

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Background of the Study

Learning literature for people who are studying English or majoring in English is both important and useful. These people, if they intend to master English, certainly do not stop learning it in the context of the language education. They will go beyond it by learning literature, since in it they can learn English in its natural way. Thus, by learning literature one may learn and master English, which is being used in its natural way.

Literature is imaginative writings, stories, novels, poems, and plays that picture human life. Therefore, one of some benefits it offers is that one can learn about life through it for it says about life itself. Irving Howe in his book (1978: p.V) defines literature as a major reflection and illumination-both mirror and lamp - of human experience. Because literature pictures life with many of its aspects; suffering, happiness, love, tragedy, death, incidents, romance, law, forgiveness, crime, sacrifice, struggles, fate, faith and many others to be mentioned here, it provides great insights to readers about the art of life itself. Thus, literature has the ability to help people to become mature personally and intellectually by learning the values it carries through

words that may explicitly or implicitly teach them about life. Roberts and Jacobs (1989: p.2) state:

Literature helps us grow personally and intellectually, it provides an objective base for our knowledge and understanding; it helps us to connect ourselves to the broader culture, philosophic, and religious world which we are a part; it enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times. Literature helps us develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things.

Another benefit is that one may enjoy its beauty. Literature is beautiful for it is where language is being well used. It is an art form that is an art of words, which makes one realize the difference between the word that is truly good and the word that is merely good enough. Literature provides its readers with various knowledge and exercises their sensitivity to the beauty it offers in its language that they may enjoy the way of its language beautifully and brilliantly expresses and pictures thoughts, ideas, events, people and emotions. As to X.J. Kennedy (1991: xii), literature has much practical knowledge to offer. Roberts and Jacobs (1989: p.1) claim:

“Literature refers to written (and also spoken) compositions designated to tell stories, dramatize situations, and reveal thoughts, emotions, and also more importantly, to interest, entertain, stimulate, broaden, and ennoble readers.”

There are many ways in meeting these end. For instance, some authors intend to show thoughts and emotions while others intend to entertain the readers and so on.

Literature has three genres, which are prose fiction, poetry and drama. The writer of this thesis chose the first genre that is prose fiction in the form of novel. The

reason for this preference is that novel is always interesting and exciting to be read and learnt, for novel has the sense of actuality. In novels, the sense of actuality, for instance, the events are like those that the readers have experienced, could experience, or could easily imagine themselves experiencing. Paul Berry (1975: p.1) states that rather than meaning, fiction gives its readers an experience, one in which they participate as they read. As a result, He (1975: p.1) adds that in fiction one may encounter values of understanding, a new sensitivity, a feeling or perhaps simply a sense of enjoyment. Thus, it is true that novel has been the favorite work of art to many people around the globe.

The writer of this thesis decided to take one of the works of Victor Hugo, a prominent French writer of the 19th century. According to her, Victor Hugo is a genius and genuine writer. He used realities whether from his own experiences, history or events, which happened during his life, with so much freedom. He pictured human beings and their struggles vividly and abundantly that they seem real. His ability to use very detailed explanations, colorful and various details, illustrations produces realism. The writer is impressed by his various knowledge woven together to create the masterpiece. Hugo's philosophy, experience, history, logistics, religion and political morality contribute this reality in his novel. Hugo expresses the bitterness of love, sacrifice and endurance, which is so great in the face of multitude trials in order to reach purity in life so clearly, touchingly and chokingly. Using a great many details, Hugo makes all of these have an impressive and vivid essence.

This proves that Hugo is able to represent the world clearly and loudly through his masterpieces. If there was a great painter such as Leonardo da Vinci who painted people so vividly, then it is true to call Hugo as a word painter in telling about life.

Hugo in his masterpiece-“Les Miserables” emphasizes precious values such as justice, mercy, forgiveness, love, sacrifice, bravery, personal struggles between good and evil in its utmost. All of these values are presented with pureness that from reading it, one may come into realization that Hugo was very mature and deep in his understanding in those values that it seems as if he had undergone rich experiences in his life. It is indeed obvious that he had learnt those values deeply. In characterization of the novel, Hugo did not use complex and sophisticated psychological analysis on each of the characters, rather he simply presented them through simple emotions and actions. Hence, his characters in the novel are easy to be analyzed deeply and accurately.

The title of the novel being studied here is “Les Miserables”. As one knows that “Les Misérables” is one of the most famous French literary works which has been translated into English, the title is somewhat remained in French. “Les” in French equals with “the” in English, but it means something plural. “Miserables” means just the same as the English word for miserable, which means wretched, poor, very unhappy, miserable and unfortunate. Thus, the words “Les Miserables” mean wretched, poor, very unhappy, miserable, unfortunate people or the outcasts. The reason why Hugo entitles his work “Les Miserables” is that this novel of his is full of

the stories of wretched and miserable people who have miserable lives whether from punishments, poverty, manipulation or abandonment.

Despite of its many main themes Hugo had developed in the novel, the two important themes are, the struggle between good and evil in the soul of one man and society's struggle for a greater good. According to the writer of this thesis, "Les Miserables" is about two truths, which are, Law and Mercy. It is about one man poses as the law-the justice and the other as the mercy. About how Law and Mercy-two truths differ and opposite against each other.

