

1986

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Recommended Citation

Malmgren, Carl D. "Reading Authorial Narration: The Example of The Mill on the Floss." *Poetics Today* 7.3 (1986): 471-494.

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Author(s): Carl D. Malmgren

Source: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Poetics of Fiction (1986), pp. 471-494

Published by: [Duke University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772507>

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READING AUTHORIAL NARRATION

The Example of *The Mill on the Floss*

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1. THE MODEL

Narration, then, rests upon the presence of a narrator or narrative medium (actors, book, film, etc.) and the absence of the events narrated. These events are present as fictions but absent as realities. Given this situation, it is possible to distinguish different kinds and qualities of narration by the varying extents to which they emphasize either that immediate process of narration . . . or those mediated events themselves (Robert Scholes, *Semiotics and Interpretation*).

Any fiction is, by definition, characterized by the inevitable presence of a teller and a tale. Thus, in any fictional text there exist two planes of signification: the plane of the fictional world and the plane of the speaker. In brief, the former consists of the sign-vehicles which designate characters (invented or drawn from "real life"), the topoi through which they move, and the plot which concatenates the actions and events interrelating those characters. The latter consists of sign-vehicles which designate the necessary existence of the speaker, who, in a discursive speech act, recounts or creates that fictional world. This speaker may exist "inside" or "outside" the fictional world, and may be either foregrounded or backgrounded, may either advertise his or her presence or attempt to erase evidence of his or her existence. A typology of narrational forms can be constructed around the nature of the speaker's plane and its relation to the plane of the fictional world.¹

In its largest sense the plane of the speaker includes the basic operations which a storyteller performs upon a narrative situation, those of selection and ordering. From the storehouse of detail and articulation which envelopes the narrative germ, the storyteller

1. For a systematic theoretical analysis of the matter, see Lubomír Doležal, "The Typology of the Narrator: Point of View in Fiction," in: *To Honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, Vol. I, no editor (Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 541–553.

selects those elements which contribute to the effect that he or she is striving for and presents them in an order which best accomplishes that effect. In most instances, the speaker attempts to "naturalize" acts of ordering and selection by providing smooth and familiar transitions for out-of-sequence material and by implicitly promising that nothing of consequence has been left out. Although selection and ordering are at once both a speaker's primary function and first evidence of his or her mediation, the speaker is also identified by other elements which make reference to, or call attention to, the circumstance of the act of speech, or what may be termed the enunciation. By enunciation, I refer to the fact that someone is speaking, that someone chooses to recount a story; that the speaker is "situated," that he or she has a point of view which serves perceptual, aesthetic, and ideological functions; and that the speaker projects a personal configuration, a personality, which creates a certain mood or tone. In this essay, the enunciation should be understood as a sign-vehicle which draws attention to the speaker and establishes his or her relation with the fictional world.

The enunciation manifests itself at two levels, that of words and phrases and that of statements. At the lexical level, for example, most narratives are marked by the presence of deictics like adverbs of place or time (*last summer, here, today*) which indirectly locate the circumstance of the enunciation, and therefore constitute part of the discursive matrix. The most important deictics for prose narrative are the personal pronouns, *I* and its explicit or implicit correlative, *you*. Any narrative employing a first-person speaker creates a significant discursive space.²

The enunciation may also be marked by what Boris Uspensky refers to as "words of estrangement" (1973). Speakers occasionally express a certain degree of reserve or tentativeness about their fictional worlds: for example, they might fall back on verbs of speculation like "it seems" or "it appears;" or they might rely on words which denote uncertainty like "perhaps" or "apparently;" or indeed they might express a lack of definite knowledge with phrases like "a sort of" or "some." Words of estrangement perform a double function where an enunciation is concerned. Like deictics, they indicate the mediation of a speaking subject. But they also contribute to the characterization of that speaker. A fiction diacritically marked by a great number of words of estrangement is one whose speaker comes across as diffident, circumspect, cautious, or simply ignorant.

A third lexical enunciative feature involves the pattern of diction and imagery. As Booth has convincingly demonstrated throughout

2. For a more thorough treatment of "discursive space," see my *Fictional Space in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell UP, 1984), chap. 1.

The Rhetoric of Fiction (1964), even the most impersonal narration must employ language which is impregnated with a personal and evaluational burden. The pattern of diction establishes a narrational perspective, reinforces a speaker's preoccupations, contributes to the characterization of the speaker, and systematically creates the "mood" of the text.

A more important manifestation of the speaker for this essay involves the statement level of the enunciation, or what might be referred to as the speaker's "commentaries." In the course of relating a narrative, a speaker occasionally makes general comments about the characters, events, topoi, or fictionality of the fictional world, comments of a descriptive or normative nature. These statements can be divided into three main groups: *personal*, *ideological*, and *meta-lingual* (roughly corresponding to statements of self, society, and literature). *Personal* comments make reference to the speaker's own opinions, beliefs, judgments, or attitudes concerning the characters, events, and settings of the fictional world. In the opening pages of *Middlemarch*, for example, the speaker describes Dorothea Brooke as follows:

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it (Eliot 1977:2).

This magisterial assessment of character channels or circumscribes the reader's response to Dorothea. In a similar fashion the speaker might pass judgment on specific fictional events or upon the fictional milieu. Comments like these contribute to the characterization of the speaker and establish perspectives on the world being recounted. The speaker is situated and "humanized" while at the same time the fictional world is channeled or interpreted for the reader.

The second major system of discursive statements can be referred to as *ideological* because their presence presupposes the existence of a reading community which shares the value system, ideational matrix, or episteme in which they are rooted. Jane Austen possesses enough sociocultural assurance to begin *Pride and Prejudice* with the categorical assertion that "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (1962:171). Austen intends the statement to be received ironically, but, irony or no, the comment indicates an awareness on the part of the speaker of a cultural community for which such statements have validity. Roland Barthes assigns such statements to their own narrative code, which he calls the referential code, composed of discursive assertions whose basis lies in the scientific or moral authority of the originary culture (1974:18ff.). Statements

like these are predicated upon the assumption that the fictional world and real world are contiguous and congruent; they presuppose or propose that what can be asserted with confidence about life obtains for the inscribed world; they bridge the gap between Life and Art.

