“The Griefs of Our Children”:
Maggie Tulliver’s Early Suffering
in Its Literary Context

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要約

「我が子らの悲嘆」: Maggie Tulliver
の幼少期の受難とその文学的コンテクスト

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The Mill on the Floss (1860) において、George Eliot が下敷きにしているものは、自伝的素材であり、イギリス小説というよりむしろ大陸の小説の様式である、とよく言われることであるが、Maggie Tulliver の幼少期の受難をヴィクトリア朝小説のコンテクストにおいて考察してみることは有益である。

まずヴィクトリア朝前半期の小説——Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, David Copperfield——から、3 つの重要なエピソードを取り出し分析を行い、幼少期の受難の扱い方における相似点を明らかにする。その上で、The Mill on the Floss の前半に示される Maggie の状況を検討し、そこに、多くの共通点が発見されることを明らかにする。こうした研究は、Eliot が Brontë 姉妹や Dickens に負う点を示すのみならず、Maggie の将来の悲劇の種子となっている彼女の幼少期の苦闘についてもっと焦点を絞った読みが可能であることを示すのである。
Certain episodes which occur in the early chapters of Victorian novels, and compel attention because of their extraordinary intensity and influence on subsequent developments in the narrative, show remarkable similarities.

In each case, an orphan, or a child whose situation is to some extent analogous, is denounced as being somehow unnatural, and rejected. The suffering which the child endures is excessive; the reasons for it are beyond the child's control. The instrument of this suffering is usually an adult whose opinion is seen to be unreliable. However, a more favoured child may also play a part in it. Not only does the incident stand out vividly at the time, but the description of it contains ideas and motifs of the utmost significance to the novel as a whole. It is truly unforgettable, and we are not expected to forget it.

There is no single episode in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) which contains as many striking parallels as the three which we shall be looking at first (selected from *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*). Nevertheless, there are a number of childhood scenes in this other famous Bildungsroman of the period, in which similar feelings, ideas and images are dispersed.

A recognition of these similarities serves several purposes. It helps to counter the criticism (and the author's own fear) that she was writing too much out of her own personal experience, without the necessary artistic reworking of the material; it suggests that Eliot was rather more influenced by recent English novels than others have claimed, and she herself implied; and, most importantly, it alerts us to aspects of Maggie's early experiences which carry a particular weight of meaning, and exert a pressure on the narrative which follows.

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Naturally, much critical interest has been provoked by the incidents in the earlier novels. One of the most heavily analysed is that in which the outcast waif, Catherine Linton, tries to enter Mr. Lockwood's window on the night of his enforced stay at Wuthering Heights. This, of course, is no human child, but the ghost of one who has been wandering the moors "for twenty years"; to the terrified Lockwood she is a "little fiend... a changeling—wicked little soul!" (69). Yet Lockwood's sensations of "a little, ice-cold hand," "a child's face" and "a feeble scratching outside" (67) all suggest not only a real child, but a younger one than we might have expected. Lockwood's treatment of her is all the more horrifying as a result. Feeling himself in the grip of Catherine's hand, hearing her voice and seeing her face, he panics:

... terror made me cruel, and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes.

If this is a nightmare, it is rendered with such immediacy as to make the division between
dream and reality hopelessly blurred; on the other hand, if Catherine is a ghost, she is an unusually substantial one. The description of her wrist, the blood and the blood-drenched bedclothes all increase our tendency to feel for her as we would for a real child.

Significantly, Lockwood himself now treats the waif like a real child. "Let me go, if you want me to let you in!" he bargains. Catherine obediently slackens her grip. Taking advantage of her childish gullibility, the adult at once withdraws his hand, and piles up against the broken pane the books which had once belonged to her. Having made an opaque and solid barrier with these, he now stops his ears against her "lamentable prayer" (67).

Several details from the episode, such as the window which creates a barrier between levels of reality or states of being, and the books, recur with increasing force throughout the novel. Both have been the subject of important essays on Wuthering Heights.

The episode is vital to the mechanism of the narrative, for it provokes Lockwood's curiosity, and Nelly Dean's response to it—in other words, the rest of the story unfolds as a direct result of it. Furthermore, it impels us into this story with a strong inclination to take Catherine's part against a threatening and uncomprehending world, and puts us on our guard against the adults who tell her tale. It has important repercussions in the plot itself: his yearning to be reunited with his "heart's darling" (70) precipitates Heathcliff's withdrawal from daily life, so that the children of the next generation are left to make their peace together. Finally, there is the mood which the episode crystallizes from the opening chapters. The desolation of the waif, and also that of the nature in which she wonders so restlessly, will only be relieved at the very end of the novel. Then at last Catherine will lie at rest beneath a "benign sky," in the "quiet earth" (367).

