

# **THE SHIFT OF MARY GRIFFITH'S AWARENESS TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY IN A FILM ENTITLED *PRAYERS FOR BOBBY***

By:

Sistiono Pambudi

pambution@yahoo.co.id

tion.maraadv@gmail.com

First Supervisor : Dr. Widyastuti Purbani, M.A.

Second Supervisor : Eko Rujito Dwi Atmojo, S.S., M. Hum.

Faculty of Languages and Arts

## **Abstract**

*The objectives of this research are to identify the reason why Mary shifts her awareness toward homosexuality, to analyze the process how Mary shifts her awareness, and to explain how the shift of Mary's awareness is portrayed in the movie analysis. The theory of post-structuralism, homosexuality, and film analysis are used by the researcher to answer these research questions. The result of this research shows that: (1) the reason why Mary shifts her awareness is because Mary experiences new understandings about homosexuality from the reverend and P-FLAG, (2) fanatical phase, the phase of gaining new understandings, and the phase of high tolerance are the process of the shift of Mary's awareness toward homosexuality. In these phases, the change of Mary's interpretation toward homosexuality is shown by the last phase, (3) mise-en-scene, cinematography, and narrative structure are the elements of film analysis which sharpen the shift of Mary's awareness toward homosexuality.*

Keywords: Shift of Awareness, Homosexuality, Film Analysis, *Prayers for Bobby*

## **INTRODUCTION**

People have different ways of life. Their personalities, belief, and environments are diverse and causing different ways in dealing with things

in their life. For instance, people may have different sexual orientation. According to Storms (1980: 279), sexual orientation refers to one's romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction to another person. As stated by Eliason (2010: 5), a person is called as a heterosexual when he or she has a feeling to a person of the opposite sex. Most people are heterosexuals and they are considered as normal. Meanwhile, a person who has a feeling to another person with the same sex is claimed to have a homosexual orientation and is called „gay“ for man and „lesbian“ for woman. Homosexuals are not similar to heterosexuals. They are seen as abnormal. As a result, homosexuals are often treated differently by people around them. Even, there are several unfair treatments toward homosexuals including discrimination and stigmatization. Most unfair treatments happen because of the lack of communication, the lack of knowledge, and the different perspective in particular culture's belief.

Actually people can treat homosexuals equally as heterosexuals if they have enough knowledge and can handle their perspective appropriately. It is also possible that people can shift their awareness after they know the condition of homosexuals. The awareness emerges if people understand that homosexuality should be a matter of an individual choice. The individual choice should cover how a person will achieve his or her life, including the right to choose his or her sexual orientation. Based on those statements, people will question their previous knowledge and perspective toward homosexuality stating that homosexuals are abnormal. To be homosexual is a fundamental right for everyone that should be respected and cannot be harmed with any reasons. The shift of awareness is also experienced by Mary Griffith in a film entitled *Prayers for Bobby* (2009). Mary Griffith is a mother of the main character, Bobby. She is fanatical with her belief and has less understanding about homosexuality.

Hence, she rejects her son's choice to be a homosexual and controls him.

This research focuses on the shift of Mary's awareness toward homosexuality in *Prayers for Bobby* by understanding the reason of the shift of Mary's awareness, how Mary shifts her awareness, and how film analysis presents the shift of awareness. That is why the theory of post-structuralism, homosexuality, and movie analysis is applied.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was qualitative research with content analysis. The data were collected from *Prayers for Bobby* by watching the film, rewriting the dialogue and capturing the picture each scene, and categorizing the data based on research questions. In analyzing the data, the data collected were classified into a table which contained picture or dialogue, minute, category, and meaning. In order to get trustworthiness of the data, this research was finished by investigator triangulation which employed two students of English Literature to check the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. The Reason of the Shift of Mary's Awareness toward Homosexuality

The new understandings are the reasons why Mary changes her perspective about homosexuality. Because of the new understanding, Mary gets new knowledge to treat homosexuals. In addition, she learns from other parents who also have homosexual children in a community, called P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). P-FLAG gives a chance to the parents to share their experiences when their children come out with their sexual orientation in the first time. It really shocks them, but they can love their children as who they are. Eventhough, the parents know that their children are homosexuals, it does not mean that they should treat them differently. That is why Mary shifts her awareness toward homosexuals.

Mary finds the new understanding about homosexuality after she is shocked by Bobby's death. Mary decides to visit the

reverend and looks for the more explanations about his son in afterlife. She needs an answer whether God accepts Bobby with his decision or not. In the scene, the reverend explains more about how Mary's belief sees homosexuality that God treats all human beings equally. It is different from Mary's treatments toward Bobby. Based on the reverend's explanations, Mary begins to understand what her fault is. Furthermore, the reverend suggests her to visit P-FLAG because it will help Mary to find the answers from her questions. The reverend states that Mary will get the impressive things there.

