

The Tension Between Individual Desires and Societal Expectation: George Eliot's *the Mill on the Floss*

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ABSTRACT:

George Eliot (Mary Anna Evans) is considered to be one of the greatest female writers of all time. She was an extremely brilliant woman, and her writing style reflects this. She was an avid reader who deconstructed the characters as she read. She also employed this strategy in her writing style. She describes everything that is going on in the character's thoughts, and his or her psychology is presented to the readers without any effort. Her presentation of psychological qualities in characters, according to some critics, brings life to her lifeless characters and produces distinctiveness and beauty in her works. If we remove the psychological components from her characters and works, they will perish and her work would be rendered useless. This paper examines the constraints and inequities that paralyze and confine Victorian women in George Eliot's renowned novel *The Mill on the Floss*, with an emphasis on the heroine Maggie Tulliver. Initially, background information on the author is presented, and then the novel is handled from the perspective of a woman question in the Victorian Era, juxtaposing the circumstances provided to male and female children in the Victorian era, in which cleverness is regarded as a hindrance rather than a virtue. Maggie, the protagonist, scrutinizes the attributes of New Woman. The paper reveals that Victorian women were regarded as the angels in the house who needed to be protected by men, highlighting the protagonist's dilemma between her duties and desires in a patriarchal society that limits women from educational, intellectual, and social aspects, allowing them no pleasure of life. To summarize, this paper treats *The Mill on the Floss* as a critique of Victorian society, which suffocates women, leaving them with little space for pleasure, intellectuality, or uniqueness, and underlines that such a culture is bad for both males and females.

KEYWORDS: Victorian women, Patriarchy, Inequalities, Woman question, The Mill on the Floss, Individual Desires, Societal Expectation, Intellectuality.

George Eliot (1819-1880) is well-known for her psychoanalysis of the bulk of her literary characters. In her second work, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), she concentrates on the subjective first thoughts and intents of the imaginary minds. By the end of the story, she demonstrates how their callous workings produce private and social disaster. The novel has received widespread praise from both reviewers and readers. This book, on the other hand, proposes a re-evaluation of the text using terms drawn from cognitive narratology in order to throw fresh light on the role of one-track minds in this tale. The book investigates the mental functioning of the fictitious brains and how different types of mental activity impact the interpersonal connections between and among the characters. As a result, the study contends that at least

two reasons contribute to the catastrophe in *The Mill on the Floss*. For starters, the principal fictional brains work solely on the basis of their self-centred ideas and feelings, over which they typically have little control. Second, the catastrophe is the result of societal minds' or public opinion's merciless, unforgiving, and unsympathetic views of any unusual activity.

George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* is often recognized as her most autobiographical work. For critiques of this work, the word 'autobiographical' is commonly employed. The work is regarded to be a "spiritual autobiography," therefore the subtlety of this phrase differs slightly from the common definition. The minute account of events surrounding the individuals and their situations in this work does not completely correlate to George Eliot's actual life. The term 'autobiographical' is employed here to emphasize the author's spiritual growth or development. As a result, when studying this story from an autobiographical standpoint, it is necessary to investigate the heroine Maggie's inner world.

As a spiritual autobiography, the story inevitably incorporates a lot of personal sentiments. In truth, this novel is Eliot's most personal work, and it is a tremendously fascinating narrative because it sublimates Eliot's own internal suffering. This novel's emotional themes are really appealing. These particulars are highlighted in the following chapters. Though Eliot usually writes objectively, this novel expresses many of her innermost sentiments in a fairly subjective manner. This is the novel's most prominent aspect, and it accounts for its irresistible attractiveness; Eliot created this masterpiece by wielding her pen with immense emotion.

The novel *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot addresses a number of issues, including the complexities of familial relationships, the tension between individual wishes and society standards, and the transformational power of memory. At its heart, the story explores Maggie Tulliver's difficulties and conflicts as she navigates society's confines and tries to balance her own wishes with the expectations imposed on her. *The Mill on the Floss* explores familial dynamics, notably the intricate tie between siblings. The tale is around Maggie and her Brother Tom's relationship. Eliot dives into the nuances of their relationship, depicting their love, loyalty, and disagreements. The novel emphasizes the importance of familial ties in moulding people's lives, but it also shows the limitations and conflicts that may occur within these relationships. Another major issue in the work is the conflict between individual ambitions and society expectations. Maggie's strong-willed and eccentric personality contrasts with Victorian society's strict standards, notably about gender roles. She yearns for intellectual and emotional satisfaction, but her prospects for self-actualization are limited by social conventions that prescribe a woman's place. Eliot addresses the constraints imposed on women at that age via Maggie's hardships and criticizes the suffocating influence of society expectations on personal freedom.

Memory and its transformational potential are also major themes in the story. Maggie's recollections of her past influence her knowledge of herself and the world around her, and the memories she keeps shape her perspective of herself and the world around her. Eliot investigates how memories may elicit strong emotions, impact decision-making, and shape one's identity. The story digs into the complicated interplay between the past and the present through Maggie's recollections, revealing how our prior experiences impact our views and behaviours.

Moreover, *The Mill on the Floss* explores societal class distinctions as well as the influence of economic conditions on individual lives. The struggle of the Tulliver family to retain their status and economic stability serves as a setting for investigating the repercussions of social and economic inequality. The characters' economic demands, notably Mr. Tulliver's, add to the tensions and obstacles they experience throughout the story. Eliot depicts the social complexity of the Victorian age and shines light on how societal norms may influence and constrain people's lives.

Furthermore, the novel investigates the function of education and intellectual growth. Maggie's hunger for knowledge and intellectual pursuits stand in stark contrast to the time's established female norms. Eliot examines the constraints put on women's education, as well as the possibility of intellectual progress and fulfilment. The novel's major conflict is the struggle between Maggie's intellectual curiosity and society's expectations.

Overall, *The Mill on the Floss* delves on issues such as familial ties, the conflict between individual wishes and society expectations, and the transforming power of memory, social class differences, and the significance of education. George Eliot digs into the complexity of human nature and the problems that individuals experience as they manage society's limits. Eliot presents a deep investigation of the human condition and the complexities of personal identity and agency via her nuanced portrayal of individuals and their connections.

To conclude, *The Mill on the Floss* demonstrates that, while women might fight against social standards, they cannot totally escape the teachings of the culture in which they live. Despite her rebellious character, Maggie sacrifices both her happiness and her life for the benefit of others in order to live up to society's standards. The novel demonstrates that neither men nor women are happy as long as they live in a conventional manner, demonstrating that there is something wrong with patriarchal society. Eliot does not appear to want her characters to suffer any farther in this way. Because it was impossible for Maggie and Tom to live happily ever after due to societal constraints, Eliot satisfies Maggie's dream to remain eternally hand in hand her brother by having them die together: The brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisies fields together (p. 534). With the terrible death of the siblings, Eliot blames society for suffocating individuals and indicates that civilization kills them by telling them how to behave. Maggie gives up her life to save her mother and brother's lives: She shows heroic efforts to save her brother and mother regardless of her own safety (p. 532). As a result, Maggie spent her whole life caught between obligations and wants.

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