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Maggie, an Anti-Romantic Character in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Durga Prasad Bhandari has completed his thesis entitled "Maggie, an Anti-Romantic Character in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2066/01/01 B.S. to 2067/03/06 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Maggie, an Anti-Romantic Character in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Durga Prasad Bhandari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is a realist novel that traces the development of Maggie Tulliver, a character who finds herself caught in a web of conflict with her family and community as a result of both circumstance and her unique and spirited disposition. The narrative casts Maggie as a tragic heroin as she struggles between impulse and duty to define herself as an individual as at one time she takes pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another she has no solution to resist a thing that she knows to be wrong. Maggie struggles herself to be a member of a society in which reputation, respectability, and tradition are paramount; values which shape many of the characters' actions throughout the novel, and which Maggie, in the eyes of her family and community, constantly fails to uphold. However, she cultivates spiritual aspect with under the guidance of Dr Kenn and the Thomas Kempis' book, *The Imitation of Christ*. This brings a turning point in her life and she achieves redemption as she gets drowned in the river. All this shows that Maggie is an anti-romantic and thus a realist and tragic character of the Victorian period

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Chapter I

George Eliot’s Art of Realism

Among different realistic writers of different genres, George Eliot can be described as a writer whose energizing principle of art was realism. So, Eliot's most important contribution to literature was in her treatment of realism. Avoiding the caricature fiction of Charles Dickens, Eliot perfected the genre of psychological realism, paving the way for the later work of the American novelist Henry James. Eliot understood that art should be near to life, valuing observed truths and creating a greater sense of sympathy in the reader by coherently and non-judgementally depicting the psychological motives of characters. Eliot's attention to character is mediated by a strong sense of historical and cultural climate. In “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton” George Eliot describes her concept of realism which is the portrayal of “the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones” (81). Certainly many of her characters of her novels are very ordinary people, such as Amos and Milly Barton, Janet Dempster, the Garths, and the Brookes. The degree of details with which she describes her characters and their daily activities makes them true to life. Eliot's understanding of human nature and her ability to infuse her characters with lifelike faults and foibles, to the extent that they are never fully good or fully evil, also contribute to making her novels realistic.

Another technique of realism that she uses is what Rosemarie Bodenheimer, calls the “scenic mode of presentation.” Through this means, Eliot uses the narrator to picture the scene before the reader's eyes in complete detail and then brings the scene to life when the characters begin to speak. It is as though a painting came to life, which, as Bodenheimer says, “calls attention to the novel as a fiction and yet manages to achieve a kind of intimate realism” (51). The scene to which she refers, in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love Story,” is drawn in full,

exquisite detail beginning close-up with the women, Tina and Lady Cheverel, on the lawn. Tina is painted with just the right number of brushstrokes: “large dark eyes,” “the absence of bloom on her young cheek,” the “little black lace kerchief” distinguishing the whiteness of her face and neck from the whiteness of her muslin dress, and the “small stature and slim figure [that] rest on the tiniest of full grown feet.” This is followed by an equally detailed description of Lady Cheverel and of the exterior of Cheverel Manor itself ending with three gentlemen standing at the Gothic dining room windows “sipping their claret” and watching the two women. More description of the gentlemen follows so that the entire picture is fixed in the readers’ mind. Then the dialogue begins that connects them to the ladies on the lawn: “ ‘Ah,’ said Sir Christopher, looking up from his paper, ‘there’s my lady. Ring for coffee, Anthony; we’ll go and join her’” (133-36). The strength of her heartfelt commitment to the real and the ordinary is the emotion of the narrator's statement in *Middlemarch*: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we would die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence” (194). Ironically, it is precisely through statements such as these that Eliot moves her novels beyond realism, for she doesn't just describe the scene or repeat the dialogue of her characters. Utilizing the narrator, she intensifies characters through her own insight. This technique of depicting reality “heroize[s] the insignificant until it radiate[s] importance” (Karl, 223). The characters grow larger through her insight into them.

In addition, she introduces a romantic aspect in the dramatic quality of some of the events by making the mood or atmosphere of the scene mirror nature itself. For example, the sexually charged meeting between Dorothea and Will reflects the electrically charged thunderstorm that is taking place just outside the window. As lightning strikes, they open their hearts to each other:

> They stood silent not looking at each other but looking at the evergreens which were being tossed, and were showing the pale underside of their leaves against the blackening sky . . . the thunder was getting nearer. The light was more and more somber, but there came a flash of lightning which made them start and look at each other, and then smile. Dorothea began to say what she had been thinking of . . . While [Will] was speaking there came a vivid flash of lightning which lit each of them up for the other-and the light seemed to be the terror of a hopeless love. (809-10)

It is as though the elements are in sympathy with them. Another example of Eliot's romantic technique is the flood that kills Maggie and Tom near the end of *The Mill on the Floss*. Frederick Karl says: “Her Floss becomes a great river of vengeance, a force well beyond rational life, an element recalling Noah’s Flood” (317). Although this novel predates impressionism by about 15 years, it is an example of another aspect of Eliot's writing that Karl refers to as impressionistic. It is in fact a story filled with subjective impressions that center on Maggie's inner life rather than on external reality. The flood mirrors Maggie's feelings of emotional, spiritual suffocation. In his introduction to *The Mill on the Floss*, Gordon Haight begins by saying “The Flood . . . was not an afterthought to extricate the author from an impossible situation, but the part of the story that George Eliot planned first” (v). This not only substantiates the impressionistic nature of the story, it also expresses Eliot's underlying determinism that links “people, ideas, destinies and natural events” (Karl 333). Believing that sentimentality led to false beliefs, Eliot “was convinced that certain things do not change whatever their external appearance” and that, therefore, what was called for was “a real knowledge of the People, with a thorough study of their habits, their ideas, their motives” (Karl 219). Certainly the detail in which she presents her characters has made them real for many generations of readers.

Karl describes her realism as one with “several checks and balances: with the pull of social determinism which entraps everyone, especially women; with the sense of detail that sill allowed imagination and speculative flights; with the ability to capture spirit as much as body; and finally, with the craft that recognized such fragmentation in human experience had made old-fashioned chronological narrative no longer possible-only clusters of events would do” (Karl 480). Of course, Eliot herself says that any real observation of life and character must be limited, and the imagination must fill in and give life to the picture.

George Eliot built her art from a refusal of set conventions followed by earlier writers. She resisted the kind of moral complacency and didacticism in the earlier writings, of which she has often been accused. Certainly, she disguised, compromised, resisted it, but she created her art out of a cluster of rebellions, particularly against reigning social, moral, and aesthetic conventions. In England she was the single most important figure in transforming the novel from a predominantly popular form into the highest form of art – in the tradition that Henry James was to develop. She was a romantic organicist, opposed to revolution, disturbed at any sudden tear in the social fabric, and she dramatized the dangers of political violence often – in *Romola, Felix Holt*, and *Middlemarch*, in particular. She was, as she thought of herself, a conservative-reformer. The foundation for this position was sharply articulated in her statement: “What has grown up historically can only die out historically, by the gradual operation of necessary laws” (Pinney 287). But she also saw clearly enough to represent with great force the grounds and the temptations to violence. She was a model for women’s achievement and she brilliantly and sympathetically traced their defeats. Although from her first stories forward she wrote about the church and clergy with a compassionate knowledge, she built a powerful case against Christianity; and while she constantly celebrated the value of childhood experience, traditional community, and traditional family

structures, she almost bitterly portrayed the failures of community and family. Against the judgments of a complacent society, she wrote of the unnoticed heroism of those it defeated.

The energizing principle of George Eliot's art was realism which is a mode that depends heavily on reaction against what the writer takes to have been misrepresentation. Thus, even for those "realists" whose politics might have turned out to be "conservative," it is a rebellious mode. It is rarely, and certainly was not for George Eliot, simply accuracy in representation of things as they are, although it is always that, too. It is also and necessarily a kind of authenticity, an honest representation of one's own feelings and perceptions; otherwise accuracy of representation would itself be impossible. Thus, she claims that fantastic or the boldly imaginative poet may be as sincere as the most realistic and he is true to his own sensibilities or inward vision. And in his wildest imagination he never breaks loose from his criterion, which is the truth of his own mental state. The art with which she struggled, often so painfully, was the place where the ideas and feelings could be most actively "imagined, tested, and transformed from theory into life" (Levine 27). So, "the ideal and the real were fused" in her work (Levine 28).

