

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

(PEMBELAJARAN TERHADAP KEKEJAMAN SOSIAL YANG DIGAMBARAKAN DALAM SEBUAH NOVEL *LES MISERABLE* OLEH VICTOR HUGO)

Dewi Nurul Azmi, Ikwan Setiawan, Imam Basuki
English Department, Faculty of Letters, University of Jember (UNEJ)
Jln. Kalimantan 37 Jember 68121
E-Mail: senandungtimur@gmail.com

Abstrak

Les Misérable is the story of Jean Valjean, a convict, who has just been released from prison after serving 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread. The title of the book is implying that the people in the story are the ones living miserable. the novel begins with the character Jean Valjean who steals a loaf of bread to help feed his family. He is confined to prison for 19 years as a result. He continues to have trouble and misery after he gets out because he can not get work and is rejected by society. A woman named Fantine have girls where to spend some money to pay for his daughter's life, and no one is sure and care about her misery. So she plunged into prostitution to earn money. 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, but they also take every opportunity to make her conditions even more desperate. As a result, the author writes in a novel through the characters to criticize the government at that time because the social evils that occur in the community.

Abstract

Les Misérable adalah kisah Jean Valjean, narapidana, yang baru saja dibebaskan dari penjara setelah menjalani hukuman 19 tahun karena mencuri sepotong roti. Judul buku ini menyiratkan bahwa orang-orang dalam cerita adalah orang-orang yang hidup sengsara. novel ini dimulai dengan karakter Jean Valjean yang mencuri sepotong roti untuk membantu memberi makan keluarganya. Dia hanya dipenjara selama 19 tahun sebagai hasilnya. Dia terus mengalami kesulitan dan penderitaan setelah dia keluar karena dia tidak bisa mendapatkan pekerjaan dan ditolak oleh masyarakat. Seorang wanita bernama Fantine memiliki anak yang mana dia menghabiskan uang untuk membayar kehidupan putrinya, dan tidak ada yang pasti dan peduli dengan penderitaannya. Jadi dia terjun ke prostitusi untuk mendapatkan uang. Di sisi lain, penulis menerangi sikap yang tidak adil dari masyarakat Prancis terhadap perempuan dan orang miskin. Sesama warga Fantine mengkritik dia untuk perilakunya, tetapi mereka juga mengambil setiap kesempatan untuk membuat kondisi lebih menyedihkan. Akibatnya, penulis menulis dalam novel melalui karakter untuk mengkritik pemerintah pada waktu itu karena kejahatan sosial yang terjadi di masyarakat.

Keywords: Sosial, kekejaman, Pemerintah.

Introduction

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 has spent many years in prison because he has 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.

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 becomes the major issue. The society who lives in this condition can be called as victim of cruelty. 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. 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).

Method of Analysis

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 learn. 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. 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.

Result of Data Analysis

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.

Discussion

In *Les Miserable*, the author traces the social impact of the numerous revolutions, insurgencies, and executions that took place in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France. The sense of injustice had come to a head in the late eighteenth century and resulted in the French Revolution. Now, although conditions had improved to some extent, the aristocracy had been replaced by the middle classes, and who proved little better in terms of the provision of living and working conditions for the working class. In the beginning of the novel, Jean Valjean and his sister's family are starving and struggling to live. When Jean Valjean is arrested for stealing bread to feed the children, he is given four years in prison. 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 today 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)

He begins his life as galley slave. Jean Valjean was imprisoned nineteen years- at hard labor for breaking into a bakery, stealing a loaf of bread then trying to escape from his life as a galley slave. Victor Hugo

examines the impact of society and its rules, regulations and forms of punishment- on a person like Jean Valjean. He also examines how the prisoner himself might view what he did (and how he was punished for his actions). The novel explains that Jean Valjean possesses a physical strength which is not approached by a single one of the denizens of the galleys. At work, at paying out a cable or winding up a capstan, Jean Valjean is worth four men.

