

REALISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTH IN "THE MILL ON THE FLOSS" BY
GEORGE ELIOT

Saidova Zulfizar Khudoyberdievna

*Doctor of Philosophy in Philological Sciences Teacher of English Linguistics Department Bukhara
State University z.x.saidova@bsu.uz*

Nasriyeva Makhliyo Iskandar qizi

2nd year Master student Asia International University

Abstract: *This thesis examines George Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss" as a realist novel with strong psychological depth. The study focuses on the way Eliot represents ordinary family life, social limits, gender expectations, and the inner conflicts of Maggie Tulliver. Special attention is given to the connection between external reality and inner emotional life. The novel is realistic because it presents the provincial world in a believable, detailed, and socially grounded way. At the same time, it is psychologically rich because characters are not shown only through action, but also through memory, moral struggle, feeling, and self-control. The research uses close reading, textual analysis, and a literary-psychological approach. The expected result is a clearer understanding of how Eliot joins realism with deep psychological representation and why this novel remains important in the study of Victorian fiction.*

Key words: *realism, psychological depth, George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, Maggie Tulliver, Victorian novel, inner conflict, provincial life, family relations.*

INTRODUCTION

George Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss" is one of the most significant Victorian novels because it combines a truthful picture of social life with a deep study of the human mind. The novel does not depend on sensational events. Instead, it develops through family relations, moral pressure, childhood memory, social judgment, and painful personal choices. For this reason, the work is valuable not only as a realist text, but also as a psychological novel.

The relevance of this topic can be seen in the fact that Eliot presents reality in a very human way. The world of St. Ogg's is shown through daily habits, class values, economic problems, and strict ideas about proper female behavior. At the same time, the novel enters the inner life of Maggie Tulliver and shows how a sensitive and intelligent young woman suffers under these limits. Realism in this novel is not dry description. It is closely connected with emotion, conscience, disappointment, and inward struggle.

This theme is also important because modern readers continue to find Maggie psychologically convincing. Her mind moves between love and duty, desire and self-denial, rebellion and obedience. These conflicts make the novel deeply personal while keeping it socially realistic. As a result, "The Mill on the Floss" gives rich material for discussing both the outer truth of Victorian life and the inner truth of human experience.

Main part. One of the clearest signs of realism in "The Mill on the Floss" is Eliot's careful representation of provincial life. The Dodson and Tulliver families are drawn not as

symbols only, but as ordinary people with habits, prejudices, anxieties, and practical concerns. Mr. Tulliver's pride, his legal troubles, and the family's financial decline are shown in a concrete social setting. Money, property, reputation, and kinship all shape the action. This attention to everyday reality makes the novel believable and historically grounded.

Another realist feature is the way Eliot avoids idealized characterization. Maggie is intelligent, affectionate, impulsive, and emotionally hungry, but she is also restless and sometimes inconsistent. Tom is responsible and loyal to family honor, yet he can be hard, unforgiving, and narrow in judgment. Even secondary figures are not fully simple. Mrs. Tulliver, the aunts, Philip Wakem, and Stephen Guest are presented with recognizable motives that grow from their position in family and society. This balanced treatment of character is a central mark of Eliot's realism.

The childhood sections of the novel already reveal Eliot's psychological skill. Maggie is shown as a child who feels too much and understands too early that she does not fit the expectations around her. She wants love, approval, intellectual freedom, and emotional closeness, yet she repeatedly meets criticism. Her appearance, behavior, imagination, and quick temper all become reasons for correction. Eliot does not simply tell the reader that Maggie suffers. She shows how shame, loneliness, and affection work inside the child's mind. Because of this, Maggie's later conflicts feel natural and prepared from the beginning.

The relation between Maggie and Tom is especially important for the novel's psychological depth. Tom becomes for Maggie a source of love, authority, pain, and moral pressure. She wants his approval even when he misunderstands her. Their bond contains tenderness, memory, duty, resentment, and inequality at the same time. Eliot carefully shows how childhood emotional patterns continue into adult life. Maggie's attachment to Tom is not described in abstract terms. It grows through scenes of injury, forgiveness, silence, and repeated disappointment. This makes the emotional structure of the novel complex and convincing.

