

Character Analysis of Maggie in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

ABSTRACT. George Eliot (1819-1880), famous British Victorian novelist, has illustrated many great fictions that one of them is *The Mill on the Floss* in which Maggie Tulliver, as the key character, lives in a family in which she has been discriminated against by her family members and even other people in the society because of the blackness of her eyes and hair, and her dark skin. People know her as an evil girl because of the blackness that she owns. But oppositely, Maggie tries to change their negative views to her by being kind and having good behavior. This paper has an analytic review on this character in this novel to explore her personality, behavior, and responsibility and the reactions of her family and other characters to Maggie.

1. INTRODUCTION

George Eliot is the author of great fictions, including *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1872), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). In *The Mill on the Floss*, she illustrates the noticeable relationship between Maggie Tulliver and his brother Tom, because she had the same relationship in her childhood with her strict brother, Isaac. And Maggie has biographical resemblance with George Eliot. She suffers from some tragedies, because Elliot did the same.

Maggie is a talented and intelligent girl growing up at Dorlcote Mill and she is the protagonist of this story. The novel follows Maggie when she grows up from a hotheaded and smart child into an outstanding and unconventional young lady. She grows up between strict social customs and yields them. Even as a young girl, she does not be suitable to the representation of an accepted girl. Although, she is scruffy, insubordinate, and bad-tempered, but she is also extremely smart. She never uses dialect, even in the beginning chapters of the novel when she is a child and not educated yet. Such lucid utterance as a little child is obviously meant to confirm Maggie's outstanding cleverness as well as her dissimilarity from her family.

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie – how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibers of their hearts. (216)

2. EFFECT OF FAMILY ON MAGGIE

Maggie spends a lot of time in trying to earn the esteem and high concern to her brother. Tom is closest person to her and Maggie always looks for his consent and agreement. Tom is the symbol of family embodiment and social worth which Maggie resists against. Maggie is clever and playful and she loves books and music. She has dark skin, black hair and eyes. She often associates with her father's sister, Mrs. Moss instead of her family. Self-satisfied Tom is unaware of Maggie's strive

and sees her weak. Maggie's characteristics help her to separate herself from the rest of the family in mind, emotions, thoughts, and behavior.

The darkness of her skin and eyes also has some ethical implications or meanings, because in the novel most people think that white people and white color are senior and better. Maggie is a member of a middle class family and her darker skin is a dishonor for her family. Even Maggie observes herself that her family often contrasts her to the Romanies, a lower group of the society. So Maggie's hair and skin cause her to become a victim of discrimination.

Her eyes are the symbol of power of emotion which gives her more power over others. Maggie's father, Mr. Tulliver, regrets this fact that Maggie is most intelligent in the family. Maggie's mother, Mrs. Tulliver, calls her as "wild thing" and she usually nags because of her daughter's disorderliness and forgetfulness. She wishes her daughter's dark hair would curl, such as of her beautiful cousin Lucy Deane.

In the novel, women often do not go to school, but those women in the rich families have private tutors who teach them music, painting and drawing. But it is not possible for Maggie to go to school. Once when Tom wants to go to school, Maggie is not allowed to go with him. She goes to her bedroom and lifts her voodoo doll and scratching it with her nails, while she imagines her doll as those who bother her, such as Aunt Glegg. After a while, her weeping stops and she goes outside to wait for Tom's home coming.

In the novel, women clearly have very lower position than men in the society. Tom has a contemptuous look at Maggie who is more talented than himself; and he takes her into consideration as an obedient sister, so he loves her and this is a mutual sense. She is an intelligent girl born at a time when being intelligence for women is ridiculous. She lives in a society which neither of these features fits with the developing middle class culture which is created by the Industrial Revolution.

One day, Maggie goes into the mill with Luke, Mr. Tulliver's miller, and tries to encourage him to read her books but her effort is ineffective. In the afternoon, Luke says Maggie that Tom's rabbits have died and she suddenly remembers that she had forgotten Tom's demand to feed the rabbits, and she has killed them. This is an example for her carelessness.

In the opening chapters, the characteristics of Maggie look weird by other's view. For example, Mr. Tulliver is proud for Maggie's cleverness, but he is pessimist about the future of his clever daughter and her abilities. Mrs. Tulliver discriminatingly relates Maggie to "wild thing" and "bedlam creature" and to the devil because of blackness which is the similar color between the devil and her daughter (7).

In chapter five, we can see that Maggie's world has too sensitive experiences about the world. Feeling pain and happiness for Maggie is intense because of being both young person and her acquaintance with books which cause her to know more. For example, one of Maggie's interests is concerning the mill where some animals live there, such as Tom's rabbits which died and she blames herself about it.

In school holidays, when Tom comes back home and becomes delightful of seeing Mrs. Tulliver and Maggie who adore him, he has decided to buy fishing line by money he has saved and he tells it to Maggie and says they can go fishing tomorrow. Then, Tom decides to go to see his rabbits but Maggie says that they are dead. Tom becomes sad and tells Maggie that he doesn't love her anymore and she causes to remind him mischievousness in the past. Because he also thinks that Maggie has the evil features since the beginning of her life till now because of her blackness.

Maggie goes to the attic full of sadness and stays there .She goes there because attic usually is a very dark and also a suitable place for living owls and bats. After some hours, Tom goes to get her for teatime and forgives her.

