

**THE REPRESENTATION OF LUCY AS A TYPICAL VICTORIAN WOMAN AND  
MAGGIE AS A CHANGING VICTORIAN WOMAN IN GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVEL  
"THE MILL ON THE FLOSS"**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on Maggie's representation as a changing Victorian woman which is the indication of modernity started prevailing in the end of the Victorian period, and in contrast, there are female characters mainly a character of Lucy, who is typical Victorian lady, apparently and as well as in her taste and manners, in the George Eliot's novel "Mill on The Floss". In this article the representation of these two ladies are given through two aspects, one is through their appearances and the way they dressed up, and the second is their nature and their mental tendency, as Eliot shows in this novel through psychological analysis of the characters.

**Keywords:** Victorian women, Character Lucy, Character Maggie, George Eliot, Mill on the Floss, Patriarchal pressure.

**INTRODUCTION**

Maggie is the heroine of George Eliot's Mill on the Floss. Lucy is her cousin. Both of them belong to the truly typical Victorian families. Maggie is quite in contrast not only physically but mentally too to the typicality of Victorian people especially the women of that age. Due to this contrast, she has to face a lot of problems and her personality draws a negative impact on the blind followers of set patterns and norms of society. On the contrary Lucy has no such problem. She is a true portrayal of a typical Victorian woman. This study is representation of both these ladies.

**Maggie Tulliver's Unconventional Appearance in Contrast to Lucy**

The Mill on the Floss, a novel written by George Eliot, tells a story about a girl named Maggie Tulliver, the main female character in the novel. The women she portrays in this novel are typical Victorian, except Maggie who in contrast with other female characters is quite different not only in appearance but also in manners, which gives the indication of changing of Victorian women in new modern women. Our main focus is on the female characters that apparently and inwardly the female characters are quite typical, but Maggie's position which evokes much negative attention because her physical features diverge from the norms of the upper class society.

The appearance of Maggie's outward being includes her unusual facial features, her undesirable hair and the dark complexion of her skin. Maggie's appearance is portrayed as unattractive in contrast to the Victorians ideals of beauty. Moreover, her physical qualities are sharply judged in

contrast to her cousin Lucy who in the novel symbolizes beauty and Maggie's traits are instead associated with Gypsies.

The Fashion in this Victorian society changed from the gauzy look of dresses to the bell-shaped figure draped with heavy fabrics. A crinoline consisted of many layers of fabric worn under the dress but as time progressed, instead of layers of petticoats, women wore a caged crinoline, "an apparatus that looked like an inverted, cone-shaped trellis designed for a rather large creeping plant" (Pool 214).

As *Mill on the Floss* was published in 1860, Eliot would have been aware that the crinoline was essential to most women, regardless of class. Whether young woman wore a crinoline or not, yet they were taught to dress properly. Fashion of Victorian women represents in this novel, in the form of Lizzy. Maggie seems discomfort when the ruffle stitched to gown irritated her neck and she was "frowning and twisting her shoulders, that she might if possible shrink away from the prickliest of tuckers". It is understandable that a ruffle stitched to the neck of a gown might irritate a child, but Maggie's rejection of fashion early in her life would lead to her rejection of other types of conventions.

Maggie rejects conventional fashion and it shows when Mrs. Tulliver makes Maggie a dress from a piece of Mrs. Glegg's older clothing, and induced Maggie to wear the "dyed silk frock". But Maggie, "declaring that the frock smelled of nasty dye" basted it with the roast beef the "first Sunday she wore it". But here Maggie's behavior is understandable: the dress smelled and her brother made fun of how she looked in it. At the same time, Eliot writes that "it was a sin and a shame to buy anything to dress that child [Maggie], if it wasn't a pair of shoes". Because she connects the idea of sin and shame to dress, Eliot suggests that Maggie's future will be full of ignominy. Another humorous example of Maggie's rejection of fashion occurs when the Dodson relations criticize her hair. In an impetuous act, Maggie cuts her hair, her brother Tom, said that her hair "made her look like an idiot, and it was too painful an idea to be readily forgotten"

In addition, Maggie's dress had no sleeves, "only a cape and bonnet" and she was "not likely to make a favorable impression" on anyone she met". A sleeveless dress, one cut from one of Mrs. Glegg's old dresses, was out of fashion, and showed a little too much skin. Later in the novel, other young ladies notice Maggie's dress. As a result of Tom's comments regarding her dress and hair, Maggie is humiliated and runs away. In the gypsy camp, her dress is received differently from how it was at home. The gypsies offer an admiration of her dress that contrasts Tom's repulsion. One gypsy says that Maggie wears "such a pretty bonnet and frock". Maggie then shares her dislike of proper fashion with the girl: 'I won't want to wear a bonnet' she said; 'I'd rather wear a red handkerchief, like yours'.