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Another "poor, emaciated, pallid wanderer" seeks admission to a house in another Brontë novel—this time, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847). But this comes late in the novel, when Jane is grown up; besides, the outcome is quite different: she is granted entry and refuge by St. John Rivers after her own half-death in the "dim and misty landscape" (356) of the moors. If there are reverberations of that earlier incident here, it is not surprising: although Jane Eyre was published some weeks before Wuthering Heights, it was written after it, and we know that the Brontë sisters read their work to each other. However, more pertinent to our present interest is the much-analysed episode at the beginning of the novel—the little Jane Eyre's confinement in the Reeds' "red-room."

The appeal of the episode for many recent critics lies in its red ambience: the description of the huge, damask-curtailed bed, the windows "shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery," the red carpet, the crimson table linen, and the paintwork with a "blush of pink in it" (45) yields a whole plethora of imagery for a feminist critique. Elaine Showalter, for example, suggests that Jane's ritual imprisonment here, and the subsequent episodes of
ostracism at Gateshead . . . is an adolescent rite of passage that has
curious anthropological affinities to the menarchal ceremonies of
Eskimo or South Sea Island tribes. But this leads us away from the text. Jane is, in fact, just ten years old, and not well-
developed for her age: Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary who is summoned after Jane's spell of unconscioczness in the room, estimates that she "must be eight or nine years old" (55). Maggie Tulliver is more appropriately in her teens, with "her broad-chested figure" in "the mould of early womanhood," when she enters the awesome "Red Deeps," Al-though there is much to support a "menarchal" reading here, the facts of the narrative do
tell against it. What we have is something simpler and still more basic—another incident in which a helpless child is cruelly rejected by an unfeeling adult, described in
such a highly charged way as to affect the whole of the subsequent narrative.

Jane is no spectre. Yet she too is considered by her aunt and cousins to be quite
beyond the pale. "A sickly, whining, pining thing" (260) when first taken in as an orphan, she is now being urged by Mrs. Reed to "acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner—something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were" (all emphases added). Jane herself is conscious of her "physical inferiority" (39) to Eliza, John and Georgiana, and considers herself to be an "uncongenial alien" (48) among them. Here then is another unnatural child with an "unchildlike look and voice" (267), made to stand outside the charmed circle of home and family; another instance of what Karl Miller has called "the white face at the window."

Yet, of course, we are being made more and more aware that what is really unnatural
is the behaviour of the adult. This "white face" provokes as much savagery from Mrs. Reed, directly or indirectly, as the waif's does from Lockwood. Before being sent to the
"red-room," Jane had already been injured when the boy, John, threw a book at her, and she fell and hit her head against the door. On her way to the room, she is physically
restrained by her aunt's maid: "Hold her arms, Miss Abbot; she's like a mad cat"(44); and inside the room she only just escapes being tied down with Miss Abbot's garters. Finally, she is locked into the chilly, silent, eerie room where her uncle died, and forced to spend the night in this "jail" (46). When she shakes the lock later in a "desperate effort" (49) to attract attention, she is "abruptly thrust . . . back and locked . . . in" (50) again by her enraged aunt. Later Jane accuses her of having done this "roughly and violently" (68).

To punish a young child in this way, even after her wild pleas and her "frantic
anguish and wild sobs" (50), would have been excessively cruel even if Jane had been at fault in the first place. Since she is, as usual, simply "the scapegoat of the nursery" (47), it is doubly unjust.

Inside the "red-room," Jane's most significant experience occurs when she looks in
the mirror. Masao Miyoshi has interpreted this as her first effort to find her own
identity. What she sees in it is her likeness to "one of the tiny phantoms . . . . Bessie's
[nurse's] evening stories represented as coming out of the lone ferny dells in moors,
and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers." Again we remember the ghost-
child in *Wuthering Heights*. Jane's self-assessment appears to be rather positive, however, for she is not only "half imp" but also "half fairy," her "white face and arms specking the gloom" (46). That she takes the white as her own intrinsic quality, amidst the surrounding blackness, is confirmed when she claims her spiritual ascendency to the Reeds after the incident: "I am not deceitful . . . your girl, Georgiana . . . tells lies, and not I . . . . You are deceitful!" (68–9). This realization, and the strength which comes with it, gives Jane the courage she needs to face her subsequent trials at Lowood Institution, and in the world outside it.

