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## Literary Stylistic Analysis: Exploring Figures of Speech in “The Mill on the Floss” by George Eliot

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**Abstract:** George Eliot’s second novel “The Mill on the Floss” is an autobiographical novel, specifically, a contrapuntal bildungsroman, an Aristotelian tragedy. As a research combining literature and linguistics, studying “The Mill on the Floss” as a significant piece of literature from the lens of linguistics, the research aims to identify some of the figures of speech suggested as per a checklist by Leech and Short (2007) in “The Mill on the Floss” by George Eliot. It further aims to investigate how figures of speech create foregrounding. Moreover, it aims to explore the effects that the figures of speech usage have on the psychology of merely not the characters employing them but as well on the psychology of the readers. The research holds significance for the students and for literary critics interested in exploring the works of George Eliot, highlighting the interdependency of literature and linguistics..

**Key Words:** The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot, Literary Stylistic Analysis, Foregrounding, Psychology-analysis

## Introduction

Literature is an expression of life in words of truth and beauty; it is the written record of thoughts, emotions, aspirations and is characterized by its artistic, its suggestive, its permanent qualities (Long, W. J., 2019, p.8). Indulging with literature the critic’s criticism’s purpose is to appreciate the appeal and fascinating effects of literature while working to interpret the text. This is where linguistics comes in. “Linguistics is

concerned with the nature of human language and how it is learned and what part it plays in the life of the individual and the community” (S. Pit Corder). It is “the scientific study of human language” (Victoria A, Fromkin). Stylistics gained prominence in Britain and America in 1960s according to Mc Arthur (1996) and expanded in continental Europe particularly France due to contribution of Charles Bally and Leo Spitzer. Charles

Bally advocated linguistic stylistics while Spitzer advocated literary stylistics as cited in Mode (2015, p.13).

As a number of researches relevant have been reviewed, it is quite observable that a wide gap lies in existence as there have been quite no number of research/es that point out the Figures of Speech categorically in “The Mill on the Floss”. The present research aims to answer the questions relevant to the figures-of-speech employment in George Eliot’s second novel, “The Mill on the Floss”.

## Literature Review

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Leech and Short (2007, p.11) state the goal of literary stylistics to be, ‘to relate the critic’s concern of aesthetic appreciation to linguist’s concern of linguistic description’. The questions for linguists, extending far beyond what devices are employed, as well as why they are employed reach to the questions of: why does the author choose to express himself in this particular way, and how is such-and-such an aesthetic effect achieved through language? (Leech & Short, 2007). Enkvist (1964) in his monograph, *Linguistics and Literary Style*, discusses six approaches to the definition of style, a few of which are style as: the choice between alternative expressions, deviations from a norm, a set of individual characteristics and as a set of collective characteristics.

There are three schools of thought about style determination: dualism, monism and pluralism. As in Leech and Short (2007), there are two kinds of dualism: “style as the dress of thought” and “style as a manner of expression”; there is monism: the separation of style and content; and further, there is pluralism. In “Unit 3: Style and Content”, in another book, are presented elaborations. Leech and Short (2007) specify style to reside at semantic, syntactic

, graphological and phonological level.

## George Eliot (1819-1880)

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“George Eliot was an English novelist, journalist and one of the leading writers in Victorian era” (Xi & Wen-ying, 2015, p. 307). George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans which she chose to adopt to escape gender-based discrimination. Eliot’s choice behind selection of a male name for her representation is ‘an indication to hide her gender, so that her work would be rated objectively and seriously’ (Chenni, 2016, p.135). The story of life of the prominent Victorian novelist, George Eliot, is as dramatic and complex as her best plots (Henry, 2012). “George Eliot’s ... vivid evocation of place, lively and sympathetic characters, realistic dramatization of moral dilemmas and deep understanding of people brought her a devoted readership”. (Edwards, 2003)

## The Mill on the Floss

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“The Mill on the Floss is safe for immortality” —John Blackwood (cited in Eliot & Haight, 1954-1978). Giordano (2008) put forward that the genre of the novel “The Mill on the Floss” is contrapuntal bildungsroman (p. 99) where the story of life is of two characters. She, about the characters, added that the narrator, that is George Eliot, not merely enlisted or derived characteristics of the characters but also commented on what one character possessed while the other saw in deficiency, hence raising full maturity of the novel. As cited in Rossini (2015, p. 22), Levine (2001, p. 7) describes that “The Mill on the Floss” is set on realist grounds: ‘the stimulating principle of George Eliot’s art was realism. Realism is a model that depends on reaction against what the writer takes to have been misinterpretations.[...] It is rarely, and certainly was not for George Eliot, simply

accuracy in representation of things as they are ... It is also and necessarily a kind of authenticity, an honest representation of one's own feelings and perceptions...' (Rossini 2015, p. 22).

