

Social Class Classification of The Madam and Ninette in The Short Story Magic

Septania Dwi Prameswari¹✉, Abu Fanani²
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya^{1,2}
✉ 03040321121@student.uinsby.ac.id

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze how the bourgeois and the proletariat are reflected in The Madam and Ninette in the short story Magic by Katherine Anne Porter. The short story Magic by Katherine Anne Porter is the primary data collected by the researcher to answer the research question above. This study used the descriptive qualitative method. The research data was analyzed using Marxism theory, an ideology by Karl Marx about the social class conflict that occurs in capitalist society. This study focuses on two characters, The Madam and Ninette to identify the bourgeois and the proletariat with their struggle as the lower class. The result of this study shows that the bourgeois is reflected in a character named The Madam because The Madam exploits the workers who have been working for her and minimizes the wage payment of workers. In addition, the proletariat is reflected in a character named Ninette who struggles when Ninette tries to free herself from The Madam as the bourgeois.

Keywords: The bourgeois; the proletariat; character

Abstrak:

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kaum borjuis dan kaum proletar tercerminkan dalam karakter The Madam dan Ninette dalam cerita pendek Magic karya Katherine Anne Porter. Cerita pendek Magic karya Katherine Anne Porter ini merupakan sumber data utama yang dikumpulkan oleh peneliti untuk menjawab pertanyaan penelitian di atas. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Data penelitian dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori Marxisme, sebuah ideologi oleh Karl Marx tentang konflik kelas sosial yang terjadi dalam masyarakat kapitalis. Studi ini berfokus pada dua karakter, The Madam dan Ninette untuk mengidentifikasi kaum borjuis dan kaum proletar serta perjuangan mereka sebagai kelas bawah. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kaum borjuis tercerminkan pada sebuah karakter yang bernama The Madam karena The Madam mengeksploitasi para buruh yang telah bekerja untuk dirinya dan meminimalkan pembayaran upah untuk para buruh. Selain itu, kaum proletar tercerminkan pada sebuah karakter bernama Ninette yang berusaha keras saat Ninette mencoba untuk membebaskan dirinya dari The Madam sebagai kaum borjuis.

Kata kunci: Kaum borjuis; kaum proletar; karakter

INTRODUCTION

Social class is a hierarchy that arises within a society due to the differences in wealth, status, and power. In the Marxist perspective, social classes in a capitalist society consist of two main categories: the bourgeois (upper classes), who own the means of production, and the proletariat (lower classes), who sell their labor power to survive. With the existence of social class classification, social conflict occurs between the social classes due to each class's struggle to achieve their goals. Marx considered that the conflict between these two classes was the essence of social dynamics in a capitalist society, in which the bourgeois has many more benefits than the proletariat because the bourgeois has social power. Social power is a capacity to produce effects through another self (Rummel, n.d.). Within a social power, the bourgeois can make and take a profit by employing the lower classes that need the wages to fulfill their daily needs.

The study of social class and class conflict in literary works has become one of the main themes in literary studies, especially after the development of Marxism theory. As social and economic relations in modern society become increasingly complex, the emergence of class theory pioneered by Karl Marx can help to clarify power relations in capitalist social structures. In the literature, Marxism theory has become an important tool for understanding and studying social class structure in various works. Literature often becomes a mirror of existing social conditions, and many writers use their works as a medium to criticize or depict social inequality. Furthermore, the literary works that take a Marxist approach often show the class struggle, exploitation of workers, inequality, and domination of power as central themes. In this context, the writers try to open readers' eyes to the social realities that occur around them.

One of the works that implicitly depicts class conflict is the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter. Porter is known for her ability to capture any social, psychological, and moral issues in almost all of her works. Although *Magic* is a short story, it contains many layers of meaning involving social themes and class structures. *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter is about a clean-up woman who is working for Madame Blanchard and her family. This woman said that she's happy working in Madame Blanchard's house because it's serene there and it's different from the fancy house that is the place where she worked for a long time. While the clean-up woman brushes Madame Blanchard's hair, she tells the story about the fancy house. In the fancy house, she had worked very hard and saw

many things that were unbelievable while she working there. Fancy House is a brothel that is full of slut that are rented by The Madam who is run the house. When a man wants a girl, who lives in The Madam's house, he should pay The Madam and she would give him a brass token. Then, if he was done with the girl, he gave the token to the girl. At the weekend, the girls turned in their brass tokens to The Madam to be exchanged for money. The Madam has police; the girls must come back with them or go to jail. But a clean-up woman also tells the story about a girl named Ninette, a slut who is working for The Madam and she wants to leave the fancy house or The Madam's house and give all the money that she could find to The Madam. Unfortunately, she was accused of robbing the men who visited her, and she was kicked from that place. The next day there is a man who wants to visit Ninette, and it makes The Madam realize that Ninette is still beneficial for her. Then, the cook of the fancy house claimed that she knew the spell casts. So, when the girl runs off, she casts a spell on her using remnants of her nail clippings and hair from a brush which the girl used before to bring her back totally subservient to The Madam.

