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Social Condition of French Society pre-revolution in A Tale of Two Cities Novel by Charles Dickens

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis permasalahan kondisi sosial masyarakat Prancis sebelum potret revolusi dalam novel *A Tale of Two Cities* karya Charles Dickens. Keterkaitan karya sastra sebagai penggambaran kehidupan sosial membuktikan bahwa karya sastra selalu memiliki keberpihakan. Oleh karena itu, dapat dikatakan bahwa karya sastra merupakan karya tendensius yang berarti memiliki tujuan tertentu di balik penciptaannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan sosiologi sastra. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kondisi sosial masyarakat Perancis dimana rakyatnya hidup dalam kemiskinan dan rakyat miskin dieksploitasi oleh kaum bangsawan, kelaparan melanda di setiap sudut kota, kakunya hukum pada masa sistem monarki, dan penyalahgunaan kekuasaan oleh kaum bangsawan kepada orang-orang miskin, yang menjurus pada revolusi yang dipimpin oleh orang-orang miskin. Peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa kondisi sosial masyarakat sebelum revolusi adalah kemiskinan, kelaparan, hukum yang kaku, dan penyalahgunaan kekuasaan.

This research aims to analyze the problem of social condition of French society before the revolution portrait in *A Tale of Two Cities* novel written by Charles Dickens. The linkage of literary works as a portray of a social life proves that a literary work always has partiality. Therefore, it can be said that literary work is a tendentious work which means having certain purposes behind its creation. This research uses the qualitative and sociology of literature approach. The result of the research shows that the social condition of French society where the people live in poverty and the poor people exploited by the noble, famine struck in every corner of the city, rigid of law during the monarchy system, and power abuse by the nobles to the poor people, which lead this into revolution lead by the poor people. The Researcher concluded that social condition of the society before the revolution are poverty, famine, rigid law, and power abuse.

Keywords: Sociology of Literature, Social Condition, Revolution.

INTRODUCTION

Literature depicts a collection of literary works that contain written and non-written texts, including texts and spoken language. It depicts that literature is an expression of a person that is represented by words, actions, and writings (Wellek and Warren, 1956:39) state

that literary theory itself is the study of the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like, and by differentiating studies of concrete works of art.

In addition, by Wellek and Warren (1956:12), literature is a social institution that reflects the phenomena of social behavior in society using a language as its media to express the author's thought. Sumardjo (1992: 1) states that literature is a literary work and artistic activity related to expression and creation. Literature is not a science but an art. In art, many elements of humanity are included, especially feelings; making it difficult to apply to the scientific method. The nature of literature is not universal and eternal. Literature depends on place and time. Furthermore, Sumardjo (1992: 3) explains that literature is an expression of the human person in the form of experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas, enthusiasm, beliefs in a form of concrete images that evoke charm with language tools.

Meanwhile, Suharianto (1994: 14) argues that literature is an expression of life and life combined with the imagination and creativity of an author as well as support for his experiences and observations of life. Literature is not only important in language teaching, but literature also plays a vital role in building harmony and tolerance in certain communities (Rahman and Weda, 2018). Literature has a high status in any community from ancient times to the modern era (Rahman, 2018). Appreciation of literary works as cultural product is a must, either as an authentic material or as a tool to improve social awareness within a community. Therefore, the researcher generally writes based on what happened around by exploring the phenomena as the topic to write in a literary work. It can be deduced that literature is a result of art in society. The indication of social behavior in a certain society conveys the life activity of human being, also the problem of social, economics, and politics.

Humans need a media to voice their opinion on a tragedy in a certain era and the government often issues regulations that are against the wishes of the people, especially, lower class people reject these regulations which lead to chaos and in the end creating a revolution one of the examples is French Revolution (Sukmawaty, et al., 2022). Talking about revolution (Burawoy, 2019). Revolution is the most spectacular form of social change; as a sign of a fundamental split in the historical process; reforming society from within and re-shaping humans. Therefore, revolution brought a change in the social structure of a more modern society, it describes Revolution as a concept and theory in sociology. One of the literary works that recounts the atrocities of the upper-class and lower-class during French revolution is the novel of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

A Tale of Two Cities is the only Dickens' historical novel, which tells about the two cities, London, and Paris, with their social problem. It is called historical novel because the

story develops from a historical background of the French revolution. The French revolution occurred because of the suffering and the social problem in the society. The social stratification, the economic classes, and the oppression of aristocrats to the poor people were some factors which caused the problem. The situation in France was very terrible, then. People suspected each other. They were always careful about strangers because there was no certain rule or law that could be followed by the society (Devetak and Hughes, 2008:01).