The presence of *personal* and *ideological* commentary characterizes texts in which the speaker is said to be intrusive, "classic" or "readerly" texts in which the speakers assume the authority to speak for and from their culture. These statements imply a degree of epistemological and ethical assurance on the speaker's part. He or she knows things, both about the fictional world and about the real world of which the former is a part.

A third form of discursive statements, *metalingual* statements, consists of explicit comments on, or reference to, the narrative act. For any number of reasons, the speaker chooses to address the how, what, or why of his or her unfolding fiction (or those by others), and thus exposes or explores the enabling codes of fiction. After introducing a minor character in "The Overcoat," Nikolai Gogol's speaker adds, "Of this tailor I ought not, of course, to say much, but since it is now the rule that the character of every person in a novel must be completely drawn, well, there is no help for it, here is Petrovich too" (1978:387). In a similar way Tristram Shandy compares the disorderly progression of his own narrative with the orderliness of other narratives. *Metalingual* interpolations like these help to destroy the fictional illusion, which is one reason why James chastised Trollope for using them.³

It should be noted at this point that the elements of the enunciation described above — deictics, words of estrangement, speaker's idiolect, discursive commentaries — can appear in any narrative, regardless of its "point of view." "Authorial," "figural," or "first-person"⁴ narration may employ, to varying degrees, any or all of these signifying systems. Clearly, however, each narrative situation tends to establish its identity by emphasizing aspects of the enunciation as its dominant. Authorial narration is a case in point.

3. "I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe.' He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime" (James 1972a:30). See also pp. 75–76.

4. I borrow the terms from Franz Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*: Tom Jones, Moby Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses, trans. James P. Pusack (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1971).

2. AUTHORIAL NARRATION

In the heyday of the "liberal" novel (the 19th century) author-narrator-entrepreneurs ruled their fictional worlds as despotically as the laissez-faire capitalists ruled their factories. And beyond this, the benevolently despotic narrator was invariably committed to the most sweeping generalizations about human nature. He was always looking for the laws of behavior that governed the action of his puppets. The realism of the nineteenth century was characterized by the belief that the nature of reality is determinate and discoverable but has not been discovered until now (Robert Scholes, "The Liberal Imagination").⁵

Certain theorists of fiction have identified the inevitable distance between teller and tale, *discours* and *histoire*, enunciation and fictional world, as the distinguishing characteristic of prose narrative.⁶ There exists the potential for an "interspace" between the plane of the fictional world and that of the enunciation. The fictionist may either dilate or contract this intratextual space in accordance with specific aesthetic ends. The distance can be both temporal and spatial. It is signalled temporally by the convention of the epic preterit as the controlling verb. The systematic use of the past tense creates a perspective which implies that the world being unfolded is complete, finished, and pregnant with significance. As Barthes has argued, the past tense is the formal guarantee of the Literary; it bespeaks perspective, control, and at least some degree of interpretation.

Most narratives maintain a temporal distance between the events being recounted and the time of the recounting. In what may be termed "authorial" narration, however, the distance has also a spatial dimension. The plane of the enunciation exists in a position of privilege "above" the plane of the fictional world, enabling the speaker to move freely through that world, to eavesdrop on its various characters and their thoughts, to penetrate its walls and survey its topoi, to observe and pass judgment on its significant events. Authorial narration takes the existence of this distance for granted. From a magisterial position of privilege, the authorial speaker presides over the fictional world, locates and circumscribes it, interprets and *author-izes* it.

The authorial speaker's "determined" relation to the fictional world, his or her ownership or control, manifests itself in particular

5. For a similar view to the one expressed by Scholes, which may be found in *New Literary History* 4 (Spring 1973), p. 526, see Stanislaw Eile, "The Novel as an Expression of the Writer's Vision of the World," trans. Teresa Halikowska-Smith, *New Literary History* 9 (Autumn 1977), pp. 115-128.

6. See, for example, Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979); and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977).

in extensive use of “commentaries,” discursive statements about character, society, and text, statements which originate in the speaker’s authority. These magisterial pronouncements themselves indicate two authorial assumptions: First, that the speaker knows things about the fictional world, and about the real world, culture, and human nature; and second, that the speaker knows that the fictional world is coterminous with the empirical world. Not only can the speaker expatiate confidently about his or her creatures, he or she can move readily from the “real world” to the fictional because there are no sharp boundaries between. This assumption underlies in particular the indulgence in *ideological* commentary, where the authorial persona speaks from a position of privilege for and from the culture depicted. Roger Fowler has said of this type of commentary:

A certain relevant culture is created (romantic, artistic, fashionable, privileged, socializing) to be shared by the narrator and his appropriate reader — a reader for whom these citations have a coherent significance. They are literally citations — footnote references to a selected world outside the fiction. The narrative stance created by the invocation of these cultural codes joins narrator and reader in a compact of knowing superiority (1977:34).

If the speaker adopts a position of magisterial privilege, he or she necessarily invites the reader to take up the same position. In other words, the authorial enunciation channels and controls the reader’s response.

3. AUTHORIAL NARRATION AND THE READER

(I)n an account of the semiotics of literature someone like the reader is needed to serve as center. The reader becomes the name of the place where the various codes can be located: a virtual site. Semiotics attempts to make explicit the implicit knowledge which enables signs to have meaning, so it needs the reader not as a person but as a function: the repository of the codes which account for the intelligibility of the text (Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*).

