

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There is a close connection between literature and social life because the social function of literature is how it involves itself in the midst of social life (Semi, 1989 : 56). Literature, then, is commonly divided into many kinds. One of them is novel.

Novel and social life are related to one another that we cannot separate the novel from the cultural background of society where the book was written. Novel is a story with the prose form in long shape; this long shape means the story including the complex plot, many characters and various settings (Doody, 1996: 29).

In this study, the writer will analyze the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott by using Marxist theory. The theory is given in chapter II at this thesis. According to Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), women's writing should experience and not just draw comparisons with the situation in society of men.

Little Women was released in two volumes, in 1868 and 1869. It is one of the best seller novels in America. The story in this novel reflects about life so readers immerse themselves when reading it. Therefore, people grab it. The novel has been sold in many copies, that is, around more than 2 million copies and until one of the famous film producer also exited with her novel and hope that story of *little women*

by Louisa May Alcott become a best movie in America. This novel also gets a positive value for literature because it is such a classic novel which every years can be read by old generation and young generation.

Little Women tells a story about the lives of the four girls of March, that is, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. They have different characters. Meg, the oldest, is beautiful and has a dream to become a queen who always wears a beautiful dress. Jo, the second, is tomboyish and temperament. Beth, the third, is shy and has a talent to play piano. Amy, the youngest, likes drawing. They are some of the characters of the novel.

The novel describes a class struggle. This happens because of the injustice like class distinction that exists in a society and it gives the negative impacts for the survival of the community especially the lower or the subordinate class and it provides opportunities for the dominant class to do whatever they want as oppress or exploit the subordinate class.

Based on the explanation above, the writer concludes that there are class distinction and human exploitation in capitalist's society. It describes about the social condition in capitalist's society. Human exploitation is related to the action of upper class to lower class with a cruel manner. It can make people feel bad. In this study, the writer will analyze the impact of the social class in the novel.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the writer formulates the problems as follows:

1. What are the social conditions between lower class and upper class described in the novel?

2. What are the impacts of social class?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to analyze what becomes the research problem in this study. They are as follows :

1. To find out the social conditions between lower class and upper class described in the novel.
2. To describe the impact of social class depicted in the novel.

1.4 Scope of Study

This study is focused on the impacts of different social classes as found in the novel *Little Women* written by Louisa May Alcott. The scope also describes the impact of the lower class struggle against upper class oppression found in the novel.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be described through theoretical and practical ones. Each of them can be made as follows:

1. Theoretically, this study could be a reference for the readers especially the students of the Faculty of English Literature to add knowledge about social class when later they are discussing or analyzing any literary works containing the matters about social classes.
2. Practically, this study can be a comparison for the next researchers in conducting new research on social classes. Besides, they will know what they should do if they find people from different social class are not closed or tend to quarrel to each other in their social activities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Class

Karl Marx (1973), in his theory of *class*, states that class is a set of people who play the same functions of the organization of production. Classes in the society are differentiated based on the position of economic structure which is in mastery of production. This reveals that Karl Marx's conception about *class* is based on the economical side as the fundamental factor of the human life problems. The other theoretical creator of class divisions is Max Weber (Dwipayana ,2003: 28-30). He also has the same idea as Karl Marx. He defines the term *class* as a group of people in the same social class and economical factor is one of dimensions that determine the social class of people in the society.

Generally, social class is divided into three classes. They are upper class, middle class, and lower class. It also happens in Britain. The British society is also often considered to be divided into three main groups of classes. They are upper class, middle class, and lower class or working class.

According to Kerbo (1966: 13-14), there are some characteristics of class divisions that need to be known. They are the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class.

Each of them can be described as clearly as possible through each of their explanations as given below.

a. The Upper Class

The upper class people constitute an elite group that occupies the top hierarchy of the social class of society. They have the greatest influence and dominance in society. Usually they are known as people who wallow in wealth, have high power, and dignity.

b. The Middle Class

This class is used to signify people less with comfortably off than the upper class, and definitely less powerful, but respected nonetheless. They include shop owner, housekeeper, and industrialist.

c. The Lower Class

This class is used to signify those people that rarely have the requirements of life and never considered by other classes, no matter how long or hard they worked on improving their circumstances. It also consists of the people who have no property, who are often unemployed, and have no authority.

Class is based on heredity as the only factor to divide people into social group. Therefore, there are the nobility, clergy and commoners (Day, 2001: 2). Social class is sometimes presented as a description of how members of the society have sorted themselves in varying position of importance, influence, prestige, and compensation. In these models, certain occupation is considered to be desirable and influential, while others are considered to be menial, respective, and unpleasant. In some cases, non-occupational roles such as being a parent or volunteer mentor are also considered. Generally, the higher ranking on such scales indicates higher skills and educational

level. There are many modes of class struggle practiced by people of lower class to reach higher social class. The most common ways are class struggle through violence, proletarian revolution, and dictatorship of proletariat (Wilczynski:1984).

Horton also stated that social class can be defined as a stratum of people of similar position in the social status continuum. Aristotle observed that populations tended to be divided into three group. They are very rich, very poor and those in between. The description of social class implies that money separates people into different group. The members of particular social class often have about the same amount of money, but the most important is that they have the same attitudes, values, and way of life (Horton, 1980 : 313).