The resistant element in George Eliot, in her life and her art, is closely linked with her chosen literary method. As Realism has always been a debatable issue, George Eliot was self-conscious enough about it that in each of her two first fictions, a collection of stories, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) in which, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" and *Adam Bede* (1859), she paused within the narratives to explain and justify that method. Representing the world adequately means representing its very ordinariness, and the moral project of realism is – in resistance to conventional art – to dramatize the value of the ordinary. So, with her protagonists George Eliot pauses to show that she is quite aware of his/her inadequacy. The strategy of what has been called George Eliot's "moral realism" is deliberately Wordsworthian, to evoke the romantic side of familiar things, but the project is

moral as well as aesthetic. To represent the ordinary honestly is to represent what is hidden from those like Cumming or Young – the richness of human feeling, the grandeur of what we take for granted.

George Eliot's most famous justification of her realism comes in of *Adam Bede*. The aesthetic and the moral were for George Eliot entirely intertwined. The truth of infinite value that one ought to teach is realism – the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality. Unquestionably, her theoretical arguments for realism and the weight of significance she imposed on the practice in her art give to some of George Eliot's work a quality of high seriousness – perhaps solemnity – that can help explain the way in which modernist artists rejected her. Yet this solemnity was an aspect of a mind that was extraordinarily agile, subtle, learned, and if she was uneasy with popular entertainment. But she was equally opposed to moralizing didacticism. Everything depended on getting her art aesthetically right and that was also to be the overriding project of modernism. "Art," she wrote,

> 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. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions – about the manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men, should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of the true one. (Pinney 271)

This is a kind of manifesto of moral realism. But it is important not to mistake George Eliot's commitment to the moral vocation of art and realism for a disregard of formal concerns. Art works morally only, she would insist, if it is aesthetically effective

The twentieth-century writers and critics objected to the tradition of literary realism which they believed ignored epistemological issues and questions about the inevitability of mediation. They found in it nothing but the piles of facts. But George Eliot's realism, while it is indeed attentive to the external details of the world her characters inhabit, is different from other realistic writers' realism. In her realism, the details reverberate with significance and the images are as much a part of the consciousness of the characters as representations of material reality. The very possibility of meaning is one of the questions George Eliot's novels directly encounter. So, George Eliot's realism extends from the external world to the world of individual consciousness – like James and the psychological novelists who followed, she threw the action inside. The question of consciousness – who perceives the external fact and under what conditions – becomes for her an indispensable aspect of the realist project.

The intensity and formal complexity of George Eliot's novels, even in the relatively expansive mode of her early works, must be credited in part to her refusal to disentangle representational precision, psychological states, formal coherence, and moral significance. Getting it right was for her no simple matter of recording external fact precisely, but of making herself capable of the most complete possible honesty by opening her mind and feelings to the otherness of things and people. The point is not that she always succeeded, but that for her realism was a vocation. She aspired to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in her mind. She tried to reflect what she saw in the society honestly.

The strenuousness of George Eliot's art is due not only to this commitment to tell the truth as though in a trial at law but to the awareness of how very hard it is to do so, to avoid

being false. Her novels explore with a subtlety new to the history of English literature the tricky ways of the mind, the natural and psychological and social impediments to knowing or speaking the truth. George Eliot was alert not only to the complications of society, but to the subtle difficulties of the medium, language, itself. There is a famous narrative intervention in *The Mill on the Floss* that can suggest something of this alertness:

> O Aristotle! If you had the advantage of being 'the freshest modern' instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech, as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor, – that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else? (140).

Metaphor always threatens to escape the limits of its denotation and is at the heart of language; thus the writer must be, as George Eliot sought to be herself, a kind of scholar like the one described by Walter Pater some years later, a scholar of language and meaning, scrupulous, meticulous, unrelentingly attentive. The fruits of these labors of realism to resist the conventional simplifications of art or personal interest turned out often to be only partially compensatory. There are costs to the realist program, for the "truth" George Eliot insists on is, primarily, the hard truth that the world is not made in our interest, not "mindful" of us. Reality is largely what conventional art would treat as mundane and dismiss in the name of heroism or elegance. The sympathy her art is designed to evoke depends on recognition of our mutual implication in ordinariness and limitation. She mocked all the restrictions and committed herself to the faithful representing of commonplace things. The direction of her novels is toward accommodation to the ordinary and commonplace.

The present research work analyzes Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) from the realistic perspective. The work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the research work – a short introduction to Realism. The

second chapter tries to briefly explain the theoretical modality that is applied in this research work. It discusses critical study of Realism with reference to the realist novel.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Eliot valorizes the realistic aspect of life as she characterizes the protagonist, Maggie as a rational and spiritual character. It sorts out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the argument of the study. And, the fourth and the final chapter is the conclusion of this research work.

Chapter II

A Critical Study of Realism

Introduction to Realism

The term “realism” refers to the movement in literature especially in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century in Europe and America. Realism, which came as a reaction against Romanticism, was a recurrent mode of representing human life experience in literature and stressed the real over the fantastic. This movement included Honore de Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America. They explored the recesses of the human mind through the exploration of the emotional landscape of characters. So it focused on the writer's accuracy in portraying the speech and behavior of a character from a low socioeconomic class, rather than characters from the noble class. The writers objectively presented the details and events rather than a subjective concentration on a person's feelings, perceptions, and imaginings of various characters. The movement sought to treat the commonplace truthfully and used characters from everyday life. This emphasis was brought on by societal changes sparked by *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, the higher criticism of the Bible, and the aftermath of the Civil War.

Darwin’s work emphasized on the need to view things more accurately and scientifically. So, there emerged another philosophical theory, Naturalism, an outgrowth of Realism. Regarding the representation of human life and experiences in literature even more accurately, Naturalism is considered to be ideal as it focused on depicting human instincts – desire, hunger, sexuality etc. in a more realistic manner. However, the difference between realism and naturalism is harder to define as the two terms are often used interchangeably. The distinction lies in the fact that realism is concerned directly with what is absorbed by the senses; naturalism, a term more properly applied to

literature, attempts to apply scientific theories to art. The term ‘Naturalism’ was invented by Émile Zola partly because he was seeking for a striking platform from which to convince the reading public that it was getting something new and modern in his fiction. In fact, he inherited a good deal from his predecessors. Like Balzac and Flaubert, he created detailed settings meticulously researched, but tended to integrate them better into his narrative, avoiding the long set-piece descriptions so characteristic of earlier fiction.

Naturalism describes a literary term that attempts to apply scientific principles to the study of human beings. Unlike realism that focuses on technique, naturalism implies a philosophical position. Naturalistic writers use a version of scientific method and apply it to their writing. The study of human beings focuses on their instinct, passion and the ways in which their lives are governed by “forces of heredity and environment” (Abrahms 261). Like realists, naturalistic writers follow the same technique of accumulating details but have a specific segment of reality that they wish to convey. In short the naturalistic novel is an extension of realism in that it not only deals with the locality, time period and social issues but also the focuses on the excess if human nature.

As realism is the major tool in this research, it is desirable to delve into realism in greater details. Initially, ‘local color writers’ – those writing about particular region or time to give authenticity – were an outcome of the Realistic movement. They sought to preserve a distinct way of life threatened by industrialization, immigration, the aftereffects of the War, and the changes in society. Their writing concentrated on sketching a convincing portrait of a particular region and delving below the surface picture to reveal some universal aspects. Women local colorists were concerned with

the place of women in society and the moral designs called for in a life. Freemen, Stowe, Harris, Chesnutt, and Cable were all regarded as important local colorists.

Although aspects of realism appeared almost with the beginnings of the English novel, for they are certainly present in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Jane Austen, Trollope, Thackeray, and Dickens, the realistic movement found its effective origins in France with Balzac, in England with George Eliot, and in America with Howells and Mark Twain. Writers like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H. G. Wells in England, and Henry James, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Sinclair Lewis, John O'Hara, John P. Marquand, and Louis Auchincloss in America kept and are keeping the realistic tradition alive in the contemporary novel.

Realism is, in the broadest sense, simply loyalty to actuality in its representation in literature. In order to give it more precise definition, however, we need to limit it to the movement which arose in the nineteenth century, at least partially in reaction against Romanticism, which was centered in the novel, and which was dominant in France, England, and America from roughly mid-century to the closing decade, when it was replaced by Naturalism. In this latter scene, realism defines a literary method, a philosophical and political attitude, and a particular kind of subject matter.