Every narrative addresses itself to a hypothetical audience; a story is narrated by someone, for someone. The audience of which I speak is not the auditors who sometimes appear in narratives employing a tale-within-a-tale (the actions and characteristics of which sometimes parody the actual reading audience), nor is it the flesh-and-blood reader who sits in an easy chair with the text before him or her. The reader I refer to is a “metonymic characterization of the text” (Perry 1979:43), consisting of a set of textually conditioned and culturally sanctioned mental operations which are performed upon the text. These operations are predicated upon a reader’s prior exposure to and familiarity with a narrative tradition, upon previous literary experiences which determine the competence of the “native reader.”

For the purposes of this essay, the most important operation which the reader performs on the text is interpretation.⁷ Narrative in the West (since the Biblical parable) has been a parabolic form; it refuses to state or name a meaning. The discovery of meaning by the reader consists in a process of naturalization which is based upon what Jonathan Culler refers to as *vraisemblance*: the reader organizes the reading experience by relating the otherness of the fictional text to “natural” models of experience, models which the culture makes familiar and certifies. The reader “recuperates” or “domesticates” the text by discovering ways in which it conforms to *a priori* models of “reality” and not to its own internal workings. The “reality” with which the work is seen to correspond should not be taken monolithically as empirical reality. As Culler has shown in his enumeration of models of *vraisemblance*, the reader naturalizes a text by establishing its relations with “realities” which can be empirical, cultural, and/or literary (1975:138–160).

In the “performance” of meaning, in formulating the text’s signifieds, the reader is aided and channeled considerably by elements of the text. Foremost among these are the speaker and the relation he or she establishes with the reader. In traditional fiction, regardless of the point of view, the relation is friendly, cooperative, and mutually satisfying; the speaker attempts to create a fictional community, gradually drawing readers into the world of the text. As instigator of the contact, the speaker assumes control and “creates . . . an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves . . . can find complete agreement” (Booth 1964:138).

Wolfgang Iser in his functional analysis of the reading process has argued that “the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, but, if anything, a dynamic happening” (1978:22). Every fictional text has a textual structure, consisting of a variety of perspectives, which is realized only in ongoing structured acts performed by the reader who mediates between the perspectives. Iser notes that in the novel there are generally four main perspectives: “those of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader” (p. 35). These perspectives interlink and interact, and in the reading process, the reader “occupies” serially one or another of the perspectives, playing it off against those that follow and precede it. Ultimately the shifting vantage points begin to coalesce into an evolving pattern or “total” reading. This final meeting place of the perspectives, since it has no textual existence, must be formulated by the reader.

7. For a summary of other readerly operations, see my *Fictional Space in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel*, chap. 1.

Iser's general description of the reading process is a valuable one. But it must be noted that fictional texts vary in terms of the way they hierarchically organize the system of perspectives. A text creates its modal identity and establishes its interpretive channels by systematically privileging one or another of these perspectives, by systematically creating a perspectival dominant (cf. Jakobson 1971). The reader is directed to favor one of the perspectives because of the ways in which it dominates the others. In fact, at the abstract level, one might argue that the point-of-view of the text determines the perspectival dominant. In authorial narration (e.g. *Middlemarch*), the speaker's enunciation dominates the other perspectives, and the reader aligns himself with the narrator/deity. In impersonal narration, where the speaker erases signs of his/her mediation (e.g., Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants"), the reader relies heavily on the plot to construct a meaning. In first-person and figural narration, the reader is aligned with the character who acts as center of consciousness or possibly with the fictitious "reader" who listens to or otherwise receives the discourse of the speaker. This is not to say that these narrational types do not utilize several textual perspectives, but simply that in a given narrational type one system of perspectives will tend to dominate unless another perspectival system deliberately subverts or undercuts it. The dominant perspective circumscribes, scripts, directs, or orchestrates the performance of reading by the reader. In order to demonstrate how a perspective can predominate, one must turn to a specific text.

4. THE TEXT

We feel in her [George Eliot], always, that she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; that her figures and situations are evolved, as the phrase is, from her moral consciousness (Henry James, from an 1885 review).

The text that I have chosen is George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. It has not been chosen because it is a difficult or obscure text, nor because it is a text about which there has been a heated critical controversy. Aside from some debate about the arbitrariness of the *deus ex riva* ending and some disagreement about the ultimate significance of the resolution Maggie Tulliver has come to just before that ending, discussion of the text has been marked by a high degree of consensus and agreement, so much so that readings seem sometimes to echo one another (see sections 4.3 and 4.4). *The Mill on the Floss* has been chosen as a "tutor text" (the phrase is Barthes's, from *S/Z*) just because it is representative, both of the prevailing episteme of the era and of the narrative mode in which the era expressed itself. As numerous critics have pointed out, Victorian writers felt that the laws governing human nature and society, intuited but not

as yet articulated, were determinate and discoverable and that it was the novelist's duty to provide that articulation. Moreover they felt that to discover those laws and principles would be to restore standards for human behavior, to create a new basis for "moral consciousness." Ultimately, Victorian novels were meant to influence how people *act*, to pronounce upon matters of right and wrong. In order to effect this end, Victorian novelists often relied on forms of authorial narration, a narrational stance which reflects, among other things, a certain confidence about the proprietorship of the inscribed fictional world, a certitude about the knowability of the characters and the milieu in which they move, and an assumption of congruity between the fictional world and the "real world." Authorial narration can freely address questions of behavior and morality, and can do so almost in the form of a dialogue with the reader. For the "real world" reader is the ultimate *terminus ad quem* for the wisdom of the text.

4.1 *The Narrational Stance*

Narrative mode (as any abstract literary category) is of a typologic nature and, therefore, its norms are not to be perfectly realized in the particular manifestations of the mode. . . . Our identification of the narrative mode . . . is based on fundamental properties and predominant features of the text (Lubomír Doležel, "Narrative Modes in Czechoslovakian Literature").

