



## TRAGIC ELEMENT IN *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*

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Article Received:07/01/2021

Article Accepted: 13/02/2021

Published online:20/02/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.1.122](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.1.122)

### Abstract

George Eliot's 'The Mill on the Floss' is chiefly the story of Maggie and Tom. It contains a comprehensive, elaborate and remarkably realistic picture of the English rural life in the beginning of the Victorian Era. George Eliot is at Pains to acquaint us with the background, the tradition and the heritage of the families she is dealing with in the novel. The life of The Tullivers and the Dodsons is not lofty, it is dull & sordid as families have conventional habits and worldly notions. Maggie is the center of action and the story is mainly concerned with her life & sufferings. The relation of Tom & Mr Tulliver are described at great length. George Eliot devotes Considerable space to the relations between Tom and Maggie. She loves Tom but never gets his love. Tom is rather harsh to her and his indifference makes Maggie very miserable. In Edward Albert's views: "George Eliot shows her serious concern with the problems of the human personality and its relationship with forces outside itself in "The Mill On The Floss". This paper depicts how George Eliot represents the inner struggle of a soul and reveals the motives of the character of this novel and how she goes deep to elaborate the spiritual conflicts & moral disorders which begin about the ruin and downfall of Tom and Maggie.

**Key words:** Psychological realism, domestic, conflicts and impetuous.

### Introduction

George Eliot was a prominent writer of the Victorian Era, she presents Domestic and Psychological realism in her novels by discussing motives, impulses and hereditary influences governing human actions. "The Mill On The Floss" is the happy union of knowledge with sympathy and understanding to reveal some of the real differences between people. "The Mill On The Floss" can be rightly called an artistic study of domestic realism with each and every problem of domestic life, where Maggie not only dominates the central thematic stream of the novel, but also constitutes the domestic autobiography of the novelist. Maggie stands as a rallying point for both the terminal and

exit for all the characters and tragic events in the novel.

In the novel wherein Maggie Tulliver is presented as a raw wayward and self-righteous girl obliged to live a life at first very narrow but then at once highly regulated and altruistic. Her life can be also seen as a parable of "the contrast between the world's values and the inner reality". Maggie's progress can be seen in diagrammatic form and one can notice that her character enfolds such dominant traits as love renunciation, reckless dreaminess and impulsiveness. These are almost the self-contradictory attributes of her personality which fairly indicates that her early stages had not definitely formed consciousness and her efforts

through all her life were consciously or unconsciously directed at finding a shape for her presumptions. Through a minute analysis of her motives, the springs of action, we are made to realize that knowingly she has done no wrong, because She is pure and generous. But she has to pay and suffer for she has failed to resist temptation. Her generous soul hungers for love, absolute love, which she fails to get from Tom. She is a sensitive soul caught in a web of circumstances partly of her own making, and partly beyond her control. And when the end comes, it finds her in the midst of tempest and destruction as a reconciliation and peace. The result is suffering, tragedy and ultimate death.

Maggie Tulliver was born in such an environment that she suffered intensely and ultimately died a tragic death. However, she was comparatively happy as a child. She adores her brother Tom and in his company she passes some of the happiest days of her life. But the situation gets miserable for her when Tom gets angry with her and rebukes or refuses to play with her. Maggie is sensitive and emotional and there are such moments of misery when she expresses her anger by beating a doll which she keeps in her room. There are several examples of Maggie's emotional and impulsive actions which are given by the novelist. One of the examples of those impulsive actions is when, one day Tom refuses to play with Maggie but starts playing with their cousin Lucy. In jealousy Maggie pushes Lucy in mud. Then frightened from Tom she runs away to a gypsy camp in the neighbourhood. Who are similar to her: "Maggie's thought and her misery had reached a pitch at which gypsy dam was her only refuge". The neighbours are kind to her and by night she returns home. Neglected by her brother Tom, poor Maggie also suffers from the taunts and rebukes of her three uncles and aunts- the Gleggs, the Pullets, the Deans- and her own mother too. Whenever someone rebukes her. It is only Mr.Tulliver , her father who takes her side and is sympathetic towards her.

