

# The Act of Slavery in 20<sup>th</sup> Century as Reflected in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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**Abstract**—This study aims to analyze the act of slavery that happened in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The characters that are involved are Pozzo as the master and Lucky as his slave. By analyzing how Pozzo oppresses Lucky, it reflects the act of slavery that also happened in reality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the story was written. This study is a qualitative descriptive method using the sociology of literature approach to reveal the connection between the situations in the play with the situations of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The data of this research are collected from the utterances and dialogues of the characters in the text play *Waiting for Godot*. The result showed that the act of slavery acted by Pozzo and Lucky also happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century before, during, and after World War II in the 1940s. An upper-class society would enslave and oppress a lower-class society at the time because they had power and money.

**Index Terms**—slavery, lower class, upper-class, 20<sup>th</sup> century

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literature simply means a collection of literary works that contain written and non-written accounts, including texts and spoken language. It shows that literature is an expression of a person that is described by words, actions, and writings. In general, literature may be understood as a written piece of art produced by a certain author (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). Literature also forms art that is used to express meaning and convey the beauty of language (Arafah, 2018). The language used in the literature is an utterance that performs an act used by a speaker or character in communicating with other characters (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). Meanwhile, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of literature has developed rapidly. The development raises several multidisciplinary theories such as sociology of literature, anthropology of literature, and psychology of literature (Kaharuddin & Latif, 2017; Arafah, 2018).

Besides the literature development, the era of information technology has changed the way people think and change the way of human behavior (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). It can be seen that literary works have authors' personal opinions on a certain matter. Arafah & Hasyim (2019) also argue that the change of technology made children want to hear stories or fairy tales before they go to sleep. This story that they are about to hear is categorized in children's literature. It has to have a relation with children's daily life without providing a complicated plot. The author from this category should think simply and not to make the readers confused. Therefore, literary works reflect an author's thoughts, manners, behavior, and attitudes throughout their works. Readers can understand them by analyzing the patterns or the style of the work (Hasanah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2021). As a result, readers or people who read a literary work with high motivation will also lead to achieving more information about it (Arafah et.al, 2020).

Literature is a resource viewed as a culturally valued text that is reflecting human life (Sunardi, Arafah, & Salija, 2018). Wellek and Warren (1956) also state that literature is a social institution that reflects the phenomena of social behavior in society using language as its media to express the author's thoughts. Therefore, an author generally writes based on what happened around him or her by exploring the phenomena as the topic to write in a literary work. The text of a literary work will be meaningful and give complete information if it is observed in its context, such as by studying the cultural discourse (Arafah, Thayyib, Kaharuddin, & Sahib, 2020.) It also aims to engage the study of personal, cultural, societal, and aesthetic values as an attempt to understand human experiences in this life (Sunardi, Arafah, & Salija, 2018). It can be concluded that literature is a product of art in society. That is why literary works can be seen as social products that are equivalent to cultural, political, and social studies issues (Irmawati, Arafah, & Abbas, 2020).

Literature provides useful information on the most appropriate types of literature such as Short stories, Poems, Novels, Plays, as well as Songs (Arafah, 2018). Furthermore, this writing will only focus on play or drama. All texts containing dialogues written to be performed in the form of stage action in front of an audience can be called dramas or

also known as plays. Through understanding a scene in a drama, readers can learn the culture of a certain society contained in the script of a drama and try to involve themselves in situations of the scenario of the drama.

A play by Samuel Beckett entitled *Waiting for Godot; Tragicomedy in Two Acts* deals with slavery that reflects 20<sup>th</sup>-century life but has not been broadly discussed. The act of slavery that is experiencing by the lower class society in a literary work is important to reveal because it has a relation with the condition of when and where the literary work was written. The relation between the existence of a certain class and a literary work is that literature and all other cultural phenomena reflect patterns of economic relations because literature is bound to the classes that exist in society (Taum, 1997). Milner (1981) also states that a literary work is only possible to write if the author has experiences that are directly related to the social world. Besides, Goldmann (1980) states that a literary work must have a relation with the historical background. That is why the text's sociality and communicability can be captured.

