



**TRUTH IN A MANUFACTURED WORLD: A FORMULAIC ANALYSIS
OF MEDIA MANIPULATION IN *TIME OUT OF JOINT***

THESIS

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THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

JEMBER UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

2026



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**This Thesis is Presented as One of the Requirements to Achieve Sarjana
Sastra Degree in English Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember**

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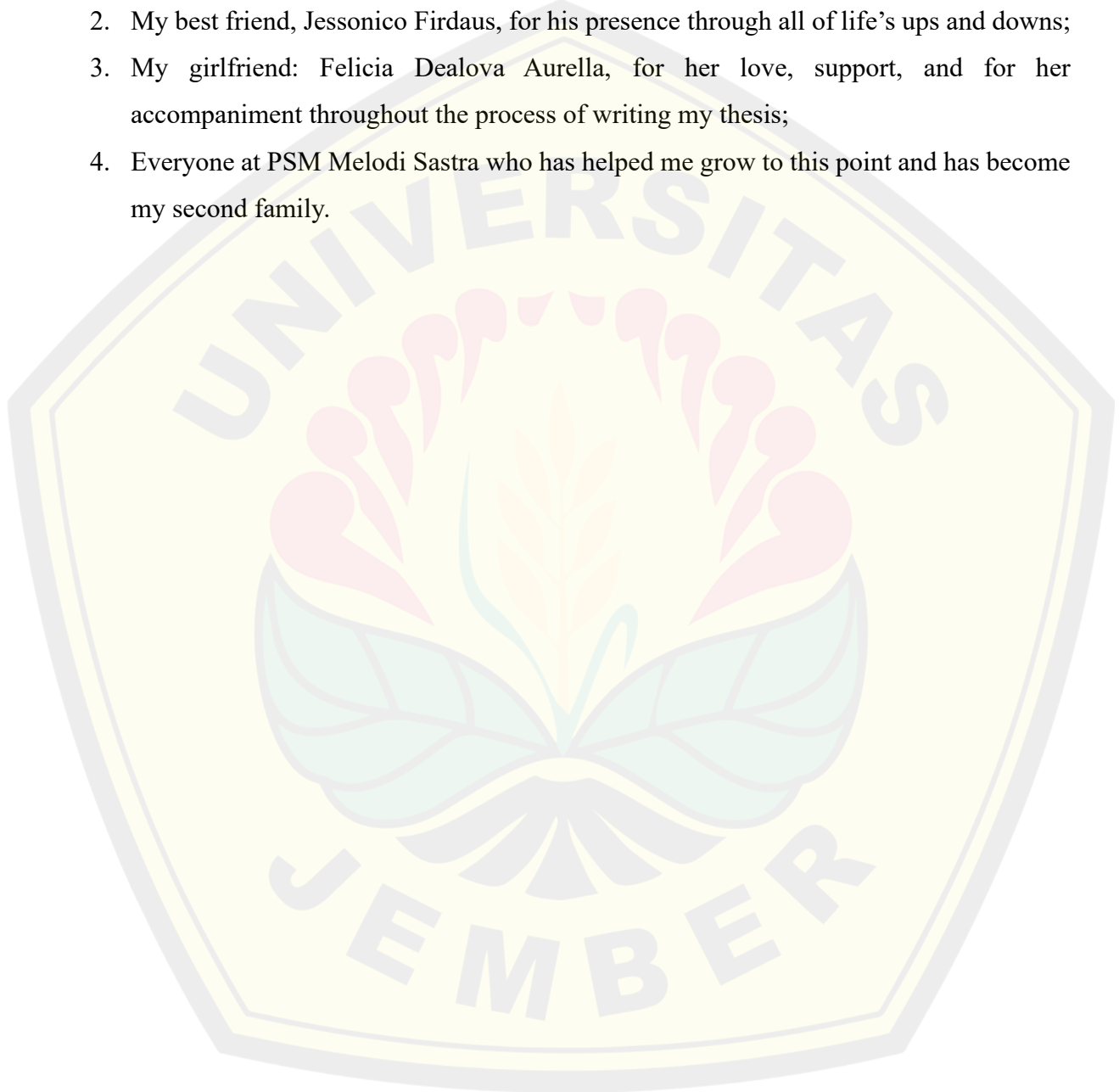
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2026

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

1. My beloved family: my father, Joko Prajitno, my mother, Sri Endah Larasati, and my brother Yefta Andreas Christianto, for their unconditional love, endless prayers, and guidance that helped me to become a better person each day;
2. My best friend, Jessonico Firdaus, for his presence through all of life's ups and downs;
3. My girlfriend: Felicia Dealova Aurella, for her love, support, and for her accompaniment throughout the process of writing my thesis;
4. Everyone at PSM Melodi Sastra who has helped me grow to this point and has become my second family.



MOTTO

“I did it my way”

-Frank Sinatra



DECLARATION

I hereby state that the thesis entitled “Truth in Manufactured World: A Formulaic Analysis of Media Manipulation in *Time Out of Joint*” is an original piece of writing. I declare that the research described in this study has never been submitted for any other degree or publication. I state to the best of my knowledge that all resources used in this thesis have been properly acknowledged.

This thesis has also undergone a plagiarism check and AI usage screening on the draft of the Final Project thesis by the program officer (the operator of the English Literature study program), with a maximum similarity index of 20% and AI usage of 20%

Jember, 12 July 2026

Daniel Ganda Christianto

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines how Philip K. Dick uses media manipulation as a formulaic narrative tool in his novel *Time Out of Joint*. The focus of this study is on the relationship between formulaic narrative structure and critiques of media manipulation in the novel, particularly in relation to the sociopolitical context of the Cold War era. This topic is worth exploring because it not only provides a literary analysis of the use of media as a narrative tool in *Time Out of Joint*, but also because, in today's modern world, media serves as a highly influential platform, offering the opportunity to gain further insight into media itself. *Time Out of Joint* was chosen not only because it is one of Philip K. Dick's most influential works but also because the topics discussed in the novel remain relevant to this day.

The theory used in this study is John G. Cawelti's formulaic theory, which addresses the concepts of moral fantasy, imaginary world, identification, and suspense. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes textual evidence from the novel and examines it through the lens of formulaic theory, as well as relates it to the historical discussion of media manipulation during the Cold War; more specifically, to a phenomenon commonly associated with Operation Mockingbird. The analysis reveals that Philip K. Dick cleverly follows and simultaneously breaks the rules of formulaic literature as described by John G. Cawelti. *Time Out of Joint* presents a moral fantasy centered on ambiguity rather than a clear victory; it constructs an imaginary world that gradually becomes the focal point of the story's mystery; it creates identification through a shared perspective and limited information between the reader and Ragle Gumm; and it builds suspense around the question "What is real?" rather than "Who committed the crime?" as found in most conventional detective stories.

The findings also show that media manipulation serves as the central ideological concern in *Time Out of Joint*. In the story, newspapers, public information, memory, and even physical reality are carefully constructed to maintain social and political control. By linking these fictional elements to historical concerns about information management during the Cold War era, Philip K. Dick transforms media manipulation from a matter of propaganda into a broader issue involving perception, truth, and reality itself. Through this narrative strategy, Philip K. Dick not only critiques powerful institutions that can easily shape public perception through media manipulation but also gives his readers a message not to accept information from the media at face value. This remains highly relevant today because, in the modern age, the media

is one of the most influential platforms, especially given how quickly information can be distributed in today's era via the internet.

