THE SOCIALIZATION OF UNUSUAL WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

Jennifer Rebecca Nachlas Hackett

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Jennifer Rebecca Nachlas Hackett

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ABSTRACT

George Eliot perceived society as evolutionary, moving toward a moral order based on altruism and feeling. Her novels usually present a young person who, because of suffering generated by a particular disability, progresses from self-regard to social love. In the majority of her novels the central characters are women and thier particular disabilities are functions of their sex, arising from the limitations and restrictions placed on women in an unevolved society. Although the movement to social love involves a change from emphasis on the particular disability to a more general emphasis on the human condition, her novels include a great deal of ironic criticism directed at the treatment of women by their society. In the cases of Maggie Tulliver, Esther Lyon and Mrs. Transome, the disabilities of being women are not alleviated by increased socialization. In spite of an emphasis on the generality of the human condition; both the characteristics and effects of socialization vary as a function of gender.

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VICTORIAN SOCIETY and GEORGE ELIOT

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The tendency to discuss the Victorian Age as a static composition formed of defined and pervasive characteristics is fading as historical distance lends perspective. "Victorian" is still a useful adjective, but the scope both of its implications and applications enlarges as, from the vantage point of the modern era, scholars reexamine the cliches and definitions applied to the age. We speak now not only of the Victorians, but also of the "other" Victorians; yet they all are Victorians. Walter Houghton[1] and Jerome H. Buckley[2] present studies indicating the complexity of the age; the static composition dissolves as contrast, transition and ambiguity emerge as outstanding characteristics. As society reeled under the impact of the industrial revolution, its structures underwent massive and easily observable reformulations. Less immediately evident was the revolution in intellectual spheres.

1 Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957).

2 Jerome H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (London: Allen and Urwin, 1952).

> The radical transition in the human mind was less apparent at first than that in society, but sensitive observers were soon aware that the traditional framework of thought was breaking down. By 1838 Thomas Arnold had noticed a new ' atmosphere of unrest and paradox hanging around many of our ablest young men of the present day.' He was speaking not merely of religious doubts but ' of questions as to great points in moral and intellectual matters; where things which have been settled for centuries seem to be again brought into discussion.'This is the atmosphere reflected in the early essays of Macaulay and Carlyle, in Sartor Resartus and Mill's Spirit of the Age, and the novels of Sterling and Maurice. All of them, written between 1825 and 1834 show that the old certitudes are certain no longer and that a reconstruction of thought is now a prime necessity. [3]

This reconstruction continued throughout the Victorian period, and is revealed by many eminent Victorian thinkers as it occurred in different spheres. Of particular interest were concepts of morality; significant changes in concepts of moral behavior grew out of the period, but debate centered about questions concerning the basis of moral responsibility. " The fact is, while moral values remained firm until about 1870, all intellectual theories, including those of morality, were insecure." [4] The primary reasons for this insecurity were the immense shifts in religious thought which occurred among many Victorian intellectuals.

[3] Houghton, p. 24.

[4] Houghton, p. 26.

George Eliot, the subject of this study, is a prime example. Basil Willey writes, " Probably no English writer of the time, and certainly no novelist, more fully epitomizes the century; her development is a paradigm, her intellectual biography a graph, of its most decided trend. Starting from evangelical Christianity, the curve passes through doubt to a reinterpreted Christ and a religion of humanity: beginning with God, it ends in Duty."[5] This 'religious' reconstruction is of paramount importance to the Victorian age primarily because as emphasis moves from God to Man, all ' religious ' questions and concerns shift from traditional, spiritual reference points, to social. Morality becomes responsibility not to God, but to man. The meaning of the individual's responsibility to man is central to all of George Eliot's fiction.

The influences which affected this change were numerous, as many nineteenth-century intellectuals extended the application of "scientific assumptions and methods from the physical world to the whole life of man."[6] This idea was not new, but never before had the concepts of natural, invariable law and causation been applied so widely and optimistically to the study of man. George Eliot was

5 Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), pp. 204-5.

6 Houghton, p. 33.

twenty-two when she was introduced to Charles Bray's The Philosophy of Necessity and Charles C. Hennell's An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity in 1841. Her ardent evangelism underwent a rapid transition. In the Inquiry Hennell critically analyzed the Gospels, and, struck by differing accounts of the history of Jesus, he examined the story as mythology. His conclusions are summarized by Basil Willey.

> Supernatural and miraculous events are out of the order of Nature; but the operation of natural law is uniform and invariable, therefore miracles do not happen and have never happened. The earliest histories, both secular and religious, of all nations, have been full of mythological and legendary stories intermixed with genuine historical matter; why suppose that those of the Jews and Christians are exempted from this rule?[7]

Hennell concluded, however, that the " 'essence' of Christianity remained unaffected by the destruction of its miraculous foundations."[8]

Although they worked independently, his views closely match those of David Friedrich Strauss, whose Das Leben Jesu George Eliot translated from the German. Strauss

> ... identifies the 'substance' of Christianity with the deepest philosophic truth, that is to say, when he finds in it a symbolic expression of Hegel's profoundest insights. The Absolute

[7] Willey, p. 214.

[8] Ibid., p. 216.

> Idea splits dialectically into One and Many, Self and Other; it realizes itself in History; it comes to self-consciousness in Man. Man is the true ' Incarnation ';the world in him returns in reconcilement to God. For Christ, the one, the unique God-man, substitute Humanity, and you have the ultimate meaning of the great myth.9

In the early 1850's, to the humanism of Hennell and Strauss was added the positivistic influences of Feuerbach and Comte. George Eliot was at work on a translation of Feuerbach when in 1853, Harriet Martineau's two volume translation of Comte's Positive Philosophy appeared.The coincidence of their conclusions, reached by such different roads, convinced George Eliot all the more of the truth of the Positive Philosophy. According to Willey,

> Feuerbach's work belongs to that powerful stream of tendency, flowing from Hegel to Marx, which was driving men deeper and deeper in upon themselves, and teaching them to discover in their own needs and longings as individuals, but above all as members of human society, the source and indeed the whole of reality of the ideal worlds of thought and faith. Religion is simply a mirage, reflecting in shadow-pictures the real tensions and discontents of earthly life; in early times, when men genuinely 'believed', it served its purpose, but now that it can only be upheld by sophistries, it is seen for what it is - a delusive spectre which beckons us away from the true sphere of our duty and service. Religion is sociology and anthropology masquerading as mystery and dogma. 10

Feuerbach's work echoed and reaffirmed the influence of Hennell and Strauss. Gordon Haight reports, " The powerful appeal the book had for her sprang, not from its bold

9 Ibid., p. 226.

10 Ibid., pp. 231-2.

humanism ... but from Feuerbach's daring conception of love: 'Love is God himself, and apart from it there is no God ... not a visionary, imaginary love - no! a real love, a love which has flesh and blood, which vibrates as an almighty force through all living.' She agreed wholeheartedly with Feuerbach's distinction between 'self-interested love' and 'true human love', which 'impels the sacrifice of self to another.' "[11]

Comte, the founder of the science of sociology, saw the intellectual movement of his time as the beginning of a new age, the final step in the progression of thought by which man explained phenomena and related to his world. Man moved from a theological stage in which phenomena were explained by supernatural agencies to an explanation in terms of metaphysical abstractions; now all phenomena were to be investigated and explained by positive, scientific laws. Comte saw the historical process as an organic process; the study of human history and human nature would yield the discovery of the dynamic laws by which human society functioned. The end of the Theological and Metaphysical stages also meant the end of theological religion; the advent of the Positive stage brought with it a new concept of Positive Religion, the Religion of Humanity, which was based on

[11] Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford: At the Claredon Press, 1968), p. 137.

Feeling, Love and Morality.

> In the future, the grand principle will be the subordination of all thought, all intellect, to the moral principle; men of science will become philosophers and philosophers 'Priests'. Life thus becomes 'a continuous and intense act of worship.' The grand aims, to which all effort is now to be directed, are the amelioration of the order of Nature where that order is at once most imperfect and most modifiable, i.e. human society; and the triumph of social feeling (altruism) over self-love: 'Live for Others!' becomes the great, the only really human, maxim. [12]

George Eliot did not join wholeheartedly in the formal structures of Comte's new religion, but his ideas, along with those of Spencer and Lewes, helped shape her own philosophy and conception of Religion of Humanity. In a letter dated January, 1853, she wrote, "I begin to feel for other people's wants and sorrows a little more than I used to. Heaven help us! said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another." [13]

Bernard Paris discusses the philosophic basis of her world view.