Realism has been defined as “the truthful treatment of material” by one of its most vigorous advocates, William Dean Howells, but the statement means little until the realists’ concept of truth and their selection of materials are designated. (qtd in Alexander 69). Generally, realists are believers in Pragmatism, and the truth they seek to find and express is a relativistic truth, associated with discernible consequences and verifiable by experience. Generally, too, realists are believers in democracy, and the materials they want to describe are the common, the average, the everyday. Furthermore, realism can be thought of as the ultimate of middle-class art, and it finds

its subjects in bourgeois life and manners. Realism focuses on the actual details in society and avoids emotion and imagination A minor novelist Edmond Duranty's view of realism is that realism meant:

> writing fiction based on observation of the world of ordinary men and women in society, using the simplest language to reach the widest audience. It also meant avoiding 'the torments of soul of young men with too much imagination', 'tormented phraseology and ideas,' and romantic psychology'. (qtd in Walder 27-28)

Where romanticists transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists examine the actual to find the scientific laws which control its actions, realists center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence.

Christopher Caudwell differentiates realism from romanticism in his *Romance and Realism* as:

> Realism is a genuine synthesis; but this realism, describing the world objectively, more and more seems to rob the picture of romantic vigor. Unit finally it becomes unemotional, dead and without virtue. Realism in turn explodes and we have anti-realism. But because the movement is dialectic, realism does not find itself opposed by the romanticism, it negates but by symbolism, futurism and finally surrealism. (7)

Realism differs from Romanticism particularly in its emphasis on real presentation of details and events rather than an imaginative concentration on personal feelings, perceptions and imaginings of various characters. Realists also reject the idealized presentations, imaginative and erotic setting, and improbable plot twists, which are the characteristic of the romance. Realists heavily depend upon their own locality,

deliberately attempting to portray faithfully, the customs, speech, dress and living and working conditions of chosen locale. Focusing on difference between Realism and Romanticism M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* says:

> Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. The romance is often said to present life as we would have it be more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality; realism on the other hand, is said to present life as it really is. It is more useful to identity realism in terms of the effect on the reader: realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and social world as it seems to the common readers evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist and that such things might well happen. (260)

Realists advocate what is essentially a "Mimetic Theory of Art," centering their attention in the thing imitated and asking for something close to a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject. They usually have, however, a powerful interest in the audience to whom their work is addressed, feeling it to be their obligation to deal with it with absolute truthfulness. Furthermore, realists are unusually interested in the effect their work has on the audience and its life. In this respect they tend toward a Pragmatic theory of art.

Realists shun the traditional patterns of the novel. This is the reason why the rise of realism came as a protest against the falseness and sentimentality which realists thought they saw in romantic fiction. They felt that life lacked symmetry and plot. They held that fiction which truthfully reflected life should, therefore, avoid symmetry and plot. Simple, clear, direct prose was the desirable vehicle, and objectivity on the part of the novelist was the proper attitude. The central issues of life tend to be ethical, that is, issues of conduct. Fiction should, therefore, concern itself with such issues, and since

selection is a necessary part of any art, it has to select with a view to presenting these issues accurately as they affect men and women in actual situations. Furthermore, the democratic attitudes of realists tended to make them value the individual very highly and to praise characterization as the center of the novel. Hence, they had a great concern for the effect of action upon character, and a tendency to explore the psychology of the actors in their stories. The surface details, the common actions, and the minor catastrophes of a middle-class society constituted the chief subject matter of the movement. Most of the realists avoided situations with tragic or tragic implications. Their tone was often comic, frequently satiric, seldom grim or somber. Their general attitude was broadly optimistic, although some writers were an exception.

Realism assumes that reality constitutes of the present – the here and now in the everyday. It therefore emphasizes accurate descriptions of specific setting, dress, and character in ways that would have appeared entirely inappropriate to Neoclassical and earlier authors. Realism, which emphasizes the importance of the ordinary‹the ordinary person and the ordinary situation, tends to reject the heroic and the aristocratic and embrace the pedestrian, the comic, and the middle class. According to George Levine, "Whatever else it means, it always implies an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some nonverbal truth out there" (249). Changing notions of what is out there obviously affect these essentially problematic notions of realism. Levine also points out that, unlike the movement in France, Realism in England:

> does not focus on the dregs of society [or] on the degradations and degenerations of humans in bondage to a social and cosmic determinism. It belongs . . . to a 'middling' condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures. (249)

At the same time what is unconventional and most exciting about the English tradition of realism is its pleasure in abundance, in energy, and the vivid engagement, through language, with the reality just beyond the reach of language. Realistic novels contain more than they formally need.

Realism in Literature

Realism in literature means that the writer represents persons, scenes, things, and facts as they are in real life. Realism, in the arts, is the accurate, detailed, simple depiction of nature or of contemporary life. Realism rejects imaginative idealization as it favours a close observation of outward appearances. As such, realism in a broad sense has comprised of many artistic currents in different civilizations. In the visual arts, for example, realism can be found in ancient Hellenistic Greek sculptures accurately portraying boxers and feeble and old women. The works of such seventeenth century painters as Caravaggio, the Dutch genre painters, the Spanish painters Jose de Ribera, Diego Velazquez, and Franscisco de Zurbaran, and the Le Nain brothers in France are realists in approach. The works of the eighteenth century English novelists Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett have also been regarded as realistic.

Realism was not consciously adopted as an aesthetic program until the mid-nineteenth century in France. However, realism may be viewed as a major trend in French novels and paintings between 1850 and 1880. One of the first appearances of the term ‘realism’ was in the *Mercure francais du XIX siecle* in 1826, in which the word is used to describe a principle based not upon imitating past artistic achievements but upon the truthful and accurate depiction of the models that nature and contemporary life offer the artist. The French proponents of realism rejected the artificiality of both the classicism and Romanticism of the academies and emphasized on the necessity for contemporaneity in an effective work of art. They attempted to portray the lives, appearances, problems, customs, and mores of the

middle and lower classes, of the unexceptional, the ordinary, the humble, and the unadorned. Indeed, they carefully tried to reproduce all the hitherto-ignored aspects of contemporary life and society along with its mental attitudes, physical settings, and material conditions.

Realism was motivated by several intellectual developments in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among these was the anti-Romantic movement in Germany which emphasized on the common man as an artistic subject. Auguste Compte's positivist philosophy emphasized the sociology's importance as the scientific study of society. Gradually, professional journalism, with its accurate and calm recording of current events, began to rise. And the development of photography, with its capability of mechanically reproducing visual appearances with extreme accuracy all stimulated interest in accurately recording contemporary life and society.

In the field of literature, the novelist Honore de Balzac was the chief precursor of realism. He made his attempt to create a detailed, encyclopedic portrait of the whole range of French society in his *La Comedie humaine*. But a conscious programme of literary realism did not appear until the 1850s, and then it was inspired by the painter Courbet's aesthetic stance. The French journalist Champfleury, who had popularized Courbet's painting style, transferred the latter's theories to literature in Le Realism (1857). In this influential critical manifesto Champfleury asserted that the hero of a novel should be an ordinary man rather than an exceptional figure. In 1857 Gustave Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary was published. This unrelentingly objective portrait of the bourgeois mentality, with its examination of every psychological nuance of an unhappy and adulterous middle-class wife, was both the principal masterpiece of realism and the work that established the movement on the European scene. Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* (1870), with its presentation of a vast panorama of France under Louis Philippee, was another principal realist work. The brothers Jules and Edmond Goncourt were also important realist writers. In their masterpiece, *Germinie*

Lacerteux (1864), and in other works they covered a variety of social and occupational background and frankly described social relations among both the upper and the lower classes.

Realist elements entered the mainstream of European literature during the 1860s and ‘70s. As realism emphasized on detachment, objectivity, and accurate observation, its lucid but restrained criticism of social environment and mores, and the humane understanding that underlay its oral judgments became an integral part of the modern novel during the height of that form’s development. Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and George Eliot in England, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky in Russia, William Dean Howells in the United States, and Gottfried Keller and the early Thomas Mann in Germany all incorporated realist elements in their novels.

Realism in the theatre was a general movement in the latter nineteenth century that steered theatrical texts and performance toward greater fidelity to real life. The realist dramatists Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg in Scandinavia and Anton Chekhov and Maksim Gorky in Russia, among others, rejected the complex and artificial plotting of the well-made play and instead treated themes and conflicts belonging to a real, contemporary society. They emphasized on the poetic language and extravagant diction, and used action and dialogue that looked and sounded like everyday behaviour and speech. Realism had no use for the theatrical delivery and the overblown virtuosity of past acting and replaced this style with more natural movements, gestures, and speech. Realist drama also used stage setting that accurately reproduced ordinary surroundings.