But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for if you had them. If you were in fault ever – if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you – I should not want punishment to be heaped on you. But you have always enjoyed punishing me – you have always been hard and cruel to me. (480)

The next day in fishing, both of them wish that they will be happily together forever. Tom's experiences and knowledge is deferential for Maggie and she makes an impression on his supremacy, but Tom refuses to accept her bookish intelligence. This shows that most people don't believe in women's cleverness and abilities. George Eliot presents the close relationship between Maggie and Tom and she says that Maggie is dependent on Tom.

Another day, when Maggie, Tom, Lucy and Mrs. Tulliver are visiting to the pullets, Maggie unwantedly destroys Tom's card house, but Tom does not accept it as an accident and goes to walking with Lucy instead. When Tom guides Lucy to the small pool, Maggie follows them and Tom finds her near them, he harshly tells Maggie to leave them alone. Maggie pushes Lucy in the mud and Tom slaps her. It was another bad memory that they have.

Her brother was the human being of whom she had been most afraid, from her childhood upwards - afraid with that fear which springs in us when we love one who is inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable [...] and yet that we cannot endure to alienate from us. (171)

3. LOVE AND SYMPATHY IN MAGGIE

Maggie's inner fight between reticent peacefulness and the wish for a passionate life come to a critical point by Philip's personality. Deformity in Philip is inherent which persuades Maggie to struggle with her fate, and Philip has afflicted with self-sacrifice and deficit of love in his life. Maggie's need for an ordinary respect and love is pleased by Philip's appearance when he says about Maggie's face," the full, lustrous face , with the bright black coronet, looked down like that of a divinity well pleased to be worshiped, on the pale-hued, small-featured face that was turned up to it" (328). Maggie finds feeling of love for Philip as for deformed animals, when they met together as children, because Maggie sees deformed animals more grateful and kindhearted than healthy animals. In here, Maggie's love has been fully grown, but it is not still described as a love to one person. This love includes some levels of compassion and kindness for Philip. Loving Philip and allocating herself to his pleasure reflect others' behaviors to her. Maggie is too young and inexpert to have knowledge about the difference between romantic love and sympathy.

Many things are difficult and dark to me – but I see one thing quite clearly – that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural – but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I didn't obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. (429)

When Philip asks Maggie “if you had had a brother like me, do you think you should have loved him as well as Tom?” Maggie replies “No, not better because I don't think I could love you better than Tom. But I should be so sorry - so sorry for you.” (186) Philip fears because her love for Tom

is in the highest level and it seems irrational. Tom's supremacy over her sister is, to some extent, subverted by harsh behavior of Philip. Another, reading the book of Thomas Kempis's writings is the most important events of her young life which suggests her leaving one's care for oneself and concentrating to other world to cure pains of other people. She picks up this book during the hard years of her teenager period and her family's insolvency. She begins search for a key for her sadness and sorrowfulness. She perceives Kempis's writings and starts propelling a life of poverty and atonement. The death of Mr. Tulliver guarantees that Maggie will be responsible for her family much more effectively than her brother.

It seemed to be a world where people behaved the best to those they did not pretend to love and that did not belong to them. And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie? Nothing but poverty [...]. (187)

One day, when Stephen kisses Maggie's arm, she does not become furious which Stephen has broken his promise to Lucy. Stephen and Maggie have let their emotions sincerely rule for a prolonged period of time. Maggie yields to Stephen for the same reason of her yielding to Philip. Eventually, Maggie's determination portrays two styles of her relationship with others.

She and Stephen were in that stage of courtship which makes the most exquisite moment of youth, the freshest blossom-time of passion - when each is sure of the other's love, but no formal declaration has been made and all is mutual divination. (291)

In Tom's opinion disgrace would be worse than death and he prefers his sister dies and has not disgrace. When Maggie comes back home, Tom tells her that she has ashamed the family and she has been a curse to her family. But, when Tom is caught in their old house and the mill is flooding, Maggie is the only person who saves Tom. In there, for the first time in his life, Tom comprehends that he has underestimated her sister and her abilities and even their relationship. Maggie shows her great personality to her short-sighted brother.

The flood provides a disastrous and informing situation in which the whole disasters of Maggie become clear to her brother. In the end, Tom calls her sister by her childhood name again in the boat which is drowning. When they are drowning in each other's arms, it shows the time of peace which Eliot says "brother and sister had gone 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 daisy fields together" (533).

4. CONCLUSION

George Eliot professionally portrays Maggie as a little girl who rehearses her modesty with self-esteem and arrogance. Although, Maggie's family labels her as unnatural and evil girl, but she justifies readers her family is completely in the wrong. She loves her brother more than he loves her; and she falls into hopelessness when he does not agree with her. She always blames herself for such alienation and unfriendliness with Tom. Maggie sees herself as an egocentric girl who searches for love and friendship with Tom, Philip, and her family. This story tears reader's heart out from the very beginning to the end; but Eliot finishes it by rejoining of Maggie and Tom for the last moments of their life. The writer shows the responsible girl who gets reader familiar with morality and goodness. The end of Maggie' behaviors defensible against social discrimination to her; and the writer tried to say that when one person in a society is disgraced, it is impossible for him/her to live joyfully and to have a happy end. Maggie died in youth, because she had already died in the family and the society.

References

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