



**A STUDY ON SOCIAL CRUELTY REPRESENTED IN VICTOR HUGO'S  
*LES MISERABLE***

**THESIS**

A thesis presented to the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Jember University as one of requirement to get The Award of Sarjana Sastra Degree in English Studies

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**DEDICATION**

This thesis is gratefully dedicated to my beloved My parents and husband Fahrizal and my child who always give me support and affections.



**MOTTO**

“In every living thing there is the desire for love”

( D.H Lawrence )



**DECLARATION**

I hereby state that the thesis entitled “ The Figure Of Women In the Life Of D.H Lawrence Manifested In Son and Lovers“ is an original piece of writing. I certify that the analysis and the research descibed in this thesis have never been submitted for any degree or any publications.

I certify to the best of my knowledge that all source used and any help received in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

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I do realize that no one is perfect. The mistakes in this thesis belong to my being common creature. Finally, I hope this thesis will be useful especially for the progress of English Literature.

## SUMMARY

**A STUDY ON SOCIAL CRUELTY REPRESENTED IN VICTOR HUGO'S *LES MISERABLE***; Dewi Nurul Azmi, 080110191041; 2015;41 pages; English Department, Faculty of Letters Jember University.

This research analyzed the social cruelty represented in *Les Miserable*. This novel portrays the unfair class -based structure of nineteenth century. Innocent people become beggars and criminals in the nineteenth century in French because of social and the effect of revolution at that time. The main character named Jean Valjean reveals how the French criminal-justice system transforms a simple bread thief into a career criminal system 19 years of prison criminal. The cruelty on the novel reveals the conditions of France. At the factory Valjean has female employee named Fantine, a single parent who always sends all the money from his efforts to those who care for her child.

A man named Jean Valjean is released after nineteen years in prison. He had been sentenced to a term of five years because he stole a loaf of bread to feed his family, but the sentence was later increased because of his attempts to escape. In other side, the author illuminates the unfair attitude of French society toward women and the poor. Fantine's fellow citizens criticize her for her behavior and immorality, but they also take every opportunity to make her conditions even more desperate.

This study is conducted in several phases. At the first, I compile, classify, and verify the data from Victor Hugo's *Les Miserable*. The first step results information about the social cruelty that represented on characters in the novel. The author describes the social cruelty in nineteenth century through characters Jean Valjean and Fantine. It goes further by analyzing social cruelty in the real society also social cruelty in the novel and its relationship. The second step is applying representation theory of Stuart Hall with discursive approach to analyze the data.

The result of this research shows that the characters in *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo (1862) represented the social cruelty in the nineteenth century. Victor Hugo describes it through main character Jean Valjean and Fantine who live in the miserable condition. Victor Hugo's ideology is criticizing the government about the social condition especially social cruelty which represented on the novel. Through *Les Miserable* he protest the government about the arbitrarily government toward common people.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, an overview to the whole thesis is provided in order to give the readers a clear description about the topic being discussed. This chapter also provides the perspective of the theory used in thesis that is Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation. Therefore, it is necessary to arrange the background of the study, the problems to discuss, the goals of the study, and the organization of the thesis. Each of which will be presented as follows.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The novel begins in 1815, more than two decades after the start of the French Revolution. It begins with the story of the return of an exhausted prisoner, Jean Valjean, who had spent many years in prison because he had stolen a small bakery. Its main character is Jean Valjean, a former convict who eventually becomes a good citizen. He is sent to prison for stealing a loaf of bread because of hunger and sentenced for 19 years as an escape punishment.

See here. My name is Jean Valjean. I am a convict from the galleys. I have passed nineteen years in the galleys. I was liberated four days ago, and am on my way to Pontarlier, which is my destination. I have been walking for four days since I left Toulon. I have travelled a dozen leagues to-day on foot. This evening, when I arrived in these parts, I went to an inn, and they turned me out, because of my yellow passport, (Hugo, 1995:130)

Hugo uses his novel to condemn the unjust class-based structure of nineteenth-century France, it shows time and the society's structure turns good, innocent people into beggars, and criminals. Hugo focuses on three areas that particularly need reform: education, criminal justice, and the treatment of women. But in this reaseach I discuss two categories,criminal justice, and the treatment of women. He conveys much of his message through the character of Fantine, as symbol for the many good moral but she got woman abuse until she died due to cruel society.