Jane's punishment in the "red-room" is as vitally important to the plot as Catherine's encounter with Lockwood in the earlier novel, not simply because it leads to her being sent away from the Reeds' home, but because it is recalled at crucial moments in her later life, too. Bertha Rochester's intrusion into her bedroom at Thornfield, for instance, reminds us of the sense of a ghostly visitation which alarms her on this occasion. Then Jane actually dreams of such a visitation after her abortive wedding day, and the blurred panic which she feels as a child gives way to a clear vision of "a white human form." It is that of the mother she has never known, who now gives her the strength to "flee temptation" (346)—in other words, to reject the prospect of an illicit liaison with Mr. Rochester.

Other elements of the incident will become motifs in the novel. Once again, books assume significance. It is while and because Jane is sitting alone reading, that John first assaults her; the breach in her habitual obedience occurs when the book is taken from her, and hurled at her. Books are a passport to adulthood which John believes himself, rather than Jane, to be at the threshold of: they are his bookshelves, he insists, "they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years"(42). Of course, Jane's "literary affectations" are childish enough, as Mark Hennelly, Jr, has suggested; yet her reading material has become the subject of intense critical scrutiny, and the benefits derived from her reading are evident from her highly articulate exchange with her aunt afterwards. Jane must travel a long route, and endure many vicissitudes, before she can lay claim to her independence as an adult, but her precocity in reading should not be underplayed. It is an early indication that, despised and neglected as she is now, she alone of the four children will reach true maturity.

The length of time involved in the process may be suggested by the "muffled windows"(46). We are familiar with symbolic interpretations of the windows in *Wuthering Heights*, and should not miss them here, or later, in *Jane Eyre*. Other physical elements of the scene, from the confining chamber itself to the jewel-casket kept there, will also recur, several of them in the context of the wedding crisis. Once more, the dramatic childhood incident reverberates throughout the unfolding narrative.

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As Charlotte Brontë would have listened to her sister's story, so another novelist, Charles Dickens, would have read *Jane Eyre* before writing his own "favourite child"—
David Copperfield (1849–50). Indeed, Q. D. Leavis has already convincingly illustrated the debt he owed to Charlotte’s treatment of childhood in it.11 More recently, R. Leavis has been concerned to show, within Dickens’s use of a similar autobiographical form, certain differences.12 Thus he sets the “red-room” scene side by side with that of David Copperfield’s punishment and confinement by Mr. Murdstone in order to bring out points of contrast. Fair enough. There are even a few he has missed: for instance, David never thinks of starving himself, as Jane does—in fact, his plain meals (the first is of bread, meat and milk) bring him “something like cheerfulness.”13 Yet such contrasts are neither as many nor as significant as the parallels.

It is true that David’s mother is still alive, but his step-father has caused him to feel “daily more and more alienated” from her. He is not considered different from other children; far from it. But he is, like them, considered peculiarly depraved: “the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers . . . and held that they contaminated one another” (105). Once separated from both children and adults, David feels himself to be an “outlaw” (109) and even his mother is persuaded that he is “a wicked fellow” (112).

In this situation, which bears obvious resemblances to Jane’s, he finds the same solace as she had found in books. David’s “identification with his childhood reading” can hardly be said to be “marginal.”14 His father’s “small collection of books” has afforded him a “glorious host” of companions, and provided his “only and . . . constant comfort” (105–6). There is no direct link between this reading and his punishment, but the description of it precedes the punishment, as it does in Jane’s case, and it is equally indicative of the child’s future. The fact that he has occupied himself with such books, whilst being able to retain little from the texts he is expected to study, suggests a cast of mind which will bear fruit later—when he becomes a successful writer.

For the present, David’s ordeal follows a similar course to Jane’s. First, he is physically abused: Murdstone flogs him for not repeating his lessons properly. In the initial throes of this he retaliates, biting the adult’s restraining hand. This provokes more savagery. Then he is locked up. In solitary confinement, “almost frightened” (108) by the sight of his own face in the glass, he cries beside the window, begins to consider the question of his wickedness, and watches the “gathering night”(110) apprehensively. Later, during daylight, he watches other boys playing outside in the churchyard, but is ashamed to let himself be seen by them. The whole episode, which is spread out over five days, culminates in his being sent away to school, like Jane, with a damning recommendation. Mrs. Reed’s warning to Mr. Brocklehurst (“guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit” [65] ) is couched more dramatically on the placard that David is forced to wear when he reaches Salem House: “Take care of him. He bites” (130).