With all that in mind, it can be concluded that, through its detective and science fiction elements, this novel not only provides engaging entertainment for its readers but also addresses complex social and political issues. Philip K. Dick successfully encourages his readers to reexamine their relationship with the media they consume on a daily basis. This study contributes to literary studies by demonstrating how Cawelti's formulaic theory can be applied to analyze media criticism in popular fiction and also emphasizes how Philip K. Dick's work remains relevant in an era where information is both highly accessible and easily manipulated for other purposes.



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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide an overview of the topics to discuss and give readers a brief description of this research, while the sub-chapters will provide further details on this research in the form of background studies, research topics, research questions, and the objectives to be achieved in this study.

1.1 Background Study

Social media or even media in general have been an essential part of human life and society in the present time. It became a platform to share or seek information, entertainment, education, etc. Nowadays, many people cannot be separated from the media, and some people's jobs even depend on it. However, sometimes it can also be used for harm, such as spreading misinformation, starting propaganda, and other terrible things. With this concern in mind, literary works can provide us with a space to examine the ethics and impact of this misuse of media through speculative scenarios and symbolic narratives within them (Brown, 2022). One literary work that brings this topic to the forefront is Philip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint*, published in 1959 (Hills, 2024). With this novel, we can see how the misuse of media can affect people or even society on a bigger scale, specifically to gain control.

Philip K. Dick is an American science fiction writer, renowned for his novels that explore reality, perception, and authoritarian control through his speculative narratives. This makes him a unique writer in the realm of science fiction, as this genre is a genre that usually focuses on imaginative concepts of technology, science, and their impact on individuals and society (Sterling, 2025). His works, such as *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Time Out of Joint*, are widely known and have even been adapted into major films titled *Blade Runner* and *The Truman Show*. *Time Out of Joint* is one of his works that marked a turning point in his career, shifting his focus from general science fiction to an exploration of meaning,

identity, and ethics within the science fiction genre. According to biographer Lawrence Sutin, this novel marked Dick's first significant engagement with the theme of fabricated reality, a motif that would become central to many of his later works (1989, p. 137). The reputation of *Time Out of Joint* as a literary work that serves as the foundation of the dystopian science fiction genre, a genre of fiction depicting oppressive or frightening societies, adds to its credibility as an object of research (Vitalyevna & Qizi, 2025).

The outline of the story in *Time Out of Joint* centers on Ragle Gumm, the protagonist of the story, who is an ordinary person living in a peaceful 1950s suburb. His life goes on as usual until he realizes that strange things are happening around him, such as objects disappearing before his eyes, mysterious signs appearing, and newspaper reports that seem to contradict what is actually happening (Dick, pp. 43-59). The story continues until he finally finds evidence that the entire city he lives in is just an illusion, created to keep him unaware of Gumm's true role in the real futuristic society. All of Gumm's media consumption, memories, and daily experiences have been designed to manipulate his perception of reality (Dick, pp. 193-200). This outline shows the criticism of the misuse of the media's power that Philip K. Dick wants to address, and this criticism is in line with recent research that explains that media manipulation and disinformation can distort public perception to control society and serve the interests of those in power (Mandela, Gopalakrishnan, Suneesh, & Broskhan, 2025).

The misuse of media to shape reality and manipulate public opinion and even consciousness is the main topic discussed in this novel. In this case, Philip K. Dick not only uses the science fiction genre as a means of entertainment for readers, but he also uses it as a platform to explore how media can alter truth, enforce compliance from society, and maintain the existing status quo (Mitchell, 2023). The manipulation in the world of Ragle Gumm, carried out through fake newspaper reports, fabricated advertisements, and scripted public speeches, shows the dangerous consequences of uncritical media consumption. It also shows that the media is not a truly neutral source of information, but a powerful tool for shaping

public perception of certain issues. The media actually has the power to silence voices and views that are contrary to what those in power want and to shape the “normality” that exists in society, and to change public opinion. All of these views are related to media studies, which explain that the media actually have a close relationship with power and control (1995, p. 8). With all this in mind, the message Philip K. Dick seeks to convey in this novel is that we, as media consumers, must be critical in consuming and giving opinions, and we must also be smart in sorting through what is in the media, as well as encouraging us to reflect on our relationship with the media we consume every day.

This study uses the formulaic theory of John G. Cawelti to examine the novel’s critique of media manipulation. According to Cawelti, formula writing has a dual purpose, which is artistic and societal; both acts as a vehicle for critique and supports prevailing myths (1976, p. 34). His work focuses on how popular literature creates tales that both reflect and subvert society’s ideals by fusing classic story patterns with cultural mythologies (1976, p. 33). Cawelti’s framework is useful for seeing how *Time Out of Joint* combines elements of detective fiction and dystopian science fiction in general not only for entertainment purposes, but also to make readers reflect on what they know about this topic. Cawelti focuses on how popular literary works use familiar patterns and structures to make readers feel relatable while attempting to challenge dominant ideologies. In the novel, the truth that Ragel Gumm slowly uncovers reflects the investigative arc that is typically found in detective novels (Guarneri, 2025), and the larger theme in this novel concerning societal control by those in power relates to what was happening in the real world at the time this novel was published, namely, the Cold War (Reed, 2025).

As media scholars have noted, controlling the flow of information enables political elites to shape public perception under the pretense of maintaining order (Pleines, 2020). Therefore, *Time Out Joint* acts as a critique of this mechanism, highlighting the dangers of this media-related environment where invincible forces can rule freely. By analyzing how Philip K. Dick’s work critiques media manipulation through the genre it presents, this research contributes to a broader discussion of

the relationship between literature, media, and power and both *Time Out of Joint* and this study gives us as humans a warning and a reminder of how important media literacy and critical thinking are in this era, where media information is the backbone of human life.

1.2 Research Topic

A topic is the main idea used as the basis for research and becomes the foundation of any academic research, so it has to be planned before we start any research. Neil Murray (2008, p. 123) defines a research topic as “a specific subject or area of interest that forms the basis of a research project and is expressed in terms of a question or a problem to be solved.” From that description, the research topic of this study is the use of media as a tool for reality construction in Philip K. Dick’s *Time Out of Joint*. This study discusses how *Time Out of Joint* uses media manipulation as a formulaic narrative tool in the sci-fi/detective genre to control the perceptions of the characters in the story using Cawelti’s formulaic theory. By discussing this, this study shows how *Time Out of Joint* maintains familiarity and innovates simultaneously to express concerns about truth, authority, and social control by demonstrating how media can construct and maintain fabricated realities in the story of this novel.