Hugo criticizes on law enforcement. The character of Valjean reveals how the French criminal-justice system transforms a simple bread thief into a career criminal. After, Jean Valjean gets freedom from his punishment during 19 years, he becomes sneaky and vicious—a sharp contrast to the effect of Myriel's kindness, which sets Valjean on the right path almost overnight. In the French society of *Les Miserable*, justice is clumsy at best. It barely punishes the worst criminals but tears apart the lives of people who commit petty crimes.

A number of characters in the novel operate under pseudonyms or in disguise and these deliberate changes identity become the distinctive mark of the criminal world. Thénardier is a prime example in the novel. He masquerades under the name Jondrette, and I see that he has adopted other pseudonyms at the same time. Valjean, who uses pseudonyms to hide his past rather than to continue his criminal behavior, inhabits his alter egos more thoroughly. Even Valjean's disguises, while not as dishonorable as Thénardier's, are an unfulfilling way of living, and the first thing Valjean does after Cosette's marriage is shed his fake name in front of his new family. Disguises and pseudonyms are a means of survival for the novel's characters, but Hugo believes that life is about more than mere survival. Ultimately, one of the most important distinctions between the honest characters and the criminals is the willingness of the honest characters to set aside their alter egos and reveal themselves for who they truly are.

At the factory Valjean has female employee named Fantine, a single parent who always sends all the money from his efforts to those who care for Cosette, her little angel. But the problems after the other workers know that Fantine has a child out of wedlock, they also demand that Fantine should be expelled from the factory. Finally, after being expelled from the factories, Fantine's life is more miserable. She plunges into the world of prostitution to pay for her daughter. On the streets, she is arrested by officers, Javert.

However, Mr. Madeleine is obtains love by adopting a starving little girl, Cosette. He wonders and run away to anywhere. Cosette is a little girl who grows up in a very hard life by Thenardier family. They eventually followed to Paris when the upheaval of the revolution finally begins in Paris.

This novel portrays the unfair class -based structure of nineteenth century. Innocent people become beggars and criminals. Based on the previous quotation, the education reform, criminal justice, and treatment of women become the major

issue. The society who lives in this condition can be called as victim of cruelty by the ruling party. On the other hand, this phenomenon also relates to the social condition of France before the revolution era which can be a reflection of the society at that time. This novel is subsequently accepted as a protest and social satire around French revolution at that time. This novel is the Gospels for the community.

In conjunction with this idea, Warren and Wellek (1956:94) mention that a literary work is the mirror of society. Throughout the concepts of 'mirror', the representation in *Les Miserable* conducts particular meanings, which are very implicit to be analyzed. Hall explains in his work, "Meaning structures 1 and meaning structures 2 may not be the same." (2005:119).

Stuart Hall is a well known representation theorist. I choose his theory to get critical understanding of cruelty in the novel. I will apply theory of representation by Stuart Hall (1997).

## **1.2 Research Topic**

This thesis is about the representation of social cruelty in the novel, such education crisis, woman abuse, and criminal justice.

## **1.3 Research Problems**

The problem in this novel is human creation that has a complex relation and meaning to readers and society. This research discusses the representation of cruelty in France before the revolution era. For its relation, this research tries to connect the representation of the cruelty by looking at the characters such as Valjean. The character of Valjean reveals how the French criminal-justice system transforms a simple bread thief into 19 years of prison criminal. The cruelty on the novel reveals the conditions of France. This point of cruelty is supported by Javert, a rigid police officer. Moreover, this research explains the objective understanding by using the representation of the society.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the background of the study above, some questions are formulated to discuss further. They are:

1. How does the novel represent social cruelty?
2. What is the relationship between social cruelty in the novel and social cruelty in real society?
3. What is critical idea of the author?

## **1.5 Purpose**

The purpose of the research is to understand representation of social cruelty in the novel. The second purpose is to find out the relationship between social cruelty in the world and social cruelty in real society. The last is to explain the critical idea of the author. Finally, for other writers who are interested in analyzing representations, this thesis can be a reference.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is used to support the analysis. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter describes about the previous researches that are related to the topic of the research. The second subchapter explains the theory that is used to analyze the representation of social cruelty in *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo. The theory used in this research is taken from Stuart Hall's theory of representation.