Wolfgang Iser has argued, as summarized above, that a text structure consists of a variety of perspectives for a reader to negotiate and that a novel generally contains four main perspectives – those of the narrator, plot, characters, and fictive reader. I have added that the typologic nature of the text is in part determined by the perspective which dominates. In authorial narration the perspective of the speaker/narrator dominates the other perspectives. Graham Martin, characterizing the "classic realist text," the phrase he uses to denote texts marked by authorial narration, says that it consists of a hierarchy of discourses presided over by a metalanguage, in the form of the authorial enunciation, which "settles for the reader the relative weight of the other discourses" (1980:36).⁸ *The Mill on the Floss* contains just such a metalanguage, consisting of the intrusive commentary of the authorial persona, who in some respects is the

8. In the article Martin argues that the authorial speaker of *The Mill on the Floss* is guilty of unreliability because s/he wavers between objective analysis and hostile commentary, seems ambivalent about the Tulliver-Dodson clan, alternately poses as idyllic dreamer and shrewd commentator, and in places seems uncertain about the issues in question. I would argue (1) that these features of the enunciation serve to characterize the speaker as a more rounded, "human" witness to the events recounted and (2) that discrepancies or anomalies such as these do not change the typologic identity of the text or undercut the speaker's ultimate authority and reliability.

most important “character” in the novel. To be sure, the narrative is in large part made up of “dramatized” scenes (the novel’s first scene presents a rather long conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver about Tom’s education), but the narrative discourse is dominated by the perceptive and loquacious narrator, who acts as a kind of “Intourist Guide,”

continuously at our elbow, pointing to the salient details of this or that scene, offering cultural annotation which modifies our untutored responses, steering us past dubious areas where closer inspection might prompt embarrassing questions, or silences. . . . [The Guide] effectively works to constrain independent movement within the fictional space (Martin 1980:37).⁹

In terms of my description of the enunciation, the speaker of *The Mill on the Floss*, our guide and teacher, takes advantage of all the narrational devices available to the authorial narrator. A number of illustrative examples might clarify the way in which the speaker “occupies” the enunciative system and channels the reader’s response.

(1) *Deictic*: “Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair, and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver were talking about as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour on that very afternoon I have been dreaming about” (Eliot 1966:4–5. All further references will be to this — Everyman’s — edition). This piece of deictic commentary, coming at the end of the first chapter, is marked lexically by forms of the present tense and by the presence of the personal pronouns *I* and *you* (which create a dialogic relation between speaker and reader). The passage clearly raises the curtain for the “history” which is to follow. The speaker makes clear here that that history unfolded at some time in the past, at a temporal remove from the time of its recounting. This temporal remove assures the reader that the action recounted is both complete and pregnant with significance. This is the basic guarantee of the epic preterit in fiction, foregrounded in this particular passage.¹⁰

9. Cf. Weed (1978:429): It is “the narrator who possesses the large vision of relations, who can perceive the vast sum of conditions and who invites the reader to share in his omniscience.”

10. There are other deictic passages that emphasize the temporal distance between the time of the narrative and the time of its recounting. For example, “I am afraid to think how long it is since fan-shaped caps were worn — they must be so near coming in again. At that time, when Mrs. Tulliver was nearly forty, they were new at St. Ogg’s, and considered sweet things” (p. 5); and “These narrow notions about debt . . . may perhaps excite a smile on the faces of many readers in these days of wide commercial views and wide philosophy” (p. 261).

(2) *Personal commentary*: “[Tom and Maggie] had gone forth into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness and the golden gates of their childhood had forever closed behind them” (p. 178). This commentary serves as a coda to the second book of the novel, explicitly marking the end of the halcyon childhood years and the commencement of the disruptions and disappointments of adulthood. The speaker closes one chapter in the children’s life and signals a thematic shift into a process of initiation and maturation, thus preparing the reader for what is to come. At the same time the speaker demonstrates complete knowledge of the course of the history and control of its presentation.

(3) *Ideological commentary*: “I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the life of Tom and Maggie — *how it has acted upon young natures in many generations*, that in the onward tendency of humans things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts” (p. 254; my italics). The first part of this commentary consists of the speaker’s *personal* evaluation of the Dodsons’ and Tullivers’ religious beliefs, but mid-sentence the speaker shifts levels and makes an *ideological* statement, generalizing from the Tullivers’ situation toward those in similar “real life” situations. The italicized transition serves to connect the fictional world with the “real world,” marking their contiguity and congruity. *Ideological* statements like this one emphasize the cognitive potential of the reading experience, as is made explicit in the interpolated clause, “it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand.”

(4) *Metalingual commentary*: “Such things could have had no perceptible effect on a thoroughly well-educated young lady, with a perfectly balanced mind, who had had all the advantages of fortune, training, and refined society. But if Maggie had been that young lady, you would probably have known nothing about her: her life would have had so few vicissitudes that it could hardly have been written” (p. 361). Here the speaker comments upon the aftermath of Maggie’s first meeting with Stephen Guest and draws attention to one of the usually unremarked codes of the narrative contract, that something must happen to the protagonist or there would be no reason to recount her story. It should be noted that *metalingual* statements like these appear very infrequently in *The Mill on the Floss* (unlike *personal* and *ideological* commentary), and for good reason. *Metalingual* commentary addresses the codes and conventions of the narrative act and thus foregrounds its artificiality (even fraudulence). Given her ultimate purposes, Eliot does not wish to remind her

readers that they are reading about an invented world. As a matter of fact, her speaker takes care to refer to the narrative in progress as a “life” or “history,” concealing in that way its fictionality.¹¹

As suggested above, authorial narration in general, and the enunciation of *The Mill on the Floss* in particular, are heavily marked by reliance on *personal* and *ideological* commentary. These two sets of commentary, often used in conjunction (see section 4.2), act to interpret the fictional world for the reader and to bring it into relation with extratextual reality. Commentary like this characterizes the classical realist text, creating a metalanguage designed to influence the moral tenor of the age, in obedience to James’s notion that “there is surely no principle of fictitious composition so true as this — that an author’s paramount charge is the cure of souls” (1972b:293–294).

In order to carry out this charge, the authorial speaker must reach out to the reader, creating a community of sympathy and understanding or at times even a classroom. As the following commentaries make clear, Eliot’s speaker continually attempts to do just that:

If you blame Mr. Riley very severely for giving a recommendation on such slight grounds, I must say you are rather hard on him (p. 22).