In "The Mill on the Floss", the world is as divided into public and private is as well gendered: Male characters carry out public duties, while female characters carry out domestic or private duties. Men are free, active, ruler and combatant and the women are passive, submissive and obedient except Maggie Tulliver. Men deal with more serious and influential activities, and many times they have the right to determine the female characters and their children's fates. (Gungor, 2020, p. 75). Nielson (1999) discussed the tragedy of gender in a way what and how the gender roles were existent in the Victorian Age and how George Eliot made an expression at these gender roles. The result of forcefulness of these gender roles lead both the characters to drown at the end of the novel." The themes outlining selfishness and self-representation became to be most prominent in "The Mill on the Floss" and can be deciphered by following the following main channels of thought as indicated by Cooper (2007, p. 138): first channel is the power of an individual to represent himself/herself. Second channel is power of society to interpret individual action and the third channel is 'narrator's ability to surpass all other considerations by telling the reader what to think and the way this surpassing is reflected by various narrative techniques.

The character around whom the story revolves is that of Maggie Tulliver (the protagonist). Maggie is a talented, intelligent girl, growing into a lady at Dorlcote Mill (Soofastaei & Mirenayat, 2015, p. 72). Xi and Wen-ying (2015) state that "Maggie Tulliver is the young Eliot herself" (p. 307).

Saghir conducted a study titled

"Constructivism—The Mill on the Floss" in which she intended to explore the 'role' constructivism played behind Maggie's unorthodox behavior in opposition to the opinion of the public. Her findings included that Maggie's behavior (at first) as opposed to the society which she lived in, and by the end of the story, Maggie's decision to leave off Stephen Guest, was because constructivism played a key role in her life, as she did not wish to lose the relationship with her brother Tom, and with the society. This was the decision which reflected how strong her behavior was due to the mindset created to abide by the society's norm, to keep her behavior under regulation. Dikici (2014) performed a study, the purpose of which was to determine the approaches applied in the novel: found out were mainly those of realism (oppressive and nostalgic referents), feminist approaches, existentialism, an approach dealing with epistemology, and lastly, the approach of critical reasoning.

Rossini (2015) outlined the major themes in the novel, as well how George Eliot created it a tragedy deviating from certain formal elements, while maintaining the essence of Greek Aristotelian tragedy. She as well discussed how Maggie Tulliver could be contemplated as a tragic heroine. Nayeypour (2018) examined the factors behind "The Mill on the Floss" resulting into a tragedy and state that there were two factors responsible for this: first, the self-centered thoughts and emotions of the characters, and second, the "social mind' or public opinion's unforgetting, unforgiving, and unsympathetic perspectives of any unconventional behavior.'

## Research Methodology

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### Nature of Research

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The research was qualitative in nature,

non-experimental, excluding quantitative approaches to stylistic analysis of the text. Method of literary stylistic analysis was used to explore the significance of figurative language in the novel, data was selected and collected qualitatively by comprehensively reading of the novel "The Mill on the Floss" by George Eliot.

## Instrument

For literary stylistic analysis the checklist provided by Leech and Short (2007) was used as a research tool. The checklist provided by Leech and Short covers all linguistic and stylistic levels: lexical, syntactical, figurative language, phonological level and context. This checklist is valid and reliable as the checklist had been used frequently and employed by researchers in conducting stylistic analysis.

## Design

Data has been analyzed orderly and systematically by stylistic analysis, answering the research questions one by one from the angle of literary stylistics.

