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Fthonos Théon and Forgiveness in the Writings of George Eliot

Bakalářská práce

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Nezaviněná vina a odpuštění v díle George Eliot

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Fthonos Théon and Forgiveness in the Writings of George Eliot

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RESEARCH PLAN:

Fthonos Théon, "the wrath of gods" or undeserved guilt is present in all three examined novels but the circumstances and the outcome differs from novel to novel. The motifs of guilt and forgiveness are greatly significant in the writings of George Eliot as it is reflected in her own life and era.

The novels Middlemarch, Silas Marner and The Mill on the Floss were chosen as three examples of writing of Eliot and initial material for this Bachelor Thesis. Alongside with them, considerable amount of secondary literature on the relevant phenomenon was utilized to support the statement this Bachelor Thesis proclaims. All relevant claims and theories were gathered and elaborated into a consistent piece of academic work.

List of recommended literature:

- Hardy, Barbara: The novels of George Eliot: a study in form (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1959).
Hardy, Barbara: Critical essays on George Eliot (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970).
Fulmer, Constance Marie: George Eliot: A reference guide (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977).
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Baker, William (ed.): Critics on George Eliot (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973).
Roberts, Neil: George Eliot: her beliefs and her art (London: Elek, 1975).
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King, Jeannette: Tragedy in the Victorian novel : theory and practice in the novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
Sadoff, Dianne F.: Monsters of affection: Dickens, Eliot & Bronte on fatherhood (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
Bedient, Calvin: Architects of the self : George Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and E.M. Forster (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1972).
Harvey, J.W.: The art of George Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961).

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V..... dne

Podpis.....

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Introduction

Alongside other significant writers of the Victorian era in England, such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, or the Brontë sisters, Marry Ann Evans (or George Eliot) created considerable number of remarkable characters and veritable narrations in her books. This thesis focuses on the motif of *Fthonos Theon*, accidental guilt or *wrath of gods* as well as forgiveness in two books of George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*.

This thesis argues that *Fthonos Theon* is present in all three examined novels, but the circumstances and the outcome differs from novel to novel. The motifs of guilt and forgiveness occur frequently in the writings of George Eliot, as it is reflected in her own life and era.

The objective of the bachelor's thesis is to describe, analyse, and compare moments and situations, when the accidental guilt occurred in three listed works. George Eliot's original works as well as academic articles, essays, and other scientific sources were used to support and prove arguments stated in this thesis. Characters and their behaviour are one of the relevant topics of study along with the situations that precede and follow. The aspect of forgiveness is crucial and closely connected to the guilt and psychology of the characters.

This thesis puts forth the idea that George Eliot used her life experience and her non-Christian philosophy as the framework for her dramatic narrations of guilt and forgiveness. As suggested, this thesis intends to study the behaviour of the characters and demonstrate the argument that in all three pieces of writing, there is no genuine guilt in the work of George Eliot, but the characters always hold some amount of responsibility over their behaviour.

1. Mary Ann Evans, her life experience and philosophy on Fate, Forgiveness, and *Fthonos Theon*

George Eliot or Mary Ann (or Marian as she called herself) Evans was a complicated woman, who underwent a long-lasting and difficult moral, philosophical, and psychological changes during her life. She had to face struggles in her family and her love life and she was also a victim of prejudice as a translator, writer, and intellectual, which was further exacerbated by the fact that she was a woman. All of these challenges shaped and formed her approach towards forgiveness and guilt in all forms.

Concerning this subject, the major influences on Marian Evans were her religious views and how they changed during her life. She converted from Calvinism to Agnosticism in her twenties¹ mostly under the influence of her reading and later on of meeting significant people, who proclaimed to abandon the traditional Christian approach and turned towards Deism, Positivism, or Agnosticism. However, Gerald Bullett in *George Eliot, Her Life and Books* claims that she 'rejected theological Christianity. She did not reject religion. She had always had a lively ethical sense, and a social conscience.' (Bullett, 35²).

It was her easily tractable character what accelerated the change from rather naïve but devoted Christian young lady to a positivistic woman. She conformed to opinions and thoughts of men of science, whom she encountered personally, such as Dr Brabant, John Chapman, or George Henry Lewes. This thesis mentions them further in the text as they tremendously influenced her opinions and philosophy.

1.1 Childhood and Christian Era

Concerning her childhood and puberty, Mary Ann, as she was called during her early life, was educated as a Christian in all manners. Her father Robert Evans was a respectable Christian who highlighted the importance of faith in the life of any individual³. Mary Ann was sent to boarding schools, where she was further educated. There she also accepted Christian faith as a cornerstone of her life.

¹ Bennette, Joan. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948) 18.

² Bullette, Gerald. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Life and Books* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press 1947) 35.

³ Bennette, Joan. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948) 5.

During her school years, Mary Ann is proclaimed by many literal scholars to be similar to Maggie Tulliver, heroine of *The Mill on the Floss*, at the beginning of the novel⁴. Yet, she equally shared significant characteristics with Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* and other female characters of her pieces of writing such as Romola. Combining this statement with the following pieces of information, Mary Ann of that time can be defined effortlessly. As Joan Bennette argues in her book *George Eliot, Her Mind and Her Art*,

(Eliot's heroines) share her intense moral earnestness, her passionate nature with its tendency to self-mistrust and self-mortification, her thirst for large draughts of intellectual day as well as thirsts of love more large than they.⁵

With the disposition as portrayed above, it is evident that Mary Ann approached Christianity and all its aspects in a serious and rather dogmatic manner as the Calvinist Church ordered. Forgiveness happens to be one of the major issues in Christianity and notably *The New Testament* engages with this phenomenon tremendously. Mary Ann perceived Christian faith emotionally, vigorously, and personally for she was influenced by her surroundings and acquaintances. As a result, forgiveness was a significant part of her life and philosophy.

Miss Lewes was a major influence in Mary's early years; she was her school teacher and confidante, with whom she continued a lively correspondence years after Mary Ann finished her education. It was Lewes who was a witness to Mary Ann's progressive transformation as she continued to read works of philosophers such as Strauss, John Henry Newman, and Isaac Taylor⁶. These authors questioned traditional approach to Christianity and all dogmas. Mary Ann approved of the most of statements of these philosophers and gradually started abandoning the dogmatic manner of Christianity. The process, however, continued for many years.⁷

One of the most significant milestones in spiritual and philosophical life of Marian was retreating to a house on the Foleshill Road close to Coventry in the March

⁴ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 4.

⁵ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 4..

⁶ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 14.

⁷ Bullette, Gerald. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Life and Books* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press 1947)

of 1841⁸. There she encountered people who dramatically changed her perception of life and reality, and contributed to her conversion from traditional Christianity.

1.2 Coventry

Marian lived in a house with her father and managed the household. Apart from duties such as baking, she also spent time reading. She encountered the written work of Charles Bray whose life, at first, as a determined Christian and then involving sudden change of his opinions and declaration of determinism and phrenology, was fascinating for Marian. Later on, she met him in person when she frequented the Coventry group.

Concerning changes in Marian's opinions during her Coventry years, it is Charles Bray who 'has a right to claim his share among the influences which shaped George Eliot's vision of life'⁹, as Bennette claims (Bennette, 29). As she entered the Coventry group, her Evangelical opinions and beliefs were subject to many other convictions and philosophical approaches. Reading Auguste Comte and meeting influential men such as Herbert Spencer, only supported the already commencing mental metamorphosis.

The transformation which was supported by her new life in Coventry was complete after nine months of her stay there (from March to November 1841¹⁰). Marian was prepared to express her change of beliefs and accept full responsibility connected with this decision. She was convinced that going to church afterwards would be a hypocritical decision. However, this outraged her father who decided to disown her until she started going to church anew.

Marian struggled with her new philosophy as she was separated from her father and decided to live in lodgings at Leamington¹¹ and earn her living by teaching. It was a time of suffering, notably because of the separation from her beloved father whom she always respected and honoured¹². Nevertheless, Robert Evans asked her to

⁸ Bennette, Joan. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948), 19.

⁹ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 24.

¹⁰ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 29.

¹¹ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 29.

¹² Bullette, Gerald. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Life and Books* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press 1947), 39.

return after three weeks of separation. Her care and companionship were missed greatly¹³.

In early months of 1842, she made a decision to abandon her dogmatic and obdurate approach and accept the reality in a more tolerant manner. At the same time, she clearly claimed that she definitely forsook Calvinism as she writes in a letter dated from February. Afterwards, she stayed at her brother Isaac's and his wife. It is important to point out that she was forgiven by her brother almost immediately, unlike Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*¹⁴. Even her father forgave her and let her to live with him if she started going to church again. In order not to lose him, she made this compromise as she suffered tremendously because of the separation. This decision marks her change to a mentally mature creature.

Marian Evans acquired quite a lot of knowledge about human nature, their wrath, sorrow, and the power of forgiveness, owing to this experience. She used the knowledge in her famous works of writing as she became a more sensitive observer.