Mrs. Tulliver, as we have seen, was not without influence over her husband. No woman is; she can always incline him to do either what she wishes, or the reverse (p. 146).

If you think a lad of thirteen would not have been so childish, you must be an exceptionally wise man (p. 163).

The personal pronouns in the above commentaries, the informal tone, even the ironic twist, help to create a dialogic relation with the reader. As one critic has said of *Middlemarch*,

Eliot creates a fictive reader whose position seems to be one of secure and privileged detachment, and endows that reader with traits of superior wisdom and experience that imply he is far above the mistakes and illusions that prevail among the characters whose lives he explores. . . . [She creates] a reader who is an amused but uninformed tourist, a favored pupil willing and eager for whatever instruction the narrator may be able to offer (Smith 1977: 195–196).

Speaker and reader, teacher and pupil, meet as comparative equals in the text, secure in the position of privilege that the enunciative metalanguage establishes for them.

11. E.g., p. 378: “But you have known Maggie a long while, and need to be told not her characteristics, but her *history*, which is a thing hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of characteristics” (my italics).

4.2 Narration in Operation

Every gesture is . . . followed by the narrator's gloss, an explanation of a specific act which soon becomes a general observation on the nature of human behavior (Jane S. Smith, "The Reader as Part of the Fiction: *Middlemarch*").

In authorial narration *personal* and *ideological* commentaries dominate the enunciative system, which in turn acts as the privileged perspective within the fictional space. In addition, these two sets of commentary frequently appear in tandem, a personal statement giving way to a generalizing *ideological* context or an *ideological* "digression" being specifically applied to an aspect of the particularized fictional world. The latter situation, in which the narrator proceeds quasi-deductively from a discursive ideological essay or truism to its more specific applicability to the world of St. Ogg's, tends to occur at the beginning of chapters or books. For example, Book 4, "The Valley of Humiliation," begins with an extended discourse on the differing effects produced upon the traveller by the landscapes of the Rhône and Rhine rivers and then compares these circumstances to those of the Floss (pp. 253–254). Similarly, Chapter 12 of Book 1 begins with a generalizing description of St. Ogg's as representative of English provincial towns of that era, culminating in the following ideological pronouncement about the tenor of the time:

It was a time when ignorance was much more comfortable than at present, and was received with all the honors in very good society, without being obliged to dress itself in an elaborate costume of knowledge; a time when cheap periodicals were not, and when country surgeons never thought of asking their female patients if they were fond of reading, but simply took it for granted that they preferred gossip; a time when ladies in rich silk gowns wore large pockets, in which they carried a mutton-bone to secure them against cramp. Mrs. Glegg carried such a bone (pp. 109–110).

The ironic tone here serves to distance the reader from the foolishness and ignorance of those benighted times,¹² but these ideological incipits have other, equally important functions. They locate the fictional world somewhere within the "real world," provide historical pedigrees and geographic contexts, and reinforce the contiguity of real and fictional worlds.

Much more common in the enunciation of *The Mill on the Floss* is the situation in which the narrator proceeds inductively from specific *personal* observation to general *ideological* "law." Examples of this procedure are legion, but it might be helpful to examine a number of instances.

12. It should be noted that the irony in the passage cuts two ways; it is directed both against the ignorance of the past and the foolish pastimes of the present.

Tom never quite lost the feeling that Philip, being the son of a "rascal," was his natural enemy, never thoroughly overcame his repulsion to Philip's deformity: he was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received: as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance (p. 154).

And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie? Nothing but poverty and the companionship of her mother's narrow griefs — perhaps of her father's heart-cutting childish dependence. There is no hopelessness so sad as that of early youth, when the soul is made of wants, and has no long memories, no superadded life in the life of others (p. 219).

Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance; it is the partial sleep of thought; it is the submergence of our own personality by another (p. 440).

In each of these examples, as in many others, the *ideological* statement is grammatically marked by the shift to the present tense, by the absence of qualifiers, and, on occasion, by reversion to first- or second-person pronomial forms. I would suggest that this inductive method dominates Eliot's enunciation (and that of authorial narrations in general) because it serves as a model for the process the novel wishes to instigate in the reader, the interpretive "leap" from specific fictional case to generalized human "truth." In other words, the microtextual shift from *personal* to *ideological* commentary, by leading the reader from the fictional world to the real world, encourages the reader to perform the same operation at the macrotextual level. By stepping back from the unfolding fictional world, the authorial narrator brings that world into perspective and initiates a similar process of correlation and mastery in the reader.

4.3 *Narration and Theme*

Maggie's adult choices are never simple. They are always, in the words George Eliot used in 1856 to describe the tragedy of *Antigone*, choices between "two principles both having their validity, . . . at war with each" (Rosemary Mudhenk, "Patterns of Irresolution in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*").

As should be clear from the foregoing, the most frequently employed form of commentary in *The Mill on the Floss* is *personal* commentary. Not only does it rival scenic presentation for amount of text space, it even creeps into chapter headings like "Mr. Tulliver Shows His Weaker Side," "Maggie Behaves Worse Than She Expected," and "The Golden Gates Are Passed," and into book titles like "The Downfall," "The Valley of Humiliation," and "The Great Temptation." Throughout the novel the reader's expectations, responses, and understanding are being skillfully channeled and controlled by the systematic deployment of *personal* commentary.