The warning, of course, makes David’s first experience of school as distressing and bewildering as Jane’s at Lowood, and Steerforth’s acceptance of his innocence in the matter does as much for David as Helen Burns’s and Miss Temple’s belief in Jane does for her. In fact it is for this reason that David becomes “bound to him ever afterwards” (136).
The effects of this episode, then, are as far-reaching for David as her stay in the “red-room” is for Jane.

Like Jane’s, David’s consciousness is clearly used to pass judgement on the adult whose behaviour is, after all, more at fault than the child’s. When David asks himself in his loneliness, “was it a criminal act that I had committed?” (109), his anxiety about being sent to prison or even hanged is not as foolish as it sounds: in 1851, Mary Carpenter noted from the Governor’s report that at Newgate alone there were “400 boys under 16 out of 3,000 annually in gaol.” But few sensitive nineteenth-century readers could have missed the irony implicit here. The crime, of course, whether in law or in common morality, is Murdstone’s, just as Jane, not Mrs. Reed, is the injured party in Jane Eyre.

Dickens impresses on our minds the profound impression made on David’s by his confinement: “I never shall forget”; “those five days . . . occupy the place of years in my remembrance” (109); “all this appears to have gone round and round for years instead of days, it is so strongly stamped on my remembrance” (110). It is the high point of the whole painful Oedipal struggle with Murdstone, the first of several father figures whom David will have to shake off before attaining his maturity. He will also have to learn to cope with the loss of that ineffectual mother in the background. The shame which he experiences when he sees his peers outside the window, the stripes which torment his whenever he moves, and the guilt which he feels for distressing his mother, foreshadow a story as fraught with problems and soulsearchings as Jane’s.

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It is hardly surprising that no single episode in The Mill on the Floss echoes every aspect of the scenes analysed above. In the first place, the novel is generally, and rightly, assumed to have a strong autobiographical colouring. We are made aware of this immediately, from the way in which “That little girl” (54) merges into authorial reminiscence in the first brief chapter. In fact Eliot so enjoyed reliving her childhood in it that she admitted afterwards to having dealt rather hurriedly with the rest of the book: “my love of the childhood scenes made me linger over them,” she wrote. Besides, Eliot had conceived a “violent antipathy” to Jane Eyre and is not likely to have permitted conscious influence; and she had referred, in an essay written in 1856, to Dickens’s “frequently false psychology.” What literary models there were for the novel, are usually thought to have been “continental—not English.” Nevertheless, Maggie’s early experiences show some striking resemblances to those of the fictional children we have looked at above.

Like Eliot herself, whose mother died when she was sixteen, Maggie loses a parent only later. Indeed, if her brother Tom is about twenty—one when their father dies (423), she must be about eighteen, which tallies with the information about her age given on her first visit to the “Red Deeps.” Nevertheless, long before she loses her beloved father, there is something of an outcast about her.

In the Tulliver family, it is generally acknowledged that Tom, with his “light brown
hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips . . .” (84) and so on, takes after his mother’s family, and Maggie, the very type of the “dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl” (85), after her father’s. Both her parents see this as a cause for regret. Her mother finds her, at nine years old, “too big . . . tall of her age” (60), and a poor figure altogether beside her cousin, “little pink-and-white Lucy” (164) whom she “can’t help loving . . . as if she was my own.” Lucy is indeed “more like my child than sister Deane’s” (96), says Mrs. Tulliver. Meanwhile, her father, who is more able to accept the appearance of this “straight black-eyed wench” (60), fears that Maggie is “Too ’cute for a woman” (59–60). Maggie’s position in her little world (ironically, one in which the old ideal of kinship is continually touted) is therefore almost as anomalous as that of the earlier child figures we have looked at. She seems, in fact, a “small mistake of nature”, a sort of changeling whose very hair is unlike that of “other folks’s children” (61).

Mrs. Tulliver’s regret is the more selfish and self-pitying: “it seems hard as I should have had but one gell, an’ her so comical,” she says; and that word “comical,” coming after her descriptions of Maggie’s seeming “half a idiot i’ some things” and singing to herself abstractedly “like a Bedlam creatur” (60), carries no weight of teasing affection. So it is to her father that Maggie turns for support. And she finds it here, in her earlier years. “Peremptory” (90) with everyone else, he is tender-hearted towards her, apt, in her childish crises, to speak to her “soothingly” (125, 180). Later, however, despite previous suggestions that she will stand aside from the general censure of him (125), she will feel “fits even of anger and hatred” towards both her parents “who were so unlike what she would have them to be” (380).