## Research Findings

"The Mill on the Floss" was a contrapuntal bildungsroman revolving around the lives of Maggie Tulliver and her elder brother Tom Tulliver, from the age of nine and fourteen to the moments when they depart from the world. Book I reveals that Maggie is type of a rebellious girl who is comfortable in being her natural self, being dark and looking like a 'gypsy', a remark that her maternal-family continuously restored towards her. Tom, on whom she's emotionally dependent, when she was forced to encounter his ignorance towards her and anger he portrayed at her, were life-altering moments for her, for then she was disheveled amongst her revolving emotions, ultra-changing which she

ultimately had no control over. Tom's ignorance towards her lead her to actually run away, escaping from emotional torture, to the gypsies, from where afterwards she returned to her father, her loving-father, who then scolded Tom and Mrs. Tulliver. Maggie's emotional condition can be comprehended from the fact that she had kept a doll up in the attic, in whose head she would dig nails when anger surrounded her, especially imagining that she was doing so to her Aunt Glegg. George Eliot has kept the novel alive throughout by using various figures of speech paired with regular psychological analysis. The figures of speech are made to rise in conversations as well as in narrator's authorial narrative commentary bringing ornamentation to the novel.

Eliot made frequent uses of parallelism to give musicality, rhythmicity, and to enhance foregrounding by building association between elements in the novel. Parallelism, was often bought about by Eliot as she offered her opinion and guided the reader to the way of thought she had desired for him/her to follow: *"I think they must have been given to feeble remonstrance, getting more and more peevish as it becomes more and more ineffectual"*. This was syntactic parallelism being used as 'more and more' (peevish) runs parallel to 'more and more (ineffectual). Another instance of parallel structure creation is in a set of sentences part of Mr. Tulliver's response to Mr. Riley as the former clarifies his consideration upon whether Tom, prior's son, was stupid: *"Everything winds about so — the more straightforward you are, the more you're puzzled"*. This was a usage of lexical parallelism where the same word along with the indefinite article 'the', being into 'the more' is put into function. Mr. Tulliver was often found to say that, that was a 'puzzling world'. He often remained conscious as to not be dodged by anything

or any factor while making his judgement of whether Tom was stupid. Significant example of continuous parallelism lay in Bob's consecutive statements where each statement ends with the syntactic structure that runs parallel to the sentence occurring before it: "... he does.", "... he is.", "...I would". The parallelism of this kind that was created lifts upward the level of certainty with which he is putting forth the propositions and his wish, creating an effect on Tom at making him believe and consider Bob reliable.

George Eliot had been observed to use anaphora to create and promote foregrounding by placing emphasis, and placing emphasis for revealing the emotions, for specification and clarification, to promote certainty in regards to behavior of self, and to bring attention to, the mention of whom is significant. "what I want is to give Tom a good eddication; an eddication as 'll be a bread to him." is an emphasis upon 'good' quality education. In "A good education, let me tell you, Tulliver, — a good education is cheap at the money." is used for convincing by placing weight through emphasis on the idea of granting Tom good quality education despite the amount of money that were in demand. Maggie uttered, "Oh dear, Luke! ... Oh dear, Luke ... Oh, Luke...", when she found out that because of her negligence Tom's rabbits had died out of hunger. She feared that Tom would be angry at her, which he then was, the anaphora here indicates here the intensity of fear and of regret.

Eliot commented, "We learn to restrain ourselves ... We keep apart ...; We no longer approximate." when Tom was angry at Maggie when he found out that his rabbits were dead because of what he thought was because of Maggie's naughtiness. Eliot used here anaphora to justify to the readers Maggie's behavior for she went up to the attic where again her

behavior was not under her control. Eliot explained that as adults 'we' that is, they, acknowledged the art of distancing themselves when the need was, from people the distancing from whom the need was, but children failed to do so. Eliot regularly so announced her opinions through-out the book sometimes in the form of general commentary.

Bob also made use of anaphora, which revealed that in Eliot's world of "The Mill on the Floss" each of her characters was aware of basic language art, which Bob as well adopted to make Tom realize the importance of the person for whom "he" repeatedly is being used side by side mentioning the special's attribute: "He lives up at the Kennel Yard at St Ogg's, he does. He's the biggest rot-catcher anywhere, he is." Mr. Tulliver, to whom the world is often puzzling and everything relevant to it and everything relevant to dealing with it is puzzling, said that: "... it's puzzling work, talking is." Chiasmus was used as by inverting the parallel structure while involving repetition of "is" in "it's" and as of "is" without the latter falling into contraction, invertedly. This inversion while maintaining parallelism indicated to what extent Mr. Tulliver was himself puzzled and confused by what surrounded him. Eliot uses antithesis in the narration as in "... accusing she didn't know whom of she didn't know what." In regards to Mrs. Tulliver, insisting upon the very fearful nature of Mrs, Tulliver who was afraid Maggie had drowned.