She continued to attend to her father and their household, to nurture friendships with intellectuals of her time, both by correspondence and in person. In 1844, she began with translation of *Leben Jesu* which kept her engaged for three years¹⁵. Thanks to the tiring and challenging work, she became an acquaintance of Dr Brabant whom she started to be growing fond of. Their age difference, her fascination with his knowledge and maturity is by many compared to Dorothea and Casaubon of *Middlemarch*. Her controversial relationship helped her to portrait the emotions and struggles of her heroine in such realistic manner and the reason of her actions¹⁶. However, Dr Brabant was married and therefore, it was impossible to maintain such a relationship, even though he called Marian a daughter¹⁷. Mary Ann was nevertheless prepared to be devoted to him despite the reality. Her behaviour indicates how passionate and romantic her character was. This feature is shared by many of her heroines, above all Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss*. It also identifies the

¹³ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 39.

¹⁴ Bennette, Joan. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948), 30.

¹⁵ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 35.

¹⁶ Bennette, *Her Mind and Her Art*, 38.

¹⁷ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 41.

reason of their behaviour which sometimes led them to tragic or unfortunate state of affairs.

Robert Evans died after years of illness in May 1849¹⁸. This occurrence marks the end of one era for Marian as she lost her beloved father whom she honoured, loved deeply, and attended to with much care despite the difference in their views. It was obvious that her life had changed forever. After travelling Europe with the Brays and spending nine months in Switzerland in order to recover from her heart-breaking loss, she then moved to London to begin a new chapter of her existence.

1.3 London

The capital was now open to Marian as she started working as a translator and journalist. After sometime, she moved to house of John Chapman, not only a man of thought and science, but a bigamist as well, who shared his household with both his wife Susan and mistress Elisabeth. His character served as an inspiration for Stephen Guest of *The Mill on the Floss*¹⁹. It is not known whether Marian was in love with him, but one can learn from his diaries that Chapman was convinced of her affection. This partly artificial relationship lasted for more than two years with a pause when Marian was forced to leave the house because of the pressure from Chapman's wife and mistress. However, she later returned and lived as a lodger.

This experience helped her to understand the complicated soul of men influenced and ruled by passion. On the other hand, her time spent with Chapman and sharing fresh and perhaps revolutionary ideas broadened her understanding and helped her to evolve into the writer she would become.

Love was very important in the life of Marian Evans and it influenced her existence and her work. As Joan Bennette claims, 'she needed to love and to be loved; and, both because she was a normal woman and because she was a woman of keen intelligence, she preferred the companionship of men.'²⁰ (Bennette, 47). Therefore, when she met Herbert Spencer and encountered his intelligence and poetic personality, she found herself to be in love with him. The relationship, however,

¹⁸ Bullette, Gerald. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Life and Books* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press 1947) 45.

¹⁹ Bennette, Joan. *GEORGE ELIOT, Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948), 46.

²⁰ Bennette, *Her Mind and her Art*, 47.

finished only as a close friendship because of his incapability of falling in love with anyone. Spencer decided not to marry at all in his life. He nevertheless nourished intimate friendships despite being close to Marian.

However, Herbert Spencer introduced Marian Evans to George Henry Lewes, undoubtedly the most significant male in her life after her father. Before meeting Lewes, Marian was an independent mature woman residing in London and playing the role of a contributor and the editor of *Westminster Review* magazine, owned by Chapman. Even though she was supported and admired by a circle of well-educated and faithful friends, she lacked a romantic relationship in her life. After months of meeting Lewes, Marian decided to start living with him, without marriage and as a partner of a married man. This was possibly the grandest example of her – maybe accidental – guilt and forgiveness in her life.

1.4 Marian and Lewes

Many scholars writing about life and work of George Eliot – notably during the early period – emphasise Lewes's importance in the affair.

George Henry Lewes was a married man and with his wife Agnes had two children. Yet Agnes fell in love with another man and was unfaithful to her husband. Lewes could have abandoned and disgraced his wife, but he decided to remain her lawful husband, even though he did not live with her.

When Lewes met Marian, he was quite an unhappy man. The process of befriending was gradual as we can learn from the letters which Marian wrote during this period. Many remarks on how appealing Mr Lewes appeared to her could be a sign of warm affection and love. However, no one wanted to believe that Marian, once educated as a Christian, would run away with a married man.

The act was sudden and the consequences were weighty. The two lovers escaped to continental Europe, with Marian leaving only a brief, yet famous letter dated 20 July 1857, in which she is begging her friends, the Brays, to understand her. As Gerald Bullett quotes,

‘Dear Friends – all three – I have only time to say good-bye, and God bless you. Post restante, Weimar, for the next six weeks and afterwards Berlin. Ever your grateful and loving Marian.’²¹ (Bullett, 87) .

Her brother Isaac disowned her and her sister did not contact her for many years; even her old friends, such as the Brays, disapproved of her decision.

Marian Evans was aware of the cost she had to pay in order to share life and a household with Lewes. It is clear that she found inspiration in her own life for the second part of *The Mill on the Floss*, in which Maggie is kidnapped by Stephen Guest and together they sail on a boat. Unlike Marian who chose her new life on her own free will, Maggie refuses to marry Stephen and returns home.

Three months later, she sent a letter to Charles Bray, in which she tried to express how she felt about her decision and explain, at least to some extent, her motives²². The letter implies that Marian considered all the possibilities, but still she chose to follow the love of her life. She desired to get married legally, but circumstances did not allow her to do so. She expected a hostile reaction and later succumbed to uneasiness and pain.

One of the best examples of accidental guilt of *Fthonos Theon* can be observed in her love life. It was not her fault that Lewes had been married before he met her; she could not resolve the issue, no matter how much she desired to do so. The divorce was out of the question for the sake of his children. Marian had to accept that she was about to spend her life in ‘sin’ and adultery, considering the conventions of the epoch she lived in. She truly faced ‘the wrath of gods’ when she made the decision to live with Lewes despite the customs and manners of the period. Her greatest concern was that she would lose her dear friends and acquaintances; many of them indeed abandoned her.

It is important to observe how her philosophy and religious views changed during her life. At the age of twenty, as a devoted Calvinistic young lady, she would have never chosen such a path. As her attitudes and views changed, partly thanks to

²¹ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 87,

²² Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 88.

her liberal companions and new ideas, she was prepared to accept this extraordinary way of life.

Some scholars accuse Lewes of being the main culprit of the affair, others accentuate his devotion, support, and love. Bullett claims that their relationship was extraordinarily harmonic²³ and it helped Marian to develop her skills and become the writer George Eliot, whom readers know.

1.5 Christianity

Christianity played a significant part in Eliot's life, morality, and philosophy, and its importance and impact should not be overlooked. English society of her era was fully Christian and faith influenced Marian's life, behaviour, and work like nothing else.

As mentioned previously, Marian Evans had decided to abandon Christianity when she had been in her twenties, but she never forgot and never stopped practising self-sacrifice and moral principles given by Jesus and his teaching, while she abandoned rules given by the Church and the elaborate system created by this institution and she questioned the fact of Jesus being incarnated God on Earth. Philosophy and values given by Jesus were crucial to her life and behaviour.

This fact can be observed in both her life and her work. Marian always considered living in devotion important, to her father and then to other men, especially George Lewes.

Considering her work, there is no universal approach to Christianity in her books. However, many of her characters do not fit in the traditional society and the ones practising Christianity do not seem to have particularly positive personalities. The Christian community in *Silas Marner* serves as a good example. Still, it can be observed that open-minded, revolutionary people such as Mr Ladislaw or even Maggie Tulliver are those whom the writer favours the most. Even Silas Marner does not find happiness in returning to his faith, but in taking care of a little girl and opening his heart and home to another person. These examples indicate that Marian had never returned to Christian faith during her life.

²³ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 92.

Marian Evans also questioned human immortality because of the lack of any particular answer to this issue. She was rather looking for a solution to how one can live a life in 'sympathy, compassion, tolerance, these are the mainsprings of her mind as of her art.'²⁴ (Bullet 129.)

As indicated in the following paragraphs, Marian behaved in a stoic manner with an enormous sense of duty, tolerance, and devotion. She was not sin-indifferent, but 'at once clear-sighted and warm-hearted, passionate and compassionate.'²⁵ (Bullet, 130.)

Faith, religion, and philosophy dominated in her life; as an intelligent, quite independent, and revolutionary woman, she had firm opinions on many issues and aspects of spirituality. She did not accept any dogmatic approach and bigotry. However, she was a truly spiritual woman with rich inner life and experience. She was passionate about ideas and was not afraid to express emotions and affection.

She became more tolerant and found natural affection towards other human beings, no matter what beliefs they held. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Marian never returned to Christian faith, but respected everyone who found answers to questions. As she revealed to an old friend from Geneva in her famous letter on religion, her opinions changed and human individuals were the most valuable for her in the time of the letter²⁶. The full version of the letter can be found in the appendix of this bachelor's thesis.

