining. Therefore, the residents had to sell their lands at low prices even though they had several children that were to inherit them. These conditions regularly initiated quarrels between the children and parents due to the untimely sale of assets when the heir was still strong and healthy. Furthermore, the money obtained from the land sale often finishes without a trace, resulting in the children feeling deprived of their rights as heirs to the owners of the properties.

The Unemployment Rate in Appalachia

Although Appalachia is the largest coal-producing area in America, it does not automatically bring prosperity to the surrounding community. This is due to low wages paid to the workers in this factory, which has a much broader impact, especially on the level of welfare. Furthermore,



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the safety of their working conditions is very minimal and although the coal mining jobs are very risky, the employees are paid wages of approximately 22 dollars per hour only. However, the residents have to accept the low salary, as they cannot find any other jobs, and the high unemployment rates have forced them to choose high-risk jobs with low salaries. The worst issue is that the level of illegal drug use in this area is higher than in other places. This is, of course, due to the high level of unemployment, which causes increased frustration in this society. The people are often victims of injustice committed by the authorities and businessmen, resulting in severe psychological conditions for the occupants of this area.

The people in the Appalachian region have a higher mortality rate than other regions because of the environmental effects caused by the mining industry (Hendryx). Furthermore, the pollution of air and water has worsened the health issues of the residents, and these detrimental conditions have received opposition from various parties. One of such people is Julia Bonds, who has been protesting against the mining system and the impact on people's lives since the 1990s. The MTR mining system makes land unrecoverable in the Appalachian region. However, entrepreneurs often ignore the protests because they are supported by the local government. Even when they respond or grant the protesters' requests, it would be temporary.

The natural conditions and limited employment opportunities have forced the locals to sell their lands. Those that obtained large capital from the sale used it for business in the urban area, while the unfortunate ones had to accept the situation by working as factory employees. It is also impossible for the owners of lands to build their own companies because it requires huge capital to construct a coal mining industry. Therefore, property ownership in this area is controlled by people from outside the region. Some information suggests that indigenous people control less than fifty percent (50%) of the land in the area (Couto; Gaventa). The lack of jobs in the Appalachian area also results in a low level of education for the residents. Most of these people only graduated from high school, which is in stark contrast to other regions of the United States, where the average education is undergraduate (Shaw, Thomas; DeYoun, Allan; Redemacher). Additionally, more than thirty percent (30%) of the young people in Appalachia lack adequate



skills and can only access menial jobs with very low levels of welfare. Furthermore, this area is more dependent on blue-collar jobs, such as farming, lumbering, and mining, which do not require higher education. This situation has caused many children to drop out of school to help their parents earn a living (National Career Development Association, 2014).

Apart from health issues, the existence of coal mines does not necessarily have an impact on the prosperity of the surrounding community. People have difficulties in securing jobs, especially women, since companies prefer male workers, considering these occupations involve strong physical exertion. Also, the jobs are very limited because machines perform most of the work, and so, very little human labor is required.

Appalachia also has a very high level of inequality for women due to the natural environment and the types of work that exist in the area. Women have limited occupational opportunities and, as such, are more oriented towards domestic work. They also obtain lower wages and experience very high rates of job loss (Denham et al.) hence, women are the most vulnerable group to poverty. According to Thorne (2005), Appalachia is the area with the highest poverty rate, and women that care for children under the ages of six have a much higher level of poverty than other regions nationally (Thorne, Deborah; Tickamyer, Ann; Thorne).

Black Lung Issues in Appalachia

The author of this novel depicted sensitive issues happening in several regions in Appalachia up till now. Recently, some researchers urged President Trump to re-evaluate the law dealing with the wash management of the coal mining industry in the United States. They believe that the industrial dust from the process is the cause of the black lung disease spread in the center of Appalachia. Meanwhile, Trump motivated the coal mining industry to increase their production. However, the President of United Mineworkers of America, Cecil Roberts, urged the current administration to remake the regulations for the industry so that the existence would not make a negative impact on the society surrounding the territory



(<https://internasional.kontan.co.id/news/debu-silika-tambang-batubara-sebabkan-penyakit-paru-paru-hitam> accessed 31/05/2020 at 5:15).

Although some steps have been taken to prevent black lung disease, the cases in West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky have increased significantly. This issue was predicted as the effect of the increasing work and production in the mines, as using the heavy machines caused the extensive spread of silica dust in these areas.

Until now, the coal mining industry did not follow the rule of work safety, which is legalized by the government. As reported by some researchers on health issues:

Coal companies continue to operate these mines without stringent regulations, even as public health researchers have amassed significant evidence over the last decade concerning the negative effects. This evidence showed that people like Bradford that live near mountaintop mines disproportionately suffer and even die from a litany of health problems, including cardiovascular disease and cancer. A study conducted by researchers from West Virginia University revealed that tiny dust particles released into the air in Edwight promoted cancer growth when injected into human lung cells. Furthermore, another by the United States Geological Survey, a science agency within the Interior Department, found that nearby streams have lost half their species of fish (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/10/coal-mine-next-door/how-us-governments-deregulation-mountaintop-removal-threatens>).

Besides Roberts, David Zatezalo, the head of coal health and safety administration (MSHA), explained that in the last three years, there had been a reduction in the coal dust from the mining industry since the agency issued an inhalable coal dust regulation. Zatezalo urged the regulators to acquire accurate measurements of the silica level before deciding on new regulations concerning this chemical (<https://www.law-justice.co/> accessed 11 October 2020 at 05:25).

The coal mining industry in Appalachia has added to both the physical and psychological problems, and has caused the people to stress due to the unsafety of the environment for habitation. This condition is caused by the dust and the possibility of flash floods because of incorrectly managed coal waste. Furthermore, it has also increased conflicts between the settlers and their families and has caused many of them to be homeless. Numerous children in this area



have no inherited land because their parents had sold their farmlands cheaply to the coal industries. Also, many face difficulties in getting employed or earning as there are no job opportunities.

The cases mentioned above were witnessed by the people that came to the legal aid clinic where Samantha worked as a volunteer. She encountered many victims of the coal mines that had become beggars or homeless people. Also, some lived in caravans or their cars and had difficulties in attaining 24-hour free parking space. They had made cars their homes and had to move often because many of the areas in the district were monopolized by the coal mining companies.

Conclusion

According to the discussions above, *Gray Mountain* is a clear reflection of the true events in Appalachia and can be considered as a social criticism that is based on this reality. This is reinforced by the statement of the author in the description at the back of the novel stating that the book was the result of direct observations in the field. There, Grisham also expressed gratitude to the various parties that helped obtain much information relating to the impact of coal mining in Appalachia. Novels similar to this one entail good meanings for social change and are according to their purpose or function, which are entertaining and educating, *dulce et utile*. Unfortunately, realistic novels that deal directly with socio-political or legal issues are still very rare in Indonesia. The novels in this country avoid sensitive issues like this because democratic maturity is yet to be well-established. Hence, there is a concern or fear of the consequences of writing these kinds of literary work.

Research on foreign literature, especially American, will provide more insight because they have a variety of themes, and the more realistic it is, the better, as it serves as a lesson or imparts knowledge. Therefore, literary works are not only entertaining but also educational media for readers.



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