Eliot portrays Maggie's character in a complex manner. Maggie's relationship with Phillip is made up of renunciation as well as indulgence. At each step straightforwardly Maggie says , most confidently " I have made up my mind". She is shown

very quietly as moving back on her true nature behind each detail of apparent change. Her love with Phillip is overwhelmed with carving instead of devotion. In reverence to Maggie's first stage of rouse, it is apparent that in the wake of the crisis of her father's bankruptcy and prostrating illness she was faced with utter confusion. Then Maggie's nature comes to be further revealed in the context of her forming and breaking of an amorous relation with Stephen Guest. When Stephen Guest fraudulently takes Maggie out for boating and on reaching Mudport made an impetuous matrimonial proposal. Before this Maggie might be cherishing some secret passion for Stephen but at his proposal her conscience recoiled in sorrowful disdain, because the acceptance of the proposal meant depriving two person- Lucy Dean, Stephen's virtual betrothed and Philip Wakem, her own lover. Therefore, Maggie finally decided to refuse the proposal putting forward the reason:

"I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery"

Only Maggie cannot be blamed for frailty because her encounter with Stephen only came as one in the long series of her past experiences. Critics have been almost unanimous in their condemnation of Maggie's allowing Stephen to take her to Mudport. But they do not seem to take into account the basic fact that she was prone to reckless and dreamy behavior right from her earliest childhood. She is always impulsive and unpredictable. Like Hetty Sorrel, the heroine of 'Adam Bede', Maggie is 'a poor wandering Lamb'. She is the same Maggie who one day in her jealousy pushed Lucy into mud after showing temper against Tom who preferred Lucy, she was the same impetuous Maggie who persuaded Tom to cut off her hair, the same who dropped her piece of cake on the floor at Garum Firs and who then immediately made her brother spill his cowslip wine by impulsively putting her arm around his neck. Her dreamy nature is traceable to her starving Tom's rabbits to death and recollecting that Tom had entrusted her with their care only after returning from his boarding school. Even at this Maggie pleaded innocence and Tom, before excusing her, traced her past highlighting the naughty dreaminess embedded in her character:

“but you’re a naughty girl. Lost holidays you licked the paint off my lozenge-box, the holidays before that you let the boat dray my fish-line down where I’d set you to watch it, and you pushed your head through my kite, all for nothing.”

Maggie had barely any faith in outward drama because she always believed in the truth of feeling. She believed in obeying the divine voices within us-for the sake of being true. This side of Maggie’s character came out when Stephen pleaded his love for her emphasizing that their past relations could not annul their present bliss and Maggie refuted his assertion pointing out the significance of intentions:

“Dear ,dear Stephen , let me go!- don’t drag me into deeper remorse. My whole soul has never consented it does not consent now.”

In the novel, her final decision in the novel to rush to rescue her brother from the devastating flood is very heart touching. It shows how emotionally connected she is with his brother Tom. As she realized that the river Floss was in spate, she at once moved to save her brother. And this decision of Maggie plunges her into action which is the revival of her past. She shows her deep love for her brother and the importance of which in terms of growth is emphasized by Eliot:

“everyone of those keen moments has left its trace, and lives in us still, but such traces have blent themselves irrevocably with the firmer texture of our youth and manhood.”

When there was a crisis in her brother’s life she rushed, in her habitual self-disregarding way, to brave floods to save Tom and it comes to be proved that they could not be separated as they believed that “thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives.” It is during their last movement before their death that Tom realizes his mistake and gives her the affection which she has hungered for her life. Beginning in mere egoism and rebellion, Maggie moves on to incomplete realization and asceticism in breaking with Philip as there was family pressure but experience intensifies her vision clear and mature and she grows capable

of a deliberate act of renunciation with Stephen. Then, her rescue of Tom for that matter is a spontaneous moral action which is not preceded by any conflict. It is an undeniable proof of the continuity and growth of the basic traits of her nature.

It can be concluded that Maggie is noble, generous, and kind-hearted. But she suffers intensely and her suffering is heart-rending. The novelist has given us a peep into her suffering soul by a clever analysis of her mental process. George Eliot’s Psychological skill is visible in the portrayal of other characters also. Tom, Philip Stephen the Tullivers, the Gleggs, Riley and Dr. Kenn, are all pictures from Eliot’s gallery of characters whose minds have been skillfully analysed. George Eliot tried to do in novels what Browning did in poetry. Elizabeth Drew rightly said,

“George Eliot in the first to practise the deliberate exploration into the springs of human motives and human mistakes and into the inexorable continuity of cause and effect in human behaviour.”

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