Despite the fact that her living the life as George Eliot, the famous writer, was successful, she did not always experience happiness. Her devotion to Lewes affected her mental state by attacks of anxiety and sadness which could not be coped with easily.

Moreover, Marian lost two of her stepchildren. She had taken care of her stepson, Thornton, who had been suffering from an illness for six months before he died. Neither the mother of the child, Agnes Lewes, nor her partner Thornton Hunt showed such care and loyalty. Marian considered her stepsons as her real sons, even though they were not connected by blood.

²⁴ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 129.

²⁵ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 130.

²⁶ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 132.

One can observe that Marian's moral standards and behaviour did not change with her conversion from Christianity, but were rooted deep in her personality. Marian Evans fought to be a good stepmother and partner as well as a good novelist. She struggled to provide for the family and attend to Lewes who was in poor health. They found themselves facing the society and traditional moral standards, only to be approved of and welcome in the end.

As Marian matured, she welcomed the life as it occurred. On the other hand, her fragility caused moments of sadness and depression. She found no joy in her life or in the world around her; only sometimes would she find pleasure in writing. Furthermore, she decided to 'live without opium'²⁷, meaning traditional morality and standards of the society, including Christianity. Her inability to experience happiness did not help her fragile soul, either.

The question is whether her psychological problems were the cause of her abandoning Christian faith or it was the judgement of her trying to live a new life which was the source of her deteriorating health. It cannot be stated what had caused her being in such unfortunate state of affairs or what could have been prevented from happening. The fact is that Marian Evans never returned to her Calvinistic faith; she found happiness and fulfillment in her work and her liberal life with George Lewes.

1.6 Final years

Marian Evans did not achieve immediate success in her writing career. It was the change of her name into a male one, George Eliot, and Lewes's remarkable abilities to negotiate with editors. Mysterious George Eliot, once believed to be a vicar, provoked curiosity in society of London. Almost no one knew the true identity of the talented writer. When it was finally revealed, Marian's works were recognised as distinctive and fine pieces of writing.

Marian worked hard for many years and found peace and happiness in life with Lewes, her work, social life, and travels abroad. Both partners kept their schedules busy in order to provide for themselves as well as for Agnes and her three children.

²⁷ Bullette, *Her Life and Books*, 144.

One can presume that overwork caused severe health problems to both George and Marian. As mentioned above, Lewes had to provide for his quite large, yet unconventional family. Moreover, his occupation was not the only interest of his. His partner, Marian, found relief and happiness in writing and experienced feelings of easiness when working – it served as a cure for depression.

Thankfully enough, Marian Evans enjoyed a significant amount of public attention and admiration during her life with Lewes. They even created ‘a bar’ where they welcomed admirers of her books. The intellectual society slowly accepted their family situation and approved of fine pieces of writing. However, most of the people still considered her behaviour uncommon and disturbing – she indeed paid the price for her decision.

2. Fthonos Theon and Forgiveness in *The Mill on the Floss*

In this chapter of the bachelor's thesis, *The Mill on the Floss*, the motif of *Fthonos Theon*, and forgiveness in the plot as well as behaviour of the characters are analysed and described.

As the novel is partly biographical and the writer finds inspiration in her own life and experience, it is crucial to observe psychology of her protagonists as well as events in the book. Life of the writer and of her characters are connected – this fact needs to be taken into consideration.

It is not certain whether actions taken by the characters were motivated or occurred accidentally and were 'caused by gods'. Heated discussions could be held over issues such as whether Maggie Tulliver could have prevented her reckless behaviour during her childhood which only led to unstable relationships during her adulthood.

The question is whether Stephen was driven only by his passion towards Maggie or he truly loved her; whether Maggie provoked him to kidnap her and later disgrace her, and whether the Tullivers's loss of wealth was accidental or it could have been prevented.

This chapter is discussing several opinions and points of view which are acceptable, for even the writer did not give clear answers regarding the motifs included in her works.

2. Fthonos Theon in *The Mill on the Floss*

The plot of the novel is complex and psychology of the characters and their motivation cannot be recognised and understood without struggle. Many of the actions described in the novel can be considered mistakes or selfish of a character. It is possible to view the unfortunate state of affairs as the result of actions which could not be affected in any way – such as human nature, family, health conditions, or power of nature. This phenomenon is one of the reasons for *The Mill on the Floss* being challenging to analyse as the nature of many situations is debatable.

In the following paragraphs, several situations, which are the most notable, are analysed and pieces of evidence of possible *Fthonos Theon* are presented.

2.1 Maggie and her unusual personality

The first part of the novel is fully and in detail dedicated to childhood and growing-up of the main character of the book, Maggie Tulliver. George Eliot used many of her own personality traits in *The Mill on the Floss*. It can be said that Maggie is the writer's alter ego.

Taking this piece of information into account when analysing the personality of Maggie, it can be stated that *The Mill on the Floss* served as a therapy for George Eliot. She reflected on memories of her childhood when she was considered bright and talented, yet misunderstood.

It is arguable whether Maggie's intelligence, open-minded personality, and fiery temper are the 'curse' which is the source of common misunderstanding between her and her relatives, or it is rather her dark complexion, curly hair, and tall figure which raise critique in her family circles.

It is important to emphasise that Maggie did not get much sympathy from her mother or her older brother Tom. They considered her outlandish for she preferred wandering around the river Floss and spending her time outdoors. The only member of the family who showed affection towards her, was her father who supported her in her studies and exploring the world around her.

Maggie Tulliver was born in the wrong epoch. In Victorian times, it was unimaginable for a girl or woman to be educated, erudite, and self-sufficient. The first 'wrath of gods' can be observed in this unfortunate fact. Unhappiness and later on tragedy were caused by the clash of the personality of Maggie Tulliver and the standards of the era she was living in.

George Eliot expresses her sorrow and pain in her approach towards women during 19th century by using elaborate descriptions of suffering of her own alter ego. One can observe that the writer is fairly disappointed about puritanism of the society. She also longs for being understood and approached in the same manner as men. Most of all, she yearns for equal education and possibilities for gaining knowledge. Eliot demanded liberty in every area of life possible.

The only solution for Maggie to this issue would be to change her personality. If she behaved in the manner acceptable for a young lady and if she accepted her social

role and would have not longed for any other pleasure than playing the piano, wearing a nice dress, embroidery, and walks in the garden, she would have possibly been satisfied. However, her free spirit would have been suffocated by performing such activities. Moreover, her unconventional opinions and behaviour were not unique among the Tullivers. Her father supported her tremendously in self-actualisation and self-fulfillment. It can be proclaimed that the father and the daughter shared similar temperaments and passions which could not be controlled. To both of them, innate irascibility caused many unfortunate situations which ended in tragedies.

Nevertheless, Mr Tulliver was responsible for his miserable death as well as complicated situation of his family. In case of his daughter, it is not defined easily. The issue of Maggie's demise is examined below and questions of her responsibility are analysed.

2.2 Love of Maggie and Philip

The love affair of Maggie Tulliver and Philip Wakem is difficult to label as a canonical love story in British novels. As the protagonists did not get married and Maggie was split between Philip and Stephen Guest, the romantic storyline appears to be rather unconventional and extraordinary.

It is questionable whether Maggie would be happy with tender Philip after all. We can ask questions which motives led Maggie to find Philip amiable and Philip to be so devoted to his childhood love. One can ask whether it was Philip's need for almost motherly care which he never got from his own mother or Maggie longing to take care of someone.

Despite a number of faults which we can recognise in characters of both Maggie and Philip, there are some factors which could not be influenced by either of the central protagonists. The chain of miserable events led to separation of the two lovers and later concluded in a heartbreak of Philip and indirectly in Maggie's death.

The first 'wrath of gods' apparent on Philip was his corporeal handicap. Because of his limping and fragile constitution, he could not perform activities other boys and men of noble families could do such as horseriding or physical exercises. This caused his alienation among the peers, leading to constant loneliness. Even though he was

talented and bright, he was considered imperfect and useless. Despite this, he evinced a tender heart, the soul of an artist, and the intelligence of a scholar.

His gentle soul and deformed appearance were inseparable handicaps which could not be healed. This contradiction was the cruelest of all the misfortunate situations to which he and his family were driven by the 'wrath of gods'. Despite this fact, Philip and his father did not become bitter or envious, but they expressed loving affection towards people they adored.

The second 'wrath of gods' was not of natural handicaps but of human pride, narrowness and unyieldingness. Among all the significant citizens of St Ogg's, the town where the plot is set in, Mr Tulliver and Mr Wakem appeared to be in dispute of such gravity that none of them was prepared or willing to yield to each other. Both fathers forbid their children to ever encounter or talk to their enemies or to each other. Thus, it was almost impossible for Maggie to remain openly in contact with Philip. Their pure love was stopped by force of human rage.

