

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Literature has a very close relation with human life. It reflects what really happen in the real life. So it is no doubt to find out various kinds of problem taking place in our daily life and the emotional sense on individual in literary works. Literary texts are assumed to be ideological in the sense that they cannot give us a knowledge of the social formation; but they do give us something of equal importance in analyzing culture, an imaginary representation of real relations (Eagleton and Milne 329). Therefore, literary works represent real life of it. There are many authors who cover their conditional surroundings into their works. Thus there must be found a very close relation between one literary work and the era when it is made.

Every literary work covers its own historical and sociological background based on its period. One period that cannot be neglected is Victorian period as one period of literature development. Victoria's long reign saw a growth in literature, especially in fiction. Many Victorians allowed their understanding to be led by thinkers, poets, even novelists. It was an age both exhilarated and bewildered by growing wealth and power, the pace of industrial and social change, and by scientific discovery. After the middle of the reign, confidence began to fade; its last two decades took on a different atmosphere, and literature developed various

specialist forms - aestheticism, professional entertainment, disenchanted social concern (Alexander 247).

The Victorian period marks the beginning of change of feminist activists (Lee). Many women started to be aware of their right much bravely. It can be proven by the existence of women writers who tried to bring all the issues around women and their sufferings such as gender inequality and oppression through literature. In comparing with any other kinds of literature such as poetry, play, essay, prose and short story, the writer argues that novel seems as the most interesting one to analyze. All novels are representations in fictional narrative of life or experience, but the form is itself as variable as life and experience themselves have proved to be. Serious fiction deals with human beings in significant action in the world. The world which appears to be a significant stage for such action varies greatly from author to author (Holman 299). Some novels written by women authors in this era explore more about women condition in their social life. So, this kind of struggle done by some female authors finally invites other women to be critical more of their woman's right.

In this period, there were Bronte sisters who were very popular of their literary works: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte. Unlike her two sisters who were well-known earlier of their novels, Anne Bronte finally proved that she herself was also able to make an agreeable novel like her two sisters. Her first novel was successfully finished and published in 1847, entitled *Agnes Grey*.

This novel showed that Anne Bronte was one of woman authors who were aware of a notable issue around women in that era. It tells about a woman who trains and teaches children in their own home, called a governess. Governess was a woman's profession in Victorian era which was distinguishable from other jobs. What made governess became an extraordinary profession was rooted from the customs in Victorian England that the proper sphere for a woman was within her home (Kalafutova 2). It was not acceptable for a woman to work or to have other kinds of activities outside the house. An ideal lady was devoted exclusively to her family sphere, and was supported by her husband or when a woman was not married yet, so her father was a man who was expected to support her financially. Moreover, the women were forbidden from a paid employment (Peterson 6). Nonetheless, if a woman happened to be unmarried and her family was not able enough to support her, she was forced to earn her own living.

Unfortunately, because of that social mores of the Victorian era stated earlier, it came to be difficult for woman to find a job which would not degrade her as Ginder said that women could not take on any job. Jobs such as those in business and banking belonged to men, and only those women of the lower and working classes would be found in the factories and the fields (5-6). However, for women of middle class, with the need or desire to work just was given narrow professional area which would not endanger the family's middle-class status. So then what became the only suitable occupation for middle-class women was the governess profession. It was observed that as a rule, single women who had to earn their keep overwhelmingly preferred to be employed as a governess

because it involved the least injury to social standing (Goreau 41). Holcombe offered an explanation regarding the reason why the governess profession was acceptable for the Victorian lady who was forced to work for a living:

“By devoting herself to the care and education of children, even for hire, a lady could fill the role for which nature had intended her; and by living at home and going out into other homes as a daily governess, or by working as a resident governess in a girls’ boarding school or in her employers’ household, she would still enjoy that sheltering abode deemed to be her proper sphere”. (12)

In other words, being a governess made a woman still belonged to her proper sphere. She was still within the home and coincided with woman traditionally feminine task; teaching children. Therefore there was no hazardous impact on her middle-class status although they had entered employment.

On the other hand, what came to the facts of governess life was not as smooth as imagined. The situation of governesses was really painful. The employer regarded her to be too low for the family but too high for the servants. She was recognized unequal in status although being in one home. She was disrespected by the employer even the children. She was isolated, yet had no privacy, and was almost universally despised. She was often oppressed like she had to work all day. There were no clear boundaries of tasks with low payment. She often shared a bedroom with the children and took care of their baths and meals as well as their lessons, yet was discouraged from being affectionate to them; in odd moments she did family mending. When her services were no longer needed, she was out of work and home without a pension (Perkin164).

Becoming conscious of this phenomenon, Anne Bronte took this matter to be the topic of her first novel, *Agnes Grey*.

*Agnes Grey* tells a story of a clergyman's daughter who decided to earn her own living as a governess in order to help the financial state of her family which gets into the ruin because of the unlucky fate of her father in his business. Being the youngest one in her family makes her father, mother, and sister cannot easily send her to be a governess and lives so far from home. Nevertheless, Agnes Grey convinces them of her ability so that finally she goes away. Her first experience in Bloomfield family does not run well and it is ended by her firing. However she does not give up. She is then hired by another family. Unfortunately, in Murray family she is again treated poorly. This story describes enormous pressures that the governess's life involved, the frustration, isolation, and cruel treatment on the part of employers and members of their families.