Salient Features of Realism

Realism is a direct contrast to Romanticism. As a movement, American Realism started during the Civil War period and evolved in the second half of the 19th century. It has realistically-flawed heroes instead of the idealized characters in Romanticism. The writers of

the Realism tried to represent life with their writings. Their settings often include factories and slums, and their characters are ordinary people such as poor workers, businessmen, vagrants, swindlers, and even prostitutes.

The most distinguishing characteristic of realism is that it is nothing more and nothing less than truthful treatment of material. The realists tend to be highly selective in their choice of material, focusing upon what seems real to middle-class readers. The subjects of realistic fiction thus tend to be contemporary, ordinary, and middle-class. 'Truthful' treatment of such subjects usually consists of a faithful imitation of surface details with the goal of creating the illusion of reality.

In realist literary works, character is more important than action or plot; the subject is often complex ethical choices. Characters appear in the real complexity of temperament and motive. They have inexplicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past. Humans control their destinies; characters act on their environment rather than simply reacting to it. Realism renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. There should be selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot. Events will usually be plausible. Realist novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances. Class is important in realism; the novel traditionally severs the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.

Realism has democratic properties as it is viewed as a realization of democracy. The morality of realism is intrinsic, integral, and relativistic – relations between people and society are explored. Realists are pragmatic, relativistic, democratic and experimental. The purpose of writing is both to instruct and to entertain the reader.

Another feature of realism is diction, which is in its original and primary meaning, refers to the writer's or the speaker's distinctive vocabulary choices and style of expression in

a poem or story. It is the natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric or matter-of fact. The use of symbolism is controlled and limited as far as possible. The realists depend more on the use of images. Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important and evident authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses.

There are different types of realism: classical realism, Liberal realism, structural realism and neoclassical realism, scientific realism and magic realism. Interior or psychological realism is a variant form of realism. Realism of Henry James and Mark Twain is critically acclaimed in the twentieth century; Howellsian realism fell into disfavour as part of an early twentieth century rebellion against the refined tradition and history. Luc Herman in his book *Concept of Realism* discusses the forms of realism. He surveys the central episodes in the development of the discourse surrounding realism from its inception, with substantial reference to developments in the United States. It concentrates on modernism and the avant-garde as hostile to the realist movement, but more positive critics of the concept, such as Erich Auerbach and Joseph Stern, also receive ample treatment.

As mentioned above, realism is the truthful treatment of material. It is believed that a realist writer should have belief in democracy and he/she should be able to describe the common and everyday activities o f the people. Much emphasis is given on the middle class, its life style and its manners. The writers always concentrate their attention on the here and now. They present the specific action and its demonstrable consequences. Such writers intend to be very moralistic; they want to have a moral effect on the reader as well.

One of the most important features of realism is that the writers in realist works highly value the individual in a given society. They try to explore the ethical values, mores and issues of conduct of the society. They usually see an optimistic attitude. They show the

central issues of life (ethical, moral issues) accurately as they affect the characters in actual situations.

Realist literature requires a great deal of description. Plots are very credible and designed to both flatter and convince the reader of the fictional truth of the story. Use of simple, clear and direct prose is a part of realism. Plots are secondary to characterization because the realists feel that life lacks symmetry and a realist story does not emphasize on symmetry and plot. All realistic fiction is still the author's perception of what is 'real' no matter how objective he tries to be. The basic axiom of the realistic view of morality is that there could be no moralizing in the novel. Everett Carter writes:

> The morality of the realists then was built upon what appears a paradox-morality with an abhorrence of moralizing. Their ethical beliefs called, first of all, for a rejection of scheme of moral behaviour imposed, form without, upon the characters of fiction and their actions. Yet Howells always claimed for his works a deep moral purpose. It was based upon three propositions: the life, social life as lived in the world Howells knew, was valuable, and was permeated with morality; that its continued health depend upon the use of human reason to overcome the anarchic selfness of human passion; that an objective portrayal of human life, by art, will illustrate the superior value of social, civilized man, of human reason over animal passion and primitive ignorance. (157)

Despite many things discussed on realism, what is significant regarding realism is that the authors always portray the social reality. They deal with common characters and give details of the everyday activities. So, novel and short stories are the best and important means s to explore all the features of realism.

In conclusion, realism aims to provide what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals. Another key device in this respect is diction. Traditionally, or at least prior to Bacon and Locke, less attention was paid to the correspondence of words to things than to the beauties which could be bestowed upon description and action by the use of rhetoric. It was precisely such embellishment and adornment which theorists from Bacon to Jonson to Wordsworth feared. The novel substituted for this emphasis on style and eloquence a "descriptive and denotative use of language" (227) which view the language as a "purely referential medium" (227). The goal of the novel is to achieve the immediacy and closeness of the text to what is being described in an effort on the part of the novelist to make the words bring his object home to us in all its concrete particularity This is, again, a very Lockean view of language, the purpose of which is to convey knowledge of things. From this point of view, the novel functions as a record of real life what the great French novelist Flaubert would term operating by "exhaustive presentation" (228), rather than the elegant presentation of the earlier times. The innovativeness of the novel, in short, reflects the philosophical shift and the change in worldview which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one – one which presents us with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places. The novel's imitation of human life follows the procedures adopted by philosophical realism in its attempt to ascertain and report the truth. Realism in general and the novel in particular is based on the following premise, or primary convention that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the time and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more referential

use of language than is common in other literary forms. What should not be forgotten is, firstly, that the novel is not life but an artistic imitation of life; secondly, that the novel form is a culturally and historically specific literary convention to which we have become immured to the point where readers are resistant to reading other forms of literature as well as other kinds of prose merely because they are they are unable to relate to them. The following chapter analyzes the novel *The Mill on the Floss* from the perspective of realism.

Chapter III

Maggie as a Realist Character in *Mill on the Floss*

Exploration of Victorian Socio-cultural Mores

George Eliot's most important contribution to literature has been in her treatment of realism. Eliot perfected the genre of realism and psychological realism, paving the way for the later work of the American novelist Henry James. Eliot understood that art should be near to life, valuing observed truths and creating a greater sense of sympathy in the reader by coherently and non-judgementally depicting the everyday life issues the characters encounter in day-to-day life. Eliot's attention to character is mediated by a strong sense of historical and socio-cultural climate. This thesis on *The Mill on the Floss* study explores that George Eliot very much reflects the 1830s in England including issues relating to social hierarchy, religion, gender, lifestyle, education, family and relationships and morals, principles and values. The author demonstrates how the middle class' way of life largely dominated Victorian society by the way the novel is largely dominated by the lives of the main characters who are all middle class and lower middle class and it also obviously represents what was expected of the working class people at that time.

As this study aims at analyzing the novel from the perspective of realism, it focuses on the major character Maggie's life and her conflicts with the social norms that she experiences within her family and her community in the Victorian society, rather than the plot and action. Maggie is not portrayed as being romantic and perfect, as characters are usually presented in fictionalized forms in many literary works. Eliot's own wider interest in society and relationships is reflected through this novel, which is one of the remarkable examples of realism.

The discrimination and inequality Maggie has been subjected to within the social values of a changing England have found expression in the novel. As women of the inferior sex have been expected to submit to men, so has been Maggie. Women's inferior position to men in social life has been supported by laws through legal inequity. This could be seen even in their marital lives. The daughter and wife could not have any claims on her own property, for it becomes her father's, brother's while unmarried and husband's after marriage. Although Maggie is born into a middle class family, unfortunately for Maggie, she is only given an education considered appropriate for a young lady and therefore her potential development is obstructed. Poor Maggie is always treated as guilty when a child – even when her acts are unwittingly committed. Interesting to note here is that water imagery reflects a dangerous undercurrent in Maggie. Her nature is visibly reflected in the Floss – being impetuous, dark, lively, passionate, sensitive, and changeable. There are various contradictions in Maggie's character because though she is clever and intelligent, there is no place for her in the society. Everything that is done to her seems unnatural. This is illustrated by her father and mother's early discussion in the book - about their family genes, and also by Maggie's attraction to wicked characters such as the devil. It does seem that even her appearance is related to her reading. For example, in the "mud scene" with her brother Tom and Lucy, "Maggie lingered at a distance looking like a Medusa with her snakes cropped" (87). Although witches were believed to float away and innocent women drown, so is Eliot suggesting that Maggie is innocent but wrongly treated like a witch in nineteenth century Victorian society.