Mr Tulliver was a hot-headed and stubborn man whose actions were often influenced by emotions. On the other hand, Mr Wakem behaved rather in moderate, but cold-blooded manner. These two opposites clashed in several conflicts leading to even greater antagonism against each other. Even though their children did not want to be part of this conflict, they were limited by stubbornness of their fathers.

Maggie Tulliver and her brother Tom neither could affect behaviour of their father nor his acts against Mr Wakem. These acts were short-sighted in nature and led to many struggles culminating in sorrow. It can be proclaimed that the personality of Mr Tulliver was responsible for later misery of his family. Such enmity spoilt his health and when he fell from his horse, the permanent stress almost prevented his recovery.

The aforementioned incidents can as well cannot be influenced. One could question whether Mr Tulliver could change the miserable state of his illness and death by changing his behaviour. His passionate personality led him to behave in such a manner, even though it brought destruction to his own family. The question of guilt in this case is more than difficult to analyse.

The question as well is whether the conflict between Mr Tulliver and Mr Wakem can be solved in a friendly way.

The biggest victims were children of both men. Love of Maggie and Philip was interrupted and the two lovers were irretrievably separated. Philip lived alone after the tragic end of his love. Tom Tulliver was obliged to start working for long and tiring hours to provide for his mother and sister. The sorrow and effort of his labour changed his tender heart into a rough and pitiless one.

When Maggie could not meet with Philip and her future seemed to be narrowed to a dull one full of attending to the house duties, this led to her own unhappiness commence. She experienced pain of losing her love as well as the meaning of her life. She was unable to read new books, discover the world around and, learn new things.

Her future, she thought, was likely to be worse than her past, for after her years of contented renunciation, she had slipped back into desire and longing; she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder; she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for, and despaired of, becoming more and more importunate.²⁸

The hopes of this young generation were crushed by stubbornness of their fathers. The children could not alter these events in any way and had to endure the cruelest pain. They suffered from the consequences of their fathers' actions for the rest of their lives.

2.3 Stephen Guest

It can be proclaimed that Maggie's acquaintance with Stephen Guest and the consequences of her affection were not in her control as she undertook actions for preventing such situation. However, she could not command Stephen to stop loving her. On the other hand, consequences which resulted from the love affair fatally changed lives of Maggie, Stephen as well as those of Lucy and Philip.

One can ask how Maggie could prevent her love affair, betrayal, and escape as well as whether *Fthonos Theon* can be found in this situation.

²⁸ Eliot, George: *The Mill on the Floss*, 137.

When Stephen Guest met Maggie Tulliver for the first time, it did not appear to anyone that their relationship would be more than a plain friendship. At that time, Stephen was in love with Lucy, Maggie's cousin and her best friend. Even though Maggie considered Stephen nice and attractive, she did not find him amiable. Additionally, her heart belonged to Philip and she would never betray him.

Suzanne Anger proclaims George Eliot 'frequently chastises her weak characters for not taking sufficient responsibility for their actions.'²⁹ (*Cambridge Companion*, p. 79). Stephen Guest can be approached as one of the weak characters who were not willing to take responsibility for their wrongdoings.

But as the story and relationships of the protagonists evolved, Maggie found herself in quite unusual situation as she started to feel affection towards Stephen. Stephen had an unusual charm which was difficult to resist. In addition, he was entertaining, intelligent, and physically attractive.

Stephen reciprocated Maggie's yet unspoken affection. As Lucy was a gentle and beautiful fair creature, Maggie's contrasting qualities such as her dark complexion, indomitable spirit, and bright intelligence were very appealing to him. Anticipations of their first encounters gradually changed into unpronounced attraction.

It is more than arguable what amount of guilt Maggie was responsible for in this unfortunate chapter. She behaved coldly when she was with Stephen. She never showed any sign of love in her behaviour. Yet, Stephen found himself attracted to Maggie and he demonstrated his feelings, even though Maggie did not seem to be charmed by him.

Stephen was responsible for his behaviour and as a man of honour he should have prevented such disgraceful state of manners. But on the contrary, he provoked and welcomed moments when he could meet Maggie alone. Even this fact puts her, not him, to difficult situation as it was uncommon for her to talk to a gentleman in secret. Thus, the shame fell again on Maggie, even though she did not commit anything wrong. Although her intentions were innocent, she became the victim of all these affairs.

²⁹ *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 79.

The climax of this uneasy situation occurred when Stephen unexpectedly kidnapped Maggie on a boat ride. He confided his feelings to her and pronounced his intentions to leave the town and to get married elsewhere. He was ready to leave everything he had and expected the same attitude from her.

It is possible that the whole situation was not planned by Stephen beforehand, as we cannot find any such evidence in the novel. He probably used the promising chance of the private boat ride and the incapability of Maggie to escape from the boat.

In any case, the question is whether Maggie could prevent the problem. She did not provoke Stephen by any means, but she was not indifferent towards him and Stephen knew this fact. The reader cannot be sure whether Maggie was really in love with Stephen or was it only a short romantic affair with no possible future for her. There are signs of both possibilities to be found in the novel.

She definitely struggled with temptation that often overpowered her will. However, she refused his romantic overtures and decided to return home, even though she knew she would be disgraced in eyes of everyone in her hometown. Although innocent, she paid a high price for her actions. As Sue Anger observes, such dilemma between egoism and moral standards appears in numerous novels written by George Eliot³⁰.

Her feelings as well as philosophy of morality are expressed in the following monologue, in which Maggie refused Stephen and their life together.

It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that our former life has made for us – the ties that have made others dependent on us – and would cut them in two. If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards whom – I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other. But I see – I feel it is not so now; there are things we must renounce in life; some of us must resign love. Many things are difficult and dark to me, but I see one thing quite clearly: that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural, but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too.

³⁰ *Cambridge Companion*, 81.

And they would live in me still and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned.³¹

One can ask how she could have behaved in order to stop it and whether she should have been more reserved towards Stephen; it is also questionable whether it was primarily Stephen's fault or he really loved her and it was not only a matter of passion.

Concerning the intentions of Stephen, there is no doubt he would have married Maggie if she agreed. He would not leave her disgraced without legal matrimony. He was driven by strong emotions beyond his control. He was able to abandon his family, his beloved Lucy, and future career in order to be with Maggie.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the first chapter of this bachelor's thesis, George Eliot encountered a man whom she later portrayed as Stephen. From her own experience, one can state that she had no illusions about him. Marian did not depict him as a positive character of her novel.

Moving to observation of the complicated character of Stephen, one can proclaim that he was a strong and destructive force which could not be countered or influenced by Maggie or any other protagonist. He predominantly substantiated *Ethos Theon* in *The Mill on the Floss* with all its irreversible power and corruption. He was the cause of the greatest sorrow and struggles of three characters in the novel. While it is disputable whether he intentionally destroyed happiness of individuals around him, the tragic consequences are evident.

Despite the fact that Stephen was responsible for many unfortunate situations, such as the impulsive kidnapping of Maggie, he cannot be considered a villain. Maggie could not escape disasters. When she died in the flood, the lives of other protagonists of the love quadrangle returned to normal.

As a matter of fact, there is no genuine villain to be found in *The Mill on the Floss*. As the author wrote the novel partly autobiographically, she did not portray her characters in a polar way. The majority of her characters share both positive and negative qualities. Thus, her novels remain realistic and multi-layered.

³¹ Eliot, George: *The Mill on the Floss*, 350.

2.4 Flood

In the end of the novel, Maggie appeared to be slowly rebuilding her reputation and restoring her broken relationships with her relatives and even with Lucy who had had a nervous breakdown after the fateful boat ride. Maggie fought with tremendous effort against the unhappiness and social separation which befell on her. The moment she achieves independence and finds an occupation, the tragic natural disaster takes her life and all the effort she had undertaken so far.

The river Floss is the most evident leitmotif of the entire novel. It appears in all its parts and it defines the unchanging rhythm of the lives of Tullivers. The Floss also provided the living for the family which administered the mill. In the first chapters, Tom and Maggie happily played on its banks. The river was the major source of happiness, adventure, and new experience.

Contrarily, in the end of the novel, the river was the worst enemy of all for it could not be persuaded, controlled, or stopped. The fatal 'rage' of nature finished short and sorrowful life of the main protagonist. The real *Fthonos Theon* culminated in the flood which caused the passing of only one individual: Maggie. She could not escape her fate.

The death of Maggie affected the lives of her near ones as well. Tom finally decided to forgive her, even though it was only a few moments before their eternal separation. It is not indicated by the writer how he lived afterwards. Philip Wakem did not marry anyone and remained faithful to his only love. Stephen Guest found a way back to heart of Lucy and they married soon after the unfortunate accident. However, it seems that the lack of presence of Maggie Tulliver haunted them as they visited her grave frequently. However, no one suffered as much as Philip.