Related to the above cases, it is very important to search the relationship between a literary work and social reality. The researcher comprehends that novel *A Tale of Two Cities* is famous and suggested to be the object of research studies because there is much that can be explored from the novel. Thus, the researcher focusses on the French society social condition in *A Tale of Two Cities* novel by Charles Dickens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociology of literature has a very long history. According to Jadhav (2012:25), it was H. A. Taine who firstly tried to arrange the sociological approach to be fit in literature in a scientific way. One of his works, entitled *History of English Literature* (1886) became the landmark in the history of the sociology of literature. Right after that, Karl Marx, Frederic Engels and their followers also gave a contribution to the development of sociological approach by looking the literature as an economic infrastructure of the society. However, the sociology of literature gained its success in the history of critical theory in the late 20th century. It is also inseparable from the thoughts of several social thinkers and critics, such as Lucien Goldman, Leo Lowenthal, Robert Escarpit, Alan Swingewood, Diana Laurenson John Hall, Georg Lukacs, even (Jadhav 2012:25).

Sociology of literature consists of sociology and how the sociology reflects in a literary work. Talking about sociology, it cannot be separated from the fact that it has relation with the society. It learns how the people interact and socialize each other in one community. Therefore, sociological approach helps the researcher to see the relationship between a literary work and the society where the story was written. Sociological Approach was developed by many experts, such as Georg Lukacs, Lucien Goldmann, Laurenson and Swingewood, even Wellek and Warren.

Georg Lukacs clearly states in Milner (1981:27) that a literary work only possible to write if the researcher has experiences that directly related to the social world. Then for him, the great researcher must be able to put his thought, imagination, and experience in his literary

work as an original writing and has an inseparable connection between human as a private individual and human as a social being, as a member of a society.

Besides, Goldmann (1981:11) states that a literary work must have relation with the historical background. That is why the text's sociality and communicability can be captured, so that Goldmann finds the relationship between literary work and society. Literary work comes as the reflection of how that society lives as the creation of a researcher to puts his thought, view, feeling and gives emotion about the real condition of a society in a certain period of time. It also learns about human behavior in everyday life when they interact in their group or community (Nahdhiyah, et al., 2022). Therefore, sociological approach is an appropriate approach to not only study about human behavior in society, but also how the social communities influence or affect their behaviors in daily life. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972:13) state that literature as the mirror to the age. It is indicating that the readers can discuss the social phenomenon which happens to the society in a certain period and certain place through the literary work. It means that literary work reflects the situation and condition of social life in the society.

The researcher of a literary work is influenced by the situation and condition where the literature is written because the researcher is also the member of society. Laurenson and Swingewood (1972:17) argue that this approach deals with the social background of the researcher and how the researcher himself reacts and response to the system that has been built by the society where he has lived. A researcher should be more sensitive toward the social phenomena because a researcher is always produced a literary work that is inspired by what happened in the society. Through reading a literary work, the readers will get information about the cultural background of a story where the characters live by describing their feelings, thoughts, believes, traditions, customs and so on (Rahman, 2018). Therefore, literature can develop the reader's knowledge not only about the literary work itself, but also the socio-cultural background where the story was written.

Novel is a creative literary work in the form of prose. In contrast to poetry and drama, prose emphasizes the narrative side (Alviah, 2014). According to Semi (1998: 32) defines the novel as "giving a firmer concentration of life, with a novel which is defined as a broader design, containing developmental history which usually consists of several fragments. Novel is a form of literary work which is also known as fiction (Sukmawaty, et al., 2022). In the world of literature, the term novel is familiar. According to (Tarigan, 1993:164), the first literary work in the form of a novel was born in England with the title *Pamella* which was published in 1740.