As Eliot herself meant by a "realist" to be "an artist who values the truth of observation above the imaginative fancies of writers of "romance" or fashionable melodramatic fiction," she rightly observes social reality of the Victorian period. This technique is artfully utilized in her writings in a way which human character and relationships

are dissected and analyzed. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot uses the relationships of the protagonist of the story, Miss Maggie Tulliver, as a medium in which to convey various aspects of human social associations. It seems that as a result of Maggie's nature and of circumstances presented around her, that she is never able to have a connection with one person that satisfies her multifaceted needs and desires. Maggie is able, to some extent, to explore the various and occasionally conflicting aspects of her person with her relationships between other characters presented in the novel. "From an early age, Maggie needs approval from men. Maggie is not shown in any deep relationship with a female friend. We can explore into Maggie Tulliver's person and her short development as a woman in four primary male associations: her father—Mr. Tulliver, her brother—Tom Tulliver, her friend and mentor—Philip Wakem and her dangerous passion with Steven Guest. Maggie unconditionally loves her father although he has been the unconscious root of many of her misfortunes. "Tom's and Maggie's young lives are blighted by the gloom, poverty, disgrace and death of their father. Maggie is obliged by her father's failure to leave school. It is the misfortune of a clever girl denied any activity other than domestic. Eliot relates:

> And yet this Christmas day, in spite of Tom's fresh delight in home, was not, he thought, somehow or other, quite so happy as it had always been before. The red berries were just as abundant on the holly, and Maggie had dressed all the windows and mantelpieces and picture-frames on Christmas eve with as much taste as ever, wedding the thick-set scarlet clusters with branches of the black-berried ivy. (135)

In the time period of the setting of the novel, women were regarded as male property, to take care of household matters and without skill, originality and intelligence of a man. Mr. Tulliver cared deeply for his daughter's future but inadvertently oppressed Maggie through his views of women. This idea is represented in his dialogue with Mr. Riley of Maggie's

"unnatural" intelligence: "It's a pity but what she'd been then lad—she'd ha'been a match for the lawyers, she would. It's the wonderful'st thing" (16). Mr. Tulliver by nature was stubborn, opinionated and led his family to disgrace as a result. However, there is a close bond between him and Maggie for which he had always protected her and favored her over Tom, as much as would permit in that age. Maggie always felt a responsibility to please her father and to never cause him any grievances. She was loyal to him at times that he seemed to not return her affection "How she wished that [her father] would stoke her head, or give her some sign that he was soothed by the sense that he had a daughter who loved him!" (251). When her father was in the lowest point of self-ruin and was under the scrutiny of the family, Maggie took upon the position of the protector and loyally defended her protector. "Her father had always defended and excused her, and her loving remembrance of his tenderness was a force within her that would enable her to do or bear anything for his sake" (184). While the daughter fulfills her duty towards her father, she is restricted from the kind of space she desires because this is what the society demands.

Maggie's brother, Tom, is the person of whom she was the most fond of. She turned the cheek on some of his unkind actions toward her in the realization of a strong, unbreakable bond. This excerpt from "Brother and Sister" portrays the type of relationship Maggie and Tom Tulliver have. He was the elder and a little man of forty inches, bound to show no dread, And I the girl that puppy-like now ran, now lagged behind my brother's larger tread. Every episode in the early chapters show Maggie's high hopes of pleasure being dashed by disagreements with Tom. "Tom indeed was of opinion that Maggie was a silly little thing: all girls were silly . . . still he was very fond of his sister and always meant to take care of her" (34). Even with this mutual love, Tom is extremely harsh of Maggie, whose only concern is to please him and maintain closeness with him throughout their lives. In many instances, Tom would feel his authority being threatened by Maggie and bear insensitive punishments upon

her. He shows his rage and after his own personal interpretation and feeling, giving Maggie no chance to defend herself. The worst punishment he could evoke upon Maggie is to estrange himself from her and banish him from [their] home. This action in their troubled relationship causes Tom to be callous and harsh and raises the possibility for Maggie to be isolated in the world. Tom says, “You will find no home with me. . . . You have been a curse to your best friends . . . I wash my hands of you forever. You don’t belong to me!” (434). We clearly notice the divided views and paths of these two siblings. The only thing Maggie desired was to have no “cloud between herself and Tom” (406). Despite all of the hardships that Tom had inflicted in Maggie, the possibility of his danger during the flood sparked the natural protective nature in Maggie as she laboriously fought the river to Tom’s house in a small boat. As seen before in times of great dispair, they put aside their differences and forgave each other without saying a word. In their unfortunate ending, their mutual love was shown as “an embrace never to be parted” (467). Tom and Maggie are never reconciled in the real life. One of the major arguments between Tom and Maggie results in her friendship with Philip Wakem, a hunchbacked man who falls in love with Maggie. Tom furiously hates Philip as a result of his father, Mr. Wakem, which Tom regarded as an accomplice to his father’s and his family’s downfall. Maggie is given strict orders to stay clear of all Wakem accompaniments.

However, good-natured Maggie sees goodness in Philip that he is not associated with his father’s actions. They develop a close friendship where Philip resultantly developed a deep love for Maggie that exceeds the bounds of their comradeship. “Philip is from their schooldays a brotherly figure for Maggie, a loving substitute for Tom . . . Maggie's feelings for him would fall short of passion; though he is a more satisfactory brother figure. In this relationship, Maggie finds the love she has yearned for from her own brother; however it is complicated from external issues and irrational thought of a lover status by Philip. Philip

provided education and moral support for Maggie during their time together and she regarded him very dear. Philip can relate to Maggie's inferior status as a woman because he has been plagued by a physical deformity and therefore is inferior to society. He is marginalized by his deformity as women are marginalized by their gender. As their relationship progressed, it is threatened by another force: the appearance of Stephen Guest. Steven Guest can provide the aspect of passion for Maggie that Philip cannot provide. In their first interaction Steven feels an instant attraction for her, as she for him. Eliot writes:

> For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall, dark-eyed nymph with her jet-back coronet of hair, the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards she herself was conscious of timidity. (336)

Stephen complicates Maggie's life because his attraction is also irrational—he is courting her loving and dear cousin. Maggie is aware of the danger in these passions and takes great effort not to partake in them, on an external display. Maggie stated that she would rather take death than to participate in temptations that could hurt so many people: Herself, Stephen, Lucy—her cousin and Philip. How little she did not know of the disastrous effects it would have on a more broad scale. As time progresses, both Steven and Maggie find it more difficult to hide such attractions for each other and eventually Steven makes a thoughtless gesture that the two of them should be together . . . forever. Maggie's conscious and her inability to directly cause grief to her loved ones overcome her strong sexual attraction for Steven and the prospects of a free life with him. This action causes the complexities of their relation to be exposed to the general public, the public to pass ill judgment on her and begins the second major dispute between her and her and Tom. Steven is said to "be a catalyst in the primary drama between brother and sister. This is an accurate statement because tension was already established

between Maggie and Tom and if it were not for Steven, it would have been another thing to cause further conflicts. It is perhaps worth remarking that he is the literary descendant to other energetic, simple, sexually powerful men in novels who create quite complex problems for women whose alternative lovers are perhaps more sensitive.

Despite of her short and problematic life, Maggie Tulliver has the opportunities to explore various aspects of her personality and womanhood in her variety of relationships especially with male characters. She was able cherish the forgiving love of a father, which made so much impact on her life. She was able to experience virtually unpressured friendship and intellectual stimulation from her beloved friend Philip. She experienced a glimpse of sexual identity and attraction with her relations with Steven Guest that unfortunately caused them both much pain. Maggie was also allowed to experience the type of love that can exist between siblings, despite all of their disagreements, Maggie and Tom were able to realize that their bond was deeper than could have been imagined. George Eliot artfully created such relationships in this novel in a successful method to analyze and probe into the complexities of human interaction. This comes along with the message that it may be possible to have everything that one may want in life, just not all at once or at the same time.

When we see Maggie and Tom together, we can recognize Maggie's faults, but in turn, also see the external circumstances – oppressive patriarchal ideology – that affect her. Unlike her brother, she does have great sensitivity and imagination. She makes up numerous stories, such as the spiders in the Mill and the Earwigs too – in comparison Tom is very literal minded. However, we can easily see Maggie's early frustrations and understand the expression of her feelings with her "violence against her doll" (39). Eliot gives us a very full picture of why Maggie acts as she does. The strong outburst which comes from Maggie occurs under the chapters "The Downfall" when she shouts at her relatives. Eliot writes:

> Tom was a little shocked at Maggie's outburst,–telling him as well as his mother what it was right to do! She ought to have learned better than have those hectoring, assuming manners, by this time. But he presently went into his father's room, and the sight there touched him in a way that effaced the slighter impressions of the previous hour" (184).