The flood and tragic consequences could not be altered or even predicted. The author intended to express the irreversibility of human tragedy and the fact that some disasters cannot be checked. Keeping in mind that the novel is partly biographical and Maggie is the alter ego of George Eliot, the writer may have expressed the futility of life and unfortunate consequences of love and desire which could not be fulfilled by killing her main character.

The symbol of unstoppable river can be seen as the strong spirit of Maggie. Her internal strength cannot be stopped by any amount of force. The only force, which was

stronger than her will, was the flood. This metaphorical and uneven clash could not be won by the girl, even though she fought with tremendous self-denial.

The river is the only element which was stronger than the untameable spirit of Maggie Tulliver.

The reader might ask whether she could have escaped her fatal encounter with the forces of nature. It cannot be said as it is not apparent from the novel. Maggie was not selfish as she wanted to save her family from imminent danger. Perhaps this selfless act was the cause of her death.

As Suzy Anger suggests in *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, one of the main ideas in Eliot's works is 'the idea that there is escaping of one's actions and choices'³² (*Cambridge Companion*, 79). The final act of the miserable life of Maggie Tulliver portrays the cited idea and thus the predominant philosophy in the life of Eliot.

The questions such as whether Maggie escaped her cruel life by her passing or there was a chance for her to gain respect and even to find a spouse can be asked. These cannot be answered, however, it is sure her life would remain marked by all the tragedies described above.

2.5 Forgiveness in *The Mill on the Floss*

This part of the bachelor's thesis focuses on the phenomenon of forgiveness in the novel *The Mill on the Floss*. It is analogically connected with the first section which dealt with *Fthonos Theon* and guilt of the characters. Forgiveness can be considered the result of several actions taken by the characters. However, the emphasis is not as strong as in the case of *Fthonos Theon* itself.

There are a few statements in the book which express the positive approach to human flaws. The extract cited below shows that one can always find something positive in any negative circumstance. This quotation can lead the reader to the complex issue of forgiveness in the novel.

If we only look far enough off for the consequence of our actions, we can always find some point in the combination of results by which those actions can be justified: by adopting the point of view of a Providence who arranges results, or of a philosopher

³² *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 79.

who traces them, we shall find it possible to obtain perfect complacency in choosing to do what is most agreeable to us in the present moment.³³

Forgiveness is not as frequent as guilt in the novel which can be partly understood as an influence of the Victorian style of writing, own experiences of George Eliot, and the tragic mode of the novel. There was hardly any room given to solving issues and yielding positive results, but still, one may find favourable outcomes.

2.6 Forgiveness during Maggie's childhood

Maggie Tulliver was not an impeccable child; even in the beginning of the novel she is portrayed as a careless and passionate girl. Her wild childhood later inflicted some scars in her life and led to broken relationships with members of her family. Her wrongdoings caused many conflicts and disagreements, mostly with her brother and mother.

The first chapter begins with Maggie who forgot to feed Tom's rabbits during his absence and therefore, caused their death. Although Maggie begged Tom for forgiveness, and even though she bitterly regretted her fault, Tom could not easily forgive her. This seemingly unimportant event was the first step to Maggie's tragic path. Maggie had not planned to make such a mistake, but she caused more pain than she had previously thought. Her wrongdoing and its consequence repeat with greater seriousness throughout the novel.

Tom Tulliver remembered his rabbits' tragic death as well as other deeds caused by Maggie for the rest of his life. Even though he had forgiven Maggie for her reckless behaviour during his adulthood, he never forgot. His sensitive nature was often wounded by carelessness of his younger sister. As mentioned above, in the end he was able to forgive her completely, even though he had previously disapproved of her running away with Stephen. In the hour of need, both brother and sister stood together with no reproach or anger. However, forgiveness came too late.

Another member of the family, who was willing to forgive Maggie, was her loving father. Although Maggie was stubborn, unwilling to obey rules, and running

³³ Eliot, George: *The Mill on the Floss*, 330.

away from home, he never spoke against her. Mr Tulliver did not reproach her or reminded her of her past mistakes when she reached adulthood. He always called her Magsie and considered her very close to his heart. Maggie missed his loving care and unconditional love immensely.

Maggie Tulliver was a hot-tempered girl when she was a child. She disobeyed orders and once she pushed her cousin Lucy to dirty water because she disapproved of being compared to her fair and lovely relative. Lucy was a sensitive and mentally unstable girl and this unpredictable event terrified her. However, when in need, she approached Maggie as her friend and was fond of her keeping a company; Lucy also reciprocated by taking care of her miserable cousin.

It can be believed that Lucy and Maggie are opposites, antonyms, but they are not foes. Lucy overcomes anticipation and reconnects with Maggie. Both of them struggle to nourish and enjoy the friendship which is very difficult for them to keep. The oppositeness unconsciously provokes Maggie to treat her naïve cousin badly.

The anticipation of Maggie and Lucy is clearly demonstrated in case of Stephen Guest. The uncontrollable nature of Maggie predominates several moments and causes unfortunate consequences of passion and love as described above. The oppositeness can be as well be regarded as *Fthonos Theon*, for it could not be overcome or reversed by neither of the girls.

Despite the described facts, Lucy did not loathe Maggie. In the end, she was prepared to forgive her again, although she had experienced a strong emotional shock due to Maggie's encounter with Stephen. Lucy is described as nearly a superterrestrial creature with low capacity of experiencing negative emotions such as hatred or anger. This quality enabled her to forgive Maggie her presumed betrayal.

The book also mentions other characters struggling with forgiveness; it can be said that Mrs Tulliver is the most significant example of this phenomenon. Her thinking capacity was slightly limited and her world view was very narrow, only consisting of her family and relatives. This predisposition predestined her to narrow-mindedness and her being capable of recalling old mistakes and wrongdoings. This tendency in combination with her comparing Maggie to fair and lovely Lucy clearly shows that Mrs Tulliver was not contented with her daughter.

One can ask whether Maggie deliberately provoked her mother.

2.7 Mr Tulliver

The separate chapter of the need of forgiveness can be found in life and behavior of Mr Tulliver – hot-tempered, passionate, and sometimes reckless person who caused many problems to his relatives as well as himself. His mistakes were not the result of his low intellect or his lack of wisdom, but of his resolute nature.

The reader can observe the constant struggles of his family to forgive him. Maggie, who was the closest to him, did not find the process of forgiving very difficult. However, other members of the family of Mrs Tulliver did not approach him with respect or confidence. They repeated that he was irresponsible and did not consider their sister his wife.

The question whether Mr Tulliver was a truly self-centred man with no regard to others can be asked; it is debatable whether he acted in the heat of the moment and later bitterly regretted his actions with no possibility of reversing the consequences.

However, accurate answers to these questions cannot be provided for George Eliot did not offer her motives or her soul for observation and understanding as she does with other characters such as Maggie and Philip.

Mr Tulliver can be observed as one of the most mysterious characters of *The Mill on the Floss* because of his extraordinary behaviour. It is challenging for both the characters and the reader to understand and accept his actions which led to the fall of his family, his own death, poverty of his wife and children, and finally, the death of his most beloved daughter.

One can ask who was able to forgive him and who was not. It is very disputable because Mr Tulliver passed away in the middle of the novel, and hence he is remembered only during the critical situations such as the loss of former social position of the Tulliver family and the affair of Maggie and Stephen.

The reader can only hope Mrs Tulliver and Tom forgave Mr Tulliver in the end, although there are only a few pieces of evidence concerning feelings towards him after his unfortunate death. The reader can be sure that Mr Tulliver is remembered, but cannot say how.

Apart from his family, there is surely one individual who forgave Mr Tulliver ultimately: Mr Wakem. For him, Mr Tulliver was a business rival whose behaviour was diametrically different from his calculating and cold-hearted manner. They could not be more different. After the death of her father, Wakem was surprisingly prepared to welcome Maggie as his daughter-in-law. In this merciful act, his true nature is revealed. It is also evident Wakem honoured and remembered the legacy of his rival. He probably considered himself partly responsible for the death of Mr Tulliver.

Thus, it can be proclaimed that Mr Wakem showed more compassion and sympathy than Mr Tulliver's own family.

2.8 Forgiveness in the end of the novel

There are two major events which caused problems and, at the same time, required considerable amount of forgiveness: Maggie's escape and the flood and its consequences. Both of the aforementioned events were described in detail. In this section, forgiveness is analysed and described.

The escape of Maggie is thoroughly described in the previous chapters of this thesis as well as the consequences of the flood. In this section, the attention is concentrated rather on her surroundings and the consequences of the affair as well as the emotions every individual involved in and was obliged to face.

It can be asked how Maggie's relatives reacted after they had learnt the disgraceful piece of news about her escape with Stephen Guest who was in love with Maggie's cousin. They considered it treachery. For Tom, she died that day. For others, they did not understand her behaviour and found it to be disgraceful and everyone felt tremendously ashamed.

In the environment where a good reputation is one of the most significant values, there was no greater crime. Thus, forgiving or even understanding the situation was difficult, almost impossible.

