

George Eliot

1819-1880

The Mill on the Floss (1860):

Autobiographism

- St. Oggs: small town life like Eliot's pre-industrial Warwickshire
- Tom and Maggie Tulliver: Mary Ann Evans and Isaac – pragmatism vs idealism
- Maggie and Stephen Guest: the author and her “husband” G. H. Lewes
- Maggie's religious crisis: Mary Ann's crisis, Evangelical phase, later rejected

- Maggie's closeness to Philip (intellectual and wise): author's engagement in Coventry in 1841 with freethinkers and scholars of Higher Criticism of the Bible
- Yet: Maggie's rejection of Stephen vs author's life sharing with Lewes in Germany (never divorced and father of 3 children)
- Maggie's final reconciliation with Tom vs author's distancing from Isaac

Realism

- Psychological realism ≠ Dickens's taste for caricature – similar to Flaubert and predating Henry James and E. M. Forster
- Interest in impact of external circumstances on individuals: e.g. Mr. Tulliver's financial downfall in the context of contemporary materialism and egoism (his rivalry with Mr. Wakem over the use of the river Floss)

Themes, motifs and symbols

- Determinism (the flood) vs free-will (Maggie's individual choices)
- Human sympathy: Maggie, Philip and Lucy vs Tom (entrepreneur's ethic) and Stephen (self-centred)
- To Eliot the purpose of art is to present the reader with realistic situations and characters that may arouse his sympathy with others

- Pragmatic knowledge vs bookish knowledge: Tom vs Maggie
 - “The world outside the books was not a happy one” (Maggie’s thought)
 - “The world isn’t made of pen, ink, and paper, and if you’re to get on in the world, young man, you must know what the world’s made of” (Mr. Deane to Tom)
 - Maggie’s love of music associated with her reading = heightened sensitivity

- Darkness and Light: Maggie's dark skin and eyes vs Lucy's fairness (anti-conventional femininity; vs common associations with feminine beauty)
- St. Oggs: parable of the Floss ferryman who saved a poor, ragged woman who turned out to be the Virgin Mary – sympathy theme // Floss associated with Maggie (who will save Tom)
- Maggie's eyes: all men entranced by them – power of emotion & hunger for love (In Book I: Maggie – Medusa)