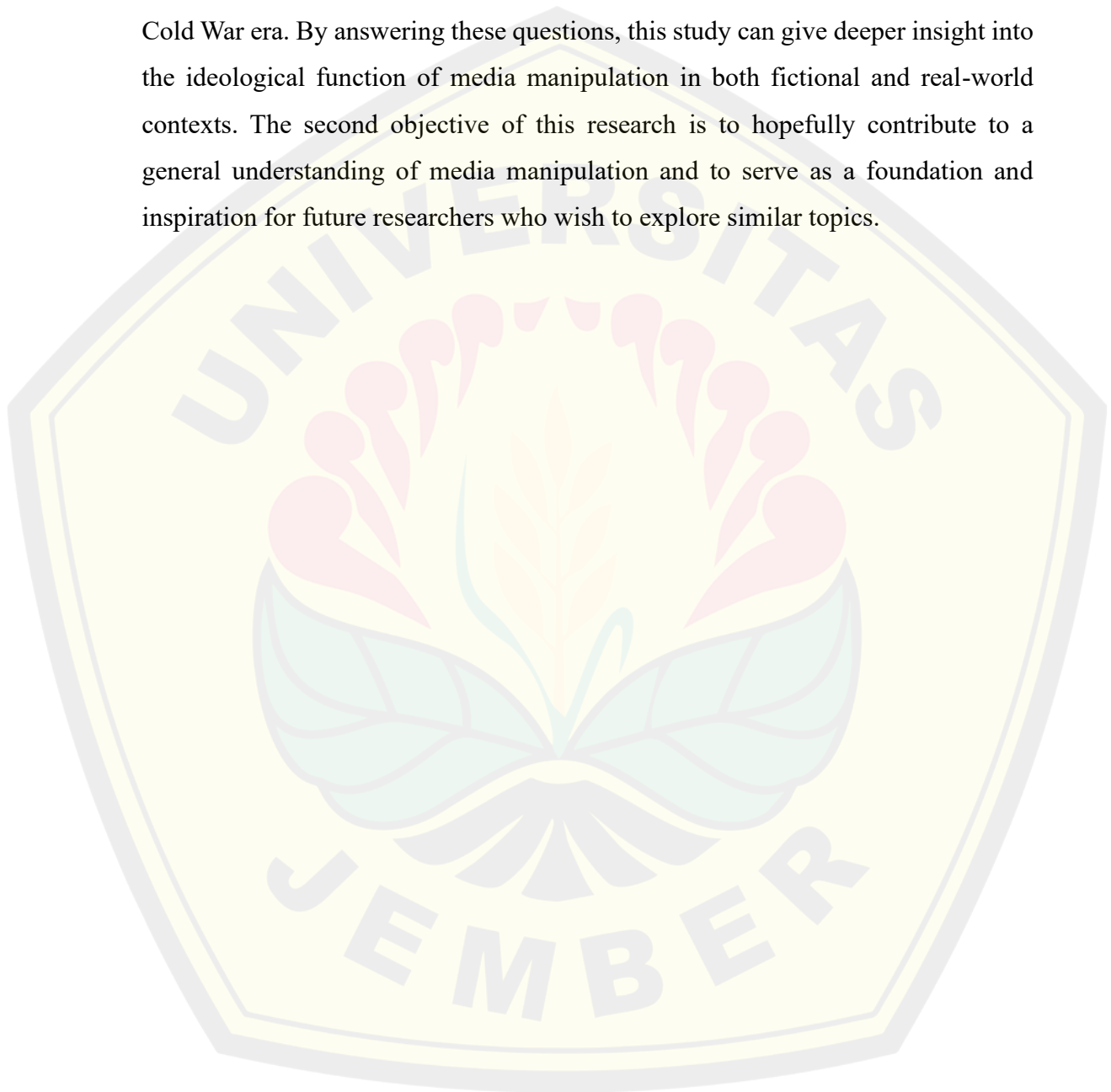
1.3 Research Questions

To explore the research topic further, this study poses the following research questions:

1. How is the formulaic narrative structure constructed in Philip K. Dick’s *Time Out of Joint*?
2. How is the formulaic structure related to the culture of media manipulation that happens in America during the Cold War era?

1.4 Research Goal

There are several objectives to be achieved in this research. The main objective is to answer the research questions, namely, how the formulaic narrative structure is constructed in Philip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint*, and how the formulaic structure is related to the culture of media manipulation that happens in America during the Cold War era. By answering these questions, this study can give deeper insight into the ideological function of media manipulation in both fictional and real-world contexts. The second objective of this research is to hopefully contribute to a general understanding of media manipulation and to serve as a foundation and inspiration for future researchers who wish to explore similar topics.



CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contains two sub-chapters that are devoted to the previous research's theoretical basis and the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is employed to get the outcome that benefits the research question in this study. Meanwhile, the previous studies are necessary not only to differentiate this study from previous studies on the same topic, but also to serve as a basis for analysis in this study.

2.1 Previous Research

Several studies discussing media control, media use, and studies that utilize Cawelti's theory serve as references and foundations for this study. For example, Pleines (2020) discusses how government institutions use mass media to maintain their political power, while Newell (2022) analyzes how social media can provide a platform for minority voices to challenge and question existing majority voices. In the meantime, Cawelti's formulaic theory is applied to various literary and media works by Arrofifah (2021), Fadhilla and Adi (2021), Kasimbara, Setiawan, and Wahyuningsih (2023), and Sulastri and Ruminda (2024), who examine how genre conventions influence narratives and storytelling. Firstly, Arrofifah examines the theme of adventure and the escapism aspect of *Through the Looking Glass*. Kasimbara, Setiawan, and Wahyuningsih examine the recurring narrative pattern in *Malam Minggu Miko Season 1*, while Sulastri and Ruminda examine the detective story formula in *Enola Holmes 2022*. In addition, Fadhilla and Adi examine the gender relations in *The Dublin Murder Squad Series*, showing the evolution of detective fiction in a conventional formula. All four of the studies above were done using Cawelti's formula theory.

Although all of the studies above gave insight into media influence/control and formulaic narratives, several notable differences became clear. Pleines and Newell are more focused on the socio-political aspect of media influence, while the literary

studies focus on the structural narrative aspect. Additionally, although Cawelti's formula theory was applied to several works by Arrofifah, Fadhilla, and others, none of them analyzes how the formulaic framework critiques the problem of disinformation in the media. By using Cawelti's theory to analyze *Time Out of Joint* and showing how its systematic unravelling of reality functions as a critique of media manipulation, this study became a bridge that fills the gaps between literary analysis and media studies by combining them.