Surprisingly, Maggie's mother showed a great amount of compassion as she was prepared to follow her daughter in the life of an outcast. One can observe surprisingly strong love towards her in her willingness to help her daughter in this unfortunate situation. Although she disapproved of Maggie's behaviour and even her appearance during her childhood, in the end, she did not abandon her.

Other citizens of St Ogg's did not approach Maggie with compassion or even show any willingness to understand her situation. This nuisance was too much for the hypocritical neighbours of the Tullivers. Maggie almost lost the possibility to find an occupation to earn at least some money for her and her mother after they had to leave the mill. Even when Maggie became a private teacher, her employee struggled with rumours about him and Maggie because he was a widower. It seems that whoever wanted to help her, they found themselves in trouble as well.

It is debatable whether Maggie was cursed for the rest of her life. George Eliot imported folk motives quite often to her novels (see *Silas Marner*), and the fact she was haunted by her past and actions she was not even responsible for, may suggest this possibility.

The previous paragraph leads to another partly supernatural element, the river Floss and the flood at the end of the novel. As mentioned in the thesis, the river is portrayed as one of the characters in the novel, a silent companion and observer throughout the years. In the final part of *The Mill on the Floss*, the river becomes an active participant which decides about life and death.

It is possible that the river Floss played the role of *Deus ex machina* in the novel, when the main protagonist appeared to be lost and with no hope for salvation, the river decided to solve the unfortunate situation for Maggie.

There were no victims of the disaster, but Maggie. The reader might ask why her. However, one may approach her death as a relief from the pain of her family as well as of her own disgrace and sorrow.

As George Levine in *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* suggests, Maggie 'having failed in extreme self-denial she had learnt from Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, must learn true resignation after her elopement with Stephen Guest, and can only triumph in the death that follows her attempt to rescue her brother.'³⁴

The nature may have shown mercy and solution of the problem which could not have been solved easily. Thus, one can observe the forgiveness of the river Floss and, additionally, forgiveness of the nature and fate by drowning Maggie in the raging

³⁴ *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, p. 10.

waters of the river Floss. Maggie probably died happily, aware of the fact that her brother forgave her and did not forsake her.

The majestic ending scene is described with respect to nature and fatality which cannot be defeated. The acceptance brings peace to Maggie's heart.

It is the moment when our resolution seems about to become irrevocable – when the fatal iron gates are about to close upon us – that tests our strength. Then, after hours of clear reasoning and firm conviction, we snatch at any sophistry that will nullify our long struggles, and bring us the defeat that we love better than victory.³⁵

George Eliot expresses the justice of nature as well as the changes it causes and proclaims that one cannot change nature or judge it for it follows its own unchangeable patterns.

Nature repairs her ravages, but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred; if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair.³⁶

It is disputable whether her death was eventually a positive end to her life. However, the reader can observe the new hope and the new beginning that it brings for the majority of the characters.

³⁵ Eliot, George: *The Mill on the Floss*, 342.

³⁶ Eliot, George: *The Mill on the Floss*, 550.

3. Fthonos Theon and Forgiveness in *Silas Marner*

Silas Marner differs from other pieces of writing produced by George Eliot. Among partly autobiographical novels, it seems that the book does not match the style of the author's writing. *Silas Marner* is a short novel which narrates the story of an old weaver who thinks his gold will bring him happiness, but finally finds contentment in taking care of a little girl who, one day, appears at his cottage.

The theme and writing style of the book resemble old Celtic myths as well as fairy tales. Besides, the reader can recognise the sophisticated characters and their unfortunate lives as well as how heart-broken and unhappy they are.

A deep human conflict can be observed in the novel. Issues of the need to belong to a community, freedom of faith, opinions, and love as well as shadows of the family and past are present in all epochs and can be observed through the folk and mystical motifs.

This part of the thesis focuses on *Fthonos Theon* and forgiveness in *Silas Marner*. Even though the novel is not voluminous, both of the examined phenomena are to be found in considerable amount.

3. Fthonos Theon in *Silas Marner*

As stated above, *Silas Marner* can be almost certainly compared to myths and fairy tales. Both Christian and Pagan approaches to life and surroundings collide and complement each other in the novel. Despite the fact that the narration appears to target at children, one can find many universal truths in the story; for this reason, it is interesting to examine and study the guilt and struggles which were not caused intentionally and can be observed as wrath of both Christian God and Pagan gods.

George Eliot denied Christianity which people found quite shocking and unusual at the time. *Silas Marner* can be considered one of the books which reflects on writer's experience. However, in the end of the novel, human hypocrisy rather than Christianity is regarded as the most criticised issue in *Silas Marner*.

3.1 Silas excluded from his community

The beginning of the novel introduces Silas as a respectable member of a Christian community in Lantern Yard. He is ready to marry his beloved fiancée Sarah and live his life devoted to his wife, work, and faith.

Everything changes when William Dane, his friend in the town, accuses him of stealing money from a dying deacon. Pieces of evidence are found and Silas cannot prove his innocence. The community condemns him and he has to leave home and his fiancée. In the end, William marries Sarah.

Silas believes God will help him prove his innocence. When no miracle happens, Silas leaves everything behind – his home as well as his faith.

The opening scene in Silas's hometown introduces Silas as an unhappy person who cannot fight against human envy and rage. The unfortunate experience changes the kind-hearted and optimistic man to reclusive and pessimistic one who does not live for anything but his money.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader can find Silas in a miserable state of mind and existence. He is described as a spider, lonely and dark.

He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection. Every man's work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of life. Silas's hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort. Then there were the calls of hunger; and Silas, in his solitude, had to provide his own breakfast, dinner, and supper, to fetch his own water from the well, and put his own kettle on the fire; and all these immediate promptings helped, along with the weaving, to reduce his life to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect. He hated the thought of the past; there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst; and the future was all dark, for there was no Unseen Love that cared for him. Thought was arrested by utter bewilderment, not its old narrow pathway was closed, and affection seemed to have died under the bruise that had fallen on its keenest nerves.³⁷

³⁷ Eliot, George: *Silas Marner*, 15.

One may ask whether it is possible to observe guilt in Silas's behaviour. It is complicated to confirm it as well as follow motives of other protagonists. One can be certain that William was the main offender; he envied Silas because of his fiancée and was ready to ruin him in order to win her.

Silas Marner truly experienced 'the wrath of gods' in the beginning of the novel. The accusations that were targeted at his person, led him to abandon his faith which was very strong before the incident. He never returned to Christianity for the rest of his life, although in the end, he was willing to go to church again as everyone else in Raveloe.

It can be said that the spiritual revolution of Silas Marner is similar to the one of Marian Evans, despite the fact that she voluntarily decided to stop going to church. The opinions of parishioners are described well in the novel. Both Silas and Marian chose their way, although each of them was led by different motives.

George Eliot manifested revolutionary opinion that one can decide to stop going to church, despite complications and disagreements. It depends on the free will of every individual. Attending church without faith is considered hypocrisy by Eliot.

As Suzy Anger in *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* suggests, the motives of responsibility and how an individual should live a life well are questions which repeat throughout the pieces of writing of George Eliot³⁸. Christianity is remarkably connected with these questions, yet later, Eliot approaches the problem from more philosophical perspective and finally becomes an objectivist in the field of ethics³⁹. Thus, she was able to create such an independent and multi-layered protagonist as Silas Marner.

Silas suffered from separation from other human beings, although he hid the fact for more than fifteen years. When Eppie appeared at his cottage, his long-lost feeling and need for human love and company were reborn.

The trial in Lantern Yard, betrayal, and complete isolation strongly represent *Fthonos Theon* in Silas's life and the novel itself.

³⁸ *Cambridge Companion*, 78.

³⁹ *Cambridge Companion*, 80.

3.2 Godfrey and his secret marriage

Godfrey Cass was the eldest son of one of the most significant people of the parish. His good nature did not reveal his dark secret – a secret marriage to Molly Farren, once beautiful but, at present, addicted to opium and alcohol.

His secret would not pose a problem if his brother Dunsey did not learn about it and benefit from it by blackmailing him. If others discovered the scandal, Godfrey would have been disowned; moreover, the marriage had led to a birth of a child, later called Eppie.

Godfrey's irresponsible nature caused problems as he did not reconsider future consequences of his actions. As a matter of fact, his character was cursed as he constantly suffered from the problems caused by himself. His marriage was regarded as hasty. Molly's looks were more important than his common sense and responsibility for his family as well as for his own life.

The issues mentioned above cannot be considered *Fthonos Theon* in its proper sense. However, the consequences of Godfrey's decisions, which he could not control, are to be approached as accidental and intractable. In fact, Molly's condition and behaviour are 'the revenge of gods' on its own – an addicted wife with a child is a genuine curse for a member of such a respectable family.

Godfrey understood the guilt and was worried whether his surroundings would learn the truth. He confessed his love and fears to Nancy, but the acceptance of superordination of God as well.

