

# Conflicts between Duty and Love in Maggie Tulliver

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## Introduction

*The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot is regarded as the most autobiographical novel of all her works. The term 'autobiographical' is frequently used for critiques of this work. However, the nuance here of this term is slightly different from the general meaning, for the novel is considered to be 'a *spiritual* autobiography'.<sup>1</sup> The minute description of happenings around the characters and their situations in this novel does not exactly correspond to the actual life of George Eliot. The word 'autobiographical' here is used with emphasis on the spiritual growth or development of the author. Consequently, when this novel is studied from this autobiographical point of view, it is essential to examine the heroine Maggie's inner world.

The novel as a spiritual autobiography naturally contains a great deal of personal feelings. In fact, this novel is Eliot's most personal work, and it is a very appealing story because there is the sublimation of private agony that Eliot herself experienced. The emotional aspects of this novel have a great attraction. These details are observed in the following chapters. Though Eliot tends to write objectively, this novel tells much of her innermost feelings in a rather subjective way. This is the notable feature of this novel which accounts for its irresistible charm; Eliot produced this masterpiece by wielding her pen with great emotion.

The definition of the term 'autobiographical' and the personal aspects of the novel have been stressed above. The point is now on the source of Eliot's strong emotion that produced this great novel. To take a general view of Eliot's life, we can observe two kinds of anguish caused by the disparity between her beliefs and social conventions. One is about Christian faith, and the other is about matrimony. When Eliot abandoned her faith in God, she refused to go to church, which disquieted her father. In addition, when Eliot met George Henry Lewes and determined to live together as man and wife, her beloved brother Isaac disowned her because of her unorthodox union with Lewes. This rift with her brother was a constant worry to the author, and she wrote *The Mill on the Floss* during such a worrying period. Eliot suffered anguish

about the external demands of duty and the internal needs of love. This personal agony is the very thing that enabled George Eliot to describe the conflicts between duty and love in Maggie Tulliver.

In order to trace Maggie's character formation, the chapters in this essay are arranged in chronological order. In Chapter I, the realistic description of her girlhood is chiefly discussed, and then the characteristic nature of Maggie's love is considered. When Maggie comes into her adolescence, she becomes conscious of her own self, and experiences the friction between other people's sense of values and her own. In the second chapter, Eliot's intention to describe the collision between an individual and a community is explored after following the process of Maggie's self-renunciation. In Chapter III, Maggie's relationship with Philip is considered, and the feature of their love is discussed separately. An omen of tragedy and an obvious sign of conflicts between duty and love are seen here. In the fourth chapter, the Maggie-Stephen affair is examined in order to appreciate Eliot's message in this most vital part of the story. In the last chapter, much attention is paid to Tom's character, and the factors of the tragedy are explored.

The purpose of this essay is to clarify Eliot's message to the reader and the artistic effects in the novel, by linking Maggie's inner experience to the author's.

## **I. Girl's Joy and Sorrow**

Every reader of *The Mill on the Floss* must be impressed with its vivid and realistic description of childhood. Firstly, the verisimilitude of the description deserves special mention. There is a perceptive insight into the delicate psychology of a little girl, and the depiction is highly detailed. With regard to this depiction, only a few British novels can be equal to this novel that draws a girl's joy and sorrow so naturally and lucidly. Maggie is the exact opposite of Tom who is 'one of those lads that grow everywhere in England',<sup>2</sup> and she has a strong personality both in appearance and in mind. Maggie is a bright girl, and she shows her emotions so crudely and behaves as a child of nature. The Victorian novelists were apparently descended from romantic poets, and inclined to sanctify the innocence of childhood. However, Maggie is not an angel of a girl who is supposed to be pure and beautiful. If there is such an angel in this novel, that must be Lucy. Without the loveliness of Lucy, Maggie appears to be much more charming and loveable. The scene in the attic attractively and effectively shows Maggie's loveable character. When Mrs Tulliver was brushing her daughter's hair, 'Maggie suddenly rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water'<sup>3</sup> because she

disliked having her hair curled. Then, she made her way towards the attic 'shaking the water from her black locks as she ran, like a Skye terrier escaped from his bath'.<sup>4</sup> There 'Maggie frets out all her ill-humours',<sup>5</sup> and there she 'keeps a Fetish which she punishes for all her misfortunes'.<sup>6</sup> The reason why we sense a sort of humour in such a description might be that Maggie's behaviour has something jolly and piquant. This behaviour is favourably childlike and is entirely free from the customs or the socially accepted ideas that grown-ups approve.