One important function of such commentary is to dictate the reader's perception of, and response to, the characters in the novel, primarily by regulating the distance between character and reader.¹³ One of the ways in which the enunciation *per se* creates and manages aesthetic distance rests upon a process involving two different types of *personal* commentary. We can distinguish between *personal* commentary that reveals the gist of a character's thoughts and feelings (commentary which can be said to have the predicate [+INTERNAL]) and that which "steps back" from the character in question and assesses him or her at a remove (having the predicate [+EXTERNAL]). Obviously the latter type of commentary puts the character in perspective for the reader, originating as it must in the privileged plane of the authorial enunciation. For example, when Maggie discovers the balm to be had from the renunciative philosophy of Thomas à Kempis, the speaker informs us that "it flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution to a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure" (p. 271), and continues with an extended revelation of her new understanding. Taking the form of indirect authorial discourse, this *internal personal* commentary brings to light in summary form the chain of Maggie's thoughts. A couple of pages later, however, the speaker makes the following comment about Maggie's newly adopted asceticism:

From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act (p. 273).

Whereas the previous commentary, detailing as it does the ratiocinative process of Maggie's mind, necessarily reduces the distance between reader and character, this *external* commentary gives the reader the view from without and puts Maggie's newly found religiosity in perspective. In general, especially in the first two-thirds of the novel, Eliot tends to balance *internal* and *external personal* commentary and thus to engage her readers' sympathy while at the same time preserving their objectivity.

Personal commentary then serves both to reveal the inner logic of characters and events and to assess or evaluate that logic and its aftermath. These are indeed its primary functions, but not its only ones. In authorial narration in general, and in *The Mill on the Floss* in particular, it also acts as a major vehicle for the articulation of theme. Authorial narration frequently embeds within its *personal*

13. For an extended analysis of the distance between the "rhetoric of character" and the "rhetoric of narration," see Doyle (1981:61-89).

commentary the residue of thematic concerns. This residue manifests itself primarily in the form of recurrent ideational units, or *thememes*. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the basic *thememe* involves the conflict between equally valid but mutually antagonistic principles, such conflict occurring both within the individual (especially Maggie) and between individuals (e.g., between Maggie and Tom).¹⁴ The most important arena for the conflict, in thematic terms, is of course Maggie's heart or soul, as the *personal* commentary makes abundantly clear. At one point the speaker asks us to step back, as it were, and look at Maggie during one of her moments of serenity, noting that despite her "grand" appearance, "yet one has a sense of uneasiness in looking at her — a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent" (p. 281). At another point the enunciation informs the reader that "to the usual precocity of the girl, she added that early experience of struggle, of conflict between the inward impulse and outward fact, which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature" (p. 257). And even earlier in the text, the speaker warns the reader about the trials Maggie is to endure: "No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it" (p. 219). Commentaries like these identify the basic thematic conflict and locate it both within and without Maggie.

At various places in the novel, different names are given to the conflicting thematic poles. While remonstrating with Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps, for example, Maggie declares that she has been happier

since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn't have my own will. Our life is determined for us — it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do (p. 284).

The conflict here seems to be between the antagonistic claims of will and duty, the latter taking precedence over the former. In another place the struggle involves a determination to renounce the world versus the desire to delight in it, as at the end of the sixth book when Maggie resolves to give Stephen Guest up, but not without second thoughts: "she lived through again all the tremulous delights of his presence with her that made existence an easy floating in a stream of joy, instead of a quiet resolved endurance and effort" (p. 452). In yet other places the competing principles seem to be the commitments of the past versus the attractions of the present, the

14. Numerous critics have singled out or discussed conflicting principles as the thematic foundation of the novel. See, for example, Doyle (1981:62ff.), Mudhenk (1983:22–25), Jacobus (1981:212–220), and Levine (1970:107–123). For an analysis of the way in which the rhetoric of the novel emphasizes splits, division, difference, creating a "conflict between contrasting linguistic registers," see Arac (1979:673–692).

claims of society versus the caprices of the self, or realistic prudence versus imaginative impulse. Moving to a higher level of generality, one might argue that the basic conflict of the novel concerns the inevitable clash between the demands of Desire (orientation toward the needs of the self) and the restraints of Law (capitulation to the claims of society). The opposition between these two conflicting registers informs the structure of the novel, both in terms of character and event. At the risk of oversimplifying, one can discover a variation of these two principles beneath the oppositions between the Tullivers and Dodsons (see, for example, p. 256) and between Maggie and Lucy, or in the pairings of Maggie and her father (pp. 191–192, 200), Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest, and Tom and Lucy. It is no accident, for example, that Mr. Tulliver's downfall results from a defeat at the hands of the "law," nor that in the last books the speaker hints at Tom's unrequited love for Lucy. Both of Maggie's lovers, Philip and Stephen, encourage her to transgress the rule of law. And even when Maggie obeys the law, as when she returns chastened from her "elopement" with Stephen, she resists adhering to the "letter of the law" by refusing to move in with her Aunt Glegg, that formidable representative of judicious behavior.

The main armature of the plot, however, rests upon the opposition between Tom and Maggie and the vicissitudes of their relationship. In this respect, Tom is a rather more one-dimensional character than Maggie, acting as he does as the "novel's chief upholder of general rules and patriarchal law" (Jacobus 1981:212). Throughout the novel Tom is connected with the rule of law, particularly with its strict application.:

There were no impulses in Tom that led him to expect what did not present itself to him as a right to be demanded. Why should people give away their money plentifully to those who had not taken care of their own money? Tom saw some justice in severity; and all the more, because he had confidence in himself that he should never deserve that just severity (p. 209).

This *external personal* commentary touches upon Tom's strengths and weaknesses, which derive from the same basic traits. Because he is so legalistically single-minded, he possesses the determination, perseverance, and opportunism to rescue his family from the humiliation of indebtedness and poverty. That same dogged purposefulness, however, also manifests itself in the form of self-righteousness and narrow-mindedness. After Tom insults Philip in the Red Deeps, Maggie reprimands him (Tom) as follows: "You have been reproaching other people all your life — you have been always sure you yourself are right: it is because you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims" (p. 326). Tom adheres to the strict rule of law, to his "share of boy's justice" (p. 46), in part because he has

not the imagination¹⁵ to transcend his narrow view of things, a limitation which the speaker's *personal* commentary emphasizes when it summarizes his mind as "strongly marked by the positive and negative qualities that create severity — strength of will, conscious rectitude of purpose, narrowness of imagination and intellect, great power of self-control, and a disposition to exert control over others" (p. 430).