2.2 Formulaic Theory

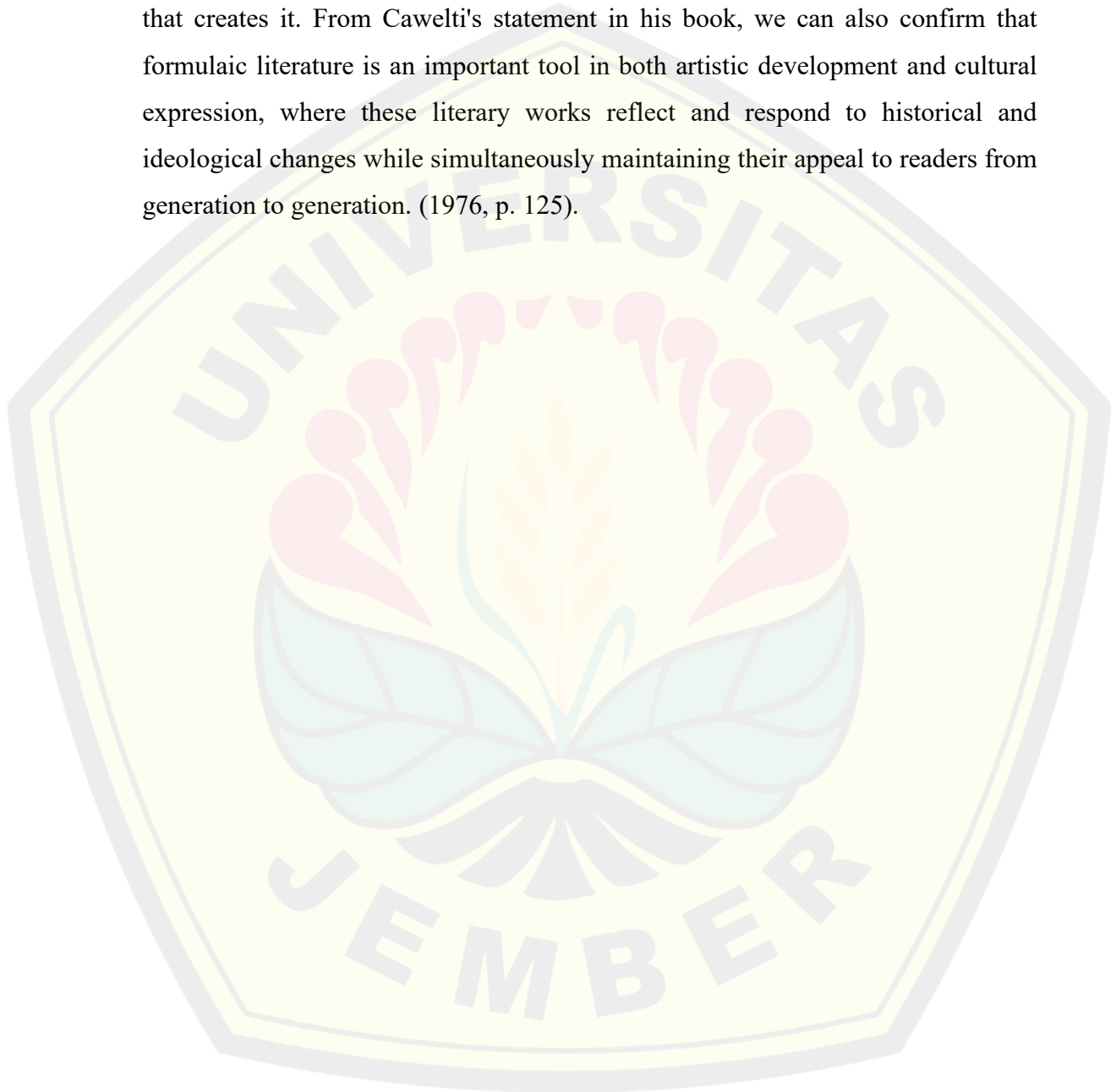
John G. Cawelti is a literary scholar that widely known for his contributions in the study of genre fiction and popular literature. In his book, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, he defines formula literature as "a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works" (1976, p. 5). To put it simply, he points out that formulas or formulaic literature provide a sense of familiarity for readers and also give the author room to provide creative variations on them to give readers a new atmosphere, so that readers do not get bored when consuming their works. Cawelti analyzed how readers strike a balance between seeking comfort from the pattern they are used to finding and the freshness of the uniqueness provided by the author in their works. Further to this explanation, Cawelti argues that popular literature cannot simply repeat the same patterns to try to convey what the author wants to say, but the uniqueness provided by the author also helps to shape the way we think, maintains the relevance of cultural narratives, and also addresses the societal issues that the author wants to convey. With this, we can understand how changes in literature also reflect changes in ideology and history while remaining accessible and appealing to a wide range of readers.

Two key components of Cawelti's theory are the connection between standardization and the need for escape and relaxation, which is often called escapism (1976, pp. 8-9). Standardization is the mutual understanding between authors and readers about a certain topic. An example of this is their shared

understanding of the science fiction genre, which involves futuristic story settings, usually involving time travel, etc (Pulatovna, 2024). This standardization is important for the author to attract readers, because when the author and readers have the same understanding, readers can find a sense of comfort when reading, and also understand what the author wants to convey through the patterns or structures in the author's literary work. Meanwhile, escapism refers to the feeling of escape from the everyday reality provided by literary work, and usually, it is done through an immersive fictional world or the uniqueness that the author creates in their work. For example, in J.R.R. Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings*, he begins the story with the comfortable region of the Shire as the starting point for a great adventure filled with monsters and magic, and this kind of hook can transport readers into a feeling of escape from reality (Webb, 2024). A successful literary work must have a unique feature and make it its identity, even if its pattern and structure are the same as those of other literary works of the same era. Cawelti thinks that formulaic literature is often found in genres such as romance, westerns, and detective, where familiar patterns in these genres give readers a sense of security and comfort as they adapt to cultural contexts that change over time. (1976, p. 20). He also says that formulaic literature has survived to this day because it can satisfy readers' need for familiarity and uniqueness at the same time (1976, p. 51). With all of the above statements, we can conclude that repetition in a literary work can strengthen the cultural narrative that the author wants to convey, and the uniqueness provided by the author can prevent it from becoming stale and boring to consume. An example of this statement, which is also mentioned by Cawelti in his book, is the change in the science fiction genre from generally only telling stories about space travel to complex questions about identity and the ethics of the use of technology, as well as the transition of the western genre from stories frontier tales to stories from a revisionist perspective on courage and morality, showing that this balance between standardization and escapism can help maintain the relevance of these genres (1976, p. 80).

In his book, Cawelti asserts that formulaic literature is important not only for its entertainment value but also in a cultural context, as it reflects social concerns,

desires, and ideological conflicts within society (1976, p. 106). Popular genres in formulaic literature generally have a fixed structure, but writers can create flexible stories that resonate with their readers to explore fundamental concerns. Because of this flexibility, formulaic literature can be considered as an important subject for literary studies to understand how storytelling shapes and is shaped by the society that creates it. From Cawelti's statement in his book, we can also confirm that formulaic literature is an important tool in both artistic development and cultural expression, where these literary works reflect and respond to historical and ideological changes while simultaneously maintaining their appeal to readers from generation to generation. (1976, p. 125).



CHAPTER 3. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Research methods are the strategies, processes, or techniques used to collect data or analyze evidence to uncover new information or better understand a topic (Villegas, 2022). The research method used to guide this research is to uncover the research question. This chapter is divided into three parts: type of research, data collection, and data processing and analysis.

3.1 Type of Research

In general, there are three types of research that are often used in the development and discovery, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed types. Each type of research has different characteristics/laws for the search targets (Waruwu, 2023). This research employs the qualitative approach due to the nature of the data, which is taken in words instead of numbers. Qualitative research is a methodology that seeks to capture non-quantitative data as part of an approach for acquiring knowledge. This type of research will be performed by examining statements and dialogues present in the *Time Out of Joint* that illustrate the shape of Media manipulation.

3.2 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary sources were an essential part of this study, and collecting them is an important step that is required. Therefore, the information needed was obtained through in-depth reading of *Time Out of Joint* and relevant academic sources, which is necessary to find important textual evidence. In addition, it is told in the story that the media is used to control the truth and shape perceptions. Quotes and conversations from the book that highlight media manipulation became the main sources of information. To accompany primary data,

the secondary data consists of books, essays, and articles that explore the socio-political background of media manipulation throughout history in America during the Cold war era. With this combination of primary and secondary sources, a solid foundation can finally be established for analyzing how *Time Out of Joint* represents media manipulation using Cawelti's formulaic theory, and ensure that the discussion is based on both textual evidence and more general theoretical insights.