Katherine Anne Porter wrote the short story *Magic* set in New Orleans, which at that time New Orleans was a place filled with Magic. This short story concerns a business owner who controls all his workers as if using Magic. According to James T. F. Tanner (in Mooney & Nance, 1965) basically, this was done because of the economy's strength. This refers to the two main characters, those are The Madam and Ninette, who are each depicted as representing the two categories of social classes. The Madam is a figure who has power, wealth, and control over the situation around her, this reflects the characteristics of the bourgeois who tend to exploit the class below them. On the other hand, Ninette is a character who is trapped in social conditions that require her to work under the control of The Madam, showing the characteristics of a proletariat class that is vulnerable to exploitation. Based on the title, readers are supposed to think that this work contains things related to the supernatural. However, Katherine Anne Porter did not include it in her work. Moreover, the short story *Magic* contains the meaning that the author wants to convey. According to Darlene Harbour Unrue (in Mooney & Nance, 1965), Katherine Anne Porter wants to convey that her work contains inhuman social crimes that have developed within a social system.

Even though Katherine Anne Porter's works have been studied by many researchers, an in-depth analysis of class conflict in *Magic* using Marxism theory is still rarely found.

Many studies focus more on other themes in Porter's works, such as female identity, moral conflicts, or personal crises experienced by the characters. As an example, the journal article conducted by Sudarna and Yulina (2021) *Critical Discourse Analysis of The Short Fiction "Magic" Based on Norman Fairclough's Approach*. This study discusses social injustice and inequality as a core issue in the short story *Magic* written by Katherine Anne Porter in 1928. The researchers analyzed the problem using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and appraisal theory. This study was conducted to know the social wrongs, especially inequality issues in the short story, and find possible ways to solve the social wrongs. The results show that some social wrongs happen in the short fiction through judgment, affect, and appreciation.

The focus of Sudarna and Yulina (2021) *Critical Discourse Analysis of The Short Fiction "Magic" Based on Norman Fairclough's Approach* is more emphasized on discourse and linguistic aspects rather than characterization and the relationships between the characters in the context of social class struggle. One of the gaps that exist is the lack of in-depth analysis of how the characters in the short story *Magic* reflect Marxist ideology, especially in the depiction of the relationship between The Madam as a representative of the upper class and Ninette as a representative of the lower class. In this study, the researcher will attempt to identify how the characterization of The Madam and Ninette reflects the differences in power, exploitation, and the struggle that occurs between them. This creates a need to explore these characters and how their actions and motivations contribute to the larger social conflict. As a whole, this study aims to fill the gap in any existing research by conducting an analysis of how social class and class conflict are represented in the characters of The Madam and Ninette. It is hoped that the use of Marxist theory to examine the short story *Magic* can enrich the understanding of the class structure in Katherine Anne Porter's work and provide a new perspective in observing class conflict in modern literary works.

The focus of analysis in this study is on two characters, The Madam and Ninette in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter to identify the bourgeois and the proletariat with their struggle as the lower class, which was analyzed using the descriptive qualitative method and Karl Marx's Marxism theory. In line with the background above, the problem of the study is to reveal how the bourgeois and the proletariat are reflected in The Madam

and Ninette in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter. The findings of this study are expected to be helpful for the next study as the previous study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marxism Theory

Marxism is a theory that was proposed by Karl Marx in the 19th century which contains the ideologies about social, political, and economic. In addition, Karl Marx is a German philosopher, political theorist, and economist who was interested in thinking about an ideology in the field that he had mastered. This theory focuses on the struggle of the proletariat (lower classes) who are working for the bourgeois (upper class). Karl Marx divided the capitalist society into two classes, namely the bourgeois or the upper social classes who own capital and earn the profits from the proletariat who is the worker who has to work for the bourgeois for wages, without earning the profits and having no ownership of the bourgeois haves. The bourgeois has a motivation to earn the profits as much as possible using any means. While the proletariat is often exploited by the bourgeois by minimizing the wages given to the proletariat. According to Marx and Engels (2019), the proletariat is viewed as the bourgeoisie slaves, given wages for their labor that is the minimum subsistence so that they can just about survive while also depending on their labor that they cannot simply quit. As we know, Marxism theory is an ideology by Karl Marx about the social class conflict that occurs in a capitalist society, this theory will be used to analyze the characters that represent the bourgeois and the proletariat in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the researcher uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data resources that were taken from the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter. The researcher collected the data in some steps; first, read the short story *Magic* on the online literary work platform. Second, note-taking the scenes that show that the characters in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter reflected the bourgeois and the proletariat. The data was analyzed using the theory of Karl Marx, a German philosopher who proposed Marxism theory, which is defined as the social class conflict that occurs in capitalist society. The researcher uses the technique to analyze the data, as follows; analyze the data by reading the short story *Magic*, note-taking the data that will be the