Everything comes to light, Nancy, sooner or later. When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out.⁴⁰

Dunsey, the younger brother, was another issue for Godfrey. He did not intend to help his brother in solving the unfortunate situation with Molly. Quite on the contrary, he started blackmailing him. Godfrey could not change his brother or his plan to net a fortune out of the unhappiness of Godfrey. Only one mistake was needed to affect the rest of Godfrey's life and almost ruin it.

⁴⁰ Eliot: *Silas Marner*, 11.

However, the issue was not tragic to Godfrey as the problem literally died a few steps away from his house. The problem was Molly who was approaching his house with little Eppie to claim her rights as Godfrey's wife. Weak, drunk, and ill, she collapsed to the snow and froze to death in the stormy and unpleasant evening. Godfrey is protected from the worse consequences of his actions by death of his wife, and consequently, of his brother.

In the end, Godfrey realises his faults that he has made, and the pain he has caused by his recklessness and cowardliness, and admits his wrongdoings in the end of the novel.

'No,' said Godfrey, with a keen decisiveness of tone, in contrast with his usually careless and unemphatic speech—'there's debts we can't pay like money debts, by paying extra for the years that have slipped by. While I've been putting off and putting off, the trees have been growing—it's too late now. Marner was in the right in what he said about a man's turning away a blessing from his door: it falls to somebody else.'⁴¹

The will of the supernatural power was fair and merciful in Godfrey's case. This fact, which is typical for *Silas Marner*, differentiates the novel from other pieces of writing of the Victorian era and provides a more optimistic atmosphere.

3.3 The Gold

Silas Marner abandoned people and put his effort and attention only into his work as well as to his gold. It became the most important reason for his existence. His cupidity can be considered the cause for the loss of his little fortune. Even though the thief was not supernatural, in the world of *Silas Marner*, supernatural forces are to be found even in ordinary situations.

Losing the gold was the biggest nightmare of the weaver; he protected his treasure, counted it, and even talked to it. It can be said that he loved his gold more than he loved people. Thus, when the gold disappeared, Silas endured the same pain as the one endured during a loss of a relative.

⁴¹ Eliot, George: *Silas Marner*, 157.

When Dunsey Cass stole Marner's gold, he unintentionally became the supernatural power which was willing to change Silas's heart. The question is whether it was God's will, his fate, or old Pagan powers of nature. The answer is not apparent. However, the reader can clearly tell the superterrestrial powers planned and executed the painful loss and transformation of Silas Marner.

The theme of the supernatural differentiates the novel from other works of George Eliot and creates a specific environment similar to a folk story or a fairy tale where strange moments occur. In such environment, *Fthonos Theon* can be more acceptable for readers than in realistic novels.

Silas Marner had to experience and endure the loss in order to open his heart to others and accept their flaws. If the loss never occurred, he would have never welcomed Eppie to his home and the child would have died in the snow when her mother collapsed close to the Cass's manor house.

Fthonos Theon was not pure 'anger of gods' in this instance, or surely not ultimate. As it is more apparent in *Silas Marner* than in *The Mill on the Floss*, the character of Marner survived the tragedies he had encountered and he even gained more than he had expected.

Fthonos Theon is not as fatal in *Silas Marner* as it is in *The Mill on the Floss*; it is fair to the characters and it provides a second chance to improve their lives. Resemblance to fairy tales and folk tales can be found in the supernatural element of the novel. This reason caused the popularity of the novel among the youth.

The supernatural element of the novel finally returned the gold to Silas, but in a different form than he had expected – in Eppie who brought light to his life. Silas could eventually start living again; he reconnected with his neighbours and he even started going to church again. The pain of loss could not be compared with the happiness he experienced in his later years.

However, the gold caused a death and did justice none of the humans could perform. Dunsey Cass had stolen the gold, but afterwards, he lost his life soon when he fell from his horse. He did not profit from the fortune he had taken. If he did not fall, he would have blackmailed his brother and spoilt his life and he would have possibly spoilt his marriage with fair and beautiful Nancy as well.

To summarise the role of the treasure in the novel, it brought a profit to two individuals by solving their problems without any strategic solution. Themes of the supernatural as well as Eliot's philosophy are well-portrayed in *Silas Marner*.

3.4 Forgiveness in *Silas Marner*

The subject of forgiveness is more apparent in *Silas Marner* than in *The Mill on the Floss* because the former is more similar to a novel which is targeted at children, in which the moral of the story has to be pronounced clearly.

After numerous mistakes and wrongdoings, the need for forgiveness and absolution is great. Therefore, in the second part of the novel, the storyline of major characters is gradually filled with forgiveness and reconciliation.

The questions the reader can ask are who forgave whom; whether Silas forgave God or vice versa as well as whether Nancy knew about Godfrey's secret wife and whether Godfrey finally forgave his brother, even if post-mortem.

Some of the questions cannot be answered directly, but one can conclude some of them. One of the abilities of George Eliot is to bring complexity of the characters and non-judgmental conclusions with enough room for the imagination of every reader.

3.5 Silas forgives God, God forgives Silas

Silas was named after one of the significant apostles of the New Testament. Even the name predestined him to be a Christian. Nevertheless, when he had decided to abandon Christianity, he abandoned it completely, only his name remained. He reached the decision to live without people and without God, only with his money.

One can ask whether it was God who caused the loss of his fortune. It can be proclaimed that God wanted to bring Silas back to Christianity and to other settlers of the village. Anyhow, he succeeded in slow return to the life with people and in the end, when he entered the church after decades, with God.

Silas understood that his happiness is not to be found in the gold, but in the company of Eppie and other people from the village – notably Dolly Winthrop who helped him to restart his life in the community. She talked to him about God as well and thanks to her and his changing attitudes, he was able and willing to accept God

again. His bitterness had lasted for fifteen years and was finally defeated by his affection towards other human beings.

If the gold still possessed Silas's heart, he would have never experienced such happiness. In this piece of information, the reader can observe God's merciful intentions to save Silas from his solitude. Even though Silas did not respect God and he blamed him for not answering to his prayers, God used the situation with the theft of money to direct Silas's steps towards him.

The combination of Christian education and strong moral philosophy are to be found in the described story. Inanimate gold is recognised as the root of unhappiness and the golden hair of Eppie are, on the contrary, considered the path towards new beginning. Strong supernatural powers are apparent in the motif.

A *mélange* of Christianity and positivist philosophy, changing of Marianne Evans to George Eliot, metamorphosis of a Christian girl to an atheist woman – all these themes are to be found in the novel which seems to be simple on the first read, without requiring linguistic knowledge.

The God's intention to save Silas is apparent in the abstract.

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's.⁴²

3.6 Forgiveness in the house of Cass

Godfrey Cass confessed to Nancy, his fiancée, all his secrets about his wife Molly and their child. Even though he was weak and indecisive most of the time, he braced himself in the end and shared his burden of the past with the woman he loved. It cost him a considerable amount of spiritual strength for there was a high probability Nancy would reject him as well as she would malign him. Nancy was educated in a narrow-minded and highly conservative manner and such wrongdoing was considered

⁴² Eliot, George: *Silas Marner*, 130.

unpardonable and she struggled to forgive him. Although, she found the strength to forgive him and accept his pardon in the end of the novel.

On the other hand, her forgiveness was not unconditional. Her strict views did not tolerate adopting Eppie. She considered the adoption as a disobedience of God's plan for humankind. She was, however, willing to look after the child and educate her. Although, she was never willing to accept her as her step-daughter.

The difference in the behaviour of Silas and Nancy with respect to Christianity can be observed. Silas did not consider himself a Christian, was angry with God and did not go to church, but welcomed the child and became a devoted step-father, even though he was not expected to take care of her. On the contrary, Nancy did not miss any Sunday service and she considered herself to be a good Christian woman, but when there was a need for action and problems needed to be solved, she was passive. Her social status and opinion of the public were more important to her than Eppie and Godfrey. Eppie would have possibly died without Silas and his help.

One may ask how can be one's Christian faith measured, whether by their visits to the church or by their good deeds. In portrayals of Nancy and Silas, Eliot showed two opposites, two representatives of her age. It is visible that she agrees with actions of Silas Marnier and shows obvious hypocrisy of Nancy who represents the honourable society of the Victorian times.

The question is whether Nancy's forgiveness was hypocritical. The reader may imagine her rather selfish intentions why she tolerated Godfrey's past. It was the biggest dream and goal of every unmarried girl in Raveloe to become a bride of a man with fortune who could provide for her. Godfrey was the wealthiest man in Raveloe. In such isolated place as the town, it was impossible to find a better husband than him. Thus, it can be proclaimed that Nancy accepted Godfrey's faults because she wanted to live a happy and plentiful life.

3.7 The society forgives Silas, Silas forgives the society

The final act of forgiveness can be observed when Silas returned back to other people, after years of isolation. Of course, the citizens of Raveloe considered him mysterious and even a bit scary, and they needed time to accept him as well.