An author opens the doors of the unknown and invisible worlds to readers not only by stimulating feelings and emotions but also by helping them to discover the meanings of life and existence (Floriani & Arafah, 2020). *Waiting for Godot* itself is a play generally known as theatre of absurd. It is because Beckett put his view based on what he has learned from the previous writers or influenced by his neighborhood at the time. The story of the play is commonly known as an attempt of characters to find the existence of life by doing many absurd and unusual things. Furthermore, their attempt to find the meaning of life is to change the life better by meeting Godot. The author usually displays the behavior of characters with unusual, absurd, or abnormal personalities that bring about various readers' feelings. People indeed believe that human behavior is still attributed to inner motives, intentions, aims, and plans (Purwaningsih, Arafah, & Abbas, 2020).

There must be some other researchers that have been written about the same topic or the same object. All the previous studies presented here give some hints in comprehending problems that are found in the play. As the writer found, some researchers have analyzed *Waiting for Godot* from different kinds of perspectives, such as the religious meaning (Amin, Abdulla, Ali, & Ahmed, 2019; Wang, 2011), the attempt to find human existence (Singla, 2016), or the failure of comedy (Ithawi, 2020). Another research also presented the reflection of social class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century using the object *Wuthering Heights* (Indrasari & Abbas, 2020). They are both presenting the social class and condition of society in a certain period using a sociological approach.

Unfortunately, no journal article evaluates the act of slavery and its relation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the play was written. Therefore, to fill in the gap, this research focuses on the act of slavery represented by Pozzo the master, and Lucky as his slave. The name of Lucky himself is a contradiction because the meaning of his name is promising his life seems fine, but in fact, he lives in misery. According to Hasjim, Arafah, et al (2020), names stand for things or people and the names' mean depend on what they stand for. In this case, Lucky does not get the meaning of his name in real life. Based on that, the writers also tell the readers about the real condition of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the play was written.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sociology of literature consists of sociology and how sociology reflects in a literary work. Talking about sociology, it cannot be separated from the fact that it has a relation with society. It learns how the people interact and socialize with each other in one community. Therefore, the sociological approach helps the writers to see the relationship between a literary work and the society where the story was written.

Georg Lukacs clearly states in Milner (1981) that a literary work is only possible to write if the author has experiences that are directly related to the social world. Then for him, the great writer must be able to put his thought, imagination, and experience in his literary work as original writing and has an inseparable connection between human as a private individual and human as a social being, as a member of society. Therefore, the sociological approach is an appropriate approach to not only study human behavior in society but also how the social communities influence or affect their behaviors in daily life. A literary work can never be separated from the social background includes in it. The readers who also read the literary work can get more explanation by exploring the extrinsic elements of the literary work.

Pfefferkon (2014) states that over the past three decades social inequality has grown in France, as in many other countries. However, in that period, the dominant discourse also happened in society such as in social, economic, and political life. Moreover, Pfefferkon (2014) adds that the differences of hierarchies in society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century raise several conflicts between the different groups which can cause them to become rivals. In the end, these groups compete with one another to maintain their position. As an example, the upper class will be a master while the lower class will be a slave.

After that, from the late 1970s onward, the number of unemployment arises along with the arising of short-term employment. This fact leads the workers to have less ability to organize themselves and fight for their life sustainabilities. The last choice they can do to continue their living is to work for people who have money and power, being a slave is one of them. To sum up, the act of slavery is the result of the government's actions. The representation of Pozzo and Lucky are symbols of how dominant the government is to society. In socio-cultural life in society, these kinds of symbols are used to connect the relation between one class to another class in one environment (Hasyim, Arafah, & Kuswarini, 2020). In the end, it is still about the class that has power that will control the people from the

lower class. Society is struggling to get a better position but seems useless since the power struggle is always be won by those who have power.