There are many impressive things in P-FLAG. These impressive things make Mary imagine her fault toward Bobby. First, P-FLAG gives a space for all people in order to share their experiences about their homosexual children, so that all parents have chance to tell and to argue about homosexuality. The parents can tell the process how they accept their children as homosexuals. They are the stories that Mary never listened before. Second, P-FLAG

saves the gays' right as human beings. It is shown by the P-FLAG's campaign to support the gays' right and the image of homosexuals in the society.

Through the sharing moment, Mary learns that each mother's statement is a hope for every child. Her statement supports and stimulates children's emotions to express their feelings. In addition, a mother's support will build positive thinking although they are homosexuals. It is different from Mary's statements toward Bobby. Mary does not show appropriate statements to Bobby in order to solve his problem. Mary only thinks herself without doing personal approach to help Bobby. When Bobby was alive, Mary only thought the reaction of the people if they knew Bobby was a gay. It is so ironic because she does not show deep emotion to care her son whosoever he is. Even, she has closed her mind to find the more understandings about homosexuality beyond her belief. It is also the reason why she never treats homosexuals equally.

## B. The Process of the Shift of Mary's Awareness

### 1. Fanatical Phase

Fanatical phase is the first step of Mary's personal experiences toward homosexuality. Mary is a figure with a high fanaticism. It happens because she believes in the doctrine of her belief so much. As a result, she becomes a protective mother toward her child's decision. For example, she has less permissive behavior to Bobby's sexual orientation. Mary's fanaticism also affects Bobby's social intercourse and psychology such as his mom's prohibition to have homosexual friends and his tragic death. Thus, the fanatical phase is the condition when she treats homosexuals unfairly.

There are many scenes and dialogues which represent Mary's high fanaticism in the movie. For example, in the scene when Mary states that Bobby is a sinner if he decides to be a homosexual. It is represented by Mary's statement toward her husband. She judges homosexuality in the perspective of her belief. It is an abomination.

Mary's statement indicates that Mary really closes her mind to understand other reasons and factors about homosexuality. It is because Mary does not let him to explain why he decides to be a homosexual. In addition, Mary only focuses on her fear if Bobby becomes a homosexual. That is why Mary always closes herself to find the understanding about homosexuality from other people such as parents in P-FLAG.

### 2. The Phase of Gaining New Understandings

The impact of the new understandings is very significant to Mary. For example, Mary has less fanaticism after she gets many explanations from the reverend. It starts when she visits the reverend and he explains logically about how God treats homosexuals. He states that God loves homosexuals as the ways they are since an abomination toward them does not mean a sin but unclean. Based on the reverend's explanations, finally she wants to decrease her ambition to blame homosexuals.

The new understandings change Mary's interpretation toward homosexuals, although she does not totally agree with the reverend's explanations before. The reverend tries to inform her with many examples and cases about how her belief treats homosexuality. It indicates that knowledge has a big role to Mary's interpretation. Hence, Mary can reestablish her knowledge about homosexuality and her belief's doctrine. Then, the reverend suggests her to visit P-FLAG because this forum will give her the more understandings about homosexuals. It shows that the new understandings are so beneficial in the shift of Mary's awareness.

In P-FLAG, Mary listens to the parents' stories about their personal experiences toward their gay sons. Mary is shocked by the understandings and the attitudes of parents whose sons are gay. Disappointedly, she contemplates her fault to Bobby. Because of the new understandings from P-FLAG, Mary becomes tolerant toward homosexuality issue. It is shown by her permissive attitudes toward

homosexuality. She opens her mind to get the more understandings from other people.

### 3. The Phase of High Tolerance

After Mary finds many understandings about homosexuality from educated people such as the reverend and parents in P-FLAG, she shows high tolerance toward homosexuality. It begins through her enthusiasm to be part of the P-FLAG member. Then, she supports P-FLAG to help homosexuals' rights. For example, in the scene when Mary and some parents from P-FLAG come to the court. Then, they sit as the supporters of homosexuals. It indicates that Mary is already in the side of homosexuals. She really changes her interpretation toward homosexuals, although there are some people who are resistant about P-FLAG's action.

Mary's efforts to support homosexuals make her family impressed. Also, Mary surprises all people in the court because she shares about her personal experiences toward homosexuality in the podium. She begins the stories

about homosexuality when she has high fanaticism against it. She also explains her fanaticism against Bobby as a homosexual and the impact of unfair treatments to homosexuals. Even, she closes her speech amazingly. She says that Bobby's death is the result of parents' ignorance and fear of homosexuality. Basically, her statement emphasizes the parents' egoism that she experiences. Based on her statements, she shows that the problem of homosexuality is the parents not children, but the parents will understand their fault after they get the impact of their egoism. Thus, Mary clarifies wrong perception about homosexuality in the society.