Although Maggie is in many respects Tom's opposite number, her case is more complicated than his because she embodies the principles of both Law and Desire; she is, in fact, torn between them, and her "history" recounts her struggle to learn which voice to listen to. Even after her formal education comes to an end, she retains "a soul untrained for inevitable struggles . . . unhappily quite without that knowledge of the irreversible laws within and without her" (p. 269). The proper balance of Desire and Law is the main "irreversible law" which she must take to heart.

What sets Maggie apart from Tom are her passionate nature and restless imagination:

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, with all the detail and exaggerated circumstance of an active imagination. Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage (p. 58).

Her impulsiveness causes her no end of problems, as when she cuts her hair, pushes Lucy in the mud, or runs away to join the gypsies, but her imagination enables her to be open to new experiences, to thirst for them, and to empathize with those about her. Maggie is ruled by a

passionate sensibility which belonged to her whole nature, and made her faults and virtues all merge in each other — made her affections sometimes an impatient demand, but also prevented her vanity from taking the form of mere coquetry and device, and gave it the poetry of ambition (p. 378).

Again, the speaker employs *external personal* commentary to summarize a character's strengths and weaknesses.

It is Maggie's "passionate sensibility" which lies at the bottom of her inner struggle. On the one hand it ties her with indissoluble bonds to her family and friends, to those who had made early claims on her love and pity, to the "ties that had given meaning to duty" (p. 444). On the other hand, it drives her out to the larger world, to the gypsies' camp, to the Red Deeps, to the realm of literature, to the arms of Stephen Guest, where she satisfies her need for a fuller

15. Cf. p. 370: "There was a terrible cutting truth in Tom's words — that hard rind of truth which is discerned by unimaginative, unsympathetic minds." The speaker slides here from *personal* to *ideological* commentary to lend more force to the indictment of Tom.

existence. Her passionate nature weds her for life to her brother Tom, but it also creates in her the need to be loved, the “strongest need in poor Maggie’s nature” (p. 32; see also pp. 33, 282, 369). The need to be loved leads to the two great temptations in Maggie’s life and, along with vanity, constitutes the most self-serving side of Desire. During her period of renunciation Maggie comes to understand, intellectually at least, that her need to be admired is a form of self-love, and ultimately she knows that she must answer to the voice that speaks for “something higher than mere personal enjoyment” (p. 432).

It should be noted that the struggle which wages in Maggie’s soul is not the simple question of love versus duty or the present versus the past; the actual dynamics of the conflicting principles are more complicated than that. Maggie renounces Stephen, thus submitting to the dictates of Law, in no small measure because of her genuine love for Lucy and Philip and her desire that they be happy. And Stephen comes closest to winning Maggie back, not when he appeals to her love for him (a function of Desire), but when he emphasizes the degree of his own suffering (an appeal to the Law of Conscience). The speaker admits that the two principles serve different interests at times, that Stephen “had called up a state of feeling in which the reasons which had acted on her conscience seemed to be transmuted into mere self-regard” (p. 439). The reader’s sympathy and interest are heightened by the believable way in which the conflicting principles at work in Maggie can serve different masters.

At the macrotextual thematic level, one can say that *The Mill on the Floss* recounts a series of implicit or explicit Thou-shalt-nots, interdictions, or Laws, which are contravened by Maggie, whose motivation — a function of Desire — is personal and selfish, essentially grounded in a need for love and approval. Tom admonishes Maggie not to forget to feed the rabbits, makes her swear on the Bible that she will have no more intercourse with Philip Wakem, advises her against taking a position after the death of her father. As one critic points out, even “knowledge in *The Mill on the Floss* is guarded by a traditional patriarchal prohibition” (Jacobus, p. 218); Maggie is discouraged from exploring the arcane mysteries of Euclid and Latin. In each case Desire prompts Maggie to transgress the Law and leads to ostracism and repentance.

4.4 *The Sense of the Ending*

Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion which is at best a negation (George Eliot, in a letter to John Blackwood).

If there is any serious critical disagreement about *The Mill on the Floss*, it centers on the final book of the novel where “Maggie

Tulliver struggles once again between her love for Stephen Guest and her devotion to community, family, and past” (Mudhenk 1983:20). Critics generally agree that the improbable and conveniently timed flood, however aesthetically foreshadowed, makes for a flawed conclusion, but they disagree about the nature of her “final” renunciation just before the flood. Interestingly enough, critics do not disagree about the resolution she has come to and its significance. There is an interpretive consensus that Maggie has determined to renounce Stephen forever and to resign herself to a life of solitude and penitence, in this way affirming her commitment to family and friends. As a matter of fact, the “readings” of this episode often repeat the same refrain. George Levine says that in the conflict between claims of the past and present “the past rules the present, lives in it, and we are but the growth and outcome of the past” (1970:111–112); Janet Freeman argues that Maggie must listen to the voice of the past, must “obey the guiding, saving memory” (1977:386); and Jonathan Arac asserts that “through fidelity to such a past, and only through it, can Maggie be sure in life of a ground ‘firm beneath [her] feet!’ ” (1979:677).

Critical debate focuses not on what happens or what it means but on how one should interpret Maggie’s action; the arena shifts here from analysis and interpretation to evaluation and judgment. The question becomes whether her renunciation signifies her final victory over self-serving desire and the advent of maturity, or whether it represents her “tragic failure to become a whole and fulfilled woman,” unable either to accept whole-heartedly the conventions of society or to forge independently a path of her own (Doyle 1981: 58).¹⁶ As the rhetoric of that last reading suggests, the critical ground has shifted toward ideology, and we have moved, in E.D. Hirsch’s terms, from the novel’s meaning to its significance. Regardless of the way in which we respond to the final renunciation (a function of extrinsic variables), I think we can determine the speaker’s attitude toward it (a function of the discourse) by examining the enunciation in the final book.