### 2.1 Previous Research

The previous study is important because it helps me to get the references relating to the chosen topic or similar object in this thesis, and to give an explanation to the readers that this thesis is originally different from the previous studies. In this thesis I use two of previous researches.

Andriek Martha Prayoga (2006), a student of English Department, Faculty of Letters, is one of the few who has studied Stuart Hall's theory of representations. Andriek's study has inspired the present study since he discusses the same object which is character. Andriek studied the effect of Materialism and Madonna on selected lyrics while this ongoing thesis talks about the idea of hero and villain of fictional characters. Andriek analyzes "Material Girl" and "Dress You Up" song lyrics popularized by Madonna in 1984 which have materialistic society as its discourse. His research uses Stuart Hall's theory to analyze the representation of materialistic society in those song lyrics. This research takes the representation of materialistic society in those song lyrics as the data that are analyzed by Stuart Hall's theory of representation. It is impossible to finish the thesis without limiting problems to discuss.

Those two song lyrics are taken from Like a Virgin album launched in 1984. There are nine songs in this album, but this research takes two song lyrics that are analyzed by using with the theory of representation, they are "Material Girl" and "Dress You Up". A year before, this album had been launched, the economic conditions of USA recovered from inflation that happened in 1982. He uses the term of Encoding/Decoding to analyze literary work. By using this theory, the ideology behind the representation of materialistic society is presented through the thesis.

In conclusion, the Madonna's song lyrics actually deliver social criticism to materialistic society, but people have seen the other side, which is only as music play. Here, the presence of Madonna is not only used to brainwash people's critical thinking, but also to increase the profit by manipulating the market demands.

The second previous research was written by Elok Darojatin entitled "The Representation of Proletarian French Woman's Oppressions in the Nineteenth Century in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserable*". The thesis talks about the oppressed proletarian people in the nineteenth century in French because of social and political conflict at that time. The woman character named Fantine is characterized as a victim of the French's situation. Her life is miserable since child until the end of her life. Elok's thesis aims to gain the portrayed representation of proletarian French's woman's oppressions in *Les Miserable* and the ideological position of the author toward it. This research was conducted to analyze the critique of Victor Hugo toward social condition of social cruelty in *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo.

Elok's thesis shows that the woman character in *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo (1862) represents the proletarian French woman's oppression condition in the nineteenth century. Victor Hugo describes it through Fantine, a character who lives in the miserable condition. The factors of her oppressed condition come from social and her own condition. Social condition forces her to be the victim and shapes society to have a perspective that woman is the other, not the one. The surrounding people who oppress woman mean the bourgeois class and even the woman proletarian class itself. Victor Hugo's ideology is criticizing the government about the social condition especially woman's oppression. Through *Les Miserable* he breaks the mystery of common people life and protest the executive government about the arbitrarily government toward common people.

## 2.2 Stuart Hall Theory of Representations

The main understanding of the theory of representation is the use of language to convey something meaningful. According to Hall, representation connects meaning and language to culture. Hence, representation is the most important part of the process in which the meaning produced and exchanged between members of the group in a culture existed in our minds by using language. This can be said that, representation is a way to produce meaning that system consists of two major components, namely the concept in mind and language.

Stuart Hall through his book entitled *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practice* argues:

“Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people... Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things.”(Stuart Hall,1997:15)

Hall's quotation above means that representation is a main part of the process of production and exchange meaning of the concepts in our minds to other through language. Language is one of the media through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in a culture (Hall,1997:1). Language also functioned as a sign. The signs whether they are sounds, written words, images that electronically produced, musical notes, even objects also used to stand for or represent our concepts, ideas, and feelings to other people.

Representation works through representation system and there are two systems of representation; a set of concept or mental representations and a language (Hall, 1997:17).