> The order of things is unconscious, unresponsive to man, unrelated to human desires and values; but there is, in Eliot's view, another order, a human moral order, which <u>is</u> responsive to consciousness and which <u>is</u> a source and sanction

[12] Willey, p. 196.

[13] Ibid., p. 230.

> of moral values ... The moral order is an evolved order, but its evolution differs from that found in the non-moral order in that it is produced and directed in some degree by human feeling and conscious purpose, casual(sic) agencies which are entirely absent in non-moral evolution.[14]

The evolutionary direction of the moral order was produced by the amoral cosmic process which selected for 'social union' because of its survival value. In order to exist in an 'unresponsive' cosmos, men banded together to have greater effect on the forces inimical to survival; those who most effectively achieved this social union had the greatest chances for survival. This tendency was not only naturally selected, but reaffirmed by habit and tradition which encouraged social characteristics in individuals.

> The moral order is manifested in love and fellow-feeling between individuals, in the products and traditions of human culture, in the laws and institutions of society, in the creeds, symbols, and ceremonies of religion; in general, in any human institution or activity which by interposing itself between the individual and the alien cosmos lessens the disparity between the inward and the outward and humanizes the world.[15]

The foundation of human society and the moral order is based on the evolution in man of consciousness, "... the faculty which enables man to separate the self from the not self and objects from feelings."[16] This ability to distinguish

[14] Bernard Paris, "George Eliot's Religion of Humanity", English Literary History, XXIX (December, 1962) rpt. in G.R. Creeger, ed., George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p.14.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p.15.

self from others also produces an 'awareness of species'; that is, of not selves, who are yet like self, and this in turn is "the basis of all ethical action, of the sense of solidarity with our own kind which leads us to sacrifice our own immediate gratification for the good of others."[17] The evolution of consciousness in man rendered him innately social and sympathetic, qualities which had high survival value. These qualities are strengthened and encouraged by traditional social forms and values. For the individual, sympathy is partially a function of experience.

> Unless we have had an experience much like that which another person is undergoing, we cannot perceive and share the states of feeling signified by his behavior. Thus Eliot felt that suffering humanizes. Our own suffering, if it does not simply embitter, leads us to be sympathetic with the sufferings of others, and our sympathy leads us to behave so that others will not suffer as we have.[18]

The evolution of the moral order in society is ultimately the result of moral advances in individuals, who, because of their greater consciousness, intelligence, sympathy and experience, manifest a morality which is superior to the morality which reposes in traditional social systems.

> The individual who has a strongly sympathetic nature combined with profound personal experience and the ability to imagine the inner states of

[17] Ibid., p. 16.

[18] Ibid., pp.17-18.

> others has a moral life that is independent of tradition; he has a more highly developed conscience and a truer sense of good and evil than tradition, in its present state of development, could supply. The sympathetic tendencies can lead a person to rebel against the harsh usages of tradition, even when such rebellion involves great personal risk.[19]

This rebellion is only apparent, since its aim is the further good of society and the evolution of more social vision and systems.

The relationship between the individual and his society is itself evolutionary. His social inheritance invests him with social and sympathetic tendencies; the society into which he is born provides a traditional framework of accumulated moral values and modes for their expression, or Duty. These are modified in the individual by his intelligence and experience which affect his consciousness and his interpretation of his relationship to society. This is the process of socialization.

Because it is a process, socialization is difficult to define. All of George Eliot's characters are socialized in that they all have some understanding of their relationships to society, whether conscious or not, and they behave in reference to others in their social sphere with some awareness of the limitations and restrictions placed on them

[19] Ibid., p. 17.

by their societies. But the degree of acceptance with which the individual regards his social limitations varies; for there is always a tension between his regard for himself and his regard for others. "Man is a product of both the animal kingdom and the social organism ... Man's egoistic impulses, his concern for himself at the expense of others, are manifestations of his animal nature; but his moral life, his desire for the welfare of others, is largely a consequence of his relation to society."[20] Thus an individual's socialization is always subject to development as a result of his experience in society; he learns to recognize and, hopefully, tolerate, social limitations on acting freely and willfully; or, in other words, the necessary submission of self to society. For some characters the tension between self and society is minimal; social limitations do not interfere with self-fulfillment, as for example, in Mrs. Poyser in Adam Bede. For others the tension is greater, and the ongoing process of socialization is more evident.

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From her first piece of published fiction "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" in Scenes of Clerical Life.

[20] Ibid., p. 15.

to her last completed novel, Daniel Deronda, George Eliot has demonstrated a major concern in the precise placement of her characters in a social environment. Although this statement, or some modification of it, could be applied to virtually any author who deals with characterization, in George Eliot's works the balance between involvement and detatchment, sympathy and realism, results in a clarity of focus which is one of the major elements of her greatness. The discrepancies that exist among the social ideal, the individual ideal, the social reality and the individual reality form the basic structure of all of her fiction, for all of her central characters. George Creeger outlines the basic situation of her fiction:

> Characteristically, the following kind of situation is likely to obtain in a George Eliot novel; despite the presence of a fully conceived and often minutely reproduced society, the principal emphasis falls upon the problems of the individual. This individual, normally young and inexperienced, is presented as intellectually capable and emotionally intense, but morally obtuse. The cause of the obtuseness is almost invariably a form of pride - the blindness of egoism. 21

Egoism is for George Eliot, as for other Victorian intellectuals, the quality most inhibiting to the moral development of an individual in that it prevents the individual from establishing

21 George R. Creeger, "Introduction," George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p.5.

satisfactory relationships with others. Bernard Paris describes " three basic ways, in George Eliot's novels, in which the self relates to the world."

> It may relate to the world egoistically (or subjectively), in which case the distinction between the inward and the outward is obscured; self is seen as the center of the world and the world as an extension of self. It may be overwhelmed and threatened with annihilation by the hard reality of the world; it then experiences a state of disillusionment or disenchantment in which the world, even the human order, is seen as a totally alien, non-human existence and self as dehumanized, and completely insignificant or spiritually homeless. Or, retaining its integrity but giving up its egocentricity, it may relate to the world at once meaningfully and objectively, seeing the world as an autonomous existence of which it is part. [22]

Characters in George Eliot's fiction occur in each of these stages, but the central theme is the moral progress of an individual through the stages, a movement Barbara Hardy describes as " from self-regard to social love".[23]

Usually this individual is encouraged in moral growth by another individual superior in moral growth and social vision. Laurence Lerner terms this model the " influence of a noble nature," relating the model to George Eliot's fictional theme of the religion of humanity. "What had usually

[22] Bernard J. Paris, Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1956), p. 128.

[23] Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1959), p. 234.

been admitted, in the evangelical view, as a necessary stimulus - the minister whose preaching or conversion first opened the sinner's heart - is here moved to the centre of the process. It need no longer be a minister; but this fine person who catches the imagination of the penitent is now not merely the stimulus to but the cause of the changing of heart."[24] Since, with the exception of Silas Marner, all of George Eliot's novels after the first concentrate on the moral development and social problems of women, nearly all of her 'penitents' are female, and nearly all of her 'fine persons' are male, a situation which prompted Barbara Hardy's characterization of "the hero as mentor." Occasionally the direction is reversed, as with Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, or Dorothea and Lydgate; but these exceptions are outweighed by the frequency of male mentors, Tryan, Philip Wakem, Savonarola, Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda.

The role of the mentor is basically to alert the 'penitent' to the form of his or her egoism, and provide a model of greater socialization and moral development. The relationship between mentor and penitent is always established on a strong emotional basis, sometimes 'spiritual', as with Romola and Savonarola, but more often affection or love, as with Maggie and Philip, Gwendolen and Daniel, Esther and Felix. The centrality of feeling as a motivating force occurs throughout George Eliot's fiction. Feelings of affection or love, however personal and egoistical, tend to sensitize

24 Laurence Lerner, The Truthtellers: Jane Austen, George Eliot D.H. Lawrence (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 47.

the individual to awareness, sympathy and concern for another. If this 'other' is morally superior to the penitent, he can direct this expansion of awareness and sympathy to the larger sphere of society.