For the support Mr. Tulliver has given Maggie, firing and assuaging “this need of love, this hunger of the heart” (91), has not in fact been enough—it has been a form of self-indulgence, as disastrous in its way as that which he has accorded himself, by allowing his pride and stubbornness to lead his family into bankruptcy. Aunt Clegg is as right to comment on how he “does spoil that child” (125) as she is, later, to criticize his “misconduct” (293) in his public life.

In short, as the aunts and uncles recognize at the time, neither of Maggie’s parents has ever been adequate to her real need for a loving discipline. Hence the intensity of her sufferings, as intense as those of any of the alienated child figures in the earlier novels.

Other critics have suggested that Tom takes over the role which Mr. Tulliver fails to fulfill: “The narrative . . . insists metaphorically and structurally on the brother as figurative father.” This may be so as Tom grows in stature, and we are given hints of such a development: Nature, we are told, “Under these average boyish physiognomies . . . conceals some of her most rigid inflexible purposes” (85). Yet Tom in the first book—“Boy and Girl”—is very much a child. With only a little hesitation, he conspires with Maggie in cutting her unruly hair, knowing full well that she will “catch it” (120) from her parents. On this occasion, he runs off laughing, lured by the smell of dinner, leaving her to face the music alone. Child that he is, he cannot stand in loco parentis at this stage.

Maggie’s lonely reflections on this occasion provide one of the passages closest in
spirit to those in the Brontës' novels, and *David Copperfield*. It starts with her "bitter sense of the irrevocable" (121), passes through anguished self-analysis arising from Maggie's contrasting of herself to her brother, and ends with one of Eliot's long authorial commentaries, this time on the griefs of childhood:

We have all of us sobbed so piteously standing with tiny bare legs above our little socks . . . . Every one of those keen moments has left its trace and lives in us still . . . . we should not pooh-pooh the griefs of our children. (122-3)

Of course, the sentimentality of these "tiny bare legs above our socks" marks a dramatic decline in creative energy and impact from the "little, ice-cold hand" at Lockwood's window; it is tempting to trace such a decline back to Dickens—for instance, to Peggotty's keyhole interview with David on the last night of his confinement; and to blame it on the authors' self-pitying attitudes to their own troubles in childhood.26 Nevertheless, the scene as a whole works on us in several ways.

Most importantly, it directs us towards the seeds of doom and later self-torture in Maggie's character, for we are shown how "Maggie rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse, and then saw not only their consequences, but what would have happened if they had not been done" (121). It prepares us for the development of Tom's role, to the extent that it at least associates him with punishment, through Maggie's picture of him "lashing the gate" (121) or "whipping" (122) it, and showing no compunction afterwards. It sets Maggie "crying before the glass" like the fictional children we have already discussed, with the miserable awareness of adult rejection and condemnation. She "felt it impossible that she should . . . endure the severe eyes and severe words of her aunts" (122). And it stands her at that same troubled threshold of self-consciousness, her "small soul" overwhelmed by "dim guesses . . . [a] strangely perspectiveless conception of life" (123). For Maggie, as for the waif Catherine, there will never be the same degree of maturity which Jane Eyre and David Copperfield achieve. The need for the loved one (Tom and Heathcliff, those masterful brothers) will always be the absolute imperative of their lives.

Other passages in the early chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* contain other noticeable and revealing parallels. In one, cruelly chided by Tom for neglecting his pet rabbits during his absence at school, Maggie hides behind the tub in "the long empty space of the attic" (89), resolving to starve herself—as the older Catherine Linton had done, and as Jane Eyre had considered doing. On this occasion, no "sudden beam of sunshine" (79) comes through the latticed attic window; twilight falls, as it falls on the earlier child characters. This episode too calls up authorial pronouncements on "the bitter sorrows of childhood" (89). More significant, however, is the disgrace Maggie suffers when her reading ability is demonstrated to the auctioneer and appraiser, Mr. Riley, in Chapter 3. Her book is not snatched away from her, as Jane Eyre's is, but she is told sharply to shut it up, and her father does, for once, dismiss her "peremptorily" (68). She then retires to a dark corner behind his chair, venting her thwarted affection on her wax doll.