Thus, the former part of this novel has an excellent depiction of a girl's joy and sorrow. However, there is a problem of imbalance to be noticed as we find the description of Maggie's girlhood and of her environment in the first two Books occupy as much as one third of the whole. Eliot herself was aware of this, but the main cause of this was wholly due to her deep attachment to her hometown where she lived her girlhood. Eliot had already been deprived of both her parents before she took up her pen for this novel, and there was bitter discord between Eliot and her beloved brother Isaac during the composition of this novel. Eliot must have been haunted by the distress that nothing could make them understand each other at that time. Girlhood to the author in this period was an adored world to which she could never return. If we criticise this novel by eliminating author's personal conditions from her writing, the imbalance at issue must be a problem. However, this problem gives readers today a new allurements as revealing Eliot's soul, the distress and love in Eliot's own life enhancing the charm of the childhood description.

Maggie's single-minded love for her brother Tom is glimpsed on almost every page of the first volume. Maggie, who is very emotional, feels joys and sorrows for trivial things in her daily life, but the only ruler of her emotions is her brother Tom. He has a decisive influence on her delicate feelings. The characteristic of Maggie's love is observed after this through her relationship with her beloved brother.

Maggie tells Luke the head miller how much she loves her brother. 'I love Tom so dearly, Luke – better than anybody else in the world. When he grows up, I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together. I can tell him everything he doesn't know. But I think Tom's clever, for all he doesn't like books: he makes beautiful whip-cord and rabbit-pens.'<sup>7</sup> However, all the rabbits that 'Tom spent all his money to buy'<sup>8</sup> died. Maggie takes great pains to appease Tom's wrath when she has to tell him about the rabbits, for 'Maggie dreaded Tom's anger of all things'.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Tom, who has a strong sense of justice, tries to punish Maggie and won't forgive Maggie easily despite her imploration. She had thought how happy she would be when Tom came home, but now she is deep in sorrow because he is cruel and doesn't love her. Tom

leaves her alone and pushes her feelings down from the seventh heaven to the depths of sorrow. Tom is the only ruler of Maggie's joys and sorrows, but he is such a dull boy who has no sensibility to understand Maggie's delicate feelings. Maggie loves her brother more than any one else, and she ungrudgingly pours out the whole of her affection for Tom. However, it is important to note that Maggie's love is not a heavenly love. She always desires her love to be rewarded, and her love is supported by the desire to be loved in return. In short, she expresses her affection simply because she wanted to be loved. 'The need of being loved', that is 'the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature'.<sup>10</sup> 'When her need of love triumphed over her pride',<sup>11</sup> the narrator expands this nature into the general idea. 'It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love, this hunger of the heart: as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world.'<sup>12</sup> This means that we cannot live on unless we are blessed with other's love, just as we cannot live without food.

Maggie's love is earnest and deep, but its great happiness exists in the reward itself. When one's love for the other is properly rewarded, it brings perfect union between the two. If not, the joy of the union never arises. In Maggie's case, she loves others so earnestly wishing to be loved that a heavenly love seems to be hypocritical, lifeless, and unattractive. This theme of love is of great significance in George Eliot's life, so some mention of it will be given again in the following chapters.

### **. From Ego to Renunciation**

'The golden gate'<sup>13</sup> of Maggie's girlhood had for ever closed behind her, and she went forth into her 'new life of sorrow'<sup>14</sup> and entered 'the thorny wilderness'<sup>15</sup> with the coming of her adolescence.