3.3 Data Processing and Analysis

A systematic approach is needed to analyze how *Time Out of Joint* critiques media manipulation through its story, since it aims to maintain this analysis's coherence and academic foundation. This approach allows the analysis of media manipulation not only by using direct textual evidence from the novel but also by applying the theoretical framework, and ensures that the final conclusion is solid and accurate. The first stage in this systematic analysis approach is categorization of the important sentences and quotations that hint the media manipulation in *Time Out of Joint*. To help contextualize the depiction of media manipulation in the story, this categorized data will receive an additional analysis using secondary data from sources outside the novel. Following the categorization step, John G. Cawelti's formulaic theory will be used for further analysis. This framework is used to help us understand how *Time Out of Joint* uses its mystery/detective and science fiction moral fantasy or genre to highlight media manipulation through the novel, particularly the imaginary world, identification, and suspense. Furthermore, relating to Cawelti's formulaic theory, the analysis will be continued by relating the findings of the pattern of the story to the cultural background.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Moral Fantasy

As stated in his book, Cawelti describes moral fantasy as the psychological satisfaction that readers obtain in a fictional world where justice/truth can always be upheld, even when the social system in that fictional world is depicted as oppressive or ethically ambiguous (1976, p. 38). According to Cawelti, the depiction of moral fantasy can differ in each genre. For example, in adventure stories, the victory of the protagonist/hero in the story serves as a fantasy of personal power and absolute success in a moral mission; in romance, the protagonist's success is depicted as achieving a perfect union driven by love and serves as a fantasy where love can overcome everything; or in mystery stories that provide moral fantasy where the hidden truth is finally revealed and the culprit can be identified. So, moral fantasy here is not about a good or bad ending, but more about the clarity of the moral meaning of the story, where the clarity of the moral meaning can provide a sense of escapism for the reader. Cawelti also explains that moral fantasy depends on recognizable patterns (hero, villain, and clear mission) that resonate throughout various cultures.

From that description, the moral fantasy that Philip K. Dick constructs in *Time Out of Joint* is not centered around heroism or justice. He follows the traditional mystery/detective genre and constructs it around the satisfactory, where the truth can be revealed. However, instead of presenting clear victories, he wants the reader to understand why the questionable action taken by the authorities in the story is necessary for the betterment of all. From that perspective, Philip K. Dick wants to tell the readers about the normalization of deception as a necessary condition for social stability and survival. The story both guides Ragle Gumm and the reader into the realization that the truth is not all bad as we seem, but it is done in order to maintain a larger political and military system. This moral framework is shown through Ragle Gumm finding the evidence, which slowly leads him to reveal the truth of his world, which is that the world he lives in is fabricated.

The reasoning from the authorities for why they orchestrate this manipulated world is made clear when Ragle Gumm finally knows that there is a war between the Earth and the Moon happening outside his world: *"It wasn't himself and Vic that the MPs hunted. It was the enemy. The war was being fought between Earth and the Moon"* (Dick, 1959, p. 193). This statement changes the perspective of Ragle and also the reader about the whole picture of the false reality of Ragle's world. From this, it can be concluded that the artificial world created by the authorities does not function as a prison or an act of manipulation, but was created as a defensive strategy to protect important individuals during the war. By placing this deception in the context of an ongoing war, this narrative forces us to reinterpret that this deception was not solely committed for malicious purposes, and encourages us to reduce our sense of injustice regarding the manipulation of Ragle's reality.

This reasoning is further reinforced when Ragle realizes and understands that his role in this system is very important. He understands that his life has been set up in order for him to continue solving the newspaper puzzle so that the military can predict enemy missile strikes. He states, *"I know what I do, now. I know what the contest is, and what I am. I'm the savior of this planet. When I solve a puzzle, I solve the time and place the next missile will strike"* (Dick, 1959, p. 193). This awareness changed Ragle's position from being a victim of manipulative actions to becoming an important core element in this system for the survival of the Earth. From this point on, the narrative of the story also changes from focusing on personal freedom to the importance of collective security. Although Ragle still does not accept the manipulation carried out by the authorities, he is faced with a very big threat, and the manipulation that revolves around his life here is portrayed as a necessary sacrifice to maintain collective security rather than simply a mere crime. In this way, the novel constructs a moral fantasy in which questionable actions can be considered ethically acceptable if they are intended to prevent greater destruction.

The moral fantasy of *Time Out of Joint* here plays on the idea that the readers have to understand the truth rather than forcing them to fully reject the "villain's" action,

even though it is cruel and ethically questionable, but if the goal is for something more important, then it should be understandable, or if it is in the context of the story, justice and individual freedom may have to be sacrificed for the sake of collective security. This is in line with Cawelti's notes that formulaic narratives often resolve moral conflict not by dismantling institutions, but by reaffirming the intelligibility of the system's logic (1976, p. 43). This novel does not fully support the actions of the authorities, but neither does it fully criticize them, leaving readers in an ambiguous position in terms of ethics, where these manipulative actions are neither justified nor supported. This unresolved ambiguity has become the core of the novel's moral fantasy, which allows readers to voice their own opinions on the matter, having been informed of the reasons behind the actions and the costs that had to be paid.

4.1.1 Imaginary world

The imaginary world is one of the essential parts of formulaic literature, as it is the most important tool that authors can use to create the feeling of escapism through world-building. According to Cawelti, one of the things that makes a literary formula successful is the creation of a rich fantasy world that allows readers to become more immersed in the story (1976, p. 19). What this great world-building does is make it so that readers can't directly apply their standards of what makes sense in the real world and what is possible because they've been transported to a different world (1976, p. 19). However, not all imaginary worlds in a literary formula are built from scratch. Most authors create imaginary worlds based on the real world, but add a slight twist. This is done so that readers can still feel familiarity with the author's fantasy world and can more easily understand what the author wants to convey (1976, p. 21). This balance is important in order to satisfy both the reader's need for familiarity and escapism (1976, p. 51).

In *Time Out of Joint*, Philip K. Dick creates the imaginary world based on mid-20th-century America, the same era in which the Cold War was still happening, and also the same era in which this novel was published. This statement is supported by one

of Mrs. Kesselman's lines, which reads, *"It's an ordinary five-tube radio that we got right after World War Two"* (Dick, 1959, p. 136) and also from Mrs. Keitelbein *At our last class," Mrs. Keitelbein said, folding her hands before her on the desk, "somebody raised a question concerning the impossibility of our intercepting all the enemy missiles in the event of a full-scale surprise attack on America* (Dick, 1959, p. 153). This similarity of historical and cultural setting creates an impression of reality even though the reference is only partially selected (1976, pp. 19-20). This familiarity also allows Philip K. Dick's imaginary world to function as a stable and believable foundation, making it easy for readers to immerse themselves in the story because of its familiarity with the real-world context. In this story, Philip K. Dick wants readers to see the fantasy world he has created through the eyes of Ragle Gumm, the protagonist, which at first glance seems perfectly normal. However, as the story progresses, strange things begin to happen in this initially believable world. One by one, these phenomena reveal the true nature of Ragle Gumm's world and also gradually reveal the science fiction twist given by Philip K. Dick in the setting and the story itself. Because the reader experiences many of the phenomena alongside Ragle Gumm, it makes Ragle Gumm himself seem less like a character in the story and more like the reader entering the story itself, because the reader shares the protagonist's feelings and confusion. This also makes the imaginary world itself become not only a setting, but a mystery that the reader and Gumm try to uncover, and this level of immersion provides a great sense of escapism for readers.

