TREATMENT OF CHILD FIGURES IN SELECTED NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

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To My Beloved Family and Friends

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the treatment of child figures in nineteenth-century England with a view towards understanding the internal dynamics of the presence of these figures in selected novels written by George Eliot. By looking into the development of the child figures, I would attempt to chart the progress made by the novelist concerning gender issues during Victorian times. It is my belief that in Eliot's novels, the child embodies certain virtues that persevere in a rigid patriarchal society. The child figures characterized in Eliot's novels reveal a tradition that endorsed conflicts between the genders. Though Eliot managed to rise above a restrictive society and earn for herself success in a career dominated by men writers such as Charles Dickens, she was upset with the lot of women who had to accept their existence living a mediocre life due to gender discriminations from the early years of their lives. She laments over the issue of gender discrimination that divides children into masculine and feminine types and condemns them to a one-sided existence from young. Eliot believes that a revamp of the existing education system would greatly benefit children to re-think issues concerning equality. In their quest for identity, children should recognize their latent talents and potentials.

Eliot has also taken a lot of pains to map out the psychological path travelled by her characters as they confront issues that hurt her from childhood and continued to haunt her in her adolescence and later adulthood. The figures in her novels wrestle with their

inner selves as they try to please their parents and at the same time try to stay true to their selfhood. The novelist has shown greater emphasis on girls as she expounds her heroines' dilemma realistically as they come to odds with society's expectations. At times, she allows her heroines to rebel against certain constraints as she was forced to do so in order to reach her goals. This we see too through glimpses of autobiographical realities in the author's works.

The novelist has also shown disillusionment with the society's treatment of children on its march towards modernization and she has attempted to persuade the readers to believe in allowing the children to grow in a more conducive and less gendered environment. George Eliot shows the importance of a rich and imaginative environment to enable the future generation to possess an extended vision of life. This vision would include a more sensitive human who is in touch with his/her masculine and feminine sides and who would not be hesitant to connect with his/her emotions for a more meaningful existence on earth. This new vision that Eliot foresees is one that includes a harmonious relationship with nature. In demonstrating these aspects, I would keep my scope to only certain child figures in selected novels of George Eliot namely The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner.

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini akan mengkaji layanan terhadap kanak-kanak dalam abad ke sembilan-belas di England dengan tujuan memahami perkembangan watak dalaman kanak-kanak tersebut yang berkaitan dengan hal-hal jantina pada zaman Victoria. Untuk kajian ini, saya akan hanya menumpukan kepada beberapa novel yang ditulis oleh George Eliot. Pada fahaman saya, terdapat watak kanak-kanak dalam novel Eliot yang mengandungi beberapa unsur diskriminasi dan penindasan oleh masyarakat patriaki pada zaman itu. Perwatakan kanak-kanak ini menunjukkan bahawa munculnya konflik kerana masyarakat patriaki mendiskriminasikan jantina wanita.

Hidup Eliot juga boleh digambarkan sebagai satu pergelutan. Beliau menggunakan aspek-aspek dari zaman kanak-kanak sendiri untuk mewujudkan satu realisme dalam perwatakan kanak-kanak dalam novel-novelnya. Beliau mengesyorkan kepada golongan wanita pada zaman Victoria bahawa mereka boleh mengatasi penindasan dan diskriminasi dalam keluarga dan masyarakat dan menceburi pelbagai bidang jika mereka mempunyai kesedaran tentang potensi yang ada pada diri mereka. Beliau sendiri dapat menulis beberapa novel yang dapat mengagumkan penulis-penulis terkenal seperti Charles Dickens. Beliau pasti jika beliau boleh, wanita yang lain boleh juga.

Dalam perkembangan kanak-kanak, George Eliot ingin menunjukkan bahawa setiap kanak-kanak dapat mencapai kecemerlangan jika dia dididik dan diasuh dengan saksama. Dengan ini, Eliot ingin memberi kesedaran kepada sesuatu komuniti untuk melayan kanak-kanaknya seperti mutiara yang bernilai kerana mereka adalah harapan masa depan.

Jika mereka ditindas dari kecil, daya kreativiti mereka akan hilang dan aspirasi negara tidak akan tercapai. Satu masyarakat yamg berjiwa besar dan berwawasan akan menganggap generasi muda sebagai sama rata tanpa mengira perempuan atau lelaki.

George Eliot telah menunjukkan bahawa dalam arus perubahan kerana industrialisme, masyarakat beliau sudah mula mengejar kebendaan dan sudah lupa mendidik insan-insan muda dengan nilai-nilai murni. Seorang kanak-kanak perlu mengetahui tentang penderitaan seorang insan lain dan juga perlu berkaitan rapat dengan alam semulajadi. Baru kanak-kanak ini dapat membesar dengan sempurna dan dapat berkhidmat untuk masyarakat dengan optimum.

Selain daripada pendidikan, Eliot berpendapat masyarakatnya perlu menerima hakikat bahawa seorang perempuan sama nilai dengan seorang lelaki dan kehadiran wanita juga sangat diperlukan. Dengan menyentuh kepada teori Darwin yang menyatakan bahawa setiap spesis bergantung kepada spesis lain untuk hidup, Eliot menunjukkan sebagaimana kanak-kanak bergantung kepada orang dewasa, orang dewasa juga bergantung kepada anak-anak mereka. Untuk hidup berharmonis, segala konflik rumahtangga harus diatasi dan kanak-kanak perlu dididik dengan baik, dengan penuh hormat pada keistemewaan yang ada pada setiap individu. Untuk menunjukkan aspek-aspek yang disenaraikan di atas, saya akan menunpukan hanya kepada beberapa watak kanak-kanak dalam novel-novel The Mill on the Floss dan Silas Marner.