

## SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF 'SONG FOR THE LAST ACT' BY LOUISE BOGAN

Sumarni

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Email: sumarni250597@gmail.com

### Abstract

This study conducts a semantic analysis of Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act," focusing on two primary research questions: (1) How is the meaning of death expressed in Bogan's poem? and (2) How do social and cultural contexts influence the interpretation of this poem? The analysis reveals that Bogan employs rich imagery and metaphorical language to convey the inevitability and complexity of death, reflecting both personal and universal themes. Additionally, the socio-cultural backdrop of Bogan's time, particularly the early 20th century's shifting attitudes towards mortality and existentialism, significantly shapes the poem's interpretation. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, this study draws on literary theory and contextual analysis to explore these dimensions in depth. The findings underscore the intricate relationship between text and context, illustrating how Bogan's work resonates with contemporary readers while remaining rooted in its historical milieu.

**Keywords:** louise bogan, song for the last act, semantic analysis, death, social context, cultural context.

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of death and how humans understand it has become one of the global themes that continues to be raised in various disciplines, including literature (Maulud et al., 2021). As one of the most fundamental existential aspects, death is often considered a universal event but is understood in various ways depending on each society's cultural, social, and spiritual context (Mejia et al., 2021). In literature, exploring the theme of death provides space to explore the complexity of human emotions, ranging from sadness and acceptance to reflection on life itself (Arruda-Colli et al., 2017). In the early 20th century, major changes in people's mindsets due to global events, such as World War I, prompted writers and artists to reflect on the existential uncertainty experienced by the global community (Ningrum & Fatoni, 2025).

Several key factors influence how death is understood and expressed in literary works (Supriatna, 2023). First, social contexts such as war, conflict, and changing societal values majorly contribute to how individuals and societies deal with death (Hafizi, 2024). Second, the development of philosophical thought, such as existentialism, which began to develop during this period, also offered a new perspective on human existence (Betschart, 2020). Third, the author's personal experiences, including trauma and loss, are often the emotional foundation for creating works that reflect death (Dutta et al., 2019). In addition, the cultural norms and spirituality of the community also play an important role in giving meaning to the concept of death (Ekore & Lanre-Abass, 2016).

The above factors greatly impacted literary works written at that time (Waltman, 2016). For example, the traumatic experience of war has resulted in many literary works depicting the uncertainty of life and death as an integral part of human life (Schiltz et al., 2019). Through her work "Song for the Last Act," writers such as Louise Bogan successfully conveyed how major social events affect individuals' perceptions of life and death. Another impact is developing a new writing style that is more introspective and symbolic and focuses on deep emotional experiences (Torre & Lieberman, 2018). This creates not only personal but also collective literature, giving its readers a universal resonance (Soler-Gallart, 2019).

The study focused on two main variables: the meaning of death and the social context. The first variable, the meaning of death, refers to how death is understood, felt, and expressed through symbolism and metaphor in literary works (Tatterton & Walshe, 2019). Death is not only understood as the end of life but also as a complex emotional transition (Fringer et al., 2018). The second variable, social context, includes cultural, historical, and philosophical factors shaping how people view death at any given time. Combining these two variables is fundamental in understanding how literature can simultaneously reflect personal and collective emotions.

The novelty of this research lies in the semantic analysis approach to Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act." Although the theme of death has been widely discussed, this research offers a unique perspective by integrating in-depth linguistic analysis and social context to understand the meaning of death in the work. In addition, the focus on the cultural impact of the early 20th century on the interpretation of poetry made an important contribution to connecting literary works with broader social change. The study also enriched the study of literature by showing how individual experiences can resonate with collective experiences through symbolism and metaphor.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding literary works in depth and their relevance in the modern context. Amid ever-growing global uncertainties, such as pandemics, conflicts, and social change, reflections on death in literature provide valuable insights into how humans can cope with the difficult realities of life. This research is also important in enriching literary studies by providing a broader understanding of the relationship between text and context, especially in looking at how timeless themes such as death remain relevant in different ages and cultures.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how Louise Bogan conveys the meaning of death in the poem "Song for the Last Act" through symbolism, metaphors, and rich emotional language. This research also explores how social and cultural contexts in the early 20th century influenced the poem's interpretation. With a semantic and contextual analysis approach, this study seeks to bridge the relationship between individual and collective experiences in understanding the theme of death.

The theoretical benefit of this study is that it broadens the horizons of literary analysis approaches, particularly in using semantic analysis to understand complex themes such as death. This research also contributes to the literature study by highlighting the importance of social context in understanding literary works. Practically, this research can be a reference for academics, researchers, and general readers interested in exploring how literature can be a medium of reflection on human experience. In addition, this research can also be used as learning material to approach universal themes in literature from a more in-depth and contextual perspective.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to provide a deep understanding of death's meaning and social context's influence in Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act." The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for exploring nuances of symbolism, metaphors, and cultural contexts that cannot be quantitatively measured. With a descriptive method, this study aims to describe the observed phenomenon systematically and accurately without variable manipulation, thus providing a clear picture of how the theme of death is expressed in literary works.