The English society is responsible for such impulsiveness of her. She is naive in the sense that she thought their outburst of honesty would actually bring them to their senses, but it is not beneficial. She is merely frowned upon once again. This shows Victorian society certainly did not provide women the luxury of growing into their full selves. The existing social norms prevent Maggie from acting independently. George Eliot has demonstrated her awareness of this fact in almost every novel she has written.

Eliot certainly does not make Maggie appear romantic and perfect character. An "inbuilt" example might be where, "The keenest of all dread with her was, lest her father should add to his present misfortune the wretchedness of doing something irretrievably disgraceful" (252). Here we recognize Maggie's own self-interest keenly. However, Eliot does not condemn Maggie to understand her feeling of acute loneliness and sympathize readily. With the exaggerated description, we sympathize too with "the poor child" and her state of total deprivation – which was not her fault. For example; "Maggie's sense of loneliness and utter privation of joy had deepened with the brightness of advancing spring. There was no music for her any more – no piano, no harmonized voices, no delicious stringed instruments with their passionate cries . . ." (256). Although Eliot seems to be too emotionally involved here, she steers a fine course between making Maggie too self-absorbed and too self-sacrificing. This shows that Maggie becomes an anti-romantic character.

Eliot keeps Maggie for a child much longer than other heroines - for a large proportion of the book Maggie is under thirteen years of age. Maggie remains an immature

person throughout her life as she is a woman. We might deduce from this that the only real criticism seems to be of Tulliver parents and the provincial society who are incompetent and feckless: totally inadequate for Maggie. In the "Valley of Humiliation", Eliot actually criticizes Maggie's pride and impetuosity; "From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her . . . She often lost the spirit of humility" (262). However, Eliot, once having criticized her heroine, then explains the reasons for Maggie's behaviour and her excuses to retain our sympathy. We understand that she should not be cramping her nature as Philip says, "You are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature" (294). Furthermore, it is Philip who accurately predicts her future: "You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite" (295). It is Philip's task to explain Maggie to herself and the reader in order to put her behaviour into perspective.

It is worth considering the Stephen Guest "Elopement" scene where she elopes with Stephan Guest. Maggie is certainly misjudged by the society of St. Oggs: noticeable is the conflict between the individual and his environment. The outcome does seem predictable, we know here that Maggie wants revenge against fair women, and we cannot blame her for finding Lucy's offered life-style attractive. We see that this scene wakes her up to adult responsibility. She is loyal to her family and is guided by the ties of her past. However, generally we are dissatisfied with the scene because though we understand Maggie, we do not feel with her for Stephen. Stephen's recognition of her exceptional nature is interesting – coming from a character who is himself rather commonplace and like so many other idle young men in that town. It is also significant that Maggie has no female role model outside

books: only the negative examples of her conventional aunts and the overburdened Mrs Moss. She admires Lucy, but does not want to emulate her. It is in this scene that we also recognize Maggie's derive to be loved by men is very dangerous. She herself recognizes this, "I was never satisfied with a little of anything" (295) – but we can see too that she always judges herself harshly.

Eliot does not completely idealize Maggie or attack her heroine and her feelings. She seems to be against judgments of a general kind. Although our sympathy rests with Maggie, we notice the criticisms from the other characters, particularly from her brother Tom; "at one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another, you have not resolution to resist a thing that you know to be wrong" (352); and also Philip – as well as those "inbuilt" few from Eliot herself. It is obvious that The Mill on the Floss is not a simple fairy tale; it is grounded on the real situation in society. Although she starts her life in a narrow, cramped society, she does make choices but finds herself unable to escape her destiny "like the cause of an unmapped river" (276). It is interesting to note that the early scenes set up the pattern of behaviour that Maggie employs in the rest of the novel; her childhood is obviously dominant in the structure of the book.

Pearson and Pope argue that Maggie is somewhere between an "intelligent man" and a "perfect woman" (28). She feels inferior to her brother because he is much more tolerated and is sent to school though she herself does better than him intellectually; in the same way, she feels inferior to her cousin Lucy as she is always negatively compared with her because of the latter's passivity about good manners. Thus it is clear that the message she gets is very clear. By virtue of being female, she is inferior to her brother and by virtue of personal defects she is inferior to the ideal woman represented by her cousin. In their view Maggie is depicted by Eliot as a victim sacrificed on the twin altars of ideal womanhood and male supremacy. Maggie cannot make a sensible choice between these two as the latter contradicts

her gender and the former her characteristics. It is self-denial that she chooses when she has to. The teaching of male superiority and female inferiority causes self-doubt, or in many cases even self-hatred, and leads women to commit themselves to the self-denying myths of virginity, romantic love, and maternal sacrifice. In Maggie's case, however, it appears as a desire to acquire men's knowledge or to live like men, as she thinks being a female is what makes one disconnected or unhappy. First she wants men's knowledge, and then she wants to make a world without love or affection in it as men do. But the subsequent events make it clear that her problem does not originate from being a female but also from the unique aspects of her personality, which is shaped by Victorian social mores.

We might agree that Eliot's aim was not to idealize her heroine, but to try to broaden the reader's sympathy and see that, "the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within" (359). Eliot seems to have felt that the fundamental role of man was a more practical, active one, that man should be "engaged in a dustier, noisier warfare, grappling with more substantial obstacles, and gaining more definite conquests" (277). While a woman's struggles might be "almost entirely within her own soul, one shadowy army fighting another and the slain shadows for ever rising again" (277). The heroines suffer because of their restricted sphere of thought and action. Maggie is not satisfied with the woman's narrow world or viewpoint.

Eliot pictures the suppression of women's intellectual and imaginative qualities and attacks the egotism of men and their complacency. Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, the imaginative, sensitive girl, who idolizes her older brother and envies his involvement in worldly affairs, is easy to identify with the young Eliot. An appetite for learning and a great need to be loved are common to both author and heroine, and the same impulsive discretion can be seen in both. Unconventional women like Maggie and Eliot herself are vulnerable in the face of public opinion and the pressure of convention. Their wishes and imaginations of a

better way of life usually meet with frustration and sometimes disaster. What Eliot proposes in her novels and particularly in *The Mill on the Floss* is that women should be understood; and that women should have a sufficient education to judge for themselves and to achieve their goals.

Spiritual Influence in Maggie

In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* the protagonist of the novel, Maggie is greatly influenced by the philosophy represented Thomas a Kempis's book *The Imitation of Christ* and Dr. Kenn that represent the spiritual side. In an angelic effort of saving others' life she finally gives up her own life and attains saintly status. These people influence her life to a greater extent as she ultimately achieves maturity with "religion of humanity."

Thomas à Kempis is Maggie's spiritual guide, who counsels her in her later years, through his book *The Imitation of Christ*, to embrace a life of self-renunciation. Though Tom, Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest try to oppress Maggie with or tempt her toward values and conduct she considers wrong, Maggie successfully resists these groups of people and remains true to her principles floated by Dr. Kenn and Thomas à Kempis. She attains such enlightenment that she ends up being a guide to her brother Tom.

Dr. Kenn is the parish priest whom Maggie meets while visiting her cousin Lucy at the end of the novel. She is experiencing the agonizing struggle between sexual temptation in her relationship with Stephen and loyalty to Lucy – who is unofficially engaged to Stephen – and to Philip, to whom Maggie herself is unofficially engaged. Dr. Kenn has no idea yet of these complex relations, but, in his first conversation with Maggie, he can sense the emotional turmoil she is undergoing. Maggie places her trust on Dr. Kenn and thinks that he could be a wise spiritual guide:

> She felt a childlike, instinctive relief . . . when she saw it was Dr. Kenn's face that was looking at her: that plain, middle-aged face, with a grave, penetrating kindness in it, seeming to tell of a human being who had reached a firm, safe strand, but was looking with helpful pity towards the strugglers still tossed by the waves, had an effect on Maggie at this moment which was afterwards remembered by her as if it had been a promise. (389)

Later, after Maggie has suffered the disgrace for eloping with Stephen but returning to St. Ogg's unmarried, she turns to Dr. Kenn for support and help. Dr. Kenn proves to be of Eliot's typical mentor than any of the others in *The Mill on the Floss*: a wise man with a mature moral sensibility, he undertakes to guide a young woman who is in need of moral counsel. Maggie makes her confession to Dr. Kenn, a common feature of Eliot's narratives. Eliot's likening the mentor's function to that of a priest is still another of the recurring characteristics. Dr. Kenn is an Anglican priest, but Eliot makes clear in the following passage that the priesthood of the counselor is of a different order:

> The middle-aged, who have lived through their strongest emotions, but are yet in the time when memory is still half passionate and not merely contemplative, should surely be a sort of natural priesthood, whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge and rescue of stumblers and victims of self-despair. Most of us, at some moment in our young lives, would welcome a priest of that natural order in any sort of canonicals or uncanonicals, but had to scramble upwards into all the difficulties of nineteen entirely without such aid, as Maggie did. (389)

Dr. Kenn's counseling has sacramental and spiritual quality which would certainly seem to prove him as a George Eliot quality. Nevertheless, as Eliot hints at the end of both quotations above, Dr. Kenn finally leaves Maggie to her own course of life breaking the promise she has

perceived in his presence and leaving her to move alone. His first response is to brave community disapproval, believing Maggie to have been treated unjustly. When his efforts to secure Maggie work are obstructed by the uncharitable prejudice of his parishioners, he offers her a position as governess in his own widower's household where she gets opportunity for further spiritual development.