Maggie's hair is also indicative of her nature. Mrs. Tulliver's dislike of her daughter's locks several times hinted in the novel. Mrs. Tulliver feels her daughter's hair is unruly and rough—especially when she is attempting to curl it in the proper fashion. In her youth, Maggie's hair becomes slightly more fashionable and her hair is braided and coiled which was acceptable in Victorian society. Yet, like her nature, it is still unable to match to the proper fashion. Eliot hinted once that "she [Mrs. Tulliver] would still brush and carefully tend Maggie's hair, which she had become reconciled to, in spite of its refusal to curl, now it was so long and massy"

Maggie's hair is symbolic of her nature. Its refusal to become typical Victorian girl, symbolizes her refusal to bow to convention. And, like many Victorian women who strove to be different, Maggie was doomed to fall. Almost a double standard to the modern mind, Maggie's acquiescence to her mother's desire for Maggie to have her hair decorated in a "coronet on the summit of her head after the pitiable fashion of those antiquated times" In giving in to the "vain decoration" which showed a "queenly head above her old frocks"

It is Stephen who, when he first meets Maggie, cannot hide his attraction to the "dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair" Philip also worships Maggie's hair. While spending time in the Red Deeps, Philip likens her to a god. It is obvious to the reader the difference between Maggie and her cousin Lucy. Even at an early age, Lucy is described as "pretty and neat," as "no accidents ever happened to her clothes" .The only accident to befall Lucy occurs when Maggie, jealous of the attention lavished on Lucy by Tom, pushed the "poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow-trodden mud" Pink and white, as opposed to the red associated with Maggie, are appropriate colors for a young lady. Instead of wondering who pushed her down, all Lucy ponders is "the spoiling of her pretty best clothes and the discomfort of being wet and dirty" ,like any proper young female child should do.

Almost perfect, Lucy's thoughts mark a clear contrast between those of Maggie, whose thoughts can run from stormy to sunny in a second. Later in the novel, when a young adult, Lucy is described as "slight" and "aerial" and wearing "faultless drapery of silk and crepe" These descriptions show that Lucy's character doesn't change. Clad in the finest cloth, she is, and stays, nearly flawless. In addition to clothing, Lucy's hair is also always in fashion. To start, Lucy has blonde curls. Her curls are always "perfect," and when visiting her cousin as a young lady, Maggie smiles and holds up "one of Lucy's long curls, that the sunlight might shine through it"

One other contrast between Maggie and Lucy occurs in "Confidential Moments." Lucy visits Maggie's bedroom to discuss their musical evening in her "white dressing-gown" As white is the color of innocence, as well as the fashionable color worn by most unmarried ladies, Lucy is wearing the perfect color. Maggie, however, wears a "pink cotton gown".The color pink is made by combining the colors white and red, and as red is associated with passion, the color of Maggie's gown is symbolic of her personality's mix of passion and innocence. While Lucy can get away with wearing the color pink, because her character holds no hint of passion, Maggie cannot. The difference between the two fabrics of these gowns also illustrates the difference between the two classes—a dressing gown is slightly more fancy than a gown of simple cotton.

Maggie's imperfect facial features show, a sharp contrast in the presence of Lucy, whose features are highly admired by her aunts. The following passage illustrates the exact opposites of the cousins and the reaction they cause. Maggie's appearance is attractive and her facial features diverge from beauty norms and are therefore disliked by her relatives. The face was fundamental in determining feminine beauty during the Victorian era and highlights that the Victorians valued "smooth, pink and rounded cheeks, fairly large eyes, small, straight noses and little rosebud mouths". So, it can be argued that Lucy's traits resembles with the Victorian's ideal of feminine beauty and are therefore highly valued, while Maggie's lack of beautiful physical features becomes a strong indication of non-femininity.

Throughout Maggie's childhood, the outer beauty of the female body is the essential element in establishing the personal value of women. This can clearly be noticed in the judgments of Maggie's outer self where she is the target of criticism. Her mother and her aunts in particular are very observant. On the occasion when all of the family members are gathered to have dinner together, the following discussion regarding Maggie's hair and her dark complexion arises between her aunts and her mother:

'I think the gell has too much hair. I'd have it thinned and cut shorter, sister, if I was you; it isn't good for her health. It's that as makes her skin so brown. It shouldn't wonder. Don't you think so, sister Deane?' 'I can't say, I'm sure sister', said Mrs Deane, shutting her lips close again and looking at Maggie with a critical eye. 'No, no' said Mrs Tulliver 'the child's healthy enough – there's nothing ail her. There's red wheat as well as white, for that matter, and somelike the dark grain best. But it 'ud be as well if Bessy 'ud have the child's hair cut, so as it 'ud lie smooth'.