Climax, as a stylistic device, was often used by Eliot, wherein one extract she employed it while as performing the commentary upon Tom's and Bob's fight, where great movement she had involved: "Tom's blood was thoroughly up: he went at Bob with a lunge and threw him down and kept it like a cat, and pulled Tom down after him. They struggled fiercely on the ground for a moment or two, till Tom,

pinning Bob down by the shoulders, though he had the mastery." The usage of anticlimax in the following scene created by George Eliot was for the purpose of creating a humorous effect through the humiliation of Tom as Tom ordered his dog to leap at the snout and grab it and Yap, his dog, miserably failed him: "High! Yap,—hoigh! there he is," said Tom, clapping his hands, as the little black snout made its arrowy course to the opposite bank. "Seize him, lad! seize him!" Yap agitated his ears and wrinkled his brows, but declined to plunge, trying whether barking would not answer the purpose just as well." George Eliot as well effectively employed neologisms that she had formed, metonymy, personification, synaesthesia, simile, and symbolism.

Neologisms refer to the creation of new words as well as to the creation of new pairs of words. Neologisms were brought about as in: 'curtain of sound', 'wretched pleasure', and 'Magsie'. Creation of new words was held for the performance of that very stylistic function which the existent words and pairs-of-words could not create the effect of, that is, the effect of successfully creating a novel world, the existence of which lies important for the readers to be immersed in it, when they have to allow themselves to fall under the effect of it, where the narrator was the story-teller, the author being word-creator, the lexicographer, herself. Tom called Maggie "Magsie" at the time when they were emotionally close, and Tom did not think of her as being 'naughty'.

Metonymy was used in *The Mill on the Floss* as: "tossing back her mane" where mane was taken to be that of the pony's as Maggie was often compared to a pony when it was about her unkempt hair. Importantly, the novel was begun by George Eliot by the usage of personification, as personifying Floss while calling it 'broadening Floss' stating that it

'hurries on'. And there was personification of the sea, the 'loving tide' of which was 'rushing to meet it' and 'checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. Further, Ripple (the tributary) is personified to create an impression that 'its low, placid voice — as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving'. Moreover, personification of Maggie's hair was created as in "Maggie's hair, as she threw off her bonnet, painfully confirmed her mother's accusation." Synaesthesia was used to make active in imagination the senses of hearing and seeing combined resulting in imagining an action, the like of which actually took place (as Maggie was the performer of the action): "Tom's name served as well as the shrillest whistle; in an instant she was on the watch, with gleaming eyes, like a Skye terrier suspecting mischief, or at all events determined to fly at anyone who threatened it toward Tom." Simile, Eliot employed customarily, as in, "when she listened to the light dripping sounds of the rising fish, and the gentle rustling, as if the willows and the reeds and the water had their happy whisperings also." Further, in, "I can't help loving the child as if she was my own;". And in, "*Yet the excellent dog accepted Tom's attention with as much alacrity as if he had been treated quite generously.*" Simile employed frequently, lead the reader dive into an array of imagination just as Maggie used to, as Eliot aimed. George Eliot widely made use of rhyme, alliteration and assonance in "The Mill on the Floss".

Rhyme, in "... quite a gentleman sort o' man" created a rhythmical effect in the conversation, pleasing to the ears and marking what the speaker was saying to be of significance for he had proved his capability of understanding through effective production of deliberate rhythmic effects. Further, in another instance of rhymemwas an alarming rhythmicity

added to exercise its effect on the reader, effects of considering the significance of psychological analysis that George Eliot was performing. Alliteration was employed thoroughly as could be observed approximately within each two to three lines of the novel, revealing the fact as to how deeply the considerations had been made by the author concerning the style of the novel. In the first paragraph of the novel there is generous use of alliteration, which side by side creating musical effects and producing rhythmicity, attract reader's attention and hence, create foregrounding: "... where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace." Further, alliteration is used in the following to place emphasis on Mrs. Glegg's wish upon maintaining elegance: "Mrs. Glegg had doubtless the glossiest and crispiest brown curls in her drawers, as well as all curls in various degrees of fuzzy laxness; but to look out on the week-day world from under a crisp and glossy front would be to introduce a dreamlike and unpleasant confusion between the sacred and the secular." Further, alliteration is used by Maggie, and enhanced by narratorial narration: "Never mind, make haste!" said Maggie." When Maggie encourages Tom to cut her hair.