As Dr. Kenn displays all the qualities of an excellent spiritual guide, Eliot gives us a clue that his inspiration proves to play a big role in the fact that he has ties to Maggie's past. He comes to the parish of St. Ogg's while Maggie is teaching at a school some distance away. He has not known her through her childhood and girlhood as she grows to young adulthood. The bonds of love and loyalty formed in a pastoral relationship over many years would perhaps have enabled him to endure the wicked and unpleasant gossip of which he eventually becomes victim. Maggie leaves Dr. Kenn, when he has informed her that he must dispense with her services, with "a new sense of desolation. She must be a lonely wanderer" (459). After certain period of guidance, he leaves her on her own with unlimited freedom though she becomes alienated.

Most of her cherished childhood memories center on Tom, the older brother she has always respected. The family catastrophe – her father's business failure – so overwhelms Maggie that she welcomes à Kempis' teaching of self-sacrificial living in the hope that she may lessen her pain by renouncing any joy. With the help of Bob Jakin she comes across an old copy of *The Imitation of Christ*. Aided by an unknown reader of the past who has marked passages with a "quiet hand" (461), Maggie receives à Kempis' quietist message as an illumination of her spiritual turmoil. À Kempis teaches her to "'forsake thyself, resign thyself'" (260), declaring that self-love is a sinful, "'inordinate inclination'" (260). À Kempis' use of inordinate implies that self-love is an act by which a human being overreaches his or her sanctioned place in the created order, the great chain of being. The

love of self is an indication that one is presuming to appropriate God's place at the height of the Great Chain, for only God is worthy of love. Only by renouncing such excessive love, by forsaking oneself, by abandoning oneself, by losing oneself in God, says this traditional Christian teacher, can one hope to gain "'much inward peace'" (260). This is what Maggie cultivates in herself. Maggie attempts to enter this state from a desire to escape the unhappiness she is already experiencing in her life. She receives the revelations she discovers in à Kempis' book "as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor" (260). She is excited by the thought of a plane of existence inhabited by these supernal beings, whose lives transcend the monotonous life she leads. The great chain of being may have fixed our place in the cosmic system for the duration of our time in the temporal sphere, but the Christian hope is that, through a life in which our sinful humanity is purged by self-renouncing obedience and service, we may finally be allowed to join God in the life everlasting. The present life is merely a "stupor" compared to the vitality that may be experienced in the kingdom of heaven. If we can only deny ourselves to the utmost in this life, this reasoning goes that the heavenly rewards will be great. There is undoubtedly a conviction working here that if we can keep ourselves pure and intact, unviolated by the world, we will be able to present a more valuable offering when we arrive in the heavenly kingdom. The inescapable comparison is to the retention of virginity for the rightful lord and master. Worldly relationships or beloved memories of the past are not desirable for the soul that would be holy. Thomas à Kempis does not allow for that cherishing of the past which forms Maggie's true religion. He would undoubtedly counsel Maggie that holding onto the past is simply another form of self-indulgence which must be rooted from the soul. À Kempis' logic, which is solidly within the Christian tradition, is undeniably twisted. It envisions the devout Christian disposing of self in order for that same jettisoned self to receive delayed gratification in the form of great

rewards later on. What psychic agency can possibly be carrying out the task of ridding the self of the self? How can a self who has annihilated itself receive a reward later on for having accomplished the annihilation successfully? These are the questions that need to be answered. The main way out of Neoplatonic Western Christianity, in its attempt to untwist this logic, has been the body/soul split. Because it has envisioned the soul as an entity separable from the body, it has been able to accomplish much by requiring painful sacrifice of the body while promising the soul a heavenly reward after death when the soul will be free of the burden of physical existence.

Eliot also makes apparent that Maggie's efforts to suppress her emotional life in the cause of self-renunciation are ineffectual, by embedding a casual phrase in a sentence whose main claim is to testify to the positive quality of Maggie's new inner discipline: "That new inward life of hers, notwithstanding some volcanic upheavals of imprisoned passions, yet shone out in her face with a tender soft light that mingled itself as added loveliness with the gradually enriched colour and outline of her blossoming youth" (263). When Stephen Guest enters Maggie's life, the volcano erupts. Maggie has joined Lucy for a visit after having been away from St. Ogg's, working as a schoolteacher. Stephen and Maggie find themselves overcome by a powerful sexual attraction, which Maggie resists at first but eventually succumbs to at Stephen's urgings. He tricks her into running away with him. She rejects the action almost immediately, returning to St. Ogg's alone, but reality is that she is indelibly stained by the scandal of her elopement in the eyes of the people.

Stephen's role as an influencer of worldly things is revealed in his tempting Maggie to act in opposition to her values. He is not a superficial malevolent villain however. He too struggles with his conscience in his attraction towards Maggie. However, he succumbs first and fully to the temptation and thus becomes Maggie's tempter. When, he and Maggie are boating on the River Floss, he allows the boat to drift far past the place they would ordinarily

have turned back without her knowledge. Maggie is offended when she realizes what Stephen has done. Stephen, in turn, tries to convince Maggie that the only way to correct the situation is for them to conciliate and get married right there before they return to St. Ogg's. She refuses emphatically and returns to St. Ogg's alone.

In Maggie's mind, what Stephen is suggesting by his marriage proposal amounts to a continuing drift from responsibility symbolized by their drift on the river's current. She considers their responsibilities to past relationships – in particular with Lucy, Philip, and Tom – to be sacred and overriding in importance. She cannot bring herself, finally, to reject the past in favor of her passion for Stephen. The reality is that Maggie shows herself here to be in fact under the influence of her past, unable to accept the changes to her life and identity that sexual awakening brings with it. This becomes clear in Maggie's speech to Stephen that "'If I could wake back again into the time before yesterday, I would choose to be true to my calmer affections, and live without the joy of love'" (426). Thus in her triumph over this situation, which she achieves by embracing the pain that returning to her hometown's contempt will bring her, Maggie refuses natural desire. The "'calmer affections'" of childhood – no doubt the innocent and harmless feelings of the sexless latency period – are what the adult Maggie longs for in a regressive refusal to grow. It is during the latency period that the psychic activity of sublimation, that is, directing sexual energy to socially acceptable activities, begins to flourish. The point of sublimation is to transform natural desire – specifically sexual desire – into more socially acceptable forms of expending energy, from art or philosophy to embroidery or woodworking. In its crusade against the natural, Christianity has made extensive use of this culturally induced psychic deformation.

Sublimation is the primary tool that Philip uses in counseling Maggie. More precisely, he urges her to adopt sublimation in the form of learning and culture as opposed to the severe religious sublimation she has taken up in her early teen years under the influence of Thomas à

Kempis. He recognizes and brings forcefully to Maggie's attention the stifling nature of the self-renunciation that à Kempis teaches:

> "You are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed – that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance – to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. . . .You are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself." (294)

Under the influence of her new guide, Maggie does begin to open herself to the world she has been denying and allow herself the inner growth she has been trying to block. Unfortunately Tom discovers their secret friendship and puts a brutal end to their meetings. Her next and final attempt at self-expression occurs at the end of the novel when she falls in love with Stephen, a move which ends in disaster. Philip's counseling of Maggie is motivated, in some way, by self-interest. Though he is genuinely concerned for her well-being in counseling her to free herself from the shackles of self-renunciation, he has an ulterior motive in the fact that he is in love with her and wants to spend time with her. To this end, he urges her to "'let me supply you with books; do let me see you sometimes – be your brother and teacher. . .'" (296). He encourages Maggie to cherish the past in the form of art and literature, but he is less enthusiastic about teaching her to cherish her personal past, considering this includes a father and brother who hate him by association with his own father. Philip's counseling phase over Maggie comes to an ironic conclusion at the end of the novel, when he comes to see the egotism embedded in his counseling and confesses to Maggie that she has rather been the truer counselor of the two.