Although, as Creeger points out, the emphasis of George Eliot's fiction is on the individual, the 'fully conceived and often minutely reproduced society' occupies a crucial position in the thematic development, since the basis of individual morality depends on the relationship of the self to the society. In one sense, the individual and the society cannot really be separated in George Eliot's fiction - the society is as integral a part of the individual as the individual is of the society. But the movement toward social love incorporates a shifting perspective of the individual's perception of society, and thus, her central characters all exhibit carefully articulated intellectual and emotional positions in this respect. However, her characters also exist in society, act in society and are acted upon by their society.

Society for George Eliot was a far reaching phenomena, interrelationships extending deeply into the past and far in to the present; a complex of influences organically structured, and all arising in the natural interactions of men over time. Society evolved slowly, and the present

always grew out of the past; tradition, and continuity are the vehicles for the moral wisdom and development of the community. Time functions similarly for the individual. As Buckley points out in The Triumph of Time, "If the present seemed wavering and amorphous, the past at least was fixed and definite. Natural piety involved an honesty of memory willing to confront the quite immutable truth of antecedents. Accordingly, Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on Floss who has once been strong, refuses to yield to a last temptation 'when the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness' comes upon her 'like a pang of conscious degradation!'" [25]

Society, or community, plays a significant role in George Eliot's novels. Dorothy van Ghent, in an article on Adam Bede, suggests, "...it is the community that is the protagonist of this novel, the community as the repository of certain shared and knowlegeable values that have developed out of the ages of work and care and common kindness." [26] David Carroll proposes that, "George Eliot envisages society in her novels not only as an aggregation of individual relationships, but

25 Jerome H. Buckley, The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress and Decadence (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1966), p.97.

26 Dororthy van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p.177.

also as a collective entity. She places this entity alongside the individual as an actor in the drama and traces their interrelationship, insisting upon their interdependence by means of the structure of her novels." [27]

Critics do not agree as to the nature and demands of society in relation to the individual as presented by George Eliot. Calvin Bedient writes:

> By contrast, in George Eliot there is, for the most part, no objection whatever to the forces, the makeup, of her own society, much less to the idea of society itself. On the contrary, the chief burden of her novels is that human beings are not social, not "Victorian" enough - society having as yet failed to redeem them from what Freud called "the crude life of the instincts." George Eliot's characteristic subject is the necessary submission of the individuals to their own society, be it Renaissance Florence or nineteenth-century St. Ogg; and this submission is to be made not so much in the interest of this or that society as in the general interest of the socialization of the self. For her any society is preferable to the explosive egoism of the individual. Society's function is to contain man, and it is not for the prisoner to complain. [28]

Bedient oversimplifies the motive behind the process he calls socialization, that is, "the necessary submission of the individuals to their own society;" within the ironic structures of the novels much criticism is leveled at the 'unevolved' narrowness of certain communities, just as certain 'unevolved'

[27] David R. Carroll, "Felix Holt: Society as Protagonist," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVII, No. 3 (Dec. 1962), 237-52 rpt. in G.R. Creeger, ed., George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 124.

[28] Calvin Bedient, Architects of Self: George Eliot, D.H. Laurence and E.M. Forster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 33-34.

characters receive sympathetic but sharply ironic criticism. Socialization is necessary in spite of the faults and limitations of society - this is often the 'tragedy' for, or basis of the tragic choice of the morally conscious character. Yet even characters who are morally underdeveloped and egoistical participate in the tragedy of a limited society. An egoistical attitude towards society does not predispose society to gratify the desires of the egoistic character; submission to society is still necessary, as Hetty Sorel, Mrs. Transome, Godfrey, Bulstrode and so many others find out. An individual cannot control his destiny because his destiny is determined by interrelationships which extend far beyond his or her vision and control. Raymond Williams discusses this, and some of the implications in Culture and Society:

> Always, at her best, she is unrivalled in English fiction in her creation and working of the complication and consequence inherent in all relationships. From such a position in experience she naturally sees society at a deeper level than its political abstractions indicate, and sees her own society, in her own choice of word, as 'vicious.' Her favorite metaphor for society is a network: a 'tangled skein'; a 'tangled web'; 'the long-growing evils of a great nation are a tangled business.' This, again, is just; it is the ground of her finest achievements. But the metaphor, while having a positive usefulness in its indication of complexity, has also a negative effect. For it tends to represent social - and indeed directly personal - relationships as passive: acted upon rather than acting. [29]

[29] Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), p. 117.

But passivity is relative, and some characters have more tendency toward action than others, and more influence. John Holloway, in The Victorian Sage, points out, "But for George Eliot every character has his distinctive occupational niche, and it is this which determines his nature and gives him what leverage he has upon the course of the action."[30] This is certainly true for her male characters. Tom Tulliver, faced with financial ruin and community disgrace, goes into business and redeems the family from debt and disgrace. But this was his option as a male. Gwendolen Harleth, faced with a similar situation, has only the options of a position as governess, or a marriage of convenience. Many of George Eliot's female characters face similarly limited options - Maggie Tulliver and Esther Lyon become governesses, Mary Garth a dependent female companion to her sick uncle; Mrs. Transome and Gwendolen choose marriages of convenience. Dorothea Brooke is independently wealthy, but even she cannot engage in the social action which she so desperately craves, except as the wife of a socially active man; in a sense, her marriage to Casaubon is as much a marriage of convenience as the others. Throughout her fiction George Eliot plays ironically on the limited options of her female characters; but this is only one aspect of the problems innate to women

[30] John Holloway, The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1962), p. 118.

treated in her fiction. She continually deals with social and moral consequences specifically detrimental to women. Illegitimacy, for example, occurs as a function of plot and structure in Adam Bede, Silas Marner, Felix Holt, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda. The only work untouched by these themes is The Mill on the Floss, and in this work major attention is given to the problems of a woman desiring an indepentent financial and moral place in society. These concerns affect male characters as well - Harold Transome and even Matthew Jermyn feel the consequences of illegitimacy; but the consequences are of a different order than they are for Mrs. Transome or Hetty Sorel. Lydgate suffers from an unsuitable and unhappy marriage, but his occupational resources provide a kind of power and gratification unavailable to Mrs. Transome, Gwendolen Harleth, or Dorothea during her union with Casaubon. Of course, many of George Eliot's female characters are content with their social options - the Mrs. Poysers, the Denners, the Celia Brookes. But nowhere in her fiction is there a male counterpart to the Maggies, Gwendolens and Dorotheas who have no social outlet for their talents and energies.

The specific emphasis on the particular moral development, socialization and social problems of women as

distinct from those of men in George Eliot's fiction has virtually been ignored by most leading George Eliot critics, with the outstanding exception of Barbara Hardy. Hardy not only recognizes the pattern, but investigates the use Eliot makes of it.

> The heroines of George Eliot's novels - Maggie Tulliver, Romola, Esther Lyon, Dorothea Brooke, and Gwendolen Harleth - all share the ex officio disability of being women. A disability is, as we have seen, something which George Eliot seems to have needed for the compassionate appeal of her tragedies. In Amos it was an unattractive person and little sensibility; in Adam it was social inferiority; in Hetty it was narrow imagination and humble position. With the heroines it almost ceases to be a matter of class - though Maggie is an exception - and becomes a matter of gender. The woman's disability, like the inferior changes of the Poor Man or the Younger Son of folk tale, provides the handicap. It is a handicap which does not necessarily make the impetus for tragedy, but which plays a large part in determining the quality of the tragic suffering and redemption. [31]

Since the 'disability' is a function of limitations and restrictions inherent in society, George Eliot's consistent use of this particular disability suggests a conscious and sustained criticism of the social limitations placed on women. Hardy cautions, however, against over-emphasis on a 'feminist' interpretation of George Eliot's fiction. To Hardy, the disability is a device of form, and the

[31] Hardy, p. 47.

particular disability of being women functions just as any other disability. She emphasized George Eliot's 'intention' in this respect in a discussion of Middlemarch.