Maggie becomes conscious of her *self*, and the customs of her community that are based on traditionally fixed ideas gradually begin to strike her as incongruous to her ego. Such a community in which Maggie has grown up nurtures her rebellious spirit, and she experiences difficulties in coming to terms with older people around her. These symptoms of her ego seem to overlap with the young Marian's in many ways. In this chapter, the disparity between the generations that brings pains and difficulties to Maggie is to be observed. This observation, as a result, reveals the process of Maggie's self-renunciation, in which Eliot's intention to describe the collision between individual and community can be seen.

First of all, it is naturally required to define the socially accepted ideas of the community

because those are the very things that build up the background of the process of Maggie's renunciation. The representatives of the influential ideas in the community are the Dodsons and the Tullivers. In short, 'the religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable'.<sup>16</sup> It seems that their unenlightened ideas are easily seated in traditional customs. Their religion is merely in name, and it cannot be the salvation of a suffering soul. They are living in an age that swallows anything from the past, and a carefree life exists in ignorance rather than in learning. These are the conditions that cause pains to Maggie and oppress her. Basically, she cannot put confidence in conventional religion or material prosperity. The following observation traces the process of Maggie's reformation from ego to renunciation.

Under these circumstances, it is inevitable that a girl like Maggie becomes aware of her self. The sensitive Maggie cannot easily follow such conventions, but at the same time she cannot sever her relations with the surroundings she was brought up in. Two contrary feelings coming from a rebellious spirit against the middle-class narrowness, and from a fateful sense of solidarity with the customs of the community, arise in Maggie, and she has to stand in a dilemma. Here, the theme of tragic conflicts between generations is unfolded; a person of high integrity is destined to face these sorts of conflicts. Thus, Eliot's inquiry into the reciprocity where the internal world of an individual is inextricably linked with the external world of convention is well recounted.

The bankruptcy of the Tullivers divested their home of the once warm atmosphere, and the days of sorrowful struggle against poverty began. During these hard times, Maggie experienced struggle and conflict between 'the inward impulse and outward fact which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature'.<sup>17</sup> Maggie's passion is a craving for beauty and learning, but she feels nothing but pain because she has no means to attain them. 'She could make dream-worlds of her own – but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life.'<sup>18</sup> 'She wanted some key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart.'<sup>19</sup> Then, she found the key in the book, *Thomas à Kempis*. The book explains the teachings of renunciation. 'This voice out of the far-off middle ages, was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message.'<sup>20</sup> This divine revelation by Thomas à Kempis proves to be Maggie's major turning point.

Maggie's soul is always craving for something sublime, and 'some volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions'<sup>21</sup> appear in her face at intervals. However, she has to experience nothing

but frustration even if she earnestly thirsts for sublimity. Hence, she discovers peace in self-renunciation. The reason her ego can come to terms with the customs of renunciation is only because she wishes, more than anything else, to be loved by Tom who is a symbol of the customary world. Renunciation is the only way to salvation for Maggie who stands in a dilemma.

The conflicts between generations have been considered through Maggie's process of renunciation. What then is the cause of the conflicts? Where is Eliot's intention to describe such conflicts? As an answer, the word 'evolution' should be considered. As Rosemary Ashton observes in *George Eliot* (1983), Eliot's essays in 1855 and 1856 prove that Eliot applied philosophical principles to literature. The technical term that she used in those essays was 'evolution'. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the plot that the new generation is destined to experience the conflict with the older culture in order to make progress shows one aspect of Eliot's evolutionary ideas.

### **. Vessel for Love and Passion**

As has been mentioned in the second chapter, Maggie regards renunciation as the best virtue. However, her belief in self-renunciation is to be swayed by Philip Wakem. In this chapter, Maggie's relationship with Philip is mainly observed. Firstly, how Maggie and Philip influenced each other is considered, and then the feature of their love is discussed. The obvious signs of Maggie's conflicts between duty and love can be seen here, so this is carefully considered at the end of this chapter.