George Eliot herself complained about the “want of proportionate fullness” in the final third of her novel (cited by Doyle, p. 60), and many readers feel the later books to be thinner than the earlier ones. But what is lacking in these books is not description or event but rather aspects of the enunciation to which the reader has grown accustomed. More particularly, in books six and seven, the speaker dispenses to a great degree with *external personal* commentary. Very rarely does the speaker step back from the protagonists and give the reader some kind of objective, dispassionate assessment of their

16. For different feminist readings of the final book, see Jacobus (1981) and Miller (1981: 36–48).

actions or behavior (cf. Doyle, pp. 73ff.). This is particularly true of the central figures, Maggie and Stephen. Most critics find Stephen Guest rather odious and self-serving, and lament the fact that the speaker fails to excoriate his behavior. In Stephen's case, the reason for the speaker's silence is fairly clear: to give the reader a secure vantage point from which to judge him would only make his actions the more reprehensible and thus forfeit any sympathy for his and Maggie's predicament. But the speaker also refuses to distance Maggie in the final books, systematically remaining within the compass of her tortured awareness of the unfolding drama. One critic claims that the narrator gradually changes in the course of the novel, that time erodes her initial authority (Freeman 1977:374–388), but that judgment converts a narrational strategy into an aesthetic flaw. The speaker deliberately retreats from aspects of the enunciation in order to achieve a definite end.

In the absence of the speaker's guidance, the reader necessarily falls back on another perspective, namely that of character, in order to verify an interpretation of the climactic event. Maggie's direct discourse provides the necessary moral standard with which to judge her actions. When Stephen comes to call on Maggie at her aunt Moss's, Maggie forestalls his impulsive words of love with the following speech:

Oh, it is difficult — life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us — the ties that have made others dependent on us — and would cut them in two. . . . 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. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them (pp. 423–424).

It is a mark of the justice and force of this speech that it terminates their indiscreet interview. The day after their elopement Maggie explains her determination to return home and face the consequences with a speech that reiterates the line of reasoning above. She notes that duty must rest on the "sacred ties" of the past and that without them "we should have no law but the inclination of the moment" (p. 448). Her final renunciation, the decision not to give way to the blandishments of Stephen's letter, is based upon the strength and resolve which memories of the past impart to her (p. 485).

When Stephen tries to stay Maggie's determination to return to St. Ogg's after the elopement by appealing to the purity and intensity of their love, she makes a significant qualification. She insists that she has not consented to their love with her "whole heart

and soul" (p. 449). She thus alludes to the question of division in her soul and emphasizes the absolute need to listen to the soul's promptings: "We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us — for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives" (p. 450). For Maggie, the voice of renunciation speaks with religious sanction and with her whole soul.

Her understanding of the situation and her consequent actions are lent even more force by the fact that they are echoed by another voice of wisdom in book seven, that of Dr. Kenn. He registers his approval of her actions in language that recalls Maggie's own.¹⁷ More importantly, however, Maggie's decision and her rationale accord with the moral standards which have been articulated and privileged by the enunciative metalanguage in the other books of the novel. The speaker clearly approves of Maggie's decision, agrees that in this troubled time of moral relativism the divine voice of fidelity to family and friends offers a secure footing for personal behavior.¹⁸ At one point, the speaker notes that "knowledge of the irreversible laws within and without [us], . . . governing the habits, becomes morality" (p. 269). The rhetoric of the final book suggests that Maggie has acquired understanding of just such a law.

Critics sometimes make much of one of the relatively infrequent bits of *ideological* commentary which punctuates the final book, one which directly addresses the "shifting relation between passion and duty" and whose rhetorical flourish seems to mark it as the book's "moral":

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy (p. 469).

It may well be that here the speaker wishes to warn against strict adherence to received notions of duty and to endorse the moral latitude of "situation ethics," but the entire logic of the novel suggests that, as regards Maggie's case at least, general rules or laws do circumscribe behavior, that the voice of "divine prompting" generally speaks for the principles of conscience, family, and the

17. At one point Kenn says, "At present everything seems to be tending towards the relaxation of ties — towards the substitution of wayward choice for the adherence to obligation, which has its roots in the past. Your conscience and your heart have given you true light on this point, Miss Tulliver" (p. 466).

18. Cf. Doyle (1981:84): "We assume that the narrator approves Maggie's ultimate decision, not because she clearly implies so, but because she preponderantly uses the girl's viewpoint." Doyle feels that Maggie's "particular tragedy is one of unfulfillment and not of final ennoblement" because Maggie betrays a "fatal timidity toward life."

past. "This 'invisible teacher,' " as one critic refers to the internalized voice of renunciation, "is an aspect of the self which one might call the voice of conscience or, alternatively, sublimated maxims" (Jacobus, p. 219).

As Mudhenk and others have remarked, the renunciation in the penultimate chapter is neither final nor absolute, qualified as it is by irresolution, hesitation, and indecision. In part, this lack of closure is a function of Maggie's passionate sensibility, her thirst for life, which fans her emotional need for the warmth and comfort of Stephen's love. Only unqualified reconciliation with her brother can fully satisfy that need, however, and the flood provides a convenient resting place once that reconciliation has taken place. The refusal to supply full closure to Maggie's struggle and the speaker's relative silence on matters thematic in the final chapters serve yet another function. In Maggie's instance, maxims, the received pronouncements of family and community and duty, only take hold as they have been internalized by the student who inherits them. The individual must learn their inherent wisdom in the real world of lived experience. This argument obtains of course for the individual reader, and the speaker's taciturnity at the end compels the individual reader to take a more active role in completing Maggie's history. If, as one critic maintains, "the moral functioning of the novel is also clear: by participating in the experience of the novel, the reader will receive an education of his own" (Weed 1978:428), then the speaker's thematic reticence acts as a pedagogical tool, eliciting from the reader a final reckoning of Maggie's dilemma. The authorial enunciation goes silent, only so that the reader might speak.

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