> Any suggestion of a feminist moral is controlled and extended by the complex plot, which puts Dorothea in her place as an example less of a feminine problem than of the frustrations of the human condition. This is made emphatically plain by George Eliot's revision of the end of the novel. The first edition (1871-2), in parts, had this passage in its penultimate paragraph:
>
> > Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighborhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which whe was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage ffom a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age - on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance - on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly-asserted beliefs.
>
> In the edition of 1874 this passage was deleted, and whatever the reasons for the deletion, its effect is undoubtedly that of a clear movement away from the particular case of Dorothea. The precise references in this first version are, in the second, covered by generalization. The last version compresses and summarizes the particular indictment in the words 'the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion.' The more general and open statement glances at Lydgate, and at Bulstrode, Casaubon, and all the others, not merely at Dorothea's handicap as a woman. [32]

[32] Ibid., p. 52.

Hardy's caution is clearly valid. George Eliot was not a feminist, and consistently refused to associate herself with the feminist movement of her day in any active way. However, the role of women in society was a topic of much intellectual debate, and George Eliot's intellectual familiarity with the ideas of Comte, Mill and Ruskin certainly must have led her to serious speculation on the question. Clearly she rejected Comte's position which "saw women as biologically specialized in vocation in the most limited way, and saw no need for woman's place to leave the home in the Positivist Utopia," [33] and consistently illustrates the limitations of this position in the ironic structures of her novels. Her own unusual situation in society imposed restrictions and limitations even more stringent than usual. Her ardent, rebellious independence in the religious and social choices of her life, severely compromised her own role as a woman in Victorian society: and the adoption of a masculine pseudonym, and all that it implies, indicates a keen consciousness of the problem.

The example Hardy chooses clearly indicates George Eliot's conscious, critical awareness of the delicate tension in her writing between 'feminist Moral' and general human moral. The revision, indeed, indicates

[33] Ibid., p. 57.

a conscious desire to emphasize the human. But the very fact of the revision also implies an unconscious tendency to emphasize the 'feminine.' All of the themes in her fiction depend finally on the relationships that exists between an individual and society. In George Eliot's moral framework the enlightened individual man and the enlightened individual woman perceive society in the same way. But society does not operate with such equality. Society relates to men as men and to women as women; and the enlightened woman must deal with the same society which made being female a disability in the first place. She cannot relate to society in precisely the same way as her masculine counterpart, because her mode in the society is radically different than his. She may suffer from the generality of 'the human condition' and she may respond with the generality of a 'religion of humanity'; but her specific relationship with society must be at least partially determined by her sex.

The present study concentrates on this specific aspect of the relationship between the individual and society of three women, Maggie Tulliver, Esther Lyon and Mrs.Transome. All three are unusually intelligent and articulate and possess 'sensibility'. Maggie and Esther, profiting from the guidance of their male mentors, develop morally in the course of the novels, moving from self-regard to social love.

from egoism to altruism. This movement has been carefully studied by many critics, notably Paris, and will not be analyzed here. Rather, analysis will be directed to the effect socialization has in terms of their specific disability, the 'disability of being women.' Mrs. Transome's development in the course of Felix Holt lacks the explicit moral dimension stressed in the development of Esther or Maggie, however, she does achieve a greater degree of socialization in that, as the consequences of her past life materialize, and her 'worst fears' are realized, she perceives something more of the nature of society and her relationship to it. She does not, in the course of the novel, understand what she perceives in moral terms; and since she is last seen in the novel at the moment of her greatest suffering, there is no development of the effect of this suffering on her nature. But, in part precisely because she doesn't 'generalize' her view-point as a result of moral growth, she is more keenly aware of and verbal as to the social consequences of her specific disability. She is not only a woman, but an aging woman - and age is a determining factor in society's relationship to women. Mrs. Transome's socialization is in part a function of this change.

Although this study is limited to only three women, the approach is applicable to many others. Dorothea and

Gwendolen in particular would be ideal subjects for similar studies, and Hetty could provide an extremely interesting contrast. It is hoped that the results of this project, thought limited, will warrant further research of this type.

CHAPTER II:

Independence

INDEPENDENCE

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
> Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
> Man with the head and woman with the heart;
> Man to command, and woman to obey;
> All else confusion.
>
> Tennyson, The Princess.[1]

Barbara Hardy exempts Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss from her general statement that the heroine's disability in George Eliot's novels is a function of gender. For Maggie, she asserts, the disability is a matter of class. Her reasons for making this assertion are not clear. Certainly Maggie suffered as a result of her father's financial problems, but her suffering and alienation predate this event, and are clearly developed as a function of sex role.

The problem of sex role is illustrated so clearly throughout the first two books of the novel that it needs only brief development here. Mr. Tulliver presents a summary of the problem:

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1 Tennyson, The Princess, Part V., l. 437 - 41.

> "It's a pity but what she'd been the lad - she'd ha' been a match for the lawyers, she would. It's the wonderful'st thing" - here he lowered his voice - " as I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute - bein'a good-looking woman too, and come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak like; for I wasn't a-goin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world were turned topsy-turvey. It's an uncommon puzzling' thing." [2]

Maggie is extremely proud of her intelligence, and clearly delights in it. It is evident from her parents' conversation that she devotes a great deal of time to reading and can demonstrate a well-practiced knowledge (albeit immature understanding) of what she has read. Her father views her precocity with divided feelings; on the personal level he is pleased and proud of her, but on a social level he regards her intelligence as a drawback or limitation. As a woman Maggie's future place in society is to be a wife, and therefore, her attributes are considered in terms of their future value in this role. Considering the attributes he sought in a wife, his concern for Maggie's later social value is valid, for intelligence is not considered a valuable quality in a woman. He expresses his doubts

[2] George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (New York: Signet Classics, 1965), p. 25. Subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the paper.

frequently in the first book. Here is an example:

> " ... The little un takes after my side now; she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid," continued Mr. Tulliver, turning his head dubiously first on one side and then on the other. "It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep - she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." (p.17)

Mr. Tulliver's metaphoric allusion to the 'price' of acuteness is consistent with an underlying concern with monetary value that extends throughout the novel. The Tullivers and Dodsons hold slightly differing perspectives on how money should be managed, but money and worth form basic concerns in the value systems of both. Thus, when Mr. Tulliver speaks of Maggie's potential price, there is an element of unconscious, concrete seriousness mixed in with the naturalistic association. The implications here are indicative of the value of sex in society. Maggie, as a woman, is considered in terms of a commodity. She will fetch a price, be sold - to reduce Mr. Tulliver's conception to its crudest form. She is regarded as a product, not as a producer, and her qualities are considered in this light.

Of course, women are expected to bring money with them when they are 'purchased'. The Dodson sisters all brought substantial dowries with them to their husbands ... but these

dowries were provided by their father. It was considered very unladylike for women to earn money, except from the traditionally accepted form of the sale of butter and eggs. Mrs. Moss's dowry was provided by her brother, Mr. Tulliver. Dowries passed directly from the control of the father or brother to the control of the husband. Mr. Tulliver used his wife's money in 'going to law', a fact which receives much comment in the comparison of social status among the sisters, since Mr. Pullet and Mr. Glegg were wealthy enough to leave their wive's money in their own hands, to be lent at interest, and accumulated so that substantial amounts would be available at their deaths. That they could do this is a significant indication of their own social worth and status. Mrs. Glegg refers to it often. She tells Mrs. Tulliver,

> And I hope you've not gone and got a great dinner for us - going to expense for your sisters as 'ud sooner eat a crust o' dry bread nor help to ruin you with extravagance... And here you've got two children to provide for, and your husband's spent your fortin i' going to law, and's likely to spend his own too.
>
> (p.63)

Aunt Glegg is unusual in that she not only retains her money in her own name, but manages it herself, with much enthusiasm. Mrs. Tulliver and Aunt Pullet consider this unfeminine, and as distracting from more worthy feminine qualities.

