

**The turbulence of george eliot's mind  
in facing social norms in her society,  
as found in *the mill on the floss***

By:

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**CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION**

**A. Research Background**

Stereotypes which were traditionally embedded in women had made them to have inferior status in society. Giving birth, raising children and taking care of the household were their fate from the childhood. They were educated to do the roles as wife for these were acknowledged to have moral importance which was tied to the domestic. To get married and to have children were the best decision and the best choice for women, so that they were taught how to make up their face and performance and how to make them to look more beautiful in the sight of men's eyes. These all were done in order to get men's attention and then they would be married by handsome and high-class men, because getting married with high-class men was the guarantee for women future.

It was not a surprise if then there were stereotypes over women's beauty judged by the society and it was a bad dream for parents, mother

especially, when they had a daughter who was far from criterion of beautiful, because the good and the bad of the children was in the hand of the mother.

Those things created the society's view, which was organized along patriarchal lines, underlining that women's room was only family, so they did not need any recognition from the outside of their family. The outside of the family was men's business only. The good or the bad of the children was dependent on their mother, while the good and the bad of the whole family was dependent on <sup>1</sup> band, who was responsible for the family business. Women, whether as wives or children, also needed obedience, modesty and fidelity to serve and to please men in order to get men's pity and their satisfaction.

Furthermore, women did not need to go to work because fulfilling the family needs was men's responsibility only, and this drove women to have no financial freedom in which money was the real substance of family existence and made women dependent fully upon men. When a woman depended on a man, the woman would do whatever the man, as the dominant, asked for the sake of her safety. As stated by Virginia Woolf that when one sex is dependent upon the other it will endeavour for safety's sake to stimulate what the dominant sex finds desirable (1979: 66), so the father had unlimited power over his spouse and children, especially through his control of money.

Moreover, women did not need any education as much as men did because women were considered to have inferior intellectual power, for physically women had weaker body and smaller bones compared to men so that they were also considered to have smaller brain and this made them to be viewed as unable to face and to overcome big problems. Besides, when a woman wanted to learn what men learned, she would be viewed strange even stupid because this was regarded as something useless, whereas knowledge is the most influencing power. This led to women's incapability in taking over the control. Murphy stated in his book *Beyond Feminism: Toward A Dialogue on Difference*,

“One of the most powerful forms of sexual oppression is the control of understanding. Knowledge is power; it is also a means by which men have maintained their control over women. Women who are seeking to express their insights and develop their talents within professional and intellectual communities often find that they are expected to conform to standards of thought and action upheld by men.” (1995: xii).

There was no freedom for women to decide what best for them and there was no freedom to do whatever they wanted, and it was the root of their oppression. Women impediment and limitation generally were caused by the stereotypes which judged that the woman was emotional, intuitive, passive and fragile while the man was strong, intellectual, logic, countable and rational. As what was underlined by Murphy that stereotypes are oppressive, but as forms of thought they establish a cognitive dependency that is accepted as often as it is imposed (Murphy, 1995: 54).

The emerging Industrial Revolution in England, which began in 1798, had changed people's point of view and way of thinking, especially women's. The Industrial Revolution was a time of rapid change in the methods of producing goods. Its existence affected both business and family life of the English society. It had created a new life style and way of life of the society in England. Industry, job opportunity, increased wages, and vision opened the way for a new class of citizenry by the 1850's, that was the middle class.

The new class gained their power through economic and social means, not because of inherited titles or lands as the aristocracy. They believed that wealth and social position was for those who took through discipline and hard competition. The middle class showed their wealth through the possessions they acquired, including display their good fortune by the clothes they wore. From that time, middle class women began to have some leisure, some education, and some liberty to investigate the world where they live. It opened the new step for women, called as emancipation. This began when women realized that they lacked of independence and found a stress on the domestic isolation. As stated by Copelman that middle-class Victorian women's hunger for education and occupational opportunities, and then by the mid nineteenth century individual women, started to awake from their own uselessness (Copelman, 1996: 4).