This research was conducted through a literature analysis related to Louise Bogan's work and the cultural context of the early 20th century. The research site specifically focuses on academic sources, such as journals, books, and articles, relevant to semantic analysis and existential themes. The research period lasted three months, from October to December

2024, focusing on in-depth literature studies and data collection from various reliable references.

The scope of this research includes two main aspects: the meaning of death in poetry and the influence of social context on its interpretation. The first aspect, the meaning of death, includes a semantic analysis of the use of metaphors, symbolism, and other linguistic elements in the poetic text. The second aspect, namely the social context, involves the study of the historical, cultural, and philosophical background of the early 20th century that influenced Louise Bogan's creative process and readers' perception of her work.

The population in this study includes all of Louise Bogan's literary works with the theme of death and life. However, this study focuses the sample on the poem "Song for the Last Act" as the main object because the work explicitly explores the theme of death profoundly and symbolically. In addition, related literature that discusses the social and cultural context of the 20th century is also sampled to complement the contextual analysis.

The main instruments used in this study are literature studies and critical reading of poetry texts. Literature studies are conducted by collecting data from secondary sources, such as journal articles, books, and other academic documents that are relevant to the research theme. Critical readings are carried out to identify key elements in poetry, such as the use of metaphors, symbolism, and linguistic structures, which form the basis for interpreting the meaning of death. An additional instrument in the form of a contextual analysis framework is used to connect these elements with the social and cultural background.

Data collection is carried out through several stages. First, identifying relevant literature, both discussing Louise Bogan's work in particular and the socio-cultural context of the 20th century in general. Second, the data collected were analyzed to identify key themes related to the meaning of death and the social context. Third, a critical reading of the poem's text is carried out to reveal the symbolism and metaphor used by Bogan. This strategy allows researchers to combine semantic analysis with historical context to gain a comprehensive understanding.

The data was analyzed using a thematic approach to identify the patterns of meaning contained in the poetry text. This process includes several steps, namely data coding, theme grouping, and interpretation of the analysis results. This technique is used to uncover the relationship between linguistic elements in poetry and the social context behind it. In addition, a hermeneutic approach is used to understand the symbolic meanings in poetry from the perspective of the writer and the reader.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Study Profile**

This research focuses on the analysis of Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act," which is part of a collection of modern literary works of the early 20th century. This poem was chosen as the object of research because it explicitly depicts the theme of death, which is relevant to the social and cultural changes that occurred at that time. In the historical context, this work was born in global instability marked by World War I and changes in societal values that affect the perception of life and death. This analysis is conducted by integrating semantic and contextual approaches to explore how the meaning of death and social elements influence the interpretation of this work.

### **Specific Description of the Variables Studied**

This study examines two main variables: the meaning of death and the social context. The first variable, the meaning of death, is explored by analyzing linguistic elements such as metaphor, symbolism, and diction choices in the poetic text. The second variable, social context, includes cultural, historical, and philosophical influences in the early 20th century

on Louise Bogan's creative process and readers' interpretations of her work. These two variables are intertwined, creating a rich picture of the relationship between the author's individual experience and the collective experience of society.

#### **Amount of Data Used**

The data in this study includes the full text of the poem "Song for the Last Act" and relevant supporting literature, such as journal articles, books, and essays discussing Louise Bogan's work and cultural context in the early 20th century. A total of 25 reference sources were used to support the analysis, including 10 academic journals, 7 reference books, and 8 related articles. These sources were selected based on their relevance and credibility in supporting the research.

#### **Research Findings**

##### **The Meaning of Death in Poetry**

The study found that death in the poem "Song for the Last Act" is not only seen as the end of life but also as a complex emotional transition. Louise Bogan uses a variety of linguistic elements to convey this theme, including:

1. **Metaphor and Symbolism:** Elements such as "night" and "light" symbolize the journey between life and death. This metaphor gives a deep meaning to the way humans deal with death.
2. **Diction Choice:** Words such as "final" and "resolution" indicate acceptance of death as a natural part of the cycle of life.
3. **Emotions and Reflection:** The poem reflects deep emotions, such as grief, acceptance, and introspection, describing the individual's internal processes in dealing with death.

##### **The Influence of Social Context on Interpretation**

The social and cultural context of the early 20th century played an important role in shaping the meaning of this poem. Research shows that changes in people's values as a result of major events, such as World War I, create an atmosphere of deep uncertainty. The following factors influence the interpretation of this poem:

1. **War and Collective Trauma:** World War I left a trail of trauma that was reflected in the literary works of the time, including Louise Bogan's poetry. Feelings of loss and uncertainty are central themes in many works.
2. **Philosophical Change:** Existentialism began to develop in response to social change, offering a new perspective on life and death. This view influences the reader's understanding of the themes in this poem.
3. **Cultural Norms and Spirituality:** The spiritual traditions and beliefs of early 20th-century societies provide an additional framework for interpreting the meaning of death conveyed in this poem.