### C. The Shift of Mary's Awareness Portrayed in the Movie

The shift of Mary's awareness portrayed in the movie is analyzed based on the techniques proposed by Paratista (2008) and Sikov (2009).

#### 1. Mise-en-scene

The technique of mise-en-scene is so useful to describe the process of the shift of Mary's

awareness in *Prayers for Bobby*. The process is described specifically by the technique of camera angle, and costume and make up. These techniques will help the audiences to see Mary's expressions, feelings, and mood. Thus, the audiences can get the meaning and values through each scene portrayed the process of the shift of Mary's awareness.

The camera angle technique in this film shows Mary's fanatical phase to her belief against homosexuality. In an example, the camera angle describes the scene of Mary's fanaticism in judging Bobby's friends when his friends come to his house. In this scene, Mary expresses her anger arrogantly by standing in front of Bobby. She judges Bobby and his friends because they do not obey what her belief states. The camera angle supports the emotion of Mary when her anger rises. The technique of camera is low-angle-shot which takes the Mary's picture from the low position. Based on this technique, the audiences can feel her anger and get the meaning of each Mary's gesture toward Bobby.

Furthermore, the technique of costume and make up also affects Mary's fanaticism against homosexuality. It can be seen through the scenes in the film when the cameraman shows Mary's make up and costume which represent her madness and rejection to Bobby's decision. For example, in the scene when she rejects Bobby to be a homosexual. In this scene, Mary uses natural make up which seems egoistic face. Moreover, her cloth is well-matched with her feelings and conditions. In this scene, Mary uses a standard cloth which does not represent her cheerful mood. By wearing a standard cloth, it indicates that Mary has high fanaticism because her cloth commonly represents a mother who has flat life and is easy to obey the rule. Therefore, the audiences understand that she has less permissive toward uncommon thing such as homosexuality.

## 2. Cinematography

To understand more about the shift of Mary's awareness portrayed in *Prayers for Bobby*,

cinematography is also useful to perform Mary's phase of gaining new understandings which consists of lighting and framing technique.

The phase of gaining new understandings begins in the scene when she finally accepts the reverend's suggestions about homosexuality. In this scene, the lighting technique reveals Mary's expressions which are full of disappointments. It can be seen through how the light irradiates her mimic and eyes till the audiences can see her tears. By irradiating Mary's facial expression, it means that Mary already finds her faults toward Bobby. Also, the audiences can feel her mood because the combination of lighting's colors supports her expressions.

Meanwhile, the limitation of the actor's pictures in a frame is a good technique to show moods, feelings, and meanings. The term is usually called framing. Hence, framing is the appropriate technique to reveal the shift of Mary's awareness in phase of gaining new understandings. Through the framing technique, the audiences can

understand Mary's expressions well. Her expressions can be sad, mad, or happy. That is why this technique is so helpful to audiences.

The framing technique also focuses on detail of the object. The detail of the object can be seen from the technique of zoom in and zoom out. Based on the zoom in and zoom out technique, a cameraman limits Mary's pictures which are suitable with her feelings and moods when she gains the new understandings about homosexuality from the educated persons such as the reverend.

### 3. Sound

Sound is the important aspect in a theater or a film. Besides creating a harmony, sound also makes the scenes and characterizations have a soul. Even, sound can be a sign of actor's emotion. It can be seen through back sound or the dialogues which are uttered by the actor, so that sound has a significant role to make the actors live.

In this section, a sound technique will support the shift of

Mary's awareness in the phase of high tolerance. By applying the sound technique, hopefully Mary's tolerance is informed clearly to the audiences. As a result, they understand that the new understandings have changed Mary's interpretations to treat homosexuals fairly. In addition, the audiences can feel what Mary feels through sound. It is because the music scoring can share the nuance which happens in the film. For example, in the scene when audiences can find good back sound in the scene when Mary confesses her fault to the reverend. The audiences can feel her sadness and disappointment through the amazing music scoring in the scene. It indicates that the music scoring can create touchy atmosphere of Mary's sadness.

### 4. Narrative Structure

The function of character, desire, and conflict aspect is to reveal Mary's tolerance specifically, so that her change is represented well. The scene begins through the scene of her character that wants to support equal treatments for homosexuals. Then, it

is followed by the scene which shows her desire to join the P-FLAG's action. Unfortunately, her fight is resisted by the people who oppose homosexuality.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are three results of this research. The first is that Mary shifts her awareness about homosexuality because of some new understandings. The new understandings are gained after she visits the reverend and he suggests her to visit P-FLAG. Second, the process of the shift of Mary's awareness is described through fanatical phase, phase of gaining new understandings, and phase of high tolerance. Then, the significant change of Mary's interpretation toward homosexuality is shown by the last phase. The last result is that through *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, sound and narrative structure, audiences can understand the reason why she shifts her awareness toward homosexuality.

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