

21L471 Major English Novels

Take-home exam on Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*

Due Thurs. May 6, in class

Everyone should answer question 1, then choose **either** 2 or 3.

1. In Bk. IV, Chapter 1, Eliot writes: “I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness [i.e., of the St. Ogg’s social world surrounding Maggie]; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie – how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human 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.” Write about the first chapter of Eliot’s novel (“Outside Dorlcote Mill”), considering the narrator’s relationship to the story she is about to tell. Who is this narrator, and what can we infer about her? Where *is* she during the reflections that occupy this chapter? (look closely) Why do you suppose Eliot chose to begin the novel this way? What imagery does this chapter use to introduce the idea Eliot describes in the passage quoted above – that of the interplay between forward-tending and backward-tending (or homeward-tending) impulses? Give as close and thorough an analysis of this short chapter as you can, referring to passages later in the novel as necessary.
2. How does Eliot’s novel exemplify the biologist Ernst Haeckel’s famous phrase “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”? Is Eliot entirely consistent in her adherence to this model?
3. How is the manner of Tom and Maggie’s death related to the goal that Maggie and Eliot are seeking throughout the novel? Make sure to include some careful discussion of the last two paragraphs of Bk. VII, Chapter 2.

Guidelines:

1. responses must be typed and double-spaced throughout, using a 12-point font. (Times New Roman is good). Pages should be numbered and stapled together.
2. Append a title page to your exam that includes your name, the date, and a **signed pledge** reading “This exam represents my own work and does not rely on outside sources, except where noted.”
3. You should not need to consult any outside sources to write these responses. If you do, you must cite all such sources, including websites, on a Works Cited list at the end of your exam.
4. Brevity is not a virtue. Thicken your responses with detailed reference to the text. When you cite the text, refer not only to page number but also to Volume and chapter numbers. For example: (p. 311; Vol. III, ch. 2).
5. Please contact me if you have any questions. If you need an extension for any reason, please ask as soon as possible.