In 1817, a beautiful woman named Fantine lives in Paris. She gives birth to an illegitimate child, Cosette, whom she leaves with Monsieur and Madame Thénardier to rear with their own children. As time goes on, the Thénardiens demand more and more money for Cosette's support, yet they treat the child cruelly and deprive her even of necessities. Meanwhile, Fantine goes to the town of M and obtains a job in a glass factory operated by Father Madeleine, a kind and generous man whose history is known to no one, but whose good deeds and generosity to the poor are public information. Related to the character in the novel, Fantine and her friends are treated by their lovers in an unfair manner, such as having a sex then left them unexpectedly. The kind of cruelty in this relationship between man and woman can be seen in Fantine character. She is treated badly by Felix Tholomyes through leaving her in the unmarried pregnant condition. In the story of the novel, Fantine and the Thernadiers family have a close relationship. After Fantine bears her daughter, she goes to her hometown, M. Sur M. But in the mid of journey she meets Madame Thernadier and entrust Cossete to her. This decision is expected to help Fantine's life because it is impossible for her to care Cossate in M. Sur. M while she works there. Fantine and The Thernadier family make an agreement about the month paid of keeping her child. If the Thernadiers family is the higher middle class people, they will not take a chance about the existence of Fantine and Cossette as a way to get a lot of money. Here is Mr. Thernadiers's statement:

“That will serve to pay my note for one hundred and ten francs which falls due to-morrow; I lacked fifty francs. Do you know that I should have had a bailiff and a protest after me? You played the mouse-trap nicely with your young ones.” “Without suspecting it,” said the woman.” (Hugo, 1862: 171)

In M. sur M., Fantine lives in the miserable financial condition. She confuses to manage her daily necessity; in other side the Thernadiers family sends a letter to

ask a lot of money continually. Fantine still has the bad habit consumptive life style, whom she has ever before. She is shocked by the changing of her lifestyle from the luxurious lifestyle in Paris to be the miserable life style in the small city, M. sur M. while the monthly salary from her working place is too little to fulfill her daily necessity and her child at Montfermeil. As far as Fantine makes a decision to sell her splendid hair, two front teeth, and being a prostitute to fulfill it. Fantine's life is the result of the cruelty condition. Actually she never wants to sell her splendid hair, two front teeth, and being prostitute but it because of the situation. She is just forced to be a bad woman or to do the bad thing by society.

Les Miserable is based around the turning point in French history. Exploring the society of French is used as a basis to explain the revolution. This novel is written after the French Revolution and during the nineteenth century in French. There are many social changes in French people after the French Revolution. The background of the novel begins from 1815 to 1823, which Hugo's life begins to touch down the political world in French. In the beginning part of the novel, Victor Hugo tells some cases that represent about what happened in the reality at that time. Here are the cases about it: first, the main character Jean Valjean, in 1815 got the freedom after nineteenth years in the convict. It means that he was convicted since 1796. Secondly, Hugo wrote the title of the novel “1817”, which tells the social condition of the French lower class. Through this chapter Victor Hugo described the representation of social condition, especially how social cruelty happen by society. Because of the discussed topic is about the relationship between social cruelty in the novel and social cruelty in real society, I would like to make the limitation of revolutionary condition in nineteenth century. Men hold incredibly varied occupations, including almost every occupation one can think of from factory worker to elite craftsmen. But as the nineteenth century progressed, the decline of cottage industries led to changes for many men. In French at that time, there was the beginning of many emerging industrial plants requiring women workers to complete the production work. Some companies prefer to employ women than men because women are more thorough in their work and their salary is lower than men. This course can save the production costs of the company itself. While the women at that time find the social recognition by working outside of the house although they get a very low salary. (Beauvoir, 1953:134)

Although Victor Hugo gives us Fantine as his example of the working woman, and Fantine is shoved deeper and deeper into poverty and desperation by her circumstances, most working women of this time period did not meet her fate. Women of this time had very limited occupational opportunities, but each occupation had pluses and minuses and women were able to make the best of what they had.

In *Les Miserable*, Hugo traces the social impact of the numerous revolutions, insurrections, and executions that took place in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France. He criticizes all of the regimes since the French Revolution of 1789 for their inability to deal effectively with social injustice or eliminate France's rigid class system. Hugo now takes this critique a step further by attacking the credibility of the courts. Valjean publicly denounces the prisons for turning average men into hardened criminals. Written for the masses, Hugo wrote history from the point of view of the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, and the forgotten.

Conclusion

Les Miserable novel is one of Victor Hugo's masterpieces literary works. Through reading this novel the readers can know that what happened in French in the nineteenth century. This novel represents the social condition of the lower class society especially in Paris. Victor Hugo portrayed the social cruelty in Paris and never-ending uncertainty that political events imposed upon daily life, the social cruelty as 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.

Finally, this shows how social cruelty in French in the nineteenth century is represented by Victor Hugo through his novel, *Les Miserable*. The social cruelty in French in the nineteenth century is caused by the unstable government of French through the social injustice, revolutionary condition created working class, and the social class in society.

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