One of the pieces of evidence that Ragle Gumm found was when he realized that the media around him somehow felt off. It happened when he found a magazine and read an article about Marilyn Monroe's fame in it. The magazine article treats Marilyn Monroe's fame as something that everyone should already know: *"It talks about her as if she's very famous. All the crowds. People lining the street"*, and it also mentions *"her fan clubs in America"* (Dick, 1959, p. 58), but strangely, none of these exist in Ragle's world. At first, he cannot immediately explain what is wrong, and he says, *"I'm having trouble with words"* (Dick, 1959, p. 59). At this point, he thinks that he is just hallucinating and the problem might be in his own

mind. However, when he reads it again, he realizes that the article is written clearly and seriously as if it were normal journalism. The level of detail of the article led him to conclude that the article itself is not a fictional work, and instead, it belongs to a wider culture that does not exist in his world. Ragle understands that the problem is not a mistake in his thinking and instead lies outside himself, stating that *“it’s outside. In the things themselves”* (Dick, 1959, p. 59). This moment became a shifting point in himself, from self-doubt to the recognition that the world around him is incomplete and there is something more outside his world.

That evidence is strengthened with the disappearance of the soft drink stand, and this phenomenon even more clearly exposed the artificial nature of Ragle Gumm’s world. One day, when he goes to a soft-drink stand to buy a beer, suddenly the stand disappears in front of his eyes. At this point in the story, the setting, which initially appeared normal, began to show anomalies and reveal its artificial nature. Even this strange phenomenon was explained in detail, describing how the soft drink stand disappeared.

“The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules. He saw the molecules, colorless, without qualities, that made it up. Then he saw through, into the space beyond it, he saw the hill behind, the trees and sky. He saw the softdrink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, ...” (Dick, 1959, p. 43).

This phenomenon is significant not only because of its strangeness, but also because it shows that the manipulation carried out by the government in Ragle's world is not limited to the realm of information in the media, but also extends to the realm of reality itself. The use of the imaginary world itself as the core of the mystery in the story is a novelty, especially in the detective story genre. Philip K. Dick shifts the focus of the mystery in *Time Out of Joint*, instead of questioning who the perpetrator of the mystery is, to what kind of world the protagonist actually lives in. This contradicts Cawelti's concept of an imaginary world, which he defines as a fictional world constructed to appear believable and stable so that it can be easily accepted by readers. In the context of conventional detective stories, the setting usually functions as a backdrop that supports the process of solving the mystery, not as the

object of the mystery itself. However, *Time Out of Joint* breaks this pattern to offer something new in the detective story genre.

4.1.2 Identification

Identification is one of the most common literary devices used by formulaic writers, which is the process of establishing a psychological and emotional connection between the reader and the characters in the story, so that the reader can relate to them (1976, pp. 17-18). Through the process of sharing perspectives, emotions, tensions, and hopes, readers can effectively experience escapism because they can explore forbidden boundaries or dangerous situations without real-world consequences. One of the simplest examples from this escapism process is the protagonist in adventure stories, because usually the protagonist or hero in this genre is designed to be familiar and easy for readers to grow fond of them, and when they achieve success, readers can also feel a sense of triumph and power that they may lack in the real world (1976, p. 18). Because these protagonists are designed to be somewhat familiar, readers can understand their morals and psychology, allowing them to easily become emotionally involved with the experiences. Because of all this, identification becomes an important literary device as it allows popular works to create emotional attachment in readers while supporting the functions of entertainment and escapism in the imaginary world constructed by the story.

The protagonist of *Time Out of Joint*, Ragle Gumm, is not portrayed as a hero or an extraordinary person, but rather as an average person whose main skill lies in his ability to solve puzzles in daily newspapers named “Where Will the Little Green Man Be Next?” which later became an important point in the story, “*In the center was a photo of Ragle Gumm himself, and under it the caption: Grand all-time winner in the Where Will the Little Green Man Be Next? contest, Ragle Gumm*” (Dick, 1959, p. 17). The characterization of Ragle plays an important role when viewed through Cawelti's explanation of identification, because Cawelti explains that identification occurs when readers are compelled to participate in the action from the hero's point of view, and if readers do not have an emotional attachment

to the protagonist, this will be difficult to do (1976, p. 18). The fact that Ragle is portrayed as an ordinary person makes it easy for readers to relate to him, so that when Ragle is confronted with the mysteries of his world, every oddity and discovery that occurs, readers can also feel the same confusion, helplessness, and relief that Ragle feels throughout the story. Through this Ragle's stereotypical characterization, Philip K. Dick follows the formulaic literary pattern described by Cawelti that the use of stereotyped characters can help readers relate themselves to the protagonist and aid the purpose of escapism (1976, p. 18). Not only that, through the characterization of Ragle, Philip K. Dick follows a pattern that Cawelti refers to as the formulaic inquirer, a standard character type often found in mystery and detective fiction, such as Enola/Sherlock Holmes, John Putnam Thatcher, and so on (1976, p. 132). As mentioned earlier, Ragle is an ordinary person whose ability lies in his expertise in solving puzzles in daily newspapers, and this naturally makes him someone who can detect patterns, use logic, and see what others do not see, just like the protagonists in detective stories in general. What sets this apart is that Philip K. Dick flips this formula by turning the investigator, who typically has controls in the investigation, into the subject of the investigation. Ragle's abilities are exploited for the sake of war by creating an artificial reality so that Ragle remains unaware of his role in the bigger picture: *"I know what I do, now. I know what the contest is, and what I am. I'm the savior of this planet. When I solve a puzzle, I solve the time and place the next missile will strike"* (Dick, 1959, p. 193). Therefore, although Ragle's characterization initially follows the standard pattern of a formulaic inquirer, Philip K. Dick reverses this role and changes the very structure of common detective fiction, showing that the real mystery, in quotation marks, is not a crime, but something more complex than what is called crime itself.

In *Time Out of Joint*, identification is constructed by Philip K. Dick through something called epistemic alignment, which is a process of equalizing known information, which in the current context occurs between Ragle Gumm and the reader. (Ellmer & Reichel, 2021). In this novel, readers and Ragle Gumm are both bound by the same limited information about the world in this story, forcing readers to experience uncertainty alongside Ragle. Among the anomalies that occurred,

which also significantly disrupted Ragle's perception of reality as well as that of the reader, was the disappearance of the soft drink stand. As stated in the novel: *"The soft-drink stand fell into bits"* (Dick, 1959, p. 43). Upon witnessing this phenomenon, Ragle was greatly confused because it did not align with his framework of reality, as stated in the novel: *"Turning away, he unsteadily walked back,..."* and *"His legs wobbled under him and on his face particles of cold seemed to form"* (Dick, 1959, p. 44). In this phase of the story, readers will most likely have the same reaction as Ragle because of their limited information to understand what is actually happening. This shared ignorance is a great way to build a connection between readers and Ragle, and this is also in line with Cawelti's explanation that identification can be said to be successful, not only when readers can feel a psychological and emotional connection with the protagonist, but also when they become immerse in the story, escape the reality and sharing uncertainty and discovery in the imaginary world created by the author (1976, p. 19).