Through these dialogues, it is evident that the prevailing discontent causes a strong desire among the aunts to alter Maggie's outer appearance. Apparently, even though Mrs. Tulliver, Maggie's mother, offers some defense of Maggie's dark complexion, it emerges to be undesired and therefore criticized, which in our opinion has its roots in brown skin being representative of the low rank in the current social hierarchy during this historical period.

Moreover, the beauty norms of the upper class, which Maggie's aunts are members of, are very much influenced by class standards. Therefore, light skin and curly blond hair are highly valued by Maggie's aunts because they uphold the values of the upper class where the ideals of beauty in the superior class because of her failure to fulfill the decisive requirement for gaining social status.

Eliot, through the character of Maggie, powerfully demonstrates how a female's behavior and character determine her social status, her possibilities and limitations. Finally, the presented evidence of Maggie's appearance shows that the "deviations" in her facial features lie outside the typical upper-middle-class female beauty norms which result in Maggie represents as an unattractive lady. Her dark, straight hair and her dark complexion are indicators of ugliness which contribute to the exclusion from her own social class.

One social norm that Maggie becomes acquainted with very early on is about education. Boys, as they are expected to be involved in business and public matters when they grow up, are given a comprehensive education. Girls, on the other hand, are not provided with such an opportunity. They receive only a perfunctory education, which Eliot calls "shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history". Maggie has better at understanding Latin than Tom, and she helps her brother with his homework. It shows that Maggie is quite different than typical Victorian women in her mental capabilities.

A look at Maggie's overall character at this point may give an idea as to why she goes against social norms and disagrees with perceptions about women, what guides her actions and why she fails. From childhood, Maggie is not what is expected of a girl her age: she is tomboyish, always getting her pinafore dirty by romping about outdoors, she can't tolerate the procedure of having her hair curled and her mother cannot keep her in bonnets.

In short, she does not fit into the confines that define what a 'proper' little girl should be. Her physical aspects – having unruly hair, her skin being darker in color than the Dodsons – meet with her aunts' disapproval, as well as her wayward.

### **Maggie's Unconventional Mentality**

Maggie is often inclined to do what she feels to be right, without much thought for how her actions may be viewed by others. She is a young woman who speaks her mind when she deems it necessary, as seen in some of the examples given earlier. Also, when she first refuses Stephen, she does not care for what other people will think of her decision, she stands by what she has decided, by her own sense of right and wrong, for as long as possible, and tries to resist being directed by false public opinion about her. Maggie is also independent in spirit, if she cannot always be so in fact. After Tom rejects her because she has not married Stephen, she wants to earn her own living and not be dependent on anyone:

A comparison between Maggie and the other women characters shows that there is really only one prototype for the rest of the women in the novel. And that is the type of woman belonging to the category of those who conform to society's standards. All of Maggie's aunts and Lucy fit into this description. Lucy, in outward appearance and behavior, is correct in every way, the image of the proper young lady - never getting her clothes dirty or indulging in naughty behavior, her hair always in place. Mrs. Tulliver even regrets that she is not her daughter, instead of Maggie.

The Dodson sisters - Aunts Pullett, Glegg and Deane – can be considered the standard of what is proper for married ladies. Household duties and womanly concerns such as following the latest fashion in bonnets, having the best lace etc. are all that interest them. Maggie's father's only sister, Mrs. Moss, on the other hand, is also an epitome of womankind in another way. She is the image of fertility, a kind of earth mother figure, with her eight children. Although not happy with the financial and physical difficulty of looking after so many children, she sees it as her lot in life and is resigned.

Thus, there are only two comparable types of women in *The Mill on the Floss*. One is Maggie, who is aware of the restrictions placed upon her by society but cannot act on this awareness, except for her passive resistance to marriage, and the second is all the rest, who conform. It tells instead of women that one would be more likely to encounter in real life in the England of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the large majority who would not or could not rebel. When Maggie grows up to be a beautiful woman in spite of her brown skin, and she starts to attract people's attention she becomes the culmination as an admired member of society in St. Ogg's society. Maggie is attractive precisely because she is different from other women. She also starts to get appreciation for being clever. The appreciation comes from Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest. Slightly above Maggie's social status, Philip and Stephen are more appreciative in recognizing the value of Maggie's intelligence.