When we try to understand how Philip's existence has influenced Maggie, we should make certain of Maggie's nature. Maggie wished to be loved since her girlhood, and she fully expressed her love towards Tom simply because she wanted him to love her. However, Tom is insusceptible to her delicate feelings and doesn't reward Maggie for her affection. In comparison with Tom, Philip has cherished and hinted at a deep affection for Maggie, and has cared about her feelings. 'In the early weeks of her loneliness she continually recalled the image of him among the people who had been kind to her in life, often wishing she had him for a brother and a teacher, as they had fancied it might have been, in their talk together.'<sup>22</sup> When Maggie enters her adolescence, she has chances to see him again. She says, 'What a dear, good brother you would have been Philip. I think you would have made as much fuss about me, and been as pleased for me to love you, as would have satisfied even me. You would have loved me

well enough to bear with me, and forgive me everything. That was what I always longed that Tom should do.<sup>23</sup> In short, he is the ideal brother she has wished for. In addition, Maggie has an acute wish to become learned. Philip can quench her thirst for learning, so he is also a teacher to Maggie. The customs of their community are a cage for Maggie, but Philip tries to release her from there. Philip is the only dependable ally for Maggie, and no one but he can appease her thirst for beauty and learning. Maggie's natural desire to display her ability arises in the friendship with Philip who is crippled but has a sensitive heart and an artistic temperament.

Next, let us observe how the existence of Maggie has influenced Philip. While Maggie visits Tom at school, Philip comes to like Maggie, and his affection towards Maggie is hinted at. When Maggie and Philip are in the study alone together, Philip says, 'I'm very fond of *you*, Maggie; I shall never forget *you*, and when I'm very unhappy, I shall always think of you, and wish I had a sister with dark eyes just like yours.'<sup>24</sup> He goes on to say, 'They're not like any other eyes. They seem trying to speak – trying to speak kindly. I don't like other people to look at me much, but I like you to look at me, Maggie.'<sup>25</sup> Maggie's eyes have such a great influence upon Philip. As Philip is an ideal brother for Maggie, Maggie is also an ideal sister for Philip. Here is a herald of their early love. As they grow up, his feelings for Maggie become more earnest and serious. The next paragraph reveals the characteristics of Philip's love for Maggie.

Philip is four or five years older than Maggie, and he is fully conscious of his strong feelings towards her, but Maggie, who is now a seventeen-year-old maiden, doesn't have 'the idea that he might become her lover.'<sup>26</sup> Philip says almost fretfully, 'Ah, Maggie, you would never love me so well as you love your brother.'<sup>27</sup> He thinks, however, that 'if any woman can love him – surely Maggie is that woman: there is such wealth of love in her.'<sup>28</sup> He clings to the possibility that she *may* love him, but his love for Maggie is not the sort of selfish one. His deep affection earnestly tries to dissuade Maggie from renunciation and feeds her mind by bringing her some opportunities to experience culture.

Maggie's love for Philip is, on the other hand, rather passive. She likes being with him and talking with him very much, but her love does not have any tint of passionate or ardent love. She comes to love him because he wants her to love him. In this way, Maggie's love towards Philip is mainly based on sympathy and camaraderie, and it is the symbol of the nature of Maggie's love. Her attitude towards Philip plainly shows us the characteristics of her love. Maggie's nature has been inclined to express sympathy for unhappy people since her girlhood. When Philip entreated Maggie to see him sometimes, it was very hard for Maggie to refuse his

entreaties because she thinks it will be a kindness to him and 'an opportunity indicated for making her mind more worthy of its highest service.'<sup>29</sup> Besides, she has always longed to be loved, and Philip is 'the only person who has ever seemed to love her devotedly.'<sup>30</sup> Then, turning to Philip, Maggie is the vessel for his love and passion because she is the only one who can receive and accept his feelings, and Philip is vice versa. The existence of each other is the only and mutual vessel for love and passion. They are surely very distinguished among people in the town of St Ogg, so they have no one but each other to satisfy their demands.

