



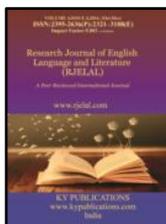
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RIVER IMAGERY IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *MILL ON THE FLOSS*

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ABSTRACT

Water is often a prevalent imagery in literature. Flood symbolises the limitless power of water, which is uncontained and powerful. It can serve as an apocalyptic symbol too. Water often seen as a regenerative spirit takes a destructive role only to cleanse and start something new. River Floss in *Mill on the Floss* takes all these roles throughout the novel. The paper focus on the river imagery in George Eliot's novel *Mill on the Floss*. River Floss holds due importance as any other character in the novel. River imagery serves as a means of foreshadowing what is to happen in the novel.

Keywords: river imagery, flood, destruction, foreshadow.

The title of the book mentions a river and hence highlight its importance. Floss is the river on which the Dorlcote Mill, the family home and business of Tulliver's is located. River Floss is the symbol of life and death whereas the mill symbolize economic stability, prosperity and survival . The novel opens with a description of the river. "a wide plain where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea...with an impetuous embrace" (Eliot 4). Mr. Tulliver's family with its mill located on river Floss symbolize harmony with Nature. But with time, the river is flooded and nature disturbed. This chaos gets reflected on the characters too. Thus the flooded river represent the unbridled emotional exuberance of the characters especially Maggie.

Maggie the wild child is a very emotional and dynamic character. Most of the time she is driven by her passion rather than reason. Her kind and compassionate nature is often contrasted with her brother Tom, who often bullies and hurt her emotions. Her heart is filled with love and empathy for others. Most of her perceptions come from the

books that she reads. This quick and clever girl often outwits her brother on many levels lest she remains faithful and holds due respect to her brother even if it meant losing her love.

The river represents Maggie herself. Her early memory dates back to the river. One of them is standing on the banks of river Floss holding Tom's hand. Along with Maggie and Tom River Floss also serves as another character. Maggie says "It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank, and listen to its low, placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving." (Eliot 4) Maggie is introduced as this little girl standing precariously on the banks of river Floss. Her character which is wild, untamed, dreamy and vivacious can often be connected with the fast flowing river. The river is representative of Maggie, her character and consciousness. The most important events of her life unfold on or off the banks of river Floss.

Floss is ominous and premonitory for what is to ensue. There had been references in the first chapter where Mrs. Tulliver gripes that Maggie is goin to fall and drown into the waters. She says

“you’ll tumble in and be drowned someday” (Eliot 10). It finally came true. Even in life, she drowned into the undercurrents of her emotions from which there was no coming back. She was condemned by the town her family and most importantly by Tom. Her reconciliation with Tom happens in the boat but ends in their tragic death. Therefore, drowning and death references lurk in the background of the novel from the very beginning. The epigraph of the book “In their death they were not divided.” (Eliot) refers to Tom and Maggie, and their strong affiliation with each other.

The rapid and full flowing river reflects the inner turmoil that disturbed Maggie’s consciousness even as a child. She freely drowns in the sudden surge of her emotions and often regrets the actions which are the outcome of her emotional self. There is an instance in the novel where she chops off her hair when accused of being an untamed child. The river can be compared to Maggie’s emotional self. The river is mighty and uncontrollable so is her emotions.

The river becomes an emblem of rapid destructive change towards the end. The Flood was rapid, so were the changes that happened to Maggie’s life. Maggie develops strong passions for Stephen even when her feelings for Phillip were still alive. But this relation is only going to take its toll on Tulliver’s family. Finally, when Maggie drowns in the water, one could say she was treading in her flood of passions which finally engulfed her to its depth. So was her passion to Stephen. Thus, flood can be seen as a destructive development of Maggie’s passion.

From the time of her elopement with Stephen, the river has more to suggest of her anguish and dilemma. She started submerging in the wrath and condemnation of society from a literal and figurative level. The final predicament of Maggie and Tom embracing each other in their death by drowning in the flood of Floss, which is indirectly her self-consciousness, is indicative of the fact that the river serves a huge role in this novel.

The epigraph of the book is premonitory of the sibling’s death. In fact, their union was made possible by water. When alive, Maggie and Tom suffered tensions in their relationship due to the choices they made in life. But it’s better to say it was

resolved in their death. They died a single death, together in water. The very river which was a treasure of memory for both Tom and Maggie turned out to be their death beds too. Maggie’s entire life revolves around that river and finally she meet a tragic end. Maggie and her life merge with the river. Hence river Floss apart being a life supporter turns out to be a harbinger for death.

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