Assonance could be found to relate the concepts encapsulated within the words, the vowels in which were in assonance, resonated, for example in: "Aunt Glegg always spoke to them in this loud, emphatic way, as if she considered them deaf, or perhaps rather idiotic;" had been created to create a direct connection, apart from the semantic one, even one at a grammatical and lexical level to further the relation held between the notion of exhibition of 'spoke' and consideration of Maggie and Tom to be 'idiotic'.

## Discussion

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George Eliot used a variety of figurative language in "The Mill on the Floss" ranging from adopting figures of speech falling under the categories of grammatical and lexical schemes to tropes and to phonological schemes. The usage was aligned with contextual meaning delivered with implication for clarification of the meaning while maintaining truth-value of the message being delivered while creating contexts and meanings as per them, as per realism. Where these are not used for maintaining the truth-value, the figures of speech are used for placement of emphasis. George Eliot has made use of parallelism, anaphora, chiasmus, antithesis, climax, anticlimax, neologisms, metonymy, personification, synaesthesia, simile, rhyme, alliteration and assonance. At each occurrence and each occasion, the figures of speech are employed, they create foregrounding, by making the figurative language use impressionistic, by making prominent the style of language created, as George Eliot created for herself a personal novel writing style.

The usage of figures of speech has an effect on the psychology of both the characters who are involved in the conversation employing figures of speech and the readers engaged in reading and absorbing the message that the novel seems to convey by the employment of figures of speech. Its plot, the nature of the characters, the morals as well as significantly, the absorption of the psychological analysis that George Eliot had been carrying out as part of narration and commentary in the novel becomes inviting for the readers. The novel, "The Mill on the Floss" conveys what George Eliot intended to convey aesthetically, ornamenting the text of the novel by the usage of various figures of speech.

Figurative language has its roots dug in

foregrounding. The more the prominence of figurative language, more the credibility, and so is more effectively and comprehensively the context developed. Figurative language brings life to the plot, increases reliability on the part of the reader towards the author, as promoting the feelings of trust as the prior would not be failed, his/her expectations would be met up through the course of the story. The usage as well develops feelings in the reader's mind that his/her feelings are being cared for by the author as the latter concentrated deeply on developing each segment of the novel: maintenance of the genre, the context, the conversation, the style, the narration. Paired with a certain type of genre, a certain type of narration, the style is dominantly created by the selective use of language that is used to express, to depict, to specify the meaning, to generalize the concepts and conceptions. The essence of a literary novel lies in the ability of the author to establish it as literary, by the careful selection of language for continuance. The language is made lively, as is the novel made lively by the usage of figurative language. To create an essence of the novel, literary, figures of speech must be instilled within.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

“The Mill on the Floss” is a text rich with stylistic devices with George Eliot mentioning the term ‘figure of rhetoric’

herself in the novel, leading to acknowledgement of how conscious and concerned she had been in the use of these devices paired with what particular effect/s each would have on the reader/s as well as on the characters who had been using them awhile speech in fictional conversation. Eliot used parallelism, anaphora, chiasmus, antithesis, climax, anticlimax, neologism, metonymy, personification, synaesthesia, simile, symbolism, rhyme, alliteration and assonance. Each figure of speech tended to create foregrounding by being highlighted by its creation, highlighting the meaning as well as the way the meaning was conveyed. Figures of speech usage among others, had its effects of influence over other participants in the conversation which they attempt to exert, as one seems to be more literate, more intelligent, more understanding, more influential than the other, domineering on the later, forcing them in any way to believe and accept what the (may-be) ‘dominant’ had been asserting, even is that was existent over few seconds or a moment. The usage of figures of speech has an effect of positive attitude of the reader towards the novel as such a language assures the readers that the reading of this particular novel would not be a waste of time and energy. It is recommended that more research can be done on “Mill on the Floss” as it deals with contemporary social ills.



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