It should be noted that both personalities have characteristics that lead them to the tragic result. Maggie has already felt an inward conflict since her reunion with Philip because her assignation with Philip is a treasonable act against her father and brother under the circumstances, namely the strife over the mill between the Tullivers and the Wakems. Maggie is in constant fear that their secret may be discovered. She is bound by loyalty to her father and brother, so she is not entirely happy during the secret meeting. It is obvious that she experiences conflicts between duty and love. Maggie's lines, 'If I were free, but I am not – I must submit,'<sup>31</sup> express this well. Duty binds Maggie to loyalty for father and brother, and love brings gratification and liberation to her. The conflicts between the two are the nucleus of this tragedy; the pitiable scenes between Maggie and Philip are an omen of the Maggie-Stephen affair. The agitation gradually adds to Maggie's grief as the realities of her surroundings are divulged.

### **. Dilemma and Decision**

After Maggie left her situation in which she had been nearly two years since the loss of her father, she came to her cousin Lucy's home in St Ogg and there she meets Stephen Guest who seems to be Lucy's fiancé. Maggie and Stephen feel irresistible attraction for each other, and finally their love for each other is declared in spite of themselves. Love between Maggie and Stephen here is totally different from the faint love between Maggie and Philip. The story reaches the climax here, and the current of the story vehemently changes into a torrent. In this chapter, first of all, the driving force that brought a predicament to Maggie is identified, and then Eliot's artistry and message in the Maggie-Stephen affair are examined. Lastly, conflicts between duty and love that pierced through both Maggie's and author's life are discussed.

As the chapters above have shown, Maggie became conscious of her ego and has groped her way through some books and the tryst with Philip. She has already experienced a dilemma between duty and love, but Stephen's love for Maggie appears to swallow everything that she has



cherished such as faith, conscience, and duty. Stephen entices Maggie so abruptly and easily, and the driving force that unites the two seems to be rather violent. What on earth is it? The reason the readers have this kind of query is that the description of Stephen's personality is too insufficient. The poor description of Stephen has been the target of criticism. Leslie Stephen presented this comment; it is unnatural that a girl like Maggie is prompted to love Stephen who is 'a mere hairdresser's block'.<sup>32</sup> This sort of criticism is simply based on the lack of Stephen's description. It seems to be practically implausible that Maggie easily falls in love with Stephen and betrays both Philip and her dear cousin Lucy, so this causes bewilderment to the readers. This issue would be resolved if the lack of description is considered to be the only matter for the problem, but if we go back to the text again and go deep into the story, we realise that the driving force that unites Maggie and Stephen originates in sexuality. As to Platonic love, there is no comparison between Philip and Stephen, and Maggie must have much more closer ties of affection with Philip than with Stephen. However, she feels how hard it is to overcome strong feelings springing from inside. It is undeniable, however, that the rôle of Stephen Guest seems to be out of harmony with the other characters. One feasible explanation is that he is the only person who has not lived his childhood with Maggie, but that can be a suitable condition to usher Maggie into her sexual awakening.

As has been mentioned, the driving force that unites Maggie and Stephen lies in sexuality. Most of the recent critics take this view, but Victorian critics also must have recognised such relationships from the description itself. However, treating love as a sensual experience was hardly acceptable to the Victorian moral sense, and it was rather an offence against Victorian standards. The *Saturday Review* critic speaks for his age when he says, "There are feelings over which we ought to throw a veil."<sup>33</sup> If that is the case, what made Eliot dare describe such an affair in such an age? The next paragraph will discuss the significance of Eliot's intention to describe sexuality.