The space devoted to both the volumes which Maggie produces, and the eagerness
with which she pours out her information about them, alert us to their importance. One is Defoe’s work, properly entitled *Satan’s Devices; or The Political History of the Devil: Ancient and Modern* (1726). This contains “a dreadful picture” which Maggie “can’t help looking at,” of an old woman in a pond:

they’ve put her in, to find out whether she’s a witch or no, and if she swims she’s a witch, and if she’s drowned—and killed, you know,—she’s innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman.

But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she’d go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. (66–7)

There is more in this passage (Maggie’s explanation of how the devil takes human form, for instance, and “sets people doing wicked things”) which prophesies the tragedy which will befall Maggie, and indeed its very nature—the temptation, the drowning, and “The Final Rescue” (title of Book 7). No wonder Mr. Tulliver listens to all this with “petrifying wonder,” and that Mr. Riley is also disturbed.

The other book Maggie fetches is Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which indicates the most positive way of interpreting Maggie’s struggle with what is not “right” (67) in her own soul. We will be reminded of this work again and again in the course of the novel: “The use of images and episodes from *A Pilgrim’s progress* is structurally central and conspicuous” in it. Indeed, the very title of Book 4, “The Valley of Humiliation,” is taken from it. Thus little Maggie’s reading interests are even more telling than Jane’s or David’s, and prefigure her suffering and her final victory over “that partial, divided action of our nature which makes half the tragedy of the human lot” (633).

One other powerfully evocative episode which occurs before Maggie’s entry into the “Red Deeps,” and focuses on her reading, comes later in the novel. The setting of this episode takes us right back to *Wuthering Heights*. “Poor child!” still, Maggie is leaning against the window–frame, full of “a wide hopeless yearning” and “as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilised world of that day.” She is sorely in need of just what she is being denied—the kind guidance of “elder minds” (381). Then she happens to pick up, from the row of books on the window ledge, a shabby old volume of Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*. This suggests to her a way through “all the miseries of her young life” (384)—renunciation of the self.

Inspired by this idea, Maggie takes up plain sewing, becomes submissive, lets her mother plait and tie up her “abundant black locks” (388), and refuses to look in the mirror any more. Indeed, “the square looking–glass . . . was condemned to hang with its face towards the wall” (392). Such asceticism cannot last. Maggie enters the “Red Deeps” in the very next chapter, and there she meets Philip Wakem again. Later still, before the Bazaar at which she is distressed by Stephen Guest’s attentions, we shall find her being forced to admire herself, particularly “her massy hair” (555), in her cousin Lucy’s cheval glass. Nevertheless, renunciation is a theme which will dominate the last part of the novel, when Maggie finds the strength to deny her passion for Stephen, and follow the “divine voice within” (604).
Thus, Maggie's chance reading at the window leads, after many trials and tribulations, to her presence at the upstairs windows of Dorlcote Mill again, at the other side this time—no longer a child but a resolute young woman—calling to her loved ones there in an "almost miraculously divinely-protected effort" (654) to save them from the terrible flood. Critics have long complained about the ending of the novel\textsuperscript{25}; but in some respects, at least, it is not as arbitrary as it might seem.

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Granted, in The Mill on the Floss Eliot is drawing heavily on her own experiences, particularly on her relationship with her brother, Isaac—Gordon Haight has pointed out that the fictional children were even born in the same years as the two real children.\textsuperscript{25} But it is a mistake to think that she might not have shaped this material according to the demands of her art. It is also a mistake to emphasize her debt to Mme de Staël and George Sand, say, while neglecting sources of inspiration, conscious or unconscious, closer to home.

A good understanding of Maggie's childhood woes can be gained by putting them in the context of other young heroines'/heroes' woes in recent Victorian literature. What is more, such an exercise serves to highlight those incidents in the early chapters which contribute most to future developments in her character and in the novel as a whole.

NOTES
4. ed. Q. D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 365. Subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.
5. See Mrs. Gaskell's account of their habit of reading and discussing each other's work, in her The Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: Dent, 1908) 215.
7. ed. A. S. Byatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 393. Subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.
11. See Appendix B: "Oliver Twist, Jane Eyre and David Copperfield" in her contribution on David Copperfield in the Leavises' Dickens the Novelist (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 152–156.
12. See n. 10 above.
13. Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, ed. Trevor Blount (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 110. Subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text.
14. L. R. Leavis 170.
20. Byatt 36 (Scott is mentioned as an exception here). For some specific references to “continental” authors, see also Byatt's Appendix on Stephen Guest (690), and Ellen Moers's discussion of his novel in her Literary Women (London: The Women's Press, 1977) 52.
24. For one of the most famous criticisms, see F. R. Leavis's comments in The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 59–60.

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