4.1.3 Suspense

Like any other, Suspense is also one of the most often used literary devices by formulaic writers, and it refers to the author's ability to make readers feel afraid about the uncertainty of whether the fate of their beloved protagonist or what will happen after a certain tragedy in the stories they create (1976, p. 17). Suspense itself has a pattern like any other literary device that is used in formulaic literature, which is usually done with a resolution delay. Popular genres like mystery, adventure, romance, and westerns depend on recognizable patterns, and suspense emerges from the balance between these familiar patterns, standardization, and the uncertainty that the writer creates through their creative imagination (1976, p. 6). The detective story genre is no different from other genres in that it has a recurring pattern. The plot of a detective story usually begins with the discovery of a crime, the investigator begins to investigate, clues are slowly revealed, and in the end, the truth is uncovered (1976, p. 132). However, if this pattern continues to be used, it will make the story boring, and readers will be able to easily guess the ending. This

is where suspense is important to the story-making process; it all depends on how creative the writer is in making the resolution of the problem satisfying for the reader. This is done to make readers emotionally invested in the story the author has created, encouraging them to continue reading to find out what will happen after an event or what will be the fate of the protagonist.

In terms of plot, *Time Out of Joint* follows the pattern that usually appears in detective stories, which typically begin with the emergence of a mystery, then continue with an investigation, and end with a revelation. This pattern aligns with Freytag's pyramid framework, which is a framework that explains the classic narrative structure.

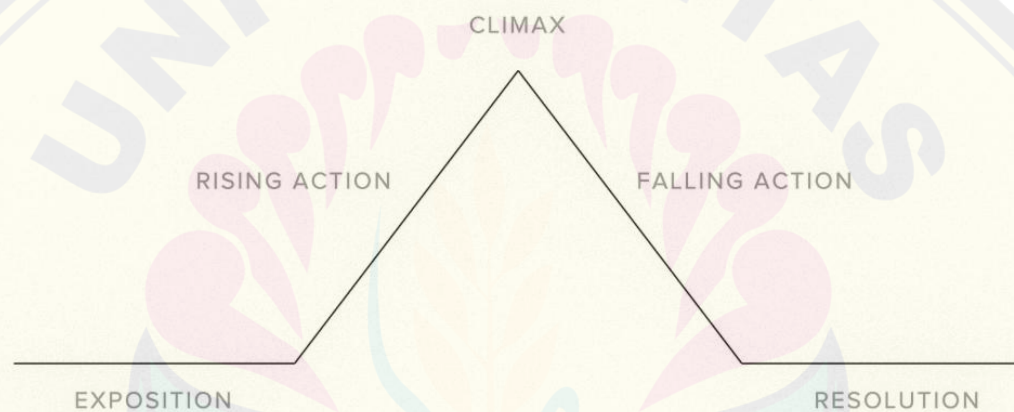


Figure 4.1

Within this framework, there are five key points in a story's plot: first, the exposition, which typically introduces the characters and setting; rising action, where conflict begins to emerge and tension rises; the climax, the peak of the built-up tension; falling action, which usually covers the aftermath of the climax and the point where the story's tension drops; and finally, the resolution, the final outcome where the conflict is resolved (Etyang, Makokha, & Obura, 2022). If we return to the plot of *Time Out of Joint*, the exposition stage of *Time Out of Joint* is the part where Ragle Gumm is introduced at the beginning of the story—an ordinary man living in a suburban area in the 1950s who appears to be perfectly normal. However,

at some point, strange anomalies begin to appear around Ragle, such as the disappearance of objects and inconsistencies in information from the media around him, which signals the start of the rising action. The climax of the story is marked by Ragle finally uncovering the mystery behind the anomalies he has experienced. This is followed by the falling action, in which Ragle reflects on the things he has done, and concludes with a resolution where Ragle chooses to leave the city—or the world—he has lived in all this time.

As explained earlier, the plot of *Time Out of Joint* follows the pattern that usually appears in detective stories. However, what sets it apart from other detective stories is that Philip K. Dick does not build the story around “Who is the culprit?” but rather “What is real?” As we already know, the city where Ragle Gumm lives is an artificial reality created because of war: “*Your town was built up as a reconstruction of several old towns which got blown away in the early days of the war. The Seabees recreated the environment fairly well, based on texts and records*” (Dick, 1959, p. 200). This makes the suspense in *Time Out of Joint* lean more toward ontology, the nature of reality or existence, rather than purely investigative (Noprianti, 2025). The shift in focus to ontological issues makes the resolution in *Time Out of Joint* slightly different from typical detective stories. Instead of revealing the culprit behind the crime, the resolution focuses more on exposing the exploitation of Ragle’s ability through manipulated reality that has been constructed for political and military interests, reinforcing that the main conflict in *Time Out of Joint* lies in whether such manipulation is ethically acceptable, which is usually the main conflict in the science fiction genre (Martín, 2024).

The use of standard detective plot patterns and a gradual shift toward discussing specific issues in the science fiction genre make *Time Out of Joint* a unique story not only in the detective genre, but also in the science fiction genre. Phillip K. Dick expands the use of suspense from simply engaging readers emotionally in the stories he creates to also serving as a reminder to his readers about the ethics of technology use, especially technologies that were highly influential at the time the novel was published, namely, mass media. The use of mass media in *Time Out of*

Joint, particularly newspaper puzzles, as weapons of war, normalizing surveillance and manipulation in the form of entertainment, is a fictional story that is difficult to believe if it actually happened in the real world (Dick, 1959, p. 193). However, this serves as a warning that Philip K. Dick wants to convey, encouraging us to remain cautious when interacting with all forms of media. In this way, the use of suspense by Philip K. Dick in his story serves not only as entertainment, but also to warn the reader about how dangerous technology, especially the media, can be if it is used unethically, not only back then when the novel was published, but it also remains relevant until now in modern society.

4.2 Media Manipulation in *Time Out of Joint*

The development of the internet and social media in this modern, digital age has transformed our perspective on how information is produced, distributed, and even consumed by the general public. Major social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have made it so that information can instantly reach a global audience with ease. Unfortunately, the ease with which information can be obtained today through these various social media platforms has become a double-edged sword that can be considered quite dangerous if left unchecked, namely the spread of misinformation. The speed of information circulation today allows misinformation, propaganda, and even manipulated narratives to spread widely before they can be properly addressed, and even blurs the line between truth and fabricated news (Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023). To add to the problem, algorithms on major social media platforms typically prioritize engagement over the accuracy of the news posted on those platforms (Corsi, 2024). This allows sensation-seeking or politically motivated news to shift public perspectives with ease and rapidity. As a result, modern media platforms reveal just how easily information can be weaponized to foster misguided perspectives within society.

The media's vulnerability to manipulation is actually not unique to the modern era. Long before the rise of social media, government agencies in several countries had

recognized the media's power to influence public opinion and perceptions regarding various issues. For example, during the Cold War—the same era when Philip K. Dick published *Time Out of Joint*—the media had evolved from merely a source of information into a crucial ideological battleground. The Final Report of the US Senate Select Committee on Inquiries into Government Operations in Relation to Intelligence Activities (the Church Committee) in 1976 stated that media manipulation was one of the primary negative consequences of improper intelligence activities (1976). The report also detailed the patterns used by intelligence agencies to employ classified methods to influence public perception, interfere with policy discussions, and suppress differences of opinion. This demonstrates that, in reality, information control is deeply embedded within the national security practice itself.