At the St. Ogg's bazaar and in party, Maggie draws admiration from men and envy from the women. However, she still thinks that Lucy is a better woman than she is: "As if I, with my old gowns and want of all accomplishments, could be a rival of dear little Lucy, who knows and does all sort of charming things, and is ten times prettier than I am – even if I were odious and

base enough to be her rival". Maggie at this point has already internalized her society's norms of what is considered favorable for a woman. Therefore, she thinks that she has less value because she does not comply with the norms. Having been living a hard life after the family misfortune and having been made to believe that she is not physically attractive, Maggie comes to believe that: "the light complexion girl would win away all the love" and "the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness" Maggie has read the images of these light complexion, blond-haired women in the novels she has read. Even what she reads defines her as "doubly other" because she is a brown, black-haired woman and throughout the novel she struggles hard to repress her desires.

The young Maggie never finds a "home" for her soul. She painfully realizes that the world is harsh. People do not treat her as she expects them to do (not until she meets Philip and Stephen that she finds people who can treat her appropriately). She can only find the "agreeable, tender and delighted" people in books. However, she has to give up even her books because reading the books makes her want to have more from life than she can. Having always been constantly opposed by her family and her social circle for her desires, Maggie learns to distrust herself and adjust herself to the standard imposed on her by the external authority. Her need for approval and love prevents Maggie from exercising her internal resources.

Maggie is denied the opportunity of making her own choice and judgment. She gradually learns to accept other people's definition about her. She learns to undermine herself. Maggie reads all the books that are left from the family misfortune, but the knowledge that she gets from the books does not help her much in real life. She wants people to recognize her good qualities and sympathize with her emotion. She wants it mostly from Tom, but both Tom and other people fail her hope. Therefore, she turns to religious books to repress her desires.

Unable to get recognition and sympathy from the world, Maggie tries to look inward to self-sufficiently fulfill her needs. Maggie turns to self-renunciation. Maggie knows that people consider her different, and she accepts their conception. Since it is mainly her desires that set her apart from other girls, she is determined to repress them. However willing she is in her renunciation, she is still yearning for love, understanding and recognition which the world cannot give her.

Maggie knows that she is not made happy by repressing her desires, but she also knows that it is the only way for her to survive, to get acceptance and love. It is indeed a form of suicide when Maggie always represses her own desires. Philip tries to convince Maggie not to deny herself and "seek safety in negation". He offers to support Maggie in her struggle, supplying her with books and becoming her brother and teacher. He says: "It is less wrong that you should see me than you should be committing this long suicide". Denying herself, in Philip's opinion, means taking away life from herself. Maggie is willing to accept Philip's offer. She even admits that she loves Philip. Yet, Maggie is again forced to deny her desire because Tom does not approve her relationship with Philip.

Philip understands Maggie's desires and loves her the way she is. His recollection of childhood memory shows that they both have things in common: intelligence and sensitivity. Philip sees Maggie as the "other" but in a more positive sense. Maggie's intelligence and sensitivity that

cause her trouble when she was a child, are the qualities that make her differ from other women, yet make Philip love her. Philip, however, fails to convince Maggie to set up her own standard and follow her desires. Maggie says: "I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving. I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do". This statement represents Maggie's bitter experience with Tom.

Maggie struggles all through her life to get Tom's love, and she feels a lot of pain because of Tom's conditional love. Therefore, she feels the need of a world outside affection although she knows there is no such world for her because she is a woman. Philip tries to make her see that her statement shows that what she is doing is renunciation, a way to escape from pain. Maggie, however, has made herself believe that she has to submit herself and adopt the inferior position. Being a young adult, Maggie still seeks Tom's love and approval. In her relationship with her brother, Maggie is always the "other." Maggie is the one who always has to follow what Tom wants, not only because she is younger but mostly also because she is female.

Their relationship is never equal. Maggie chooses to succumb to whatever Tom wishes her to do, even when it means denying her own desires, even though it is not without resistance. Tom forbids Maggie to see Philip because he thinks that by seeing Philip, Maggie disobeys and disgraces her father. Realizing that disagreeing with Tom is useless, Maggie agrees saying: "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world" Tom's reply emphasizes what he believes about what man can do and woman cannot. He says that if Maggie knows that she cannot do anything in the world, she should submit to those who "have power and can do something in the world." In his effort to force Maggie to give up Phillip, Tom arrogantly tells her,

"You might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable to his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you"

Tom's statement confirms the binary of Self/Subject and Other. His remark: "a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better" signifies the notion of men occupying the public sphere and women the domestic sphere. It also suggests that even though both Tom and Maggie have their own experience in the world, Tom privileges the kind of world that he experiences over the world that Maggie experiences. Tom sets up the standard and denigrates the kind of knowledge that she has. In other words, his version of the world counts, and her version of the world does not. He is the active and knowing subject. Therefore, he self importantly insists that his sister always follow his will. As a man, Tom sets himself up as the standard. Maggie, on the other hand, also realizes the privileges that men have over women.