These two components are related to each other. The concept of a thing that we have built in our mind makes us know what the meaning is. However, the meaning cannot be communicated without a language. For instance, we know the concept and the meaning of 'a chair'. Thus, we cannot communicate the meaning of 'a chair' (a thing that used to sit) if we are not able to express it in a language that can be understood by others. The meaning of construction process becomes very different in a culture or in a group of people because each of them has their own way



to interpret something. People who has different understanding background toward the specific cultural codes will not be able to understand the meaning of something which produced by other communities. Therefore, in order to produce and exchange meaning people have to have same understanding background toward the cultural codes. Hall (1997) states that member of the same culture must share concept, images, and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world in roughly similar ways. They must share, broadly speaking, the same cultural codes.

Based on the explanation above, I have chosen the discursive approach. I decide to use this approach because in the novel, the object that will be analyzed is Jean Valjean, the main character in the novel. The author actually constructs the novel with text and within the text is language. The novel represents the social cruelty in the real society after the start of the French Revolution which is described with Jean Valjean as the mean character in the novel. Hugo uses his novel to condemn the unjust class-based structure of nineteenth-century France, showing time and again that the society's structure turns good, innocent people into beggars and criminals. Hugo focuses on three areas that particularly need reform: education, criminal justice, and the treatment of women. He conveys much of his message through the character of Fantine, a symbol for the many good but impoverished women driven to despair and death by a cruel society. Thus, the representation can be obtained from the meaning of the language itself.

## 2.2.1 Discursive Approach

Stuart Hall states that there are two major variants or models of the constructionist approach –the semiotic approach of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure and the discursive approach of French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault. Thus, this research is conducting to use the discursive approach of Michel Foucault.

“Foucault used the word ‘representation’ in a narrower sense than we are using it here, but he is considered to have contributed to a novel and significant general approach to the problem of representation. What concerned him was the production of knowledge (rather than just meaning) through what he called discourse (rather than just language). His project, he said was to analyze ‘how human beings understands themselves in our culture’ and how our knowledge about ‘the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings’ comes to be produced in different periods”.(Hall, 1997:43)

The quotation above means that representation is not only using language to construct meaning of something but discourse as another aspect is used to analyze the representation. It happens because beside the language, there are other things that should be considered when interpreting the object. They are narratives, statements, group of images, whole discourse which operates across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject which have acquired widespread authority (Hall, 1997:42). Thus, discursive approach is used in analyzing the representation. The discursive approach uses discourse as a system of representation.

Foucault has three major ideas relating to the process of representation: his concept of *discourse*; the issue of *power and knowledge*, and the question of *thesubject* (Hall, 1997:43). In order to analyze the subject matter of the research, the writer only focuses on the use of discourse. Hall’s statement related to the meaning of discourse in Foucault’s perspective is explained below.

“By ‘discourse’, Foucault meant ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. .... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect”’.(Hall, 1997:44)

Actually, the concept of discourse of the representation is about language and practice to overcome the traditional distinction between what one *says*(language) and what one *does* (practice) (Hall, 1997:44). Foucault adds that discourse construct the topic, defines and produces the objects of our knowledge, and also governs the way that the topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. In addition, discourse never consists of one statement, one text, one action or one source. The same discourse will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society. However, the similarity happened in discourse classified as *discursive practice*.

A wide variety of terms are used to describe the modern society that characterized by means of concept such as rationalization and disenchantment of the world (Weber, 1946:155 cited in Kim, 2003:3). The rationalization means that the world can be understood and managed through a reasonable and logical system of objectively accessible theories and data, while the disenchantment of the world means the loss of sacred and metaphysical understandings of all facets of life and culture. The disenchantment is part of the process of secularization in which in the nineteenth century when empirical science replaced religious versions of world reality with its own accounts (Haferkamp, 1992:83).

As I have stated above that discursive approach is used to analyze the representation because it uses discourse as a system of representation. Therefore, discursive approach is used in this research in order to encounter the representation of social cruelty in *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design and methodology are important because they do not only concerns on how this thesis is formulated but also concerns on how the data are used properly. This chapter consists of three subchapters. The first subchapter talks about the type of the research while the second subchapter explains how the data are collected. The data processing and the data analysis in the third subchapter are used as the explanation about how the data are processed and about how the data are analyzed. Those aspects play a crucial role in conducting the research.