The social background that will be revealed in this study is the act of slavery. Therefore, in applying the sociology of literature, the writers find more information about the real condition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and connect the story with the author's biography. It is because the author wrote the story in the 1940s after World War II and the author was one of the soldiers who stand for his country.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The technique of data analysis that is used in this study is the descriptive qualitative method. The writers firstly discuss the act of slavery based on the scenes and dialogues from the characters. By explaining the situation, the writers then connect it with the world's real condition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The writers analyze this study by using the Sociology of Literature Approach to see the relation between the condition of the play and the social phenomena that happened while the play was written.

The analysis of the descriptive qualitative method is strongly influenced by the strength of the words and sentences used. It is also used to explain thought and opinion, and dive deeper into the problem. In using this methodology, the writers explain the chosen topic in detail by providing the data from utterances, how the characters act, and the description of the situation. Moreover, the writers also read theses, journals, and articles related to the play and the condition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The writers then took notes to collect the related data (Hasanah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2021). Primary data in this writing is gotten from the original text play of *Waiting for Godot* and secondary data means that the researcher gathers the data from another source as the supporting data (Purwaningsih, Arafah, & Abbas, 2019).

### IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Pozzo

Since the first appearance, Pozzo enters by showing how rich and dominant he is toward his slave, Lucky. He drives Lucky by a rope passed round his neck. It shows that Pozzo is a member of upper-class society. Not only is the fact that he can have a slave, but also oppresses Lucky. Some characteristics of upper-class society are the possession of largely wealthy and the ownership of large amounts of property. In other words, upper-class society is also called the bourgeoisie or capitalist because they are the people who have power over the middle and lower class society.

##### **Datum 1:**

*Pozzo drives Lucky utilizing a rope passed around his neck. Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket, and a greatcoat, Pozzo a whip.* (Beckett, 1982, p.16)

Although there is no information about what Pozzo did for his life or what did his job, his appearance with all the good kinds of stuff and enough food drive him to be the person who is categorized in upper-class society.

##### **Datum 2:**

*Pozzo: Leave him in peace! (They turn towards Pozzo who, having finished eating, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.) Can't you see he wants to rest? Basket! (He strikes a match and begins to light his pipe. Estragon sees the chicken bones on the ground and stares at them greedily. As Lucky does not move Pozzo throws the match angrily away and jerks the rope.)* (Beckett, 1982, p.24)

The data above shows that Pozzo has kinds of stuff such as a bag, a folding stool, a basket, a greatcoat, a whip, a pipe, even wine. While the other three people, Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky only watch him enjoy his wealth. In addition, to show more evidence about the fact that he is coming from an upper class, he always asks Lucky to do almost everything rudely. He jerks the rope if Lucky does not do whatever he wants and it will hurt Lucky more and more. Even though it is the way the slave should do, but he treats people just like an animal. He even called Lucky a pig or hog when he does not listen to Pozzo's order. Tying up Lucky in a rope and making him bring all of his kinds of stuff is how he shows the power he has as a master of Lucky. It is very common to happen in the act of slavery when the master treats the slave badly. It shows that he is using his authority to oppress Lucky since Lucky also does not want to separate from him.

##### **Datum 3:**

*Pozzo: (with a magnanimous gesture). Let's say no more about it. (He jerks the rope.) Up pig! (Pause.) Every time he drops he falls asleep. (Jerks the rope.) Up hog! (Noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage. Pozzo jerks the rope.) Back! Enter Lucky backward.) Stop! (Lucky stops.)* (Beckett, 1982, p.20)

Treating people arbitrarily and inhumanely are characteristics of upper-class society. They think that the power that he has by owning properties and gaining a good occupation drives them to do whatever they like to people from the lower class. That is how Pozzo believes that he is the owner of Lucky just because he thinks Lucky depends on Pozzo. The owning that Pozzo shows here is against humanity. He does not even let Lucky take a rest after doing all of his orders. He will jerk the rope tied up to Lucky's neck if he sees Lucky begin to sleep. Otherwise, the order that he asks for is a very useless thing that he actually can do himself. For example, open the basket, hold his whip, clean the stool before he sits, and he even needs Lucky's help to hold his coat when he is wearing it.