It is notorious that all humans are fallible and experience sexual temptation, but what is the true message that Eliot wanted to convey in the chapter, "The Great Temptation"? Eliot explained the tryst scenes of Maggie and Stephen in her reply to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton who criticized the scene. "The other chief point of criticism – Maggie's position towards Stephen – is too vital a part of my whole conception and purpose for me to be converted to the condemnation of it. If I am wrong there – if I did not really know what my heroine would feel and do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her, I ought not to have written this book at all, but quite a different book, if any."<sup>34</sup> This comment reveals that describing the Maggie-Stephen

affair was her indispensable duty in this novel, namely the scenes contain the message that Eliot really wanted to convey. The present writer argues that Eliot wished to lay stress on human nature as the spiritual existence beyond animality. Certainly, the relationship between Maggie and Stephen are based on their sexual feelings, but at the same time the moral senses or human virtues gradually stand out in clear relief against animality. Eliot persistently describes the inner conflicts between desires and duty, conscience, or human ties. Her description of sexuality must be nothing but an element to balance with spirituality. Eliot positively describes her belief that spirituality overcomes animality in this story. The scenes where Maggie is torn between her sense of duty and love produce profound artistry, and the dispute between Maggie and Stephen pulls us into each of their feelings. This kind of conversation is also given in the scene where Maggie talks with Philip in the Red Deeps, but nothing could be more eloquent than the scene that Stephen implores Maggie to marry him. When Maggie says, 'I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others,'<sup>35</sup> it speaks for Eliot's belief which had been fostered in her whole life. Similar remarks are repeated when Maggie and Stephen drift ashore at Mudport on their way to elopement. Although Maggie has been in a state of spiritual darkness for such a long time, she has determined to say good-bye to him by this time. Her resolutions still waver through Stephen's endearing tones, but she says, 'I cannot marry you – I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery.'<sup>36</sup> These lines express her moral pain in the utmost extremities. This morality prevents the novel from becoming merely a cheap love story. In the opening of *Middlemarch*, Eliot portrays a person as 'the mysterious mixture'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it is a characteristic in George Eliot's novels that the fallible and more complex flesh-and-blood heroines are realistically and sympathetically described. Apparently simplified characters were described in many of the English nineteenth-century novels, so it was a new movement in the history of English novels when the psychological description of one's inner life was analytically and realistically presented. It seems that Eliot expected her readers to empathise with the heroines through their complications. After Eliot was acclaimed for *Adam Bede*, she became conscious of her influence and aware of her duty as a writer, and her most important mission in life was elevating the human mind by expanding sympathies. Hence, her ultimate objective in describing the conflicts of Maggie and Stephen may be found in the wealth of spirituality and the triumph of humanity over animality.

The heroines, such as Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Romola in *Romola*, and Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, have the same kind of difficulties as Maggie Tulliver has, and this seems to be a variation of the same theme. Thus, the pangs of love pervade the major novels of George Eliot, and that seems

to be the greatest theme of her novels. It appears that the root of the theme is the personal agony that Eliot herself experienced. Therefore, the novels of George Eliot are mostly autobiographical in that sense.

It is considered that Eliot ruminated over the decision that she made at the age of thirty-four by depicting her heroines in emotional angst. The situation of each heroine is different from the real life of George Eliot, but the plot that the heroines experience the inward conflicts between duty and love is the same as Eliot's experiences, and the nucleus of the stories remains the same.

George Eliot took marriage seriously and regarded her own irregular but deeply fulfilling relationship with G. H. Lewes as if it were a marriage properly solemnised by the Church and recognised in law.<sup>38</sup> In translating Ludwig Feuerbach she had encountered his celebration of marriage as 'the free bond of love' and it was on this principle that she acted.<sup>39</sup> Eliot's marriage with Lewes was illegal and against the Victorian moral sense, but that was the ideal marriage for which Eliot had longed. Both Maggie and Eliot, both of them experienced the inward conflicts between duty and love. One chose duty, while the other chose love. However, the important thing here is not the result but the process that both of them experienced.

## V. Brother and Sister

The strong ties between Tom and Maggie are the crucial element in this tragedy. It is obvious that the ties bind Maggie to duty. The chapters above have shown the process of Maggie's conflict between duty and love. In this chapter, the tragic elements and effects in this novel are observed by taking into consideration Tom's character from his boyhood to his youth and the implication of the tragic ending, for *The Mill on the Floss* is the only one of George Eliot's novels with a tragic ending.