Ristiana and Adeani (2017), entitled *Konflik Batin Tokoh Utamadalam Novel Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan 2 Karya Asma Nadia*, Literary works are created by authors or writers to be enjoyed, understood, and utilized by the community in life. The researcher chose the novel "Because Mekarmu Only Once" to be studied because the novel has many elements of moral values. The existence of moral elements in literary works is often associated with the function of literature for character building. This study aims to describe the moral values contained in the novel "Because Mekarmu Only Once". This research is a qualitative descriptive study. The subject of this research is the novel "Because Mekarmu Only Once" by Haikal Hira Habibillah. This research focus on a moral value. The results of the study show that there are 24 moral values with aspects of the study of human relations with oneself, 16 moral values with aspects of the study of human relations with other humans in the social and natural environment and 31 moral values with aspects of the study of human relations with God. The most moral values found in the novel "Because Mekarmu Only Once" by Haikal Hira Habibillah are found in the aspect of the study of human relations with God, namely 31 moral values.

As for Nasution (2016) in her research entitled *Kajian Sosiologi Sastra Novel Dua Ibu Karya Arswendo Atmowiloto: Suatu Tinjauan Sastra*, Literature of any kind is a creative work that exists because of the position of humans as storytellers. Everything written and expressed by the author is a matter of life and human life. The resulting story is a picture of someone's life created by someone. Life is colored by the attitude, background, and beliefs of the author. The data is obtained from the novel *Dua Ibu* by Arswendo Atmowiloto with a thickness of 300 pages. The novel is studied with a sociological approach to literature. Based on this approach, it was found that: (1) the author's world view; (2) socio-cultural background which includes education, occupation, language, place of residence, customs, and religion; (3) the author's view of the female character; and (4) characters and relationships between characters. The social life described by the author is dominated by Javanese cultural customs, namely Solo.

From the two previous researchers who studied the novel, they discussed the character and moral values in the novel and the sociological studies, in contrast to this study, the researcher focused on the social conditions in the novel.

METHODOLOGY

In analyzing the data, the researcher used descriptive qualitative and sociology of literature by Goldmann. Based on the description of qualitative method, the writer would apply that method in conducting this research because the writer wants to describe social condition of French society in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* novel. There are two types of

source of data in this study, Primary data is the data which is collected from A Tale of Two Cities novel by Charles Dickens. Primary data includes: sentences, dialogue of characters that had been used as data of analysis that had been used as data to give the complete understanding of analysis. Secondary data is the data which is collected from many sources (some journals, books and thesis) that deal with the research object (material object). All the collected data would use theory sociology of literature by Goldmann to describe the social condition of French society portrait in Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two. All the selected data is analyzed to prove what are written in the object of this research and finally the writer can draw the conclusion for this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The French Revolution was a major event affecting the development of the present French state. In the mid-1700s to early 1800s the French revolution was able to destroy the system of absolute monarchy rule. Where in those days there was a very severe financial crisis and the existence of gaps and even discrimination against the poor. At that time, the nobility ruled arbitrarily, so that the poor were very miserable. The welfare of the nobles is highly favored, while the economic conditions of the little people are too neglected. Even the people are burdened with a very stifling tax on the neck. Social condition is the state of society in certain time or era. In the novel A Tale of Two Cities there are several social conditions that describe the in the novel which: poverty, violence, power abuse, sexual harassment and rigid law.

Poetry

Data 1

'How goes it, Jacques?' said one of these three to Monsieur Defarge.

'Is all the spilt wine swallowed?'

'Every drop, Jacques,' answered Monsieur Defarge.

'It is not often,' said the second of the three, addressing Monsieur Defarge,

'that many of these miserable beasts know the taste of wine, or of anything but black bread and death. Is it not so, Jacques?'(page 46)

The dialogue above between Ernest Defarge and the Jacques One, Two and Three regarding the people who drink the wine that had been spilt over outside the wine shop owned by Ernest Defarge, Defarge explain how miserable the poor people who fighting over for a sip

of swine that spill over and Jacques Two that the poor people the only thing they tasted is black bread and death.