All data that are presented above are Pozzo in act I, as a snobby and arrogant bourgeois. Something, in contrast, happened in act II. He becomes blind and cannot do many things since he needs Lucky to lead his way and help him to do everything. Furthermore, he is still as rude to Lucky as before. He is still using his whip to jerk Lucky if he does not listen to him. This is because he wants to show that he is still the master who has the power to control everything he has, including Lucky his slave. It is just very weird that in one night he turns to be blind.

### B. Lucky

Lucky is Pozzo's slave. He is the one that exactly reflects the person from lower-class society. He is tied up to Pozzo by a rope and he brings all of Pozzo's stuff. All his life is depending on Pozzo because he has nothing to do in his life. The only way he can continue living is by becoming a slave. Therefore, he can get food from the leftover food that Pozzo threw after eating. He can also have a place to stay beside Pozzo without being afraid of being evicted by people.

Lucky does not have the freedom to decide. It is said that Lucky became stooped because he carried heavy things owned by Pozzo. He is surrender because there is no other choice except to follow Pozzo. He will do everything that Pozzo asks to impress him. Furthermore, if he cannot impress, Pozzo will leave and sell him at the fair. He is willing to let himself hurt with a rope in his neck and becoming not comfortable.

#### Datum 4:

Pozzo: Why he doesn't make himself comfortable? Let's try and get this clear. . . He wants to impress me so that I'll keep him.

Pozzo: Perhaps I haven't got it quite right. He wants to mollify me so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him. No, that's not exactly it either.

Vladimir: You want to get rid of him?

Pozzo: He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity.

Vladimir: You want to get rid of him?

Pozzo: He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves!

Vladimir: You want to get rid of him?

Pozzo: I do. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his arse, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price of him.

The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them. (Beckett, 1982, p.30-31)

Lucky is very afraid of the idea of parting with Pozzo. Therefore, even though he is hurting, he will never let Pozzo down by doing everything that may upset Pozzo. He does not have any other option if Pozzo leaves and sells him. It is still about the class who has power will control the people from the lower class. Society is struggling to get a better position but seems useless since the power struggle is always be won by those who have power.

A lower-class society or also called the urban working class has no other resources than the ability to work with their hands, bodies, and minds. Lucky who has no property at all, to survive, must find employment work. This means he works for a capitalist-employer in an exploitative social relationship, who is Pozzo. Life treats Lucky badly that he chooses to be a slave of Pozzo to stay alive. As a slave, he is very kind to Pozzo and does every single order that Pozzo asks him to do.

He is behaving badly to the strangers because he wants to show that Pozzo is the only person he will be kind to. Therefore, Pozzo will keep him alive and will not bring him to the fest and sell him. Even though Pozzo treats him like garbage or calls him by the name of animals, he is grateful he can continue living in a very bad condition. A very bad condition here means that he only eats the leftover food, such as the chicken bones. Then his posture also becomes worse because he needs to bring heavy stuff and makes his body stooped. Not forget to mention the rope that is tied up to his neck. It hurts him every time Pozzo jerks the rope and leaves scars on his neck.

### C. Portrait of the World Condition in 20<sup>th</sup> Century

World War II that lasted from 1939 to 1945 gave a significant impact on the economic side. The colonization that occurred in many countries remained many people lost their livelihoods because they had to serve the colonists. The people became poor and even lost their places to live. These conditions are reflected in the characters Estragon, Vladimir, and Lucky the slave. Both Estragon and Vladimir are two homeless people who have no place to live and no purpose in life. Most people who live in the period of World War II were surrender to their faith because there was no other choice to stay alive.

The low living standard of Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky, and Boy are the major portrait of 20<sup>th</sup>-century life in the economic aspect. After that, from the late 1970s onward, the number of unemployment arises along with the arising of short-term employment. This fact leads the workers to have less ability to organize themselves and fight for their life sustainabilities.