One of the individual middle-class Victorian women is George Eliot, the pen-name adopted by Mary Anne Evans who is regarded as one of

the most remarkable woman writers in England. She had used the name since February 1857, when she began to write novel. The reason why she took the male name was the 'friend' who had given her the story was always referred to as 'he' in the correspondence which followed and because there was no acknowledgement for women's intelligence. According to Virginia Woolf in her book *On Women and Writing*, almost all of women writers adopted male name on their writings, as women's writing would not be read if they used their real name,

But the novels of women were not affected only by the necessarily narrow range of the writer's experience. They showed, at least at the nineteenth century, another characteristic which may be traced to the writer's sex.... we are conscious of a woman's presence – of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights. This brings into women's writing an element which is entirely absent from a man's, unless, he happens to be a working-man, a Negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of disability. It introduces a distortion and is frequently the cause of weakness. (1979: 47)

Besides, this was to free George Eliot's own consciousness for she wrote under the tyranny of what was expected from her sex (Woolf, 1979: 70).

The reason she wrote was that it was easier for her to pour her mind through the writing. As stated in one of George Eliot's essays, "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot." (In Handley, 1994: xxii). On writing she could find her lost world, to be a woman and to be exiled as well. While the reason for her success in writing

novel was, though it is difficult to find, that novel is the easiest thing for woman to write. Based on Percy Lubbock's definition, novel is an imaginary work in prose of a considerable length, which presents as real certain characters living in a given environment and describes their attitudes, fate, and adventures. Although such a work usually fictitious, the characters, situations, or events may be drawn from real life. It arises from the desire to depict and interpret human character, so the reader of a novel is both entertained and aided in a deeper perception of life's problem (In <http://www.nvce.edu/home/ataormina/novels/history/define.htm>, revisited on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2008).

As stated by Milan Kundera in his book *Art of Novel* that novel is an investigation toward human's life in the world's trap. Life is a trap, as human was born without being asked, they are locked inside the bodies they never chose before, and then they are faced to their fate to die (Kundera, 2002: 45).

As a creative writing, novel is a place where imagination can boom like a dream, and novel can destroy what can be seen as an imperative truth. A novel is the least concentrated form of art because it can be taken up or put down more easily than a play or a poem. It is a great attraction to read novel as we should be able to engage all our faculties, intellects, imaginations, emotions, appetites, desires, fears and regrets (Atkin et. al, 1995: 10). The nineteenth century novels written by woman writers were remarkable, George Eliot's novel especially. The fact was that George Eliot

was excluded by her sex from certain kinds of experience, and that experience had a great influence toward her work. She herself had been isolated by the society for living with the married George Lewes. As we know that any breath of sexual scandal would destroy a woman's reputation in Victorian morality

When she decided to live with a man engaged to another woman, her father and brother never venture to speak to her. However, George Eliot attempted to familiarize the minds of young women in the middle and higher ranks despite the accusation of immorality and when she was welcome to visit school, she could not sign the visitor's book because of the school anxiety at being associated with one of such unconventional morality (Copelman, 1996: 20). She even wrote her painful awareness of unacceptable social status in her essays and she also wrote her sadness through her noted novels, one of them is *The Mill on the Floss* written in 1860, in which its earlier chapters is autobiographical.

The novel is the story of Maggie Tulliver, the heroine, the impetuous, clever younger daughter of the Tullivers of Dorlcote Mill in St. Ogg's. Maggie frustrates her superficial mother with her unconventional dark coloring and unnatural activeness and intelligence. Like many nineteenth century literary girls, her intelligence and emotional capacity cause problems. She is devoted to her brother, Tom, but he is hopelessly limited in his understanding. This makes Maggie turn to Phillip Wakem, the son of a local lawyer, who understands her well but unpleasantly

deformed. Maggie meets him when she visits Tom's school for the first time as he is Tom's schoolmate in Mr. Stelling's school.