Philip writes Maggie a letter at the end of the novel when she has returned to St. Ogg's after her shameful flight with Stephen. He describes to Maggie the process of reflection that has brought him to the point of realizing and renouncing his egotism and entering a "purer" love for her:

> even in [my] utmost agony – even in those terrible throes that love must suffer before it can be disembodied of selfish desire – my love for you sufficed to withhold me from suicide, without the aid of any other motive. In the midst of my egoism, I yet could not bear to come like a death-shadow across the feast of your joy. . . .The new life I have found in caring for your joy and sorrow more than for what is directly my own, has transformed the spirit of rebellious murmuring into that willing endurance which is the birth of strong sympathy. I think that nothing but such complete and intense love could have initiated me into that enlarged life which grows and grows by appropriating the life of others. . . . "For some time I have shrunk from writing to you, because I have shrunk even from the appearance of wishing to thrust myself before you, and so repeating my original error. . . . Remember that I am unchangeably yours: yours – not with selfish wishes, but with a devotion that excludes such wishes. (451)

Philip's use of images in describing this process is curious: he speaks of his love as having to be "'disembodied of selfish desire'," and then, a little further in the passage, he exultantly proclaims that this love, now disembodied but a "'complete and intense love'," is the only thing that could gain entry for him into "'that enlarged life which grows and grows by appropriating the life of others. . . .'" (457). Philip and, through him, Eliot are undoubtedly using these images to describe a spiritual process – a spiritual process predicated on the traditional body/soul split of Christianity. This love, which congratulates itself on having

achieved a special refinement by virtue of having left the clamors of the body behind, nevertheless seems to need to feed on "'the life of others'" to sustain its growth. It is as if, for the disembodied soul, one psyche – one's own psyche – is never enough. Eliot's bizarre logic prescribes, similarly, that one's own body be discarded as a worthless husk in order that the real treasures, other people's psyches or souls, may be "snatched." Philip thus testifies in his letter to Maggie's superior counseling of him even while he presumed to consider himself her mentor. Nevertheless, when Eliot introduces the letter into the narrative, she presents Philip, in his struggle to rid himself of his egotism, as having redeemed himself. He now has become a genuine link to Maggie's past: "Bob brought her a letter, without a post-mark, directed in a hand which she knew familiarly in the letters of her own name – a hand in which her name had been written long ago, in a pocket Shakespeare which she possessed" (449). Philip has become worthy to write Maggie's name: he has inscribed himself into her personal history. Therefore he has become a part of the community of past ties which she has always longed for but which her actual life and connections have not satisfactorily provided for her.

She remains true to Philip and Thomas à Kempis despite their flaws. Dr. Kenn drops out of the picture after he dismisses Maggie from her post as governess, thus, in effect, leaving her to her fate. Maggie is deeply moved by Philip's letter, quoted from above; she feels confirmed in her act of breaking with Stephen for the sake of remaining loyal to Philip and Lucy: "As Maggie knelt by the bed sobbing, with that letter pressed under her, her feelings again and again gathered themselves in a whispered cry, always in the same words: 'O God, is there any happiness in love that could make me forget their pain?'" (452). Finally, she believes in morality, spirituality and true love.

When the adolescent Maggie attempts to use Thomas à Kempis' teaching as a rigid and all-encompassing rule of life, Philip rightly identifies the boring part a self-denying doctrine casts over her. Nevertheless, Maggie returns to à Kempis for help in accomplishing a

single important task as the novel comes to an ending. She draws on her memory of his counsel when she wants to continue to resist rejoining Stephen. That temptation is painfully reawakened when Stephen writes her a letter begging her to let him come to her. At that moment, Thomas à Kempis' teaching seems to her to be

> the light that . . . came with the memories that no passion could long quench: the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart, rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the wind: "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me." (461)

The image of à Kempis' words of ultimate Christian self-sacrifice, uttered in "a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the wind" (461) powerfully foretells the novel's final catastrophe. Significantly, the Christian tone is "quite lost" in the tumult of the coming flood, which, after all, is the narrative's terrible victor. The flood represents the return of the repressed, the return of all that Maggie has struggled imperfectly to deny in herself: her own passion to grow into full womanhood. In accepting the teachings of Thomas à Kempis, in accepting Philip as a love object despite the fact that she feels no passion for him, in rejecting Stephen despite her overwhelming passion for him, Maggie has maintained an opposition to her natural feelings, specifically her sexual inclinations, that has lasted her entire adolescence and young adulthood. Maggie is thirteen years old (249) – just at the turning point of puberty – when she

begins to mount this opposition; family troubles are heavily pressing her, and she seeks to escape the pain of adult life by taking refuge in à Kempis' direction in self-renunciation.

Chapter IV

Portrayal of Victorian Mores in the Novel

This study on Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* explores life issues of the major character Maggie Tulliver who comes into conflict with the narrow-minded provincials of Victorian social values and mores that surround her. Through the adversaries that follow her father's bankruptcy, Maggie acquires a faith in Christian humility, motivated by her reading of Thomas a Kempis's book *The Imitation of Christ* recommended by Bob Jakin. In the meantime she is led into the world of physicality which is represented by her brother Tom and Philip Wakem. The issue of Maggie's relationship with her parents, her brother and her lovers is also explored from the perspective of social norms of nineteenth century England. But events become more complex than her ascetic way of life can respond to, and the final pages of the novel show the heroine reaching toward a "religion of humanity".

In the novel, George Eliot realistically presents a picture of a life in Warwickshire that is full of ignorance and oppression. Though Young Maggie is bright and attempts to establish herself as 'clever,' it is her brother Tom who gets more favour from their family and society. She is confined to the domesticity while her brother enjoys much freedom even though he is not as bright as she is. She learns a hard lesson: she has no place. She is too clever and too odd. Her intellect causes her to behave in a manner that appears impulsive and willful. In keeping the Victorian mindset, the novel encompasses many stereotypes of gender roles for Maggie and Tom.

Eliot She tries to find power in her situation as a little child by punishing her fetish doll. She is not willing to let things be taken away from her. She demonstrates this unwillingness when she cuts her hair before one of the aunts has an aunt to force her will upon her. She engages in self-denial so that she can make appear to herself that she is not being denied, but is acting upon her own free will When Tom offers to take

care of her she refuses and insists on sewing or teaching to earn her own living. In each of these cases she tries to establish herself so that others have less control over her. Tom has not the capability of sympathizing with Maggie. In reality, Tom is aligned with the narrow, self-serving ethic of the rising entrepreneur.

The novel also explores the issues of family values and marriage of the English society in the nineteenth century. She identifies herself as a person who is loyal to her family and early-established relationships. Maggie is loyal to her family to the end, even though she is rejected by her family. She needs to overcome her feelings of exaggerated family loyalty that limits or restricts her. Maggie may have achieved some self-identification by refusing to marry. By refusing the marriage, she also refuses a subordinate position. She attempts to overcome the conventionality of her provincial country life. Maggie manages to do this to some degree through education. Maggie is never able to overcome her need for religion. She is never able to give up her attachment to her brother, which is almost like a religion to her. She is never able to overcome her half-belief that Tom has a right to pass judgment on her. She does not obtain Tom's approval to marry Phillip Wakem or Stephen Guest. She goes to her brother, hoping for approval, which she would never fully obtain.

In this way, this thesis presents the protagonist Maggie Tulliver, as an anti-romantic character who finds herself caught in a web of conflict with her family and community as a result of both circumstance and her unique and spirited disposition. She finds herself affected by types of philosophies represented by two groups of characters: her brother Tom, Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest represent the mundane and commonplace aspect of her life whereas Bob Jakin who buys Thomas a Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and Dr. Kenn represent the spiritual side. In an angelic effort of saving others' life she finally gives her life and attains saintly status. The narrative casts Maggie as a tragic

heroine as she struggles between impulse and duty to define herself as an individual as at one time she takes pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial. And at another time she does not have any solution to resist a thing that she knows to be wrong. Maggie struggles to establish herself as a member of a society in which reputation, respectability, and tradition are paramount. In the eyes of her family and community, Maggie constantly fails to uphold the values which shape many of the characters' actions throughout the novel. This shows that Maggie is a realist and tragic character of the Victorian period.

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