2.2 Marxist Theory

Marxist is a theory to depict social problem in literary work, especially dealing with the social changes occurred in industrial society in which the struggle of an oppressed working class to be free from the capitalist oppression becomes the main point of literary analysis. Abcarian (1998) writes that *The Marxist critic analyzes literary works to show how, wittingly or unwittingly, they support the dominant social class, or how they, in some way, contribute to the struggle against oppression and exploitation. And since critic views literature as just one among the variety of human activities that reflect power relations and class divisions, he or she is likely to be more interested in what a work says than in its formal structure.*

Based on Karl Marx's writings above, it is claimed that literary works are essentially political because they either challenge or support economic oppression of the

dominant social class. On the other hands, literary work is also the practice of human exploitation in the mode of production, distribution and exchange that in turn gives big inspiration to the working class to struggle against the exploitation. Marxist theory focuses on the content and themes of literature than on its form. Besides, Marxist critics often look at literature and look for the “hidden” messages especially as they reflect class struggle, reinforce ideas of a dominant class and illusions about reality.

Class struggle is one of the many theories postulated by Karl Marx. It arises originally from Marx’s concept of classless society. That concept is based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Since Marx sees the progress in society as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. Class struggle then becomes a class conflict which is caused by the exploitation of one class by another especially in capitalist society (Barry, 1995:156-157).

There are a number of reasons why elaborating the concept of class in terms of exploitation has theoretical pay-offs beyond the specific normative agenda of Marxist class analysis itself. These can be described below

1. Linking Exchange and Production

The Marxist logic of class analysis affirms that the intimate link between the way in which social relations are organized within exchange and within production. This is a substantive, not definitional, point: the social relations that organize the rights and powers of individuals with respect to productive resources systematically shape their location both within exchange relations and within the process of the production itself.

2. Conflict

One of the standard claims about Marxist class analysis is that it foregrounds conflict within class relations. Indeed, a conventional way of describing Marxism in sociological textbooks is to see it as a variety of “conflict theory.” This characterization, however, is not quite precise enough, for conflict is certainly a prominent feature of Weberian views of class as well. The distinctive feature of the Marxist account of class relations in these terms is not simply that it gives prominence to class conflict, but that it understands conflict as generated by inherent properties of those relations rather than simply contingent factors.

3. Power

At the very core of the Marxist construction of class analysis is not simply the claim that class relations generate deeply antagonistic interests, but that they also give people in subordinate class locations forms of power with which to struggle for their interests. Since exploitation rests on the extraction of labor effort, and since people always retain some measure of control over their own effort, they always confront their exploiters with capacities to resist exploitation. This is a crucial form of power reflected in the complex counter-strategies exploiting classes are forced to adopt through the elaboration of instruments of supervision, surveillance, monitoring, and sanctioning.

4. Coercion and Consent

Marxist class analysis contains the rudiments of what might be termed an endogenous theory of the formation of consent. The argument is basically that the extraction of labor effort in systems of exploitation is costly for exploiting classes

because of the inherent capacity of people to resist their own exploitation. Purely coercively backed systems of exploitation will often tend to be suboptimal since under many conditions. It is too easy for workers to withhold diligent performance of labor effort. Exploiting classes will, therefore, have a tendency to seek ways of reducing those costs. One of the ways of reducing the overhead costs of extracting labor effort is to do things which elicit the active consent of the exploited. These range from the development of internal labor markets which strengthen the identification and loyalty of workers to the firms in which they work to the support for ideological positions which proclaim the practical and moral desirability of capitalist institutions. Such consent-producing practices, however, also have costs attached to them, and thus systems of exploitation can be seen as always involving trade-offs between coercion and consent as mechanisms for extracting labor effort.

5. Historical/Comparative Analysis

As originally conceived, Marxist class analysis was an integral part of a sweeping theory of the epochal structure and historical trajectory of social change. But even if one rejects historical materialism, the Marxist exploitation-centered strategy of class analysis still provides a rich menu of concepts for historical and comparative analysis. Different kinds of class relations are defined by the specific mechanisms through which exploitation is accomplished, and these differences in turn imply different problems faced by exploiting classes for the reproduction of their class advantage and different opportunities for exploited classes to resist. Variations in these mechanisms and in the specific ways in which they are combined in concrete societies provide an analytically powerful road map for comparative research. Weber's class

concept also figures in an account of historical variation, and one of its strengths is the way in which his conceptual menu draws attention to the interplay of class and status and to historical variations in the forms of rationality governing life-chances. These are not issues brought into focus by the Marxist concept of class. On the other hand, the Weberian concept, by marginalizing the problem of exploitation, fails to bring to center stage the historical variability in forms of conflict linked to the central mechanisms of extraction and control over the social surplus.

2.3 Impact

According to the Oxford dictionary (2000: 678), *impact* is the powerful effect that something has on somebody or something. Based on this definition, it can be meant that everything absolutely has an impact in life. According to Lawang(Saptono, danSulasmono, BambangSuteng. 2007) in the book of Saptono at al, the negative impacts of social stratification can be described clearly as follows:

a. Conflict

Conflict is a struggle to acquire rare things such as values, status, power and many others. Conflict can also be defined as a social process in which two people or groups trying to get rid of the other party by way of destroying or making it powerless.

b.Social Disintegration

The social disintegration is a perceived decline in integrity (unity and oneness) or the destruction of the unity of the organization in society. The emergence of disintegration in society is a result of differences in the roles and social status in the form of jealousy and prejudice.