Data 2

Saint Antoine, which a momentary gleam had driven from his sacred countenance, the darkness of it was heavy-cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and want, were the lords in waiting on the saintly presence-nobles of great power all of them; but, most especially the last. Samples of a people that had undergone a terrible grinding and regrinding in the mill, and certainly not in the fabulous mill which ground old people young, shivered at every corner, passed in and out at every doorway, looked from every window, fluttered in every vestige of a garment that the wind shook. The mill which had worked them down, was the mill that grinds young people old; the children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh,

The paragraph above shows us how many social conditions such as heavy-cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and poverty these problems is like guarding them like a knight escorting the noble, especially poverty as if the grinder who grind and regrind the people that make as if the mill which had make them worked them repeatedly that also make the young people looks old and have a hoarse voice.

From the data above we can conclude that the people are too poor to provide themselves, much less a decent meal. They can only eat a loaf of black bread to satisfy their own hunger and also how the poverty prevails in every nook and cranny of place that haunts the poor people, the poor become poorer they have to work very hard that make the young people look old and grave voice. The existence of monarchy has an impact on the social life one of the examples is taxation issued by leader of the country followed by the landowner and noble.

Famine

Data 3

Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines; Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its

refuse, of anything to eat. Hunger was the inscription on the baker's shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every dead-dog preparation that was offered for sale. Hunger rattled its dry bones among the roasting chestnuts in the turned cylinder; Hunger was shred into atomics in every farthing porringer of husky chips of potato, fried with some reluctant drops of oil. (Page 41).

The data above shows us that hunger/famine happen in every corner of the place, hunger can be seen in how every shop that sell spoiled bread, sausage shop that sell a dead dog, hunger can be seen chip of potato fried using a few drops of oil. This caused by the high price of staple food in the form of bread and scarcity of wheat that happen in France because the monarchy also controls the price and the supply of man commodities which the people can't afford it.

Rigid Law

At that time, putting to death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions, and not least of all with Tellson's. Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's? Accordingly, the forger was put to Death; the utterer of a bad note was put to Death; the unlawful opener of a letter was put to Death; the purloiner of forty shillings and sixpence was put to Death; the holder of a horse at Tellson's door, who made off with it, was put to Death; the coiner of a bad shilling was put to Death; the sounders of three-fourths of the notes in the whole gamut of Crime, were put to Death. Based on the paragraph above that the legal conditions during the reign of the monarchy, criminals are tried by being given the death penalty, big or small the crime they have committed. This action was taken to reduce the number of crimes in this country but unfortunately on the contrary it made the crime rate increase (Page 74)

According to the paragraph above explain the rigidness of law during the reign of monarchy, the criminal who committed a crime no matter how big or small the end result of that will be put to death sentence. this action was taken to reduce criminality in this country but unfortunately on the contrary it made the crime rate increase.

Power Abuse

Data 4

“What did the two then, to persuade her husband to use his influence with her, to make her willing?”

‘You know, Doctor, that it is among the Rights of these Nobles to harness us common dogs to carts, and drive us. They so harnessed him and drove him. You know that it is among their Rights to keep us in their grounds all night, quieting the frogs, in order that their noble sleep may not be disturbed. They kept him out in the unwholesome mists at night, and ordered him back into his harness in the day. But he was not persuaded. No! Taken out of harness one day at noon, to feed—if he could find food—he sobbed twelve times, once for every stroke of the bell, and died on her bosom.’

Based on the paragraph above the two brother nobles who used their power in order to get the boy sister to be with the noble little brother, he torture the sister husband by tying him to the carriage and pull him, they also command the boy family including the sister husband to make them silence noise caused by frog to let the noble brother sleep well, they let the sister husband kept watch in the coldness of night, and imprison the sister husband in the morning they torturing him until he is dead. The social condition show in this paragraph is power abuse noble have the right to decide each fate of the people lives in the land that they govern but this power should be used to enrich the land, help the people, and so on. unfortunately, they used their authority to trample the people and torturing them even taxing them so highly to enrich themselves.

CONCLUSION

Charles Dickens’s novel shows the social condition of French pre-revolution how the social condition of the people at that time under the monarchy system where the hierarchy and social class divided between the ruling, nobles, and commoner, how rigid the law that make the one who committed crimes will be put to death, poverty everywhere, power abuse from the nobles, and famine that crept in every nook and cranny of the country. the nobles exploit their right by making themselves richer and make the poor people poorer. This novel shows us how to break from the monarchy system and the end of the feudalism in the country and turning it into democracy country that the people are equal.

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