> "...And I'm sure I don't pretend to know anything about putting out money and all that. I could never see into men's business as sister Glegg does."
>
> "Well, you're like me in that, Bessy," said Mrs.Pullet; "and I think it 'ud be a deal more becoming o' Jane if she'd have that pier-glass rubbed oftener - there was so many spots on it last week - instead o'dictating to folks as have more comings-in than she ever had, and telling 'em what they've to do with their money ..."
>
> (p.107)

A man's business with money is both to earn it and to accumulate it. This is true even for children. As Tom tells Maggie:

> I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy. I always have half-sovereigns and sovereignsfor my Christmas boxes, because I shall be a man, and you only have five-shilling pieces, because you're only a girl.
>
> (pp.41-2)

Mr. Tulliver's concern with Tom's education stems from the same principle. As a producer and wage earner, intelligence and education were considered valuable qualities in terms of future social place. The oft repeated maxim, 'When land is gone and money's spent/ Then learning is most excellent,' indicates this. George Eliot's criticism of this social attitude functions throughout the novel. Her irony plays as heavily on Tom's education (both the need for and the nature of it) as it does on Maggie's lack of education. Tom is clearly unsuited for the type of education he receives, and as a wage earner, ultimately finds it all

but useless. But Tom does not really suffer because of this state of affairs. At Mr. Stellings he is subject to some discomfort.

> Yet, strange to say, under this vigorous treatment Tom became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before. He had a large share of pride, which had hitherto found itself very comfortable in the world, despising old Goggles and reposing in the sense of unquestioned rights, but now this same pride met with nothing but bruises and crushings. Tom was too clear-sighted not to be aware that Mr. Stelling's standard of things was quite different, was certainly something higher in the eyes of the world than that of the people he had been living amongst, and that, brought into contact with it, he, Tom Tulliver, appeared uncouth and stupid; he was by no means indifferent to this, and his pride got into an uneasy condition which quite nullified his boyish self-satisfaction and gave him something of the girl's susceptibility. (pp.152-3)

As this description indicates, the inferiority Tom feels is a characteristic common to girls, but unusual in boys. However, Tom has other ways of maintaining his self-respect. When Maggie visits him at Mr. Stelling's, or when he returns to the family circle at Dorlcote Mill, Tom regains his sense of superiority and worth by engaging in other masculine activities, and by asserting his superiority over Maggie. His second term at Mr. Stelling's, which includes Drill and Drawing, proves much more satisfactory to him in this respect. Aside from the discomfort he feels at Mr. Stelling's, Tom has no negative feelings in reference to sex role distinctions.

Maggie, however, is acutely sensitive to the distinctions. From practically the first moment she appears, she is portrayed as trying to achieve respect and recognition for her intellectual accomplishments. An early example occurs in chapter two of the first book when Mr. Tulliver tells Mr. Riley,

> ..."she'll read the books and understand 'em better hor half the folks as are growed up."
> Maggie's cheeks began to flush with triumphant excitement; she thought Mr.Riley would have respect for her now; it had been evident that he thought nothing of her before.
> (p.22)

Maggie does not receive the respect she desires so much from this venture, due to an unfortunate choice of reading material. Mr. Riley's only response is, "The History of the Devil, by Daniel Defoe; not quite the right book for a little girl ..."(23) When Maggie visits Tom at Mr. Stelling's in King's Lorton, she eagerly attempts to master his studies in Euclid and Latin, though Tom insists that, " Girls never learn such things. They're too silly."(157) Maggie is hurt by Tom's contempt but nonetheless begins to study his books and makes considerable progress despite Tom's ridicule and the lack of any instructor. Maggie resolves to ask Mr. Stelling, " who, she felt sure, admired her cleverness," (162) whether girls were able to learn 'masculine' subjects.

> "Mr.Stelling," she said that same evening when they were in the drawing-room, "could't I do Euclid, and all of Tom's lessons, if you were to teach me instead of him?"
>
> "No; you couldn't" said Tom indignantly. "Girls can't do Euclid, can they, sir?"
>
> "They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say," said Mr.Stelling. "They've a great deal of superficial cleverness, but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow."
>
> Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie behind Mr.Stelling's chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called "quick" all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom.
>
> (p.163)

Coexistent with Maggie's inability to impress the masculine mind with her cleverness, is her inability to achieve feminine approval due to her lack of such feminine necessities as a light complexion. Maggie has real pride in her cleverness and her frustration in this sphere leads to repeated striving to prove herself; her frustration in the sphere of feminine characteristics and personal appearance takes the form of rebellion. Both her striving and her rebellion have "active" and "passive" forms. She rarely indulges in active proofs of her nature: the incidents concerning Mr. Riley and Mr. Stelling described above are examples of active striving for intellectual opportunity and recognition. For the most part Maggie passively responds to the promptings of her own nature by reading avidly whatever comes her way, and allowing her imagination free play in

fantasy and day dream. The same balance is apparent in her disregard for appearance and feminine propriety. Usually Maggie manages to dirty her pinafore and disarrange her hair without any overt or rebellious intention in mind. Occassionally, however, Maggie's frustration takes the form of active disobedience and rebellion.

> It was a heavy disappointment to Maggie that she was not allowed to go with her father in the gig when he went to fetch Tom home from the academy; but the morning was too wet, Mrs. Tulliver said, for a little girl to go out in her best bonnet. Maggie took the opposite view very strongly, and it was a direct consequence of this difference of opinion that when her mother was in the act of brushing out the reluctant black crop, Maggie suddenly rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water standing near - in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day.
>
> (p.33)

Throughout the early books of the novel frequent comparisons are made between Maggie and her cousin Lucy which irritate Maggie's lack of success in social acceptance. Lucy inherited the Dodson complexion, much to Mrs. Tulliver's chagrin, and apparently has an innate tendency toward feminine behavior. She is, "pretty little Lucy," " a little white mouse;" (110) she "always did what she was desired to do," (103) " no accidents ever happened to her clothes, and she never felt uncomfortable in them;" (95) she usually speaks "timidly" and often blushes "very pink all over her little neck." (70) Maggie, "always looked

twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy."(68) Maggie, smarting under the constant criticism of her mother and aunts which is exaggerated during a visit from Lucy, decides to act on a "dreadful resolve" to cut her hair, which she does with Tom's help, and which leads to unimagined consequences.

> She had thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty - that was out of the question - she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl and not find fault with her.
>
> (p.72)

Maggie's desires, expressed in the above example, indicate the problems of her early conflict with society; for her society did not care if she was clever or not, and cared very much that she be pretty. Consequently, her personality and the restrictions placed on her as a function of sex role are often in conflict. She is inadequately socialized in that she feels she has no place or value in her society. When Maggie's attempts to fit her own personality to her society prove so ineffectual, she decides to run away to the Gypsies. Her resolution becomes firm following an unpleasant situation at Garum Firs.

> That was by no means a new idea to Maggie; she had been so often told she was like a Gypsy and "half wild" that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances,, would be to live in a little brown tent on the commons; the Gypsies, she considered, would gladly receive her and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge.
>
> (p.115)

Her conception is idealized, of course, for the Gypsies' society, as described in the novel, also functions according to economic structures, albeit different economic values. This is pointed out to Maggie by Tom.

> She had once mentioned her views on this point to Tom and suggested that he should stain his face brown and they should run away together; but Tom rejected the scheme with contempt, observing that Gypsies were thieves, and hardly got anything to eat, and had nothing to drive but a donkey.
>
> (p.115)

Maggie's experience entirely bears this out. The Gypsies actually steal nothing from her but her silver thimble; it is Maggie herself who is of economic value as a commodity and she is returned to her father in exchange for money. Maggie does not find being with the Gypsies brings her 'entirely in harmony with circumstances'. They have neither butter nor treacle to offer her, and seem no more disposed than her own society to offer her respect and recognition for her talents. She is relieved to be returned to her father.

The economic nature of this independent venture is carefully stressed, as is Maggie's differing value system. Even before she reaches the Gypsies she is relieved of her money by two men she meets on the way.

> The formidable strangers were two shabby-looking men with flushed faces, one of them carrying a bundle on a stick over his shoulder; but to her surprise, while she was dreading their disapprobation as a runaway, the man with the bundle stopped, and in a half-whining, half-coaxing tone asked her if she had a copper to give a poor man. Maggie had a sixpence in her pocket - her uncle Glegg's present - which she immediately drew out and gave this poor man with a polite smile, hoping he would feel very kindly towards her as a generous person. "That's the only money I've got," she said apologetically. "Thank you, little miss," said the man in a less respectful and grateful tone than Maggie anticipated, and she even observed that he smiled and winked at his companion.
>
> (p.116)

The motives behind Maggie's action indicate another area which in this novel is a function of sex role, the desire or need to be loved. Many of George Eliot's female characters display this same emotional attribute, this 'woman's hunger of heart', and are similarly motivated. It is a typical Victorian attitude that women display and need a greater degree of affection and warmth than do men; George Eliot does not entirely agree with this attitude, but often displays the <u>overt</u> need as a function of sex role.