Silas's deep disillusion pushed his voluntary forlorn life aside from other people. He did not trust anyone, the pain hurt his heart too much. The kind weaver became a sad hermit, full of sorrow and wrath.

It was Eppie who influenced his return to others. His heart opened to the little girl and later, he realised that not everyone was evil in the world. He slowly approached other people. His healing was happening.

The old-fashioned and isolated community of Raveloe, however, struggled with welcoming the mysterious weaver among them. Always dark, lonesome, with attacks of what was probably epilepsy, he was highly suspicious. In addition, he did not value the church or the honourable citizens of the town. His isolation provoked them and they found it difficult to trust him. Because of his knowledge of herbs and medicine which helped him to overcome his attacks, he was considered to have magical powers.

As mentioned above, the arrival of Eppie to Silas's life reversed everything. Gradually, with the girl in his cottage, he became one of the most influential citizens of Raveloe. The new status was the outcome of his slow change and opening to the community. His care for the orphaned girl opened the door to others and showed Silas as a person with high moral standards and kind heart.

It was not Silas's fault that he was accused of stealing. He did not even show much effort when he returned to the society. The most important element was Eppie and their life together. The soul of little child changed even the wounded heart of the weaver and brought him back to life and to the community.

Conclusion

The Mill on the Floss and *Silas Marner* are two novels written by George Eliot which focus on the issue of *Fthonos Theon*, accidental guilt, and forgiveness. These two subjects are significant to the author as well as to the philosophical approaches she studied and developed during her life. This bachelor's thesis thoroughly examined both of the novels, described the important motifs found in them and compared them with the life and philosophy of George Eliot as they changed during her life.

She experienced both guilt and forgiveness in her life when she rebelled against Christianity and decided to ignore standards of the era and lived with a married man. Her decisions and the reactions of her surroundings formed her personality and style of writing as well as the choice of themes she used in her books.

While *The Mill on the Floss* is partly autobiographical and realistic, *Silas Marner* is considered to be similar to a fairy tale with more evident supernatural elements. However, there are many actions of fate and fortune to be found which can be considered the accidental guilt of *Fthonos Theon*. The act of forgiveness is in some cases more evident than in others. *The Mill on the Floss* is more focused on forgiveness than *Silas Marner*. The reasons are the differences in the level of realistic writing of the novel and the length of two pieces of writing and the time of Eliot's life when she produced the novels.

High moral standards of the author, roots in Christianity, complex philosophy and personal experience are the aspects of these novels with solid and complicated plots and a strong philosophical message. The two examined novels are complex and unique worlds of their own which, however, share a considerable number of elements.

Resumé

George Eliotová, vlastním jménem Mary Ann Evans, patří mezi nejvýznamnější představitele britské viktoriánské literatury devatenáctého století. Ve svých románech vycházela z osobní zkušenosti zapálené křesťanky, která se ovšem posléze přiklonila k moderní filosofii pozitivizmu a agnosticizmu. Své dílo zasvětila převážně silným ženským hrdinkám, které se musely utkat se soudobou společností, nepřízní osudu i s vlastní touhou po svobodě a naplnění. Většina těchto hrdinek byla napsána a inspirována životem a názory George Eliotové.

Vyjímkou se v tomto případě stává *Silas Marner*, který se zaměřuje na osudy hlavního hrdiny, který bojuje s *Fthonos Theonem*, hněvem bohů nebo nepřízní osudu. Tento román je zkoumán z hlediska boje jedince a společnosti a také je rozebrán náboženský motiv díla, který je velmi silný. Jako druhý román byl zvolen silně autobiografický *The Mill on the Floss*, kde inteligentní a tvrdohlavá hrdinka Maggie taktéž bojuje s úzkoprsou společností, netolerantní rodinou a vlastními nezkrotnými touhami po vědění, lásce a přijetí.

Obě knihy tvoří jedinečné a složité prostředí, které je třeba zkoumat odděleně, ale také se k němu musí přistupovat s ohledem na panorama celého rozsáhlého díla George Eliotové.

Tato bakalářská práce porovnává oba romány a zaměřuje se na dva důležité aspekty, *Fthonos Theon* a odpuštění, které mají společné, ale v každém románu jsou vyjádřeny svým specifickým způsobem.

V prvním oddíle je analyzován život George Eliotové s ohledem na výskyt *Hněvu bohů* a odpuštění. Vzhledem k promítání osobní zkušenosti do jejích románů je třeba nejprve pochopit život autorky, aby bylo možné plně pochopit také její dílo.

V druhém oddíle jsou oba romány popsány a důkladně rozebrány oba motivy. *Fthonos Theon* je přítomný v obou dílech, v *The Mill on the Floss* ho představuje hlavně vedení osudu, které je tragické a nezvratitelné. Aktivní silou je v tomto případě příroda i lidské předsudky. Právě v roli přírody se prolíná tento román se *Silasem Marnerem*, kde se objevuje mnoho nadpřirozených, ať již křesťanských, tak také pohanských prvků. Neštěstí je zde však jasně důsledek lidské zloby a lze také předpokládat, že svůj díl na Silasově neštěstí má také Bůh. Závěr románu ale není tragický, příběh, který nese

i pohádkové motivy, končí šťastně, kdy jsou všechny síly, které stály proti hlavním hrdinům, umlčeny novou láskou a nadějí.

Odpuštění je druhý aspekt zkoumaný v této práci. V obou dílech můžeme nalézt podobné rysy, zvláště na konci románů, ale i odlišnosti. Jak již bylo naznačeno dříve, odpuštění se v *The Mill on the Floss* neprojevuje tak zřetelně jako v *Silasovi Marnerovi*, nejen pro tragický závěr první knihy, ale také pro celkové realističtější a pesimičtější vyznění románu. Každé odpuštění je draze vykoupeno, konečná cena je pro Maggie smrt. Na druhé straně, *Silas Marner* nachází odpuštění od Boha a sám odpouští Bohu, společnosti i sám sobě. Tato jeho přeměna je ale iniciována téměř nadpřirozeným zmizením jeho zlatého pokladu. Postranní dějová linka o rodině Cassů, kde hrozí skandál kvůli tajnému sňatku prvorozeného syna Godfreyho, také končí smířením.

The Mill on the Floss i *Silas Marner* jsou jedinečné ukázky hluboké filosofie autorky, jejího bohatého života a reflektují univerzální problémy ve společnosti i v každém jednotlivci. Právě v této nadčasovosti a mnohvrstevnatosti je síla literárního odkazu George Eliotové.

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Annotation

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The aim of this thesis is to examine and describe various aspects of motifs of guilt and forgiveness in two selected books written by George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*.

The thesis commences with an overview of the life of George Eliot and her experience with faith, *Fthonos Theon* and guilt in general, and forgiveness.

In the first part, *Fthonos Theon* and forgiveness in *The Mill on the Floss* are examined. Situations of both major and minor gravity will be analyzed and described. Eliot created in *The Mill on the Floss* her protagonists with complicated inner world. They were often biographical. Therefore, the author of this thesis will concentrate on the most significant characters of her two examined works, on their life and reasons for their actions.

The second part will analyse the same phenomenon in *Silas Marner*. It will focus on different reasons for behaviour of protagonists, on the act itself and afterwards on consequences and the aspect of the guilt and forgiveness, if it was present in a situation.

Conclusion will encapsulate all discoveries from previous parts, mainly the amount of differences and similarities in the motifs of guilt and forgiveness in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*. It will as well argue different approaches towards these two motifs in the used works of George Eliot.

Anotace

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Cílem této bakalářské práce je popsat a prozkoumat motivy viny a odpuštění ve dvou dílech George Eliotové, *The Mill on the Floss* a *Silas Marnerovi*.

Práce začíná shrnutím života George Eliotové s důrazem na její osobní zkušenost s nezaviněnou vinou *Fthonos Theon*, s vinou všeobecně a s odpuštěním.

V první části jsou rozebrány *Fthonos Theon* a odpuštění v románu *The Mill on the Floss*. Všechny důležité situace budou důkladně prozkoumány a popsány. Eliotové vytvořila ve svém románu postavy se složitým vnitřním světem. Často také měli obraz ve skutečných lidech. Tudíž se autorka této práce zaměří hlavně na hlavní postavy obou děl, na jejich životy a důvody jejich počínání.

Druhá část bude zkoumat stejnou problematiku v *Silas Marnerovi*. Zaměří se na rozličné důvody počínání postav, na samotnou událost a konečně na aspekty viny a odpuštění, pokud v ně situace vyústila.

Závěr shrne veškerá zjištění z předchozích kapitol, zvláště rozdíly a shodné prvky v motivech viny a odpuštění jak v *The Mill on the Floss*, tak v *Silas Marnerovi*. Také okomentuje rozdílné přístupy k těmto motivům v díle George Eliotové.