object of this study, identify the data that was collected from the short story, grouping the data that was found in the short story into two different social classes namely the bourgeois and the proletariat, explain who are the characters that reflected the bourgeois and the proletariat in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter, and also explain what are the lower class struggle of the characters in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter reflected the bourgeois and the proletariat.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the two main characters in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter, the researcher found that:

The Bourgeois Reflected in The Madam

Based on Marxism theory by Karl Marx, the bourgeois is the upper social class, owns capital that earns the profits from the proletariat who have to work for the bourgeois for a wage, without earning the profits and having no ownership of the bourgeois have. The bourgeois have a motivation to earn the profits as much as possible using any method that they can. In addition, the bourgeois developed during feudal times by a manufacturing system in the industry that used to be controlled by guilds and also the raising of political power (Cabral, 2020). According to Marx (in Ryan, n.d.) The result will be a final revolution in which the property of the bourgeoisie is expropriated and class conflict, exploitation, and the state are abolished.

The Madam is a character in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter. The Madam exists as the owner of a fancy house which is filled with the girls who are employed by The Madam herself, and she gains a lot of profit through this job. Moreover, The Madam has a cruel personality which can be proven when The Madam grabs the girls' hair and hits the girls with a bottle right in the girls' head if they want to leave the fancy house. It is done by The Madam because she has made a rule which says that the girls who are working for her must back to the fancy house. If the girls don't come back to the fancy house, they will be imprisoned or they will be brought back by a policeman or the men hired by The Madam to find the girls. It shows that The Madam reflects the upper social class which employs prostitutes and controls the girls who work for The Madam who reflects the lower social class or the proletariat. It can be said that The Madam exploits the girls as her workers by forcing them to stay and keep working for her even though they no

longer want to work for her. This is done by The Madam because she thinks that the girls have an unpaid debt to her. The Madam as an upper social class or the bourgeois also pays her workers a small amount when she feels that she is not happy with her worker's treatment. According to Karl Marx's theory, we can conclude that The Madam in the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter reflected the bourgeois or the upper social class.

No, she began to see she was wrong to send this Ninette away, and then she said, She will be back in a few days, don't trouble yourself (Porter, 1928).

As the bourgeois, The Madam reflects the capitalist mentality of exploiting workers for maximum profit, she has a motivation to earn the profits as much as possible by returning her worker, Ninette with the spell cast by the cook in the fancy house to gain more profit. The Madam realizes that letting Ninette go away was a mistake because she thinks Ninette is still useful to her. When Ninette back to the fancy house, The Madam can make much more profit because Ninette is much loved by the visitors who often come to The Madam's fancy house.

Well, there was a girl there in that house, a poor thing, thin, but well-liked by all the men who called, and you understand she could not get along with the woman who ran the house. They quarreled, the madam cheated her on her checks: you know, the girl got a check, a brass one, every time, and at the week's end she gave those back to the madam, yes, that was the way, and got her percentage, a very small little of her earnings: it is a business, you see, like any other (Porter, 1928).

The Madam, as the bourgeois often minimized the wages of the proletariat who worked for The Madam. The Madam minimized Ninette's wages with the reason that she would not be able to get along with Ninette. Thus, the wages earned by Ninette were in very small amounts. When Ninette realized it, she started to cry and said that she wanted to leave the fancy house, but The Madam hit a bottle on Ninette's forehead.

The Proletariat Reflected in Ninette

According to Karl Marx's Marxism theory, the proletariat is the lower social class or the class of wage workers who were engaged in industrial production and whose chief source of income was derived from the sale of their labor power (Zeidan, n.d.). The proletariat is often exploited by the bourgeois by minimizing the wages given to the proletariat. According to Marx and Engels (2019), the proletariat is viewed as the

bourgeoisie slaves, given wages for their labor that is the minimum subsistence so that they can just about survive while also depending on their labor that they cannot simply quit.

In the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter, Ninette is a character that appears as a slut who works for The Madam at the fancy house. Ninette is a hard worker who makes a lot of money for The Madam.

The madam began to shout, Where did you get all that, you? and accused her of robbing the men who came to visit her. The girl said, Keep your hands off or I'll brain you: and at that the madam took hold of her shoulders, and began to lift her knee and kick this girl most terribly in the stomach, and even in her most secret place, Madame Blanchard, and then she beat her in the face with bottle, and the girl fell back again into her room where I was making clean (Porter, 1928).