Maggie is essentially passive, and is easily manipulated through her need to be loved. In the early books her devotion

to her father is outstanding, and Mr. Tulliver returns affection with fond tenderness. Her father's love is her only refuge when she feels all others are against her, and she relies on and greatly values this protection and strength.

> Her feeble power of defiance left her in an instant, her heart swelled, and getting up from her chair, she ran to her father, hid her face on his shoulder, and burst out into loud sobbing.
>
> "Come, come, my wench," said her father soothingly, putting his arm around her, "never mind; you was in the right to cut if off if it plagued you, give over crying; father'll take your part."
>
> Delicious words of tenderness! Maggie never forgot any of these moments when her father "took her part"; she kept them in her heart and thought of them long years after, when everyone else said that her father had done very ill by his children.
>
> (p.77)

But Maggie also adores her brother Tom, and tries as hard as she is able to win his affection. As she tells Luke, " I love Tom so dearly, Luke - better than anybody else in the world. When he grows up, I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together. I can tell him everything he doesn't know." Unfortunately, Maggie often angers Tom through acts of forgetfulness, carelessness and inattention. He does love her, as much as his character permits him to love anyone; but unlike Maggie, the strongest element in his character is righteousness rather than affection. This determines the nature of his feeling toward Maggie. He "was very fond of his sister and meant always

to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong."(47) He has a strong sense of his own superiority and righteousness:

> Tom was only thirteen and had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic, regarding them for the most part as open questions, but he was particularly clear and positive on one point - namely, that he would punish everybody who deserved it: why, he wouldn't have minded being punished himself if he deserved it; but, then, he never did deserve it. (p.45)

Tom is hardly as angelic as his opinion of himself would suggest, but he

> ...never did the same sort of foolish thing as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened that [redacted] he was much more wilful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty. (p.73)

These circumstances help to convince Tom that he is morally superior to Maggie. His mother reinforces this tendency; "It was Mrs. Tulliver's way, if she blamed Tom, to refer his misdemeanour, somehow or other, to Maggie."(114) Tom's desire to punish is reinforced by skill and success at it; he has a correct, if unconscious, knowledge of how to cause Maggie pain. When he finds that Maggie, through forgetfulness, has allowed his rabbits to die, he tells her, "And I don't love you Maggie."(42) Direct avowal is his means when he is young, but as he matures, his means become more subtle. Withdrawal of love is particularly

effective with Maggie, for "the need of being loved was the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature."(44)

> It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love - this hunger of the heart - as peremptory as that other hunger by which nature forces us to submit to the yoke and change the face of the world.
>
> (p.45)

The need for love, particularly Tom's love, does subdue Maggie, though Tom's unforgiving nature rarely allows for lenience. Tom and Maggie have opposing natures which are often in conflict, and whereas Tom can usually maintain the appearance of righteousness, Maggie succumbs easily to blame and accepts all faults as her own. As George Eliot describes their opposite reactions to their own behaviour: "But if Tom had told his strongest feelings at that moment, he would have said, 'I'd do just the same again.' That was his usual mode of viewing his past actions, whereas Maggie was always wishing she had done something different."(60) Taken together, these elements produce in Maggie a striking sense of inferiority. It <u>appears</u> that she has no characteristics worthy of praise, and that she fully deserves the over-measure of blame which she receives. This is exaggerated by Tom's brutish bullying and his constant reminders to her that she is unsuited and unequal to various tasks simply because she is female.

Tom, in spite of all his defects of rigidity, and possibly because of them to some extent, succeeds in presenting a high degree of conformity to the society of St.Ogg's. His basic values coincide quite completely with the values of his society and his 'inflexible purposes', being aligned with the purposes of life in his community, win him, finally, respect and recognition. Maggie's intelligence and over-sensitivity to love, being out of phase with the social concerns of her family and St.Ogg's, betray her into apparent rebelliousness. When the Tulliver family first encounters financial disaster as a result of Mr. Tulliver's 'going to law,' Maggie is appalled by the callowness of her aunts in their refusal to avert the disaster by providing financial aid. At the family gathering Maggie expresses her views:

> Maggie suddenly started up and stood in front of them, her eyes flashing like the eyes of a young lioness.
>
> "Why do you come, then," she burst out, talking and interfering with us and scolding us if you don't mean to do anything to help my poor mother - your own sister - if you've no feeling for her when she is in trouble, and won't part with anything, though you would never miss it, to save her from pain? Keep away from us then and don't come to find fault with my father - he was better than any of you - he was kind - he would have helped <u>you</u> if you had been in trouble. Tom and I don't ever want to have any of your money if you won't help my mother. We'd rather not have it ! We'll do without you."
>
> (pp. 228-9)

Maggie's outburst annoys Tom ..."it was no use to talk so". His own reaction is quite different.

> ...and it was a significant indication of Tom's character that though he thought his aunts ought to do something more for his mother, he felt nothing like Maggie's violent resentment against them for showing no eager tenderness and generosity. 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.239)

Maggie's attitudes toward money are out of phase with the economic values of her society. Mr. Tulliver, to some extent, shares her attitude, with disastrous social consequences. He does help others who are in trouble, particularly Mr. Moss, "a man without capital." Much of his financial difficulty is a result of his generousity to the Moss's, and even when he is in need, his affection for Gritty prevents his pressing for repayment. He also loans money to Mr.Riley as a friendly favor uncomplicated by legal collateral or note. Tom's attitudes towards money are closer to the norm.

To readers of The Mill on the Floss whose sympathies are actively engaged by Maggie, Tom's attitudes throughout border on the contemptible. And yet, in his own way, Tom,

if not attractive, is at least very respectable, and shows in some ways finer feelings than are discernable in his aunts and uncles. Even at the moment of financial disaster to himself, he is willing to destroy a substantial note from Mr. Moss and to promise to repay Luke's fifty pounds from his own savings. He is motivated not by generosity, but by his duty to respect his father's wishes regarding his property. He is constant, industrious and respectable, and wins the approval of his uncles and business associates. His aims are solid and worthy. He tells his Uncle Deane, "I should like to enter into some business where I can get on - a manly business where I should have to look after things and get credit for what I did. And I shall want to keep my mother and sister." (243) Without being daring, he is adventuresome enough to risk an investment in Laceham goods that eventually allows him to repay his father's debts. He is in tune with the larger social forces of his day. As Holloway says, " The background of The Mill on the Floss is the expanding prosperity and material progress of the whole nation; and when the fortunes of the Tulliver's are at their lowest, Tom is carried up again by the rising prosperity of the firm he works for, with its many interrelated and developing commercial activities."[3] Still, Tom's life is not pleasant, and his rise in the business does not much

[3] Holloway, p. 118.

change the privation he suffers. However, he regards the situation as temporary, expecting to rise, and pragmatically setting his course.

> Already, in the second year, Tom's salary was raised; but all, except the price of his dinner and clothes, went home into the tin box; and he shunned comradeship lest it should lead him into expenses in spite of himself. Not that Tom was moulded on the spooney type of the industrious apprentice; he had a very strong appetite for pleasure, would have liked to be a tamer of horses and to make a distinguished figure in all neighboring eyes, dispensing treats and benefits to others with well-judged liberality and being pronounced one of the finest young fellows of those parts; nay he determined to achieve these things sooner or later, but his practical shrewdness told him that the means to such achievements could only lie for him in the present abstinence and self-denial ...
>
> (p.325)

Tom shares the common social values of the Dodsons, which in turn, reflect the social values of St.Ogg's. George Eliot's description of the Dodson values, though woven with irony, expresses the soundness and usefulness of their code and virtues.