Then disaster strikes their relationship for Mr Tulliver and Wakem find themselves enemies over a legal dispute that leaves the former, Mr Tulliver, bankrupt. Maggie then is called home from her school. Tom returns home as well to support the family. On a business venture with Bob Jakin, Tom has amassed enough money to pay off Mr. Tulliver's debts to the family's surprise and relief. Maggie herself tries to help her family by being a governess. Several years later, Maggie returns to St. Ogg's to visit her cousin Lucy, who has taken in Mrs Tulliver. Lucy's betrothal with Stephen Guest is betrayed by Stephen for he then falls in love with Maggie. It is the start of her being unfortunate. Maggie refuses to marry Stephen and her reputation is ruined as well as her life when she is boating with Stephen. Maggie is treated in town as a fallen woman and a social outcast. Only a very limited group including Philip still show sympathy for her. Maggie vows to bear the burden of the pain she has caused others and must endure herself until death but wonders to herself how long this trial, her life, will be. At this moment, flood is coming; Maggie rescues Tom who is trapped in the house of Dorlcote Mill by using Jakins's boat. They then try to reach Lucy's house, unfortunately the boat is capsized by debris in the river, Maggie and Tom drown in each other's arm.

In this novel, George Eliot tries to expose part of her own life and to tell how her society's expectation toward women had tortured her. The

novel is the representation of the life of England society in 19th century, the turbulence of George Eliot's mind and the criticism toward her society, in which the main woman character, Maggie, who is bounded by traditional views, in some degree represents Eliot herself. As stated by Virginia Woolf in her essay that George Eliot disguises herself to all her heroines in her novel, however, she shows herself far more openly and completely in Maggie compared to her other heroines in her novels. Besides, her self consciousness is always marked when her heroines say what she herself would have said (Woolf, 1979: 157).

Different from Eliot's real life, Maggie decides to choose her duty to promise to treat Wakems as her life-long enemy and to stay away from a life of passionate love with Stephen for the sake of her family and position. As stated by Nurgiyantoro's statement in his *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*, "Pengarang dapat mengkreasi, memanipulasi, dan menyiasati berbagai masalah kehidupan yang dialami (baik secara nyata maupun tidak nyata) dan diamatinya menjadi berbagai kemungkinan kebenaran yang bersifat hakiki dan universal dalam karya fiksinya." (Nurgiyanto, 2005: 6).

Meanwhile, George Eliot preferred to free herself by living with the man she loved although she had to face the risk from it by being unable to get married and being scolded by the society for the man, G. H. Lewes, had had a child from another woman. In this novel, Eliot also wanted to show the impact of the public norms on women. As obviously seen that the

main women suffering, represented by Maggie, from the beginning to the end of the story, was caused by the norms itself.

*The Mill on the Floss* is in part a complaint against the limitation imposed on women by nineteenth-century society using Maggie as a representative of yearning and frustrated womanhood, and it is a portrayal of the English rural and provincial society in that century. The novel is the expression of soul struggle which exposed the conflict between inward impulse and outward social fact, duty and conscience, necessity and desire. It is intended not only to entertain, but also to inform, to give the reader some of the results of George Eliot's observations of people and their interactions (Jones, 1995: x).

The researcher is interested to analyze the turbulence of George Eliot's mind in facing social norms of her society by using biography, women psychology, feminism and sociology theories, for the characterization of *Magie Tulliver* is evidently in some respects based on Eliot's herself.

## **B. Scope of Study**

In this research, the researcher will analyze the turbulence of George Eliot's mind in facing social norms in her society, as found in *The Mill on the Floss*.

## **C. Research Question**

The researcher formulates one research question as follows: “How does George Eliot express the turbulence of her mind in facing social norms in her society, as found in *The Mill on the Floss*?”

#### **D. Research Objective**

The objective of research is to answer the research question proposed previously. That is to describe the turbulence of George Eliot’s mind in facing social norms in her society, as found in *The Mill on the Floss*.

#### **E. Research Benefits**

The research is expected to provide the following benefits. They are:

1. It enables the readers to comprehend more easily about George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*.
2. The analysis provides knowledge and information about the turbulence of George Eliot’s mind in facing social norms in her society, as found in *The Mill on the Floss*.

#### **F. Approach**

In this research, the researcher applies four approaches. They are biographical, psychological, feminism, sociological and structural approaches.

