

## Child Psychology in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

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### Abstract

George Eliot, a 19<sup>th</sup> century English woman writer and journalist, one of the leading authors of the Victorian era, is known for her connection of intellectual elements and emotional quality. Mary Ann Evans, using a pen name George Eliot, is of a great importance for her novels, in which she expresses her personal views of the period she lived in by different means than the other authors. She managed to gain a significant importance as a writer because her novels were different from the stereotypical light-hearted romances of her day. Her writing style reveals her interest in the religious moral code, in-depth analysis of a character, intellectual potential, and sociological interest. Eliot united the

presence of the author with psychological analyses of her characters, frequently placing herself in the position of a main heroine.

### Paper

George Eliot is one of those Victorian Novelists who is known for her intellectual perception, moral insight and psychological penetration into the deep recesses of socio-cultural milieu and inner scape of a character so as to bring out the essential morality of the society as well as authentic substance of the man which makes her novels superb artistic study of the sociological dimensions and psycho-spiritual nuances of life. Although there are some scholars like John Ruskin who has called the novels of George Eliot in general and *The Mill on the Floss* in particular as an expression of

Literary Disease which minutely celebrates the trivial and the insignificant. Even F.R. Leavis in the modern age has described some of the characters depicted in her novels as mere outline sketches without any psycho-intellectual depth and socio-cultural moorings. But, a close and minute study of *The Mill on the Floss* reveals that such charges leveled against George Eliot's art are unfounded and reflect a lop-sided and biased study of her novels based on personal tastes and likes. That is why, *The Mill on the Floss* has rightly been called an artistic study into the child psychology where Maggie Tullivers not only dominates the central thematic stream of the story, but also constitutes a psycho-spiritual autobiography of the novelist himself. In other words, Maggie stands as a rallying point comprising both the terminal and exit for all other events and characters in the novel.

When we meet for the first time in the novel, she is a simple and plain looking ugly duckling with unclean dress with a sensitive mind and

emotionally surcharged temperament, especially in her relationship with her father, Mr. Tulliver and her brother, Tom. The psychological study of the novel is made in terms of Tom-Maggie-Philip-Lucy-Stephen syndrome under the backdrop of St. Ogg's society of English rural midland.

Albeit, Maggie's psychological make-up is in sharp contrast to that of Tom, but there is a perfect epitome of the orthodox, conservative and repressive values of Dodson family and Victorian rural English society of St.Ogg's, where as Maggie is a sensitive, idealist whose defiance and unconventional attitude to life is Aeschelian in intensity. When Tom refuses to play with her or he does not take her to the outing, Maggie as a sensitive child goes to her attic and starts beating her doll. On one occasion when everybody in the house and particularly and Mrs. Deane makes insulting remarks about her ugly dress, Maggie angrily goes inside and cut her hairs. In the same way, when Tom wishes to take Lucy along with him, Maggie pushes Lucy

down in the mud and runs away to the nearest Gypsy camp to escape berating. In this way, George Eliot has successfully explored and powerfully captured the inner psyche, thought and feeling of a child born in a uncogential and repressive environment of the Victorian English country side. The psycho-analysis of the thoughts and feelings of Tom in the novel is selective as per the requirement of the illustration of central stream in the novel comparing what Lioncal Stevenson has called “the working of the innermost psycho-spiritual contours of the personality of Maggie as a mouthpiece of the novelist”. F.r.Leavis, in his essay, The Great Tradition says: “The most intensive bonding element between an author and a heroine Maggie and George Eliot is the keynote of the novel. The novelist, through the imaginative picture of Maggie Tulliver, is delineating the story of her own childhood.”<sup>1</sup>

After the bankruptcy, Mr. Tulliver makes his son and daughter take an oath on the Bible to avenge the family humiliation And insult against

the lawyer, Wakem, which, in fact, defines the next course of relationship for both Maggie and Tom. Consequently, Tom secures a job in The Guest Company whereby dint of efficiency and hard work, he becomes a partner at the age of 23, whereas, Maggie is forced to stop meeting Philip Wakem- the man she loves- which in a way is responsible for her drift with Stephen Guest on the river Floss. Even when Maggie was swayed away by the tide of the impulse with Stephen, she declined his offer of marriage, it would have been double prolonged injury to the faith of Lucy and the Love of Philip, which again is an evidence of a healthy mind in Maggie. Nevertheless, she decides to force the society of ST. Ogg’s and her family where she remains fighting a losing battle as Tom shuts his doors upon her and the society ostracizing her as says B.Samman, in his book, The Developed Image of the Heroine : “All heroines crucial for the plot, in many cases, portrayal of George Eliot herself, did have to make compromise

which were accompanied by melancholy and their struggle always ends in tragedy”<sup>3</sup>

In this way, George Eliot has artistically fused the domestic and social environment with the psychological complex of a number of characters with Maggie at the centre, where the novel *The Mill on the Floss* seems to be an essentially moral study of life with a strong spectrum of psychological analysis of the heart, soul and mind of Maggie, making it a spiritual autobiography of Marry Ann Evans herself.

## References

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