> The religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable; it was necessary to be baptized, else one could not be buried in the churchyard, and to take the sacrament before death as a security against more dimly understood perils, but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well-cured hams at one's funeral and to leave an unimpeachable will. A Dodson would not be taxed with the omission of anything that was becoming or that belonged to that eternal fitness of things which was plainly

> indicated in the practice of the most substantial parishioners and in the family traditions-such as, obedience to parents, faithfulness to kindred, industry, rigid honesty, thrift, the thorough scouring of wooden and copper utensils, the hoarding of coins likely to disappear from the currency, the production of firstrate commodities for the market, and the general preference for whatever was home-made. The Dodsons were a very proud race, and their pride lay in the utter frustration of all desire to tax them with a breach of traditional duty or propriety - a wholesome pride in many respects, since it identified honour with perfect integrity, thoroughness of work, and faithfulness to admitted rules. And society owes some worthy qualities in many of her members to mothers of the Dodson class, who made their butter and their fromenty well and would have felt disgraced to make it otherwise.
>
> (p.288)

The Dodson family received much criticism in the early reviews of the novel. Gordon Haight reports George Eliot's response to a letter published in The Times on May 19, 1860, which "objected strongly to the 'odious Dodson family, ...stingy, selfish wretches'."[4]

> I have certainly fulfilled my intention very badly if I have made the Dodson honesty appear 'mean and uninteresting', or made the payment of one's debts appear a contemptible virtue in comparison with any sort of 'Bohemian' qualities. So far as my own feeling and intention are concerned, no one class of persons or form of character is held up to reprobation or to exclusvie admiration. Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie, and I am so far from hating the Dodsons myself, that I am rather aghast to find them ticketed with such very ugly adjectives. [5]

[4] Haight, p. 327.

[5] Ibid., p. 328.

The qualities of the Dodsons' represent a high and honorable cleaving to many traditional values which have great social worth. In this sense they are highly socialized. But they provide little room or understanding for a woman of Maggie's character, whose intelligence and sensibility lead her to seek, and urge in others, relationships to society based on immediate feeling for others rather than traditional concepts. Maggie appears to be unsocialized in a conventional sense, but it is only apparent; in the terms of George Eliot's Religion of Humanity Maggie's values and sensibility represent a higher level of socialization. The conflict emerges clearly in the discussion between Tom and Maggie concerning her outburst to the Aunts and Uncles quoted above. Tom is exasperated by Maggie's unconventional attitudes and lack of prudence in expressing them. He tells her,

> "But it's always the same, Maggie, " said Tom with the little frown he put on when he was about to be justifiably severe. "You're always setting yourself up above me and everyone else, and I've wanted to tell you about it several times. You ought not to have spoken as you did to my uncles and aunts; you should leave it to me to take care of my mother and you and not put yourself forward. You think you know better than anyone, but you're almost always wrong. I can judge much better than you can.
>
> (p.249)

In his own way Tom is quite right. By all the social standards that he has internalized so completely, Maggie's words and behaviour are reprehensible. His society places the care of

his mother and sister in his hands, and he accepts this responsibility willingly and even lovingly, but he feels that Maggie makes his position more difficult than necessary, and naturally resents any additional hardships. And Maggie, even smarting under Tom's criticism, recognizes that he is right on at least a certain level, though knowing her own motivation, she tries to justify the appearance of her actions:

> "You often think I'm conceited Tom, when I don't mean what I say at all in that way. I don't mean to put myself above you; I know you behaved better than I did yesterday. But you are always so harsh to me, Tom."
> ..."No, I'm not harsh," said Tom with severe decision. "I'm always kind to you; and so I shall be. I shall always take care of you. But you must mind what I say."
> (p.249)

To Tom there is nothing extrordinary in this command. As a wage earning male and de facto head of the household he feels responsible for the image of the family as well, and this image, already so lowered by his father's misfortunes, can only suffer more from Maggie's unorthodox behaviour. As a male, he feels that Maggie should be dependent on him for both moral and financial guidance. When Maggie, desiring to help the family in monetary matters decides to take in plain sewing, Tom strongly objects to this independent action. . .

> "I don't like my sister to do such things... I'll take care that the debts are paid without your lowering yourself in that way." Surely there was some tenderness and bravery mingled with the worldliness and self-assertion of that little speech, but Maggie held it as dross, overlooking the grains of gold ...
>
> (p.308)

The conflict between Tom and Maggie is essentially a conflict of social sensibility vs. moral sensibility. Tom's value system regards all questions of right and wrong in terms of social norms, which for him, define morality; Maggie in terms of moral ideals. The most significant example of this conflict is in their differing reactions to Mr. Tulliver's oath of vengence against Mr. Waken and his family. Mr. Tulliver calls the family around him and tells them,

> "...I won't forgive him! I wish he might be punished with shame till his own son 'ud like to forget him. I wish he may do summat as they'd make him work at the treadmill ... And you mind this, Tom - you never forgive him, neither, if you mean to be my son ... Now write, write it i' the Bible."
>
> "Oh father, what?" said Maggie, sinking down by his knee, pale and trembling. "It's wicked to curse and bear malice."
>
> "It isn't wicked, I tell you, " said her father fiercely. "It's wicked as the raskills should prosper - it's the devil's doing. Do as I tell you, Tom. Write."
>
> "What am I to write, Father?" said Tom with gloomy submission.
>
> "Write as your father, Edward Tulliver, took service under John Wakem, the man as had helped to ruin him, because I'd promised my wife to make her what amends I could for her trouble, and because I wanted to die in th' old place where I was born and my father was

born. Put that i' the right words - you know how - and then write, as I don't forgive Wakem, for all that; and for all I'll serve him honest, I wish evil may befall him. Write that."

There was a dead silence as Tom's pen moved along the paper; Mrs. Tulliver looked soared, and Maggie trembled like a leaf.

"Now let me hear what you've wrote," said Mr. Tulliver. Tom read aloud, slowly.

"Now write, write as you'll remember what Wakem's done to your father, and you'll make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes. And sign your name, Thomas Tulliver."

" Oh no, father, dear father!" said Maggie, almost choked with fear. "You shouldn't make Tom write that."

"Be quiet, Maggie!" said Tom. I shall write it."

(pp.283-4)

Anyone who looked with approbation on Tom's resolve to respect his father's wishes concerning his property cannot totally blame him for his resolve to respect his father's wish in this matter. Nor can anyone who has looked with sympathy on Maggie's sensitive and affectionate nature smarting under the severity of Tom's unforgiving 'justice' feel that her reaction to her father's postion is based solely in religious dogmatism, rather than a larger concern for her fellow man. But besides being more generous and forgiving generally, Maggie remembers the kindness and affection shown to her many years ago by Mr. Wakem's son, Philip.

Maggie's earliest association with Philip Wakem occurs when he is Tom's fellow student at Mr. Stelling's. The boys

manage an uneasy friendship based on battle stories and drawing; but Philip, intelligent and acutely sensitive, is contemptuous of Tom's stupidity and is often painfully jarred by his callousness. And Tom,

> ...never quite lost the feeling that Philip, being the son of a "rascal" was his natural enemy, never thoroughly over-came his repulsion to Philip's deformity ...
>
> (p.179)

However, when Maggie meets Philip, the similar and complementary aspects of their personalities produce a great intimacy. Maggie,

> was convinced from her own observation that he must be very clever, she hoped he would think her rather clever too when she came to talk to him. Maggie, moreover, had rather a tenderness for deformed things ...
>
> (p.191)

And Philip,

> thought this sister of Tulliver's seemed a nice little thing, quite unlike her brother; he wished he had a little sister. What was it, he wondered, that made Maggie's dark eyes remind him of the stories about princesses being turned into animals? I think it was that her eyes were full of unsatisfied intelligence and unsatisfied, beseeching affection.
>
> (p.192)

Philip responds to Maggie in terms she can readily understand. He recognizes both her intelligence and need for affection, both characteristics that he possesses as well. And during this same visit he tells her

> "...and when I am very unhappy, I shall always think of you and wish I had a sister with dark eyes just like yours."
>
> "Why do you like my eyes?" said Maggie, well pleased. She had never heard anyone but her father speak of her eyes as if they had merit.
>
> (p.198)

which also strikes a chord of satisfaction in yet another unsatisfied aspect of her nature, personal appearance. They see each other seldom in the intervening years, before Mr. Tulliver's financial ruin at the hands of Philip's father renders overt intercourse impossible. And Tom, riding home in the coach with Maggie after being summoned from school by the situation, and even before Mr. Tulliver has him swear his oath, instructs Maggie, "Mind you never speak to Philip again." (213)

George Eliot emphasizes throughout the sections dealing with the time between Mr. Tulliver's financial ruin and his death that much of Maggie's sense of discontent and privation was a function of the change in personal relationships. We are asked at one point, " And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie?" (249) Her mother's 'regretful bewilderment', her father's'sullen incommunacative depression', deeply pain Maggie, as does Tom's silence.