Biographical approach applied in the research is the criticism of women biography, as the analysis is intended to compare the writer’s

biography with her work. It is necessary to know about the writer's life and times and the life and times of the characters in the work in order to truly understand the writer's work.

Psychological approach taken in this research is woman psychology, as the analysis is intended to reveal the turbulence of the writer's mind. Woman psychology theory is needed to study the writer's feeling and soul, as the writer is a woman, which both directly and indirectly influences her work.

While feminism approach taken is gynocritic proposed by Elaine Showalter. As stated previously that stereotypes embedded on woman had made them have inferior status in the society. That is why gynocritic is needed to cover the vision and mission of the writer. As stated by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their book *Theory of Literature* that literature is propaganda and the writer is not the discoverer but the persuasive purveyor of the truth (Wellek and Warren, 1956: 35). The writer seeks to change the power relations between men and women, for the writer, as a woman, experienced herself the hard life she had passed by. Through one of the writer's women characters, the writer wanted to show that women are not that weak.

Furthermore, literary work is the product of the writer's imagination which represents life. Life is a social reality (Wellek and Warren, 1956: 35). Therefore sociological approach is needed to cover the social historical background of both the novel and the writer which are

necessary for the understanding of the turbulence of the writer's mind in facing the norms of her society. As stated by Guerin that a work of art can be studied from a sociological point of view if there is effect of society on individuals (Guerin, 1979: 273).

Structural approach is taken as in analyzing a novel, the researcher must study the work structurally as a way to analyze the work as a whole. As stated by A Teeuw in his book *Sastra dan Ilmu Sastra*, "Analisis struktural bertujuan untuk membongkar dan memaparkan secermat, seteliti, semenditel dan mendalam mungkin keterkaitan dan keterjalinan semua anasir dan aspek karya sastra yang bersama-sama menghasilkan makna menyeluruh" (Teeuw, 1984: 135).

## **G. Research Methodology**

It deals with what the researcher will do procedurally in this research to find out the answer and the solution to the research question. The researcher has chosen methods which are considered suitable with the study object to be analyzed. It will be discussed as follows:

### **1. The Type of Research**

The researcher applies the library research technique because the research uses books and other writings to support the subject matter of the research as the materials. The research is also arranged in the form of descriptive qualitative method which does not include any enumeration. This research is included into literary discussion since it

takes work of literature as the object of the study. Moreover the research will be conducted by means of collecting data, analyzing data and drawing conclusion.

## **2. Data and Source of Data**

The data employed in this research are classified into two groups. The first is the main data and the second is the supporting data. The main data is taken from the novel *The Mill on the Floss* published by Wordsworth Classic, 1995, which is assumed to have close relationship with the turbulence of George Eliot's mind in facing the norms of her society.

The data may consist of the sequence of events, the dialogue between or among the characters, ideas, way of thinking, attitudes, and the whole narration in the novel, which is related to the research question.

Supporting data is other information that support the main data to find the answer to the research question. The data are obtained from other sources like criticism, essays, the author's biography, theory of literature and other information, which are relevant to this novel and able to help find the turbulence of George Eliot's mind in facing the norms of her society.

## **3. Technique of Collecting Data**

In collecting data, the researcher conducts some steps. Firstly, the source of data is read carefully and repeatedly. Then some

important information such as words, dialogues, statements, etc as the data which are relevant to the research question will be quoted and classified in accordance with its importance. The same thing is also done similarly for the supporting data resources.

#### **H. Structure of the Research**

The structure of the research will be arranged as follows.

Chapter I is Introduction. This chapter consists of background of the research, limitation of the problem, research question, objective of the research, significance of the research, methodology of the research, method of research and structure of the research.

Chapter II is literature review. This chapter consists of Women Psychology, Feminist Literary Criticism, Sociology of Literature, Structure of the Novel, George Eliot's Life and Her Literary Career, Women in Nineteenth Century England and Industrial Revolution.

Chapter III is analysis. This chapter contains the analysis of the data by employing the theory and approach, in order to answer the research objective, that is to describe the turbulence of George Eliot's mind in facing the social norms in her society.

Chapter IV is conclusion and recommendation. The researcher will conclude the analysis of the data and give recommendation to the readers.