Despite its threateningly long, (the novel consists of 1463 pages) the writer of this thesis somehow chose Victor Hugo's novel-Les Miserables. The writer, first of all, feels very lucky that she could read a beautiful and poignant novel as "Les Mis"-as it is popularly called by people whether they are academicians or people in general. She is interested in studying some aspects of so many rich aspects can be learnt from the novel that is law versus mercy, which is interesting and challenging. According to her, "Les Mis" is very deep in thought and feelings, it represents human emotions deeply such as love, hate, courage, self-sacrifice and forgiveness. It is a complex work of literature. Rich of philosophy, morality, religion, and history creating realism, meaning and long lasting impressions, yet it is told by simplicity not by psychological complexities. "Les Mis" concerns with humanity, as what Hauteville House (VH, p.xvii) commented on the novel, "... so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, there should be a need for books such as this."

As a whole, “Les Mis” is about a man named Jean Valjean who was an ex-convict. After he was saved and forgiven by a Bishop of Digne, he transformed into a good man. He accepted the bishop’s forgiveness and began a new life, which was filled with loving-kindness. He struggled all his life to reach purity, and it was indeed that he was as pure as a saint. Somehow, a very strict police inspector, a detective and a spy named Javert kept pursuing this had already transformed man pitilessly and endlessly in the name of the law to demand justice. He, Javert, hunted Jean Valjean for his past sins in order to fulfill the law that is to maintain its principle, justice.

1.2. Statements of the Problem

In accordance with the background of the study, the problem investigated by the writer is as follows:

“How are the characteristics of law and mercy as depicted in the novel-Les Miserables being compared with each other? (As law represented by Javert and mercy by Jean Valjean).”

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem stated, the objective of this study is to find out the comparisons between the characteristics of law and mercy as depicted in the novel-Les Miserables.

1.4. The Significance of the Study

The writer hopes that the result of her study is able to give a little contribution to the study of literature, especially the study of novel in general and the study of Victor Hugo's novel "Les Mis" especially in terms of law versus mercy in particular. This study takes up a French literary work-"Les Miserables" by French best-loved author, Victor Hugo. This French literary work had been translated into English. Hopefully, this study of a French literature may open a new discourse in learning literature especially in English, that there are so many literary discourses from around the world, which are worth to be read and learnt besides the already known and common English discourses from either America or Great Britain.

1.5. Limitation of the Study

The writer only analyzes one element from Victor Hugo's novel "Les Mis" that is about law versus mercy- the characteristics of law and mercy which being compared with each other. She did not analyze other things since the novel has rich topics to be learnt and it would be complex and need not a little time and efforts; therefore, she chose only one topic to be studied, about how law and mercy being compared with each other using a Christian theological viewpoint. The writer admits that there are several ways available to investigate this matter, however, considering Hugo's own religious conviction as a Christian (which is also the writer's own religious belief), the writer chose to employ Christian theological viewpoint in order

to explore Hugo's original intention in writing this novel more richfully and conveniently. The writer here took the point of view of theology for literature is broad, consisting many aspects of life, such as, moral, religion, philosophy and so on.

As what Roberts and Jacobs (1989: p.2) say,

Literature helps us grow personally and intellectually, it provides an objective base for our knowledge and understanding; it helps us to connect ourselves to the broader culture, philosophic, and religious world which we are a part; it enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times. Literature helps us develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to know the key terms, which are related to this study of literature. The following are the key terms with their definitions.

A) Novel

A novel is a relatively long fictional prose narrative with a more or less complex plot or pattern of events, about actions, feelings, motives etc of a group of characters (Webster's New World Dictionary).

B) Character

Firstly it is a person in a play, story, novel etc. Secondly, it is a role as portrayed by an actor or actress. Thirdly, it is the mental and moral qualities that make a person different from others or a distinctive trait, quality, or attribute,

characteristic. Finally another meaning is that a character is the pattern of behavior or personality found in an individual or group (Webster's New World Dictionary).

C) Characterization

While characterization is the act of characterizing and the delineation of character or creation of characters in a play, story etc. In other words, the way to picture characters (Webster's New World Dictionary).

D) Plot

A plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed. It may include what character says or thinks, as well as what he does (Perrine, p.58). In Webster's, a plot is the arrangement of the incidents in a play, novel, narrative poem etc (Webster's New World Dictionary). In short, it is the events that form or build a story in a novel.

E) Setting

Setting is basically the time and the place in a story. According to the common definition in Webster's, setting is the time, place, environment, and surrounding circumstances of an events, story, play, etc (Webster's New World Dictionary).

F) Law

Law is a rule established by authority or custom, regulating the behavior of members of a community, country, etc (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English).

G) Mercy

Compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power; also: lenient or compassionate treatment. A blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion. Compassionate treatment of those in distress (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)

1.7. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I is the introduction of the thesis and Chapter II is the related literature and study used to support this thesis. Chapter III presents the method of the study. Chapter IV presents the discussions of findings. And finally, Chapter V concludes the whole discussions.