Eliot's realism is also visible in the treatment of gender. Maggie's desires are limited not because she lacks intelligence, but because society gives her little room for growth. She is expected to be modest, quiet, obedient, and socially acceptable. Her hunger for reading, thought, and feeling appears excessive to others. In this way, the novel reflects real Victorian expectations placed on women. Yet Eliot deepens this social realism through psychological insight. Maggie does not resist in a simple heroic way. She turns inward, blames herself, suppresses feeling, and tries to become morally worthy. This inward movement gives the novel its special emotional force.

One of the most psychologically rich dimensions of the novel is Maggie's practice of renunciation. After emotional pain and moral confusion, she seeks self-discipline and self-denial. This is not presented as pure spiritual victory. Eliot shows both the attraction and the cost of renunciation. Maggie finds temporary order in self-control, but repression does not remove desire. Her emotional life remains active beneath the surface. In this sense, Eliot offers a subtle understanding of the mind: feelings that are silenced do not disappear. They return in new forms, often with greater intensity.

The relationship between Maggie and Philip Wakem demonstrates Eliot's ability to combine sympathy with moral difficulty. Maggie responds to Philip's sensitivity and understanding because he gives her intellectual and emotional attention that she rarely receives elsewhere. However, this relation is immediately complicated by family history and Tom's hostility. The reader sees Maggie not as a selfish heroine or a passive victim, but as a person caught between genuine feeling and external obligation. Eliot's psychological method lies in showing divided motives rather than simple decisions.

The same complexity appears in the Stephen Guest episodes. The movement toward Stephen is shaped by attraction, emotional hunger, weakness, and a dangerous wish to escape limitation. Eliot refuses to treat this material melodramatically. Instead, she studies hesitation, self-deception, and moral consequence. Maggie's crisis is powerful because it is inward before it becomes outward. The real drama lies in consciousness. Eliot shows how a person can understand the danger of a choice and still move toward it under emotional pressure. Such scenes reveal remarkable psychological precision.

The novel's language and narrative voice also support its psychological depth. Eliot often enters characters' feelings while maintaining reflective distance. The narration explains, interprets, and sometimes gently judges, but it also creates sympathy. Readers are invited to see why characters act as they do, even when their actions cause pain. This broad sympathy is a key quality of Eliot's art. Realism here is not only about external detail. It is about truthful moral understanding.

The ending of the novel brings realism and psychology together in a memorable way. The flood has symbolic force, but it also grows out of the natural world already present in the novel. The final union of Maggie and Tom is emotionally intense because it returns them to the deep bond of childhood at the very moment of destruction. The close of the novel is tragic, yet it does not feel artificial. It gathers the main tensions of family, memory, guilt, love, and loss into one final image. That is why the ending remains powerful for readers.

The symbolic elements of the novel do not weaken its realism. The river, the mill, and the flood carry emotional meaning, yet they remain tied to the real environment of the story. Eliot uses these recurring images to connect place with memory and destiny. The Floss is not a decorative background. It becomes part of the characters' emotional world. This method strengthens the novel's psychological depth because outer nature reflects inner tension without losing realism.

It is also important that Eliot presents memory as an active force in human life. Maggie is not shaped only by what happens in the present. She lives in relation to remembered scenes, remembered words, and remembered injuries. Childhood experiences continue to influence adult perception. In this way, Eliot anticipates later psychological fiction, where character is understood as a layered structure formed by past and present together.

Conclusion. George Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss" stands as an important example of Victorian realism enriched by psychological depth. The novel presents provincial society, family relations, money problems, and gender expectations in a concrete and believable form. At the same time, it enters the emotional and moral life of Maggie Tulliver with

unusual sensitivity. Her struggle is not shown as a simple conflict between good and bad choices, but as a painful movement through love, shame, desire, duty, and self-denial. This combination of social truth and inner truth gives the novel its lasting artistic value. In conclusion, Eliot proves that realism is strongest when it includes the complexity of human feeling, and psychological depth becomes most meaningful when it remains connected to real social life.

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