She collected a lot of money and gave it to The Madam to pay off her debts because she wanted to leave the madam's house and she wanted to stop working for The Madam who was very cruel. Unfortunately, The Madam doesn't accept the Ninette's offer. This illustrates that Ninette as the proletariat has the desire to fight for her life by running away from the exploitation that the bourgeois was done to her. After that, Ninette was beaten and accused by The Madam of being a thief who stole some money from a man who visited her because she had forty dollars. The Madam's treatment of Ninette reflects that the proletariat always faces the harsh reality. The bourgeois always controls and treats the proletariat with manipulation and violence because the bourgeois has the higher social power. After she was beaten, Ninette's body looked bloody and shabby so The Madam kicked her out of the fancy house because she thought that Ninette was no longer beneficial to her. Therefore, through Ninette experience the researcher can conclude that Ninette reflects the proletariat who sell the labor for the wages in The Madam's house, trapped in a cycle of exploitation carried out by the bourgeois, and always facing harsh treatment from the bourgeois.

Then in seven nights the girl came back and she looked very sick, the same clothes and all, but happy to be there. One of the men said, Welcome home, Ninette! and when she started to speak to the madam, the madam said, Shut up and get upstairs and dress yourself. So Ninette, this girl, she said, I'll be down in just a minute. And after that she lived there quietly (Porter, 1928).

As the proletariat, Ninette's desire for freedom is continuously thwarted by The Madam who does not let Ninette go from the fancy house. Ninette finally can free herself from The Madam by being kicked out of the fancy house. But The Madam has the desire

to keep Ninette working in the fancy house because of the men who ask about Ninette. Then, Ninette who escaped from the fancy house is spelled by the spell cast by the cook who is working for The Madam in the fancy house. This spell believed can return Ninette to the fancy house for seven days after the spell was cast. After seven days, Ninette who is spelled comes back to the fancy house with happiness. After all, we can see Ninette's struggle when she is exploited by The Madam. She is forced to keep working and be bent down to The Madam through the cook's spell cast even though Ninette does not work for The Madam.

Ninette's desire for freedom is continually thwarted. This reflects the struggle of the proletariat to escape the bourgeois control. The situation reflects the systemic obstacles that prevent the proletariat from achieving economic and social mobility. Despite having made her best efforts, Ninette is still trapped in a cycle of dependency and exploitation. This problem is an illustration of the class struggle described in Marxism theory, in which the bourgeois oppressing and controlling the proletariat to prevent changes that could threaten their position. The Madam takes advantage of Ninette's powerlessness, ensuring that Ninette remains dependent on her for Ninette's livelihood. In addition, Ninette reflects the social reality faced by the workers in the real world, in which they try to improve their living conditions, they often have to face various forms of oppression.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that the short story *Magic* by Katherine Anne Porter reflects the conflict of two different social classes between the bourgeois and the proletariat which is reflected through the characters of The Madam and Ninette. Using qualitative descriptive methods and Marxism theory, this research explores how The Madam represents the bourgeois who exploit workers by providing minimum wages and unfair working conditions. Meanwhile, Ninette represents the struggle of the proletariat who is trying to free themselves from oppression. Porter's *Magic* illustrates that in capitalist societies, the exploitation of the working class by the upper class is an ongoing, inescapable reality, emphasizing the harshness of social class struggle. By analyzing the interactions and conflicts between the two characters, this study provides a deeper understanding of how literary works can reflect social reality. These findings affirm that literature has an

important role in voicing issues of social justice and equality, as well as encouraging change in society.

REFERENCES

- Cabral, C. (2020). *Explaining Marxism: The Bourgeoisie and Proletariat*. Shortform. <https://www.shortform.com/blog/marxism-bourgeoisie-and-proletariat/>
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2019). *The communist manifesto. in ideals and ideologies*. Routledge.
- Mooney, H. J., & Nance, W. L. (1965). Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection. *American Literature*, 37(2), 223. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2923007>
- Porter, K. A. (1928). Magic. In *The Collected stories of Katherine Anne Porter*.
- Rummel, R. J. (n.d.). *Understanding conflict and war: vol. 2: the conflict helix; Social Power*. University of Hawaii. <https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TCH.CHAP20.HTM>
- Ryan, A. (n.d.). *bourgeoisie social class*. Britannica.
- Sudarna, P. N. R., & Yulina, C. A. (2021). Critical Discourse Analysis of the Short Fiction “Magic” Based on Norman Fairclough’s Approach. *Jurnal JOEPALLT (Journal of English Pedagogy, Linguistics, Literature, and Teaching)*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.35194/jj.v9i2.1758>
- Zeidan, A. (n.d.). *proletariat social class*. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/proletariat>