Firstly, the relationship between Maggie and Tom is discussed. The description of their childhood is mostly based on Eliot's own memory of her relationship with her brother Isaac. Later on, Eliot wrote a sonnet 'Brother and Sister', and the sonnet has some parallels with Tom and Maggie's childhood in this novel.

Maggie is called by the pet name of 'Magsie' when Tom is in a very good mood. Such a happy scene is, however, of a merely transient joy. As a child, Maggie adores her brother Tom and desperately seeks his love and approval, but she never receives it. Tom's character is very different from Maggie's, so they come to quarrel. Maggie is very compassionate and intelligent, but Tom has 'very prosaic eyes not apt to be dimmed by mists of feeling or imagination.'<sup>40</sup> Tom

inherits most of his character from the Dodsons. As has been mentioned in the second chapter, the Dodsons represents the social conventions of the town of St Ogg. These show that Tom is the symbol of the things that bind Maggie to her surroundings. The most outstanding characteristic of Tom's personality is his strong sense of justice. Maggie senses that his strong sense of justice is very cruel, and these symptoms are the main cause of Maggie's great distress. When Tom discovered that Maggie has met Philip secretly in the Red Deeps, his words and deeds to Philip caused great pains in Maggie. This disparity in their nature is the source of the greatest tragedy. Maggie loves Tom so dearly, but they can never understand each other because of this. It seems that the very tragedy, namely the fate-ruled tragedy, in this novel is seen here rather than in its ending. Apparently the deepest sorrow of the author is sunk in the every day incidents of Tom and Maggie because their life is full of tragic and fatal events. Maggie comes to have a rebellious spirit against her brother, but at the same time she can never cut off the strong ties with Tom. She says, 'I desire no future that will break the ties of the past. But the tie to my brother is one of the strongest. I can do nothing willingly that will divide me always from him.'<sup>41</sup> Maggie's strong ties to her brother are fateful. While Tom grows up to be the kind of person the world approves of, i.e. dutiful and proud, Maggie becomes the kind of person the world judges harshly. A woman ahead of her time, brimming with intelligence and imagination, Maggie becomes increasingly difficult for her brother and the rest of her family to understand. These situations were very familiar to the author while she was writing this very story, for Eliot was forsaken by her beloved brother Isaac due to the liaison with Lewes and was leading an uneasy life. There are traces of painstaking effort in those descriptions, but this private agony of George Eliot adds verisimilitude to the story and is still moving the readers today.

It is noteworthy that the echoes of the Greek tragedy *the Antigone* are observable in this novel. According to *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, Eliot wrote an essay about the tragedy, 'The Antigone and its Moral' in 1859. She adapts the interpretation, drawn from the German classicist August Böckh, which sees the dispute between Antigone and Creon as a clash of two just and compelling moral imperatives, namely the well-being of the state and the demands of family duty. The principles informing her own fiction are seen in her depiction of both Creon and Antigone as psychologically complex, and alike conscious of just blame for transgressing one principle in following another. She also insists that the 'antagonism of valid principles' is not peculiar to polytheism; rather, the play is timeless as a representation of the struggle between the outer life of man and his inward needs.<sup>42</sup> This theme is repeated in her later novels.

Literary critics have presented various evaluations about the conclusion of this novel. One of the most famous is the criticism by Henry James. He said of the tragic denouement in his essay, 'The Novels of George Eliot', in *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1866. 'The dénouement shocks the reader most painfully. Nothing has prepared him for it; the story does not move towards it; it casts no shadow before it.'<sup>43</sup> Many influential later critics have agreed with him, including F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (1948). However, as Barbara Hardy points out, James was obviously wrong in one respect. Though the story does not move towards the denouement, the tragic elements and effects are seen beforehand in the various scenes such as when Mrs Tulliver fretfully worries about Maggie tumbling in the river someday and being drowned.