The symbolism for a political issue is found in the play by Pozzo and Lucky. These two characters represent a political state of society at that time as an element of the capitalist and his subordinates. Pozzo represents the capitalists who are cruel to their subordinates and Lucky is depicted as a slave who is always persecuted and obeys all the orders of his master.

In addition, this element is further strengthened by Pozzo who turns blind which is an allusion to the capitalists who are blind and intentionally close their eyes to everything that happens around them, in this case, the middle and lower class or what is called the proletarians. The government only cares about the people as dominant as them. For the proletarian, getting attention from the government is very rare. The way Beckett describes Pozzo as blind includes a contradiction in it. Although he uses his power to oppress Lucky, he cannot see and find his way to walk if Lucky does not exist. Beckett satirized the government who were not likely to give attention to their society but they still need people to run their policy or to get supporters.

Meanwhile, Lucky is described as mute or dumb which is also an allusion to his weakness for not being able to voice his aspirations by protesting Pozzo's actions against him. It portrays the condition of lower-class society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century before World War II, during World War II, and after World War II. People who do not have power cannot speak up for their freedom because they were being oppressed by the colonists. The relationship that was built between Pozzo and Lucky implies the relationship between the capitalists and their subordinates or workers. Although Lucky is silent to voice his aspirations just like the lower class society at the time, he cannot do anything because he has no power to disobey his master. For the society who lived during World War II, disobey the government's policy would bring them into a worse situation. At least that is the picture of oppression that happened at the time when this play was written. Because of witnessing the war himself, Beckett surely knew that politics took over everything.

Another illustration for the 20<sup>th</sup>-century life during World War II happened in Kiribati Island. Everybody was rounded up near the post office, and some of the captives were tied up with ropes to coconut trees. A popular punishment for failure to carry out orders was to tie up a worker with ropes and place a stick of dynamite between his legs (Highland, 1991). The real situation that happened in Kiribati Island was the same as Lucky's situation. He is tied up to a rope connected to Pozzo who will easily jerk the rope if he thinks Lucky unpleasant him.

The only reason why the oppression and the neglect kept happening was that human rights still did not exist during the period of World War II. Many of the ideas stated that the human rights movement developed in 1948 after World War II and the events of the Holocaust. The ancient people did not have the modern conception of human rights so that it was a bit useless and hard to apply. After applying and about to understand human rights, the modern human rights arguments emerged over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For the writers, the existence of human rights in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not truly give a big impact on the lower class society. Discrimination, slavery, and capitalization were still existed and tortured them in many ways. Even nowadays, the act of slavery of the upper class to the lower class still exists. In all aspects of life, such as in economic, political, and social aspects, it is always the upper class who can take control of how the world will ruin. As a lower-class society, no matter how hard they try, if they do not have properties and wealth, do not have power, and still in the low-standard living, be a human is always be a dream. People will underestimate and being cynical to them.

## V. CONCLUSION

The play *Waiting for Godot* tells the story of two homeless men who are waiting for someone called Godot who never comes until the end of the story. The characters that include in the play are Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, Lucky, and Boy. To show the act of slavery that happened in the play, Pozzo and Lucky are the representation. Lucky is a lower class society because he is a slave and does not even have the power to control his own life. He does not have a home so he decides to work as a slave to continue his living. While Pozzo as Lucky's master controls the life of Lucky by oppressing and controlling his life. For Lucky, the impact of being a slave is making him surrender to his destiny. Being oppressed by Pozzo is the only way he continues his life other than death or to be sold in the fair. In contrast, Pozzo does not have to do all the things because Lucky will do them and he has the power to control other's life as he wishes.

The portrait of 20<sup>th</sup>-century life in the act of slavery is reflected in the play. The author poured his view of the world condition while he was also fighting as a soldier during World War II. The portraits after the war also include because slavery still existed while he was writing this play, even until today. The upper-class society can enslave a lower-class society because of their ability to control and use their power to do whatever they want.

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