One of the major phenomena mentioned in the Church Committee report is Operation Mockingbird, which was designed by the CIA. This was a secret CIA operation in which the agency attempted to influence the media and public opinion by establishing relationships with journalists from major media outlets and manipulating the information disseminated through those media platforms to align with the interests of the U.S. government. Although historians still debate whether this operation actually happened, there is strong evidence suggesting that the CIA did indeed secretly establish relationships with journalists and media organizations to shape the public narrative. The findings of the Church Committee further support this argument by exposing systematic abuses involving political intelligence, secret operations, and the manipulation of information channels. In its report, the Church Committee stated that the CIA not only collected classified information from U.S. citizens, but also carried out actions aimed at harassing and discrediting certain groups and individuals while manipulating public opinion as part of those operations. Thus, it can be said that during the Cold War, the media was not always a fully trustworthy source of information, but could also be used as a tool of state dictatorship.

Although *Time Out of Joint* was not a best-selling novel when it was published in 1959, it has since been recognized as one of Philip K. Dick's most significant works from the early part of his career due to the themes of identity and reality that he introduced to the science fiction genre (1989, p. 137). Regardless, *Time Out of Joint* is still an interesting literary work for addressing media manipulation because of the parallels between its story and Operation Mockingbird. Philip K. Dick takes the concept of media manipulation beyond conventional forms of media propaganda and pushes it into a more fictional realm. If we look at this through Cawelti's theory, he notes in his book that formulas and culture are intertwined; one way this happens is through the stories in formulaic literature, where these formulas reaffirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that aligns with those interests and attitudes (1976, p. 35). When we talk about Operation Mockingbird or other Cold War intelligence practices, this kind of news manipulation in a real-world setting would only result in public opinions manipulated by the government running the operation, but in *Time Out of Joint*, Philip K. Dick takes it a step further by depicting that reality itself can be constructed through this kind of media manipulation. The government in *Time Out of Joint* not only influences what Ragle believes but also manufactures the very world where Ragle himself lives. This transforms media manipulation into ontological manipulation, where perception, memory, and even existence itself can be manipulated and politically steered. Although this is merely an exaggeration of what could happen if media manipulation were actually carried out, it is clearly a strong warning from Philip K. Dick, especially when we consider the context in which *Time Out of Joint* was published. Philip K. Dick wanted to warn his readers about the dangers of media manipulation if it continues, and certainly to remind us of the importance of critical thinking before we form an opinion about something in the media.

Given how rapidly the media is evolving today, *Time Out of Joint* serves not only as a reflection of the anxieties of society during the Cold War era, but also as a strong critique and a reminder to its readers to always exercise caution when consuming information in the media. This also makes *Time Out of Joint* a relevant literary work in the modern era. The depiction of media manipulation and its dangers

demonstrates that the media is not entirely neutral. Whether media manipulation is carried out for covert operations, to promote ideological propaganda, algorithmic distortion, or for any other reason, control over information is a highly powerful tool; if it falls into the wrong hands, the consequences can be fatal. Once the media has been manipulated, the line between truth and fabrication becomes extremely difficult to identify and increasingly unstable (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021).

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that Philip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint* both follows and modifies the formulaic literary patterns described by John G. Cawelti, as all the elements of formulaic literature—such as moral fantasy, an imaginary world, identification, and suspense—can be found in *Time Out of Joint*. However, Philip K. Dick does not simply follow the existing pattern; rather, he attempts to modify it in such a way that *Time Out of Joint* challenges the conventional structure of detective fiction. The focus of detective fiction, which typically centers on the resolution of a mystery or a criminal act, is transformed by Philip K. Dick into a greater emphasis on questioning the nature of reality itself, making the world in which Ragle Gumm lives and Ragle Gumm's perspective on his own world the central mystery of the story. Since the reader and Ragle Gumm are given the same limited information, the reader can experience the confusion, uncertainty, and sense of discovery that Ragle feels in every situation. This provides the reader with a strong sense of immersion while also raising ethical questions about truth, deception, and authority. These formulaic elements are further reinforced by the depiction of media manipulation in the novel, which parallels events occurring in the era when the novel was published. By presenting a world in which information, perception, and even existence can be politically constructed, this novel demonstrates that the media—as an instrument for disseminating and obtaining information—can become a powerful tool, or even a weapon, for shaping the truth and controlling public understanding. Therefore, *Time Out of Joint* not only displays the flexibility of formulaic literary conventions but also offers a critical reflection on the dangers that can arise from media manipulation, making this novel relevant both in a historical context and in contemporary discussions about media and misinformation.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

As one of the most famous science fiction/detective novels of its time, *Time Out of Joint* cleverly follows and simultaneously breaks the rules of formulaic literature as described by John G. Cawelti. Philip K. Dick utilizes all the key elements of Cawelti's theory, which are moral fantasy, imaginary world, identification, and suspense, employing these storytelling tools and modifying them in new directions. The moral fantasy in this novel does not culminate in a definitive victory, but rather in ambiguity, where the crimes committed by the antagonist are necessary for the greater good, leaving readers to decide for themselves what conclusion they deem best. The imaginary world, which typically serves merely as a backdrop, is turned by Philip K. Dick into the very heart of the mystery revealed in this story. Identification in this novel is built through shared ignorance between the reader and the protagonist, Ragle Gumm; they are both bound by the same limited information, allowing the reader to feel the same emotions as Ragle does in every event that occurs. The suspense in this novel is not like the suspense in most detective stories, which typically centers on the question of "who committed the crime?" but is transformed by Philip K. Dick into the question of "what is real?" With all this, a story that initially appears to be just an ordinary detective story transforms into a thought-provoking work that asks readers to think critically about truth, power, and the media that shapes our understanding of both.

The plot of *Time Out of Joint* is also tied to real-world events from the era when the novel was published, in which the artificial reality constructed around Ragle Gumm parallels how the government at that time used the media to control public perception. These events were exposed by the Church Committee and referred to as Operation Mockingbird, in which intelligence agencies secretly collaborated with numerous journalists and news outlets to report news that served political interests. However, Philip K. Dick did not simply copy these events and insert them into the story; instead, he took this idea and modified it into a narrative setting where such manipulation does not stop at controlling information but extends to controlling

reality itself—where memory, perception, and even everyday surroundings can be manipulated for specific purposes. This exaggeration makes the warnings Phillip K. Dick seeks to convey feel more urgent and impossible to ignore, and *Time Out of Joint* becomes not just an ordinary novel, but also a critique of what Philip K. Dick saw around him.

With all that in mind, it can be concluded that *Time Out of Joint* is a literary work that goes far beyond mere entertainment. Through *Time Out of Joint*, Philip K. Dick expresses his views on what is happening around him and conveys them through a story. This demonstrates that popular fiction can also convey serious and profound messages and challenge readers to reexamine what they know about the world around them. An analysis of Philip K. Dick's hyperbolic portrayal of media manipulation provides a deeper understanding of how storytelling can be used to critique society. Most importantly, the message of *Time Out of Joint* remains just as relevant today as it was when the novel was first published, given the current era filled with fake news, rampant social media, and a proliferation of politically driven narratives. Philip K. Dick indirectly reminds us, as readers, of the importance of critical thinking as we consume media every day. In the end, this study hopes to inspire future researchers to continue exploring the powerful connection between literature, media, and the way we comprehend truth.

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