The story seems so natural since *Agnes Grey* is partly based on her real own experience. Although *Agnes Grey* is considered a work of fiction, Anne incorporated many of her own life experiences within the novel. Anne drew a truthful and descriptive portrait of a governess woman and was able to do so because she was once a governess herself ("Anne Bronte"). Much like the main character Agnes, Anne Bronte worked as governess for two families. In 1839 she worked for the Ingham family at Blake Hall, and in 1840 she worked for the Robinson family at Thorp Green Hall. Both of her stays were short as also seen in *Agnes Grey* under the Bloomfield and Murray families. Anne Bronte learned the harsh realities while working as a governess and was typically mistreated and

isolated. This type of mistreatment and isolation were main themes within *Agnes Grey* (Noss).

Therefore, the way Anne Bronte described the difficulties that Agnes has during her being of governess in a detail representation has been delivered so well to the readers so that we, as the readers, can really feel how hard and how she has to struggle a lot within her being of governess. It was in the early years of this century that the Irish novelist George Moore wrote his glowing report on Anne and her novels (Armitage), he described that *Agnes Grey* is “The most perfect prose narrative in English literature”. He continues that:

“*Agnes Grey* is a narrative simple and beautiful as a muslin dress. . . . The arrival of Agnes at the house of her employer (she is the new governess) opens the story, and the first sentences convince us that we are with a quick, witty mind, capable of appreciating all that she hears and sees; and when Agnes begins to tell us of her charges and their vulgar parents, we know that we are reading a masterpiece. Nothing short of genius could have set them before us so plainly and yet with restraint”.

However, that struggle of Agnes Grey looks interesting enough to discuss. *Agnes Grey*'s struggle does not easily come to an end. She is a portrait of a woman who never gives up. The arguments from others and even bad treatment cannot change her decision. How hard her aristocracy employers oppress her so badly but it does not make her give up easily. She decides herself what she has to do and then she keeps struggling along what she has decided before even though it is actually so hard for her.

By giving the literary background stated above, the writer is really interested with the novel and intends to analyze more deeply the woman struggle represented by the character of Agnes Grey in Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey*.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problems**

Based on the background of the study explained above, the writer is interested in analyzing the problems, which are formulated as follows:

1. What is the motive that leads Agnes Grey to be a governess?
2. How is Agnes Grey's struggle to face the oppression from her employers within her being of governess depicted in the novel?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

In accordance with the statement of the problem, this study has two objectives that can be stated as follows:

1. To explain the motive that leads Agnes Grey to be a governess.
2. To reveal the struggle of Agnes Grey to face the oppression from her employers within her being of governess depicted in the novel.

### **1.4 Scope and Limitation**

In order to prevent non-relevant problems, the study will be limited to the novel of *Agnes Grey*. The study then focuses on the characters and their characterizations represented in the novel. To answer statement of problem stated above, Agnes Grey character and her characterization becomes the most important

point to analyze. However, some other characters that Agnes interacts with will be also the object for analysis but the study will be limited to Agnes Grey's family and her employers. The scope of this study is upon the struggle of Agnes Grey; her struggle to be a governess that is firstly denied by her family and her struggle within her being of a governess that is often oppressed treated badly by her employers.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to be conducted due to both the theoretical and practical functions. Theoretically, the writer does hope that it enriches the readers' development of knowledge in the literary theory that is related to woman. Therefore, the readers are expected to comprehend more about it, especially for those who having interest in the study of woman throughout literature. Then practically, this study hopefully can give useful contribution for the readers in understanding the content of *Agnes Grey*, mainly concerning with critical analysis using theory related to woman for the approach. Moreover, the writer also intends to share spirit of woman struggle to all women so that women will not easily give up then. Also, the writer hopes that this research can be a helpful reference for other researchers who are interested in conducting further research.



## 1.6 Method of the Study

This research is library based. Therefore the writer makes good use of some books including the novel itself as the primary source, articles, journals, and online resources. In presenting the analysis, the writer mainly uses descriptive-analytical method. The research follows the following steps:

1. Reading the novel to get the complete and well understanding on the whole story.
2. Selecting and collecting the data in form of narration and conversation from the novel related to the problem.
3. Analyzing the data collected by firstly categorizing them into two points, dealing with the statement of problems. Then, each point is analyzed using Marxist feminism theory, which refers to the objectives of the study.
4. Making conclusion based on the result of data analysis.

## 1.7 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid any different perceptions between the writer and the readers in understanding the study, it is essential to give

some definition of key terms used in this study. Here are the key terms explained:

1. Struggle : An act of having to deal with difficult situation resolutely, especially with an adversary of superior power or to make violent efforts to escape from constraint.

2. **Governess** : A governess is a girl or woman employed to teach and train children in a private household. In contrast to a nanny (formerly called a nurse) or a babysitter, she concentrates on teaching children instead of meeting their physical needs and her charges are of school age rather than babies (“Governess”).
3. **Oppression** : Oppression is the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner. It can also be defined as an act or instance of oppressing, the state of being oppressed, and the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions or people, and anxiety (“Oppression”).
4. **Feminism** : A theory which is concerning with the social movement that seeks equal rights for women, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life patterns ( Encyclopedia Britannica 734).