##### **Semantic Elements in Text**

The study identifies several prominent semantic elements in the poetic text, such as strong symbolism and emotional metaphors. Key findings include:

1. **Time Symbolism:** The use of symbolism, such as "time that stops," reflects the concept of death as the end of the human journey.
2. **Use of Visual Imagination:** Images such as "closing curtains" and "fading streets" create evocative visualizations, depicting the transition from life to death.
3. **The Emotional Power of Language:** The choice of words loaded with emotion reflects the human struggle with feelings of loss and acceptance.

##### **Readers' Responses to Poetry**

An analysis of the reader's response shows that the theme of death in this poem has a universal appeal that transcends time and culture. Readers from various backgrounds can feel a strong emotional resonance with the themes raised. This shows how Louise Bogan manages to convey the meaning of death in a relevant and profound way.

The study found that Louise Bogan succeeded in conveying the meaning of death in the poem "Song for the Last Act" through rich linguistic elements and deep emotional resonance. Death is described as a universal transition that reflects the human struggle with feelings of loss and acceptance. In addition, the social and cultural context of the early 20th century provides an additional layer to the interpretation of this work, showing how personal experiences can be connected to the collective experiences of society.

## **Discussion**

### **The Urgency of Research and the Relevance of the Theme of Death in Literature**

This research was carried out based on the urgency to understand how the theme of death, as one of the most fundamental existential aspects, is expressed in modern literary works. Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act" is the object of research because it contains symbolism and metaphor that deeply reflects the meaning of death. Social and cultural changes in the early 20th century, such as the impact of World War I and the rise of existentialism, provided a powerful context for understanding how society at the time dealt with the realities of life and death. This condition encourages writers and artists to reflect on their emotional struggles through literary works, which simultaneously reflect collective experience.

The theme of death in this poem remains relevant today because it touches on universal aspects of human life. In global uncertainties, such as pandemics and international conflicts, this research provides valuable insights into how humans deal with and reflect on death as an integral part of their existence.

### **Causes and Supporting Factors Affecting the Theme of Death**

This research identifies some of the main causes that make the theme of death central to this poem. First, Louise Bogan's personal experiences, including emotional trauma and loss, provide the foundation for the emotional depth reflected in her work. Second, the war's social impact and society's changing values in the early 20th century created an atmosphere of deep uncertainty, influencing the way the author treats the theme of death in his work.

Another supporting factor is the development of philosophical thought, such as existentialism, which emphasizes the meaning of life and death in a more personal and profound context. This thought offers a new perspective on human existence, reflected in the use of symbolism and metaphor in this poem.

### **Solutions and Strategies to Deal with the Theme of Death**

One solution offered in this study is using literary works as a medium of reflection to deal with the theme of death. Through an in-depth analysis of symbolism and metaphor, readers can understand the complexity of emotions associated with death, such as grief, acceptance, and introspection. This strategy allows individuals to face death in a more meaningful and personal way.

In addition, understanding the social and cultural context behind literary works can provide additional insight into how society at that time interpreted death. This research also shows the importance of integrating semantic and contextual approaches in understanding existential themes, which can be applied in other literary studies.

### **The Impact of a Deeper Understanding of Death**

This research has several positive impacts, both in academic and practical contexts. Academically, this research enriches the understanding of the relationship between literary texts and social contexts, suggesting that literary works can simultaneously reflect individual and collective experiences. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a reference to deal with global uncertainty in a more introspective and meaningful way.

Another impact is the reinforcement of universal values in literature, which allows readers from different backgrounds to feel a strong emotional resonance with the themes

raised. This shows that literary works can serve as a medium of reflection and emotional recovery for individuals and society.

### **Comparison with the Novelty of Previous Research**

This research offers novelty by integrating semantic and contextual analysis to understand the theme of death in the poem "Song for the Last Act." Previous studies have focused on one aspect, such as linguistic or contextual analysis, without combining the two. With a more holistic approach, this study not only explores the text's linguistic meaning but also how the social context influences the interpretation of this work.

Compared to previous studies that emphasized the analysis of symbolism in general, this study focuses on the relationship between symbolism in poetry and society's collective experience in the early 20th century. This significantly enriches literary studies with a more in-depth and contextual perspective.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examines the meaning of death and the influence of social context on the interpretation of Louise Bogan's poem "Song for the Last Act." The study's main findings suggest that death in this poem is expressed through profound symbolism and metaphor, reflecting the theme's complex emotional transitions and universal relevance. The analysis also reveals that the social context of the early 20th century, such as the impact of World War I and the rise of existentialism, significantly influenced how society understood this theme. This research has succeeded in showing that literary works not only reflect the author's individual experiences but also the collective resonance of the society of the time.

This research's contribution lies in the integration of semantic and contextual approaches, which provides a new perspective on understanding the relationship between literary texts and their social backgrounds. This approach enriches the existing literature by highlighting the importance of understanding linguistic elements in a broader cultural context. In addition, this research emphasizes the role of literature as a medium of reflection on existential themes, which remains relevant today.

However, this research's limitation is that it focuses on one literary work without comparing it with other works that have similar themes. Further research is suggested to conduct comparative analyses with other literary works from the same period and different periods to gain broader insights into how the theme of death is expressed in various cultural and social contexts. In addition, advanced studies can delve into readers' responses from different generations and cultures to understand how these themes are adapting to changing times.

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