

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

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I.1 Background of the study

Literature study is an interesting activity but only few students can appreciate it. Many students find difficulties in interpreting the meaning of literary works. Most of them think that literature is only a subject they have to learn in college. It is not easy for the students to study literature because it needs deep thinking to get a high level of understanding. These difficulties in understanding literary works sometimes discourage students to learn or to read a literary work. Some students also think that literature is not important and does not support their education at the English Department. At the English Department of Widya Mandala University, the students are prepared to become a teacher. As teachers, the students should master various kinds of English skills, such as teaching method, English skill, linguistic and literature. Literature is the only subject that engages intellect and emotions, and by reading literary works they can learn ideas, experiences and situations in the past. It helps students to gain understanding on the events that occur around them and in the world at large.

According to Courtney (1966:VII), literature and education have been closely related for a long time. By learning literature students not only learn about the values of life but they can also improve their vocabulary and grammar. Literature has the elements of entertaining because it contains the record of

human's life, thoughts, problems and conflicts, but at the same time it is also affording knowledge because the language variations used in literary work can stimulate students to develop their intellectuality. It helps students to gain understanding on the events that happen around them. It is possible for students to learn another culture through literature because it shows people's attitude, beliefs, and problems. It provides a good example how people face and solve their problems. It is the reflection of human action and experience, and it sometime criticizes certain social conditions.

There are three main forms of literature namely drama, poetry, and prose. In this study, the writer will analyze a novel which contains the element of drama. Learning literary work such as novel helps the students face life. Novel reflects and delivers up "truths" or agreement about life and human conditions. It is the tasks of novel to render life, experience, and emotions in a potential way. A good novel according to Brown (1978:125) represents the experiences of individuals who are able to control their experience, compared with the offerings of other people who wonder aimlessly in a world of uncontrolled experience pulp novels, mass advertising and celebrations of the mediocre. Literature enriches the readers' life because it increases their capacities for understanding and communication. It helps the readers to find the meaning of life in their world expresses and share it with others.

The main reasons for analyzing novel are that it broadens and stimulates the readers' mind. This opinion was supported by Kennedy (1991 : 213), he argues that drama comes only when actors perform it, poem only when a bard

sings or chants it. Novel, however, is a story to be communicated silently, at whatever pace the reader desire. Kennedy states that among forms of imaginative literature in human language, the novel has been the favourite of both writers and readers for more than two hundred years. Through literature the writer learnt ideas, experience, situations in the past; culture and many more that can broaden his knowledge. The writer takes novel as the subject of his study since it represents a certain condition in life, containing elements of conflict which the author of the novel tries to reveal.

There are many great authors in the literary world but the writer choose John Steinbeck because he is the type of author who likes to know his material and characters in great depth and in perfect accuracy. Steinbeck has also often been considered as an author who concerns with social message in his novel. Most of his famous books deals with the lives and problems of working people and were written in 1930's and 1940's. Steinbeck was a writer of great talents, sensitivity, and imagination (Magill, 1983: 2522). Steinbeck had remarkable powers of inventions and observations, and a colourful style. He had a first rate ability in finding concrete metaphors through which to express abstract ideas and successfully. "Of Mice and Men" is a popular and a critical success, and made Steinbeck as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of The Year. Furthermore Steinbeck was a writer who won three major literary prizes during his life time, namely : the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1937, the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1940, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 (Schwerner, 1962 : 10, 13).

The idea of this novel was about companionship, defeated hope and the harsh reality of life as a worker. "Of Mice & Men" portrays the tragedy of two ranch workers, Lennie and George. They are the below-average and the dispossessed yet still they have their own individual dream of a place of their own where they can live and can be protected from hurt. Their relationship is so unique and becomes an integral part of their dream. The tragedy of the novel is that the two are perfectly connected that when one is destroyed the other is automatically destroyed. By the time "Of Mice and Men" was published, America was in a great depression. Many people went to America to escape persecution or poverty, and start a new life. This condition became the background of the story and described clearly in every character "Of Mice and Men". It is a popular and a critical success, and made Steinbeck as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of The Year. This novel was selected by the Book of the Month Club in 1937 (Schwerner, 1965: 9). The play version of this novel won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards in 1937. And later this novel became a much-talked-about motion picture in 1941 (English Teaching Division, U.S Information Agency, 1973: 10).

When the writer read this novel for the first time, he was interested in the character and the meaning revealed by the characters. The writer was interested in analysing the characters since Steinbeck put his main concern on the downtrodden people. According to Gary and James (1966:37), Steinbeck had seen the type of men in his novel who get hurt and lonely and he wished to convey his feeling to

others by creating a simple, objective but compassionate picture of this type of men.

The writer wants to focus his study on the characters because he believes that character is one of important element in narrative fiction. According to Roberts (1977:56) most fictions are concerning with character. Potter (1967:1) also said that character is a basic element in much imaginative literature and therefore they merit considerable attention paid to them. Character is also interesting because they are the reflection of human's actual life. Roberts (1977:56) said that we can learn how characters try to handle their problem because we all share the same human capacity for concern, involvement, sympathy, happiness, sorrow, exhilaration and disappointment.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study is intended to analyse and to give description about the characters in "Of Mice and Men" which related to the compassion for the downtrodden people. Therefore the question investigated by the writer is formulated as follow:

"Why are the main characters considered downtrodden people?"

1.3 Objective of the study

Based on the statement of the problem, the objective of this study are to find out the characters that are considered downtrodden people and why they are considered downtrodden people.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study hopefully can give contribution to the study of literature, especially to the study of novel in order to give a better understanding, and help students to comprehend literary works. Since this study concerns with character analysis, hopefully it can be a good reference and consideration for students in reading a literary work. Besides that, this study is also expected to be used by students of non-literary department who are interested in reading literary works.

By writing this thesis the writer hopes that the analysis of “Of Mice and Men” especially through the characters of the story will represent the whole story so that the readers feel satisfied after they read it and hopefully they can appreciate literary work in general. The writer also hopes this study can give a contribution to the readers in order to give them a better understanding of their own life and their surroundings.

The writer also hopes that the reader will come to an understanding of a class of people that is quite different from normal people. They are the below average, the downtrodden and the disposed who had been hurt and lonely. The writer also wants to introduce John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men” as one of the best novels that should be read by English Department students

1.5 Scope of the study

The writer limits his discussion merely to the main characters of the novel namely George Milton and Lennie Small, which are considered downtrodden people in terms of moral and / or mental, physical conditions.

1.6 Definitions of key term

In this study the writer gives some key terms that are related to the study to avoid misunderstanding.

- a. A novel is a fiction prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and action representative of the real life of past or present times portrayed in a plot of more or less complexities (Jeremy Hawthorne, 1985:1).
- b. Character is a person in literary work who generally refers to his nature, such as his personality, his attitudes toward life, his spiritual qualities as well his moral attributes (Potter, 1967:3)
- c. Downtrodden people are people who are abused by superior power (Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1986:654).
- d. Dispossessed is to put out the possession especially property or land, physically homeless (Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1986:654).

1.7 Organisation of the study

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I is devoted to the introduction including the background of the study, statement of the problem, the objective of the problem, the significance of the study, the significant of the study, the limitation of the study, definition of the key terms and the organization of the study. Chapter II is concerning with related literature which supports the writer 's analysis. Chapter III deals with the methodology of the study. Chapter IV is the analysis of the characters. And finally, the writer's conclusion and suggestion of the study are presented in Chapter V.