### 3.1 Type of Research

A qualitative method is used as a significant part of the process in doing research. Grix (2001:31) defines qualitative research dealt more with interpreting the subjective experiences of the individuals being learnt. The research conducts such method because of describing two things. First, how representation does denotes the mind and language referring to the characterization of heroes and villain in the stories. What the general possible representation among heroes and villain characters.

Bogdan (1975:5) states that qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data such as written words or verbal expression from the people and their behaviors that have been observed. Thus, I use the qualitative research because the data analyzed are in the form of words and sentences. In addition, they are not numerical form. Therefore, the data in this research are qualitative data. The qualitative data are taken from the dialogues and other statements of the novel which have been sorted and carefully selected in accordance with the topic of the research.

“Qualitative research can take many forms and results from the use of data gathering instruments such as observations, interviews, questionnaires and document analysis. The researchers usually concern with theory building, interpreting the data to build concepts and categories that can be brought together into theoretical frameworks”.

(Gray, 2004:320).

Following Gray’s statement above, I use qualitative research because I want to analyze the data of *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo. This research is conducted to encounter the representation of social cruelty in the novel.

## 3.2 Type of Data

The types of data used in this thesis are qualitative data. The qualitative data are not in the form of number. The data cannot be counted because all of the data are in the form of words so that the data are called qualitative data. McMillan (1992: 9) claims that qualitative data are based on a research that focuses on understanding and meaning through verbal description rather than through number. These ways of collecting data lets the writer to allocate the time by reading several books and grouping the relevant data which are found. In this thesis, the writer uses several data to get the associated data with social codes in *Victor Hugo's Story*. The data are sorted from the quotation of the character through the novel. Therefore, qualitative data are applied in the form of words or description about something; they are not dealt with numbers.

## 3.3 Data Collection

The data is documentation data. Hence the data can be called as qualitative data. According to Blaxter (1996: 141), documentary data collection uses written materials as a basis of research. Documents means that the researcher is expected to read, understand and critically analyze the writing of others whether fellow researches, practitioners, or policy markers (Blaxter et al, 1996:150). This technique of collecting data helps the writer to do comprehensive reading of several supportive books. In this thesis, the writer uses several data to get the intended data in *Les Miserable*. The data hence are collection of cruelty quotation of the novel. In addition, I also use journals and articles to support the analysis. All of the data are mostly taken from the library and the other are from the internet.

## 3.4 Data Processing and Data Analysis

For the data, the text based on data is reliable since it is the representation of the dialogue among characters in the novel. However, only the data which shows cruelty will be listed. Some steps are needed to process the analysis. Blaxter (2006:203) uses qualitative data as the techniques in processing data, such as by labeling, selecting, and summarizing. After collecting the quotation of each major character of the story, the significant text that are taken to represent each cruelty such as education crisis, woman abuse, and criminal. Then, the representations of

cruelty are selected according to each character to decide the grand representation of the novel. Then, the writer uses the theories of representations from the reference books and articles to analyze the possible meaning of representations.

As the problems to discuss mentioned before, this research shows the representation of cruelty in *Les Miserable*. Thus, the types of analysis used by the writer are descriptive method and interpretative method. Descriptive method involves recording, analyzing and interpreting the object of the study. It is proposed to arrange a description and interpretation. According to Blaxter et al (1997: 1970), descriptive is the process by which researcher defines the data that he has collected and analyzed. The finding is expected to ease the readers in understanding representations by opening the actual meaning of cruelty presented by each major character.

In this case, the researcher has seen cruelty as a major discourse that presents on the novel. According to Stuart Hall's theory of representation, discursive approach is used as the system of representation related to discourse analysis. By using discursive approach, all of the collected data related to the first sorted data taken from the novel. The data information is data concerned with the representation of social cruelty by the characters in the novel. This used to answer the question in this research. The second data information concerned with the relationship between literary text and society, the relationship between social cruelty in the novel and social cruelty in real society, and the last information about the critical idea in the novel. The second information data are taken from books and internet sources, books, and journals. After sorting and classifying the data collected, the analysis starts with the representation analysis in *Les Miserable*. The use of representation theory is to build the general description based on the novel. In the last step of analysis, the discovery of ideology is conveyed to emphasize the dominant structure of the world view in the story.