Finally, let us discuss the implication of the tragic ending. A deluge strikes the town of St Ogg, and Maggie rescues her brother by a boat. An entirely new revelation of the depths of life comes to Tom, and the brother and sister come into the true harmony for the first time. After the divine silence, Tom's lips found a word they could utter: the old childish – 'Magsie!' In an instant, however, they disappeared into the waves. This ending seems to take an easy way, but apparently it has the author's great and personal wish that the Eliot herself and her brother Isaac might understand each other and live in harmony someday. In that sense this ending is Eliot's wish fulfilment, and the wish must have been an irresistible force to describe the last scene because she had long suffered from the discord with her beloved brother. The epitaph, 'In their death, they were not divided,' must be the symbol of Eliot's greatest wish throughout her life.

## **Conclusion**

*The Mill on the Floss* is a powerful and emotional story about the conflicts and the choice between duty and love. In the first chapter, we observed Eliot's realistic descriptions of childhood and the characteristic of Maggie's need to be loved. In the second chapter, we saw that Eliot's intention to describe the disparity between the generations was based on her belief in evolutionism through the process of Maggie's renunciation. In the third chapter, we considered the relationship between Maggie and Philip, and found that the existence of each other was a vessel for love and passion because they are unusual among people in the town of St Ogg. In the fourth chapter, Eliot's ultimate objective to describe the conflicts of Maggie and Stephen was found in the wealth of spirituality and the triumph of humanity over animality. In the last chapter, after the tragic elements and effects in this novel were observed, the implication of the

tragic ending was found in Eliot's greatest wish in life.

This essay has tried to cast a light on the various dilemmas of Maggie or Eliot through this most autobiographical work. The heroine Maggie who has strong sensibilities and intelligence had to live in confrontation with the conventional community all the time from her childhood to youth. The individual and his or her environment interact dynamically as if they had a life and soul of their own. High evaluation should be bestowed upon the vivid descriptions of the thick social structure that supports the story. This novel can be designated as 'the female *Bildungsroman*'<sup>44</sup> because the story traces the personal growth and development of Maggie Tulliver. Contemporary works such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens stand comparison with this novel.

As the chapters above have shown, Eliot is a novelist who wished to elevate the mind by expanding the range of sympathies. It seems that one of Eliot's major objectives in this novel is also expanding sympathies. The author overtly asks the reader to empathise with the heroine Maggie and other characters.

The writer's wish will be fulfilled if this essay can help in any way to approach her life and works, and present a unique reading, even to a slight degree, of *The Mill on the Floss*. This story is very personal, even more so as it led the author to truthfully describe her own thoughts and natural emotions. The outcome is one of George Eliot's best-loved works.

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen, *George Eliot*, AMS press, 1973, p.86.

<sup>2</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A. S. Byatt, Penguin Classics, 1985, Book I, Chapter 5, p.84. (Hereafter referred to as *Mill*)

<sup>3</sup> *Mill*, Book I, Chapter 4, p.78.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp.81-2.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.82

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.87

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 5, p.89.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 7, p.270.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 1, p.364.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 2, p.367.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 3, p.379.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.384.

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- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.387.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, Book V, Chapter 1, p.391.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 3, pp.427-8.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 6, p.260.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, Book V, Chapter 1, p.399.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.402.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.404.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, Book V, Chapter 3, p.424.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, Book VI, Chapter 2, p.491.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, Book V, Chapter 1, p.403.
- <sup>32</sup> Leslie Stephen, *op. cit.*, p.104.
- <sup>33</sup> *Casebook Series: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner*, ed. R. P. Draper, Macmillan, 1977, p.11.
- <sup>34</sup> *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll, Routledge, 1971, p.123.
- <sup>35</sup> *Mill*, Book VI, Chapter 11, pp.570-1.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, Chapter 14, p.605.
- <sup>37</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton, Penguin Classics, 1994, p.3.
- <sup>38</sup> *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.250.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Mill*, Book IV, Chapter 2, p.368.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, Book VI, Chapter 10, p.564.
- <sup>42</sup> John Rignall (ed.), *op. cit.* p.13.
- <sup>43</sup> Quoted in Barbara Hardy, *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, p.46.
- <sup>44</sup> John Rignall (ed.), *op. cit.* p.25.

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