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Renie Johnson, M.A., M.Phil.

Affirmation of Life in Lloyd C. Douglas' *Magnificent Obsession*

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## **Lloyd Douglas’ Focus**

The paper deals with the theme of affirmation of lives in Douglas’ *Magnificent Obsession*. Lloyd. C. Douglas occupies a unique place in the history of American fiction with his spiritual ideas. An attempt is made in this paper to analyze the revival of life and faith from a state of dejection, frustration, alienation and despair.

## **Loss of Religious Faith**

Loss of religious faith and ever-growing pessimism mark the post-war world. The disintegration of faith and traditional beliefs has led writers to seek refuge from uncertainty and perplexity in some mystic religion of blood. The lead characters of Douglas in *Magnificent Obsession* highlights the state of misery, service and ministry (Divinity).

The lives of Hudson and Bobby Merrick are transformed after their encounter with the Major Personality. They are directed towards a path leading to progression and by submitting themselves to God they find the ultimate goal of the Gospel. There is a transformation from misery to ministry. Douglas provides a way to all the problems in life.

## **Affirmative View: Ultimate Triumph with the Help of Grace from Above**

Douglas in ‘Magnificent Obsession’ highlights various characters who after their encounter with the Supreme Being are led to self-realisation and self-fulfilment. The novel discusses the miserable state of the characters that ultimately with God triumph over life’s difficult situations and start ministering unto others. This kind of an affirmative view of life is perceived in the novels of Lloyd. C. Douglas.

## **A Portrait**

Doctor Wayne Hudson, the widely known brain surgeon of Detroit evolves to great heights from a very unhappy and bitter life. From childhood, he experiences unspoken sufferings, poverty and all the pains and problems in life. At the age of fifteen he enters a high school and simultaneously works in the home of Doctor Cummins. It is Hudson’s duty to look after Cummins. In the Cummins home, Hudson was an errand boy, hostler, accountant and on occasion nurse, cook, private secretary and rescue squad. His boyhood

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ambition of becoming a surgeon is realized finally when Cummins sends him to a college for medical training. The death of Hudson's first wife due to long illness brings him on the verge of failure and due to depression Hudson is half-minded to give up surgery. The meeting of Randolph an exceptionally gifted hypnotist transforms his whole life. Randolph turns out to be a Miracle Man.

We see that all success in Hudson's life has been gained only after his encounter with Randolph. Hudson is enlightened on the rules for generating the mysterious power in life. The various stages of Randolph's successful career as a great sculptor revolutionize Hudson's life. The turning point in his life is seen when he hears a sermon for achieving power.

### **The First and Subsequent Steps for Recovery**

“A projection of one's self into other personalities” (*Magnificent Obsession*) is the first step towards achievement of power. This sermon revolutionizes the life of Randolph .A peculiar intimacy is formed between him and the mysterious power. Randolph perceives the day coming alive in his hands.

After his experiences with Randolph, Hudson is in a grand state of mystification and considers himself a cold blooded materialist. According to Randolph, one of the formulae to receive power is based on building one's personality into another rather than building it out of other personalities .To quote “...this theory I am talking about doesn't ask you to build your personality out of other peoples personalities but into them .You know all about blood transfusion. One man puts life into another man” (*Magnificent Obsession*).

### **Living Under the Grace**

Hudson's sincere and philanthropic nature is revealed when he helps the poor and the needy without expecting any return and instructs them never to acknowledge his help. The untimely death of Doctor Hudson causes a great commotion in the hospital and the rumor appears difficult for it is true .Hudson's life is instrumental in bringing about the changes, particularly in the life of Bobby Merrick who is changed from an irresponsible person to a successful brain surgeon. His life is transformed by the secret journal of Hudson.

Due to utter desolation and loneliness, Bobby never dreams of any success in life. He experiences a bitter childhood. The turning point in Bobby's life is seen after his stay in the Bright wood hospital and after reading Hudson's journal. He finds himself entering more confidently into the mood of the man who has proposed the principles. He becomes conscious of a curious sense of exultation.

### **A Spiritual Guide**

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The Bible becomes a source of inspiration to Bobby Merrick. According to Hudson “One should be ready to face all problems while trying to project personalities. One must be prepared to face all failures and disillusionments” (*Magnificent Obsession*). Being much absorbed in the personality of Christ, Bobby remarks “I am tied up to the major personality like a beam of sun-shine in the sun” (*Magnificent Obsession*).

There is a divine generation and the impartation of a new life principle within the heart. From a meaningless and aimless past, Bobby Merrick emerges out as a responsible man, who finds success in life after establishing the right relationship with God.

### **Untiring Effort to Help Others**

The part played by Bobby in the life of Joyce Hudson and Helen is noteworthy. He takes great pains in bringing about some changes in Joyce who represents the post-war rebellious youth. Rebellious and erratic as she is after her father’s death, having given herself to the worldly pleasures becomes uncontrollable. It is Merrick who transforms the life of Joyce from an immature, rebellious and immoral nature. She is molded by him in a way she realizes her immoral past and regrets for choosing the wrong path in life. Is after many days of serious hard work that Bobby invents a device that revolutionizes brain surgery. Even the most complicated operations are performed successfully by Merrick.

Thus the death of Hudson proves not a failure of hope for the people, because Bobby Merrick has become a great surgeon in his place and has thus evolved into the sunlight of success.

### **Transformation of Lives Is the Goal**

Lloyd C. Douglas in ‘Magnificent Obsession’ has focused on characters like Doctor Hudson and Bobby Merrick who are transformed after their encounter with the major personality that is Christ. From a state of misery, unhappiness and hopelessness they rise to a state of service and ministry unto unfortunate people. They show a positive attitude towards life than being pessimistic. They invest their lives in others. They transmit not only what they know but more importantly what they are. This transmission entails the imparting of a life.

The characters are directed towards a path leading to progression when by submitting themselves to God they find the ultimate goal of the Gospel. There is no question of belief but of experience. Religious experience is absolute. “No matter what the world thinks about the religious experience, the one who has it possesses the great treasure of a thing that has provided him with a source of life, meaning and beauty and that has given a new splendor to the world and mankind” [Jones].

### **Affirmative Possibilities in Unsurpassable Conditions**

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From his effective portrayal of the possible redemptive factors and available remedial measures in human existence, Douglas proves his ardent faith in God and his transforming redemptive power. He visualizes affirmative possibilities even in the midst of seemingly unsurpassable conditions and asserts that life triumphs with God. The principle of loving God and fellowmen becomes one of the most confirming factors in many troubles and lonely life. This is in accordance with the views of Doctor George. D. Watson, who says “Divine love is to our spiritual nature, what blood is to our physical being -the essence of life and the source of health and strength, the very elixir of being”.

Having given themselves to the Almighty, Randolph, Doctor Hudson and Bobby Merrick are emboldened to take from him forgiveness, grace, power and love. With faith in God they face all trials and tribulations with fortitude.

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#### Reference

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Renie Johnson, M.A., M Phil.  
Department of English  
Sri Sarada College for Women  
Salem 636016  
Tamilnadu, India  
[reniejohnson@ymail.com](mailto:reniejohnson@ymail.com)

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