St. Ogg's society does not see women for what they are capable of doing. When Philip tries to get his father's consent to marry Maggie, Philip says that Maggie was never involved in their families' dispute. Mr Wakem replies: "We don't ask what a woman does – we ask whom she belongs to". It is indeed what society thinks of woman's worth. It applies strictly to Maggie in her case with Stephen Guest, the son of the owner of Guest & Co., who is attracted to Maggie for being clever and intelligent. Maggie goes out for a rowing with Stephen, but their boat is carried

further away so that they are unable to go back in time. Acknowledging their mutual feeling of love, Stephen proposes to marry Maggie. Maggie refuses the proposal because she feels that it is wrong to hurt Lucy and Philip. Confronting herself in a conflict of duty and desire,

Maggie chooses to give up her desire, although she is tempted to accept Stephen's proposal. Stephen has warned Maggie of the consequence if she goes home unwed, but Maggie insists. When Stephen says that she does not know "what will be said" and that she sees "nothing as it really is," Maggie still believes that since she is innocent, people will believe her. Poor Maggie is wrong. When Maggie comes home alone after few days, she is rejected by Tom, "I loathe your character and conduct. You struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! *I* have had feelings to struggle with; but I conquered them. I had a harder life than you have had; but I have found *my* comfort in doing my duty. But I will sanction no such character as yours: the world shall know that *I* feel the difference between right and wrong"

Again, Tom sets himself up as the standard. He values what he does and denigrates Maggie's feeling and conduct. He does not try to understand Maggie and cannot forgive her because he thinks Maggie does not follow what he asks her to do. He strongly believes that he has done his duty, while Maggie only disgraces the family. Although Maggie is as innocent as before, society considers her as a fallen woman. If she comes home married, people will forgive that she runs away with Stephen. What she does is less important than whom she belongs to. Because she comes home unmarried, she does not belong to anyone, thus she is made an outcast. She is being "othered" yet again by St. Ogg society as a whole.

Refusing Stephen's proposal but giving into her desire for him, Maggie let herself be "doubly-othered" because she is now seen as a "fallen woman." Although Stephen writes a letter explaining that Maggie is innocent, nothing can help Maggie's position once she is taken as a fallen woman. Dr Kenn, the clergyman, says, "That letter, as I said, ought to suffice to prevent false impressions concerning you".

But I am bound to tell you, Miss Tulliver, that not only the experience of my whole life, but my observation within the last three days, makes me fear that there is hardly any evidence which will save you from the painful effect of false imputations" Dr Kenn is right in his judgment of the rigid society which will not spare Maggie. He suggests that Maggie leave the town, but Maggie insists on staying. Maggie still struggles, even when Dr Kenn, the only respectable person in the society who lends her a hand, gives up. He releases Maggie from the position of a governess, because he cannot bear the criticism of the society. It accuses him of an intention to marry Maggie. Although Maggie is innocent, she plays the role of a fallen woman inadvertently and then is force into repeating it. She refuses Stephen's final proposal: "I will bear it, and bear it till death" Accepting Stephen's proposal will save Maggie from being a fallen woman, but Maggie chooses not to accept it. Performing acts as a fallen woman, Maggie in essence becomes one until death comes to her.

### **Maggie's End**

Maggie's struggle ends with her final reconciliation with Tom through the flood. The resolution in the death of Maggie and Tom, according to David is: "an emblem of irresolvable contention

between the Victorian containment of woman to an undeveloped intellectual life and the elevation of one woman intellectual to iconic sage hood” Maggie’s death, in my opinion, strengthens the notion that woman is always in struggle to find her place in the male dominated world. Being both other and doubly other, not only in the eyes of men but also of women who hold up patriarchal norms, Maggie struggles until the end of her life.

## **CONCLUSION**

The journey of Maggie from her childhood to youth is contrasted with Lucy not only by readers but also by their relatives, which is clearly shown in above description. The physical appearances and their mental aptitude also compares throughout the novel, which shows that both of them were totally different. Lucy, who was typical, was admired in that society, but Maggie, who was unconventional became the victim of that Victorian society, who in actual was representative of modern woman of this age. In this modern age Maggie is acceptable and admirable, but unfortunately that type of girls, were victim of criticism in the Victorian age.

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