> When Maggie laid down her work at night it was her habit to get a low stool and sit by her father's knee, leaning her cheek against it. How she wished he was soothed

> by the sense that he had a daughter who loved him! But now she got no answer to her little caresses, either from her father or from Tom, the two idols of her life.
> (p.294)

Life at home is social only in the narrowest sense. The financial reverses suffered by her father have led to material privations, but Maggie's desires are material only tangentially. Books and music are purchasable, but converse and affection are functions of relationships.

By the time Maggie meets Philip again she has presumably advanced in her moral development. The privations and the changed situation in her family have led her to a keen appreciation of the philosophy of Thomas à Kempis and an emotional commitment to the philosophy of renunciation. This, supposedly, encourages her in her movement from egoism to altruism. The chapter entitled ' A Voice from the Past', which quotes Thomas a Kempis and describes Maggie's reaction to his words, includes this passage.

> Under such circumstances there are many among its myriads of souls who have absolutely needed an emphatic belief: life in this unpleasurable shape demanding some solution even to unspeculative minds; just as you inquire into the stuffing of your couch when anything galls you there, whereas eider-down and perfect French springs excite no question. Some have an emphatic belief in alcohol and seek their ekstasis or outside standing-ground in gin, but the rest require something that good society calls "enthusiasm," something that will present motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness and human looks are hard upon us - something, clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves.
> (pp. 307-8)

George Eliot carefully balances the 'mature' philosophy and Maggie's adolescent perception of it. Barbara Hardy provides this description.

> When she is able to make no dream-worlds any more, and when literary dream-worlds fail her, she finds a new and subtly effective drug in the religion of self-denial .Philip - and the novel's course - make it plain to her that she is now substituting another harder fantasy for the older fragile ones. She acts her renunciations, and Philip prophesies, while the novel's course reveals that she has fallen into the fantasy of choosing renunciations - little ones that will not hurt too much. The final experience is the lengthy painfulness of renunciation, and George Eliot takes great pains to show this, even in the last foreshortened book of the novel, by making her go through it a second time. 6

The practice of renunciation does have some effect on Maggie.

> Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be "growing up so good"; it was amazing that this once "contrairy" child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will.
>
> (p.309)

This submissiveness is a function of situation, and a function of 'her own will'. Maggie's commitment to renunciation is basically intellectual rather than emotional, and it falters as soon as she is subjected to her first real temptation in the person of Philip Wakem.

For Maggie has not really changed in spite of her intellectual commitment. Philip appeals to the same aspects of her nature as he did at King's Lorton, and Maggie responds

6 Barbara Hardy, "The Mill on the Floss," Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. B. Hardy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 49.

as she did before. Philip compliments her on her appearance, drawing a deep flush of pleasure. He offers her books, conversation, admiration, affection, and a number of rationalizations as to why they should continue to meet in spite of the social distance between them. Maggie tries to resist.

> "Not if I were free," said Maggie; "but I am not - I must submit." She hesitated a moment and then added, "And I wanted to say to you that you had better not take more notice of my brother than just bowing to him. He once told me not to speak to you again, and he doesn't change his mind..."
>
> (p.322)

Although Maggie states that she is not free and that she must submit, she does not, herself, seem to believe it. Her decision to submit to Tom's will is stated as an independent decision, rather than as a statement of compulsion. And Maggie does change her mind. She meets Philip again to tell him of her resolution not to see him any more after a long struggle:

> She might have books, converse, affection... It was so blameless, so good a thing that there should be friendship between her and Philip; the motives that forbade it were so unreasonable, so unchristian! But the severe monotonous warning came again and again; that she was losing the simplicity and clearness of her life by admitting a ground of concealment ...
>
> (p.341)

But Philip's rationalizations prove effective and they continue to meet. Maggie is caught between two wrongs; she

feels that Tom's restrictions based on social values are immoral and unchristian, but also that concealment is immoral. Still she acts independently of Tom's social values and continues to see Philip. But Philip is both temptation and mentor to Maggie. Her decision to continue meeting with him leads her away from the practice of both renunciation and the conventional social values of her situation. However, as opposed to her later choice concerning Stephen, Maggie's association with Philip hurts no one, and benefits them both. Philip instructs Maggie, helps correct her adolescent understanding of renunciation and provides her with affirmation of her own worth. But the situation sets up a great deal of ironic tension between Maggie and her society. The main element of this tension is the <u>apparent</u> contradiction between morality and society.

The emphasis on appearance is evident from the earliest chapters, and the omniscient warning that discrepancies may occur between appearance and reality is first stated as early as chapter five of Book I.

> But that same nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies. Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross, she conceals some

> of her most rigid, inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters; and the dark-eyed,demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink-and-white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features.
>
> (p.39)

This statement refers to the physical appearances of Tom and Maggie as compared to their characters ; however, the same discrepancies may occur in terms of behavior. When Maggie agrees to continue meeting Philip in the Red Deeps, she is well aware of the dimension of her deception. She has struggled long, torn between the "sweet music" that tells her, "...the bond of friendship with him, was something not only innocent, but good," and the "urgent monotonous warning" that urged her away from secrecy and concealment.(318) Maggie's moral sensitivity is well enough developed so that she is not deceived by the apparent sweetness, but she succumbs to it nonetheless. Her choice is clearly ironic in personal, moral terms. It <u>is</u> good that she see Philip - in moral terms it is wicked to bear malice, and in personal terms it is clearly good for Philip to see Maggie. Though his argument is presented with a tinge of melodrama, " I would be contented to live if you would let me see you sometimes,"(318) the sympathies of the reader are engaged enough with him by this point to feel that his statement is true. Philip "was four or five years

older than Maggie and had a full consciousness of his feeling toward her to aid him in forseeing the character his contemplated interviews with her would bear in the opinion of a third person."(323) But he is convinced that these interviews would be good for Maggie too. His conviction is based largely on the love he feels for her, but again, the reader, whose feeling for Maggie is more dispassionate, also is convinced that this is true. Maggie, so sensitive, intellectual and passionate, suffers greatly in the atmosphere of privation at home. She has not Tom's opportunities for going into the world, even in the narrow world of business. Although she tries hard to find resignation in the lean philosophy of renunciation, the validity of Philip's opinion that she is starving herself is clear.

Under Philip's worldly influence Maggie begins to become <u>actually</u> socialized; the irony is that this process takes place in apparently anti-social circumstances. As Maggie's life softens and widens under Philip's tutoring, the change is noticeable even to Tom.

> He had been better pleased with Maggie since she had been less odd and ascetic; he was even getting rather proud of her; several persons had remarked in his hearing that his sister was a very fine girl.
>
> (p.355)

As always, Tom is to some extent guided by public opinion. The implication in "very fine girl" clearly refers to Maggie's

increasing beauty. Society has rarely bestowed praise on her for her other admirable qualities, and numerous references occur in this segment of the novel to indicate that her appearance is worthy of notice. Aunt Pullet, for example, remarks to Mrs. Tulliver, " I niver thought your girl'ud be so good-looking Bessy." (355)

A great deal of emphasis, evident in the language George Eliot uses from this point on, is placed on the extended metaphors of vision. The metaphoric levels extend from the concrete to the abstract, and tie in ironically with circumstances of plot. The secret meetings are discovered when Aunt Pullet mentions frequently seeing Philip Wakem walking in the Red Deeps, and Tom's immediate suspicions are confirmed by the visible manifestation of Maggie's blush. She hopes that Tom " would think it was only her alarm at her aunt's mention of Wakem before her father... But Tom was too keen-sighted to rest satisfied with such an interpretation; he had seen clearly enough that there was something distinct from anxiety about her father in Maggie's excessive confusion."(356-7) The next day Tom is alerted by Bob Jakin's remark, "...there goes that crooked young Wakem. I know him or his shadder as far off as I can see 'em; I'm allays lighting on him o' that side of the river,"(357) and hurries home to arrange a confrontation.

By threatening to reveal her secret to their father, Tom forces Maggie first to reveal the details of her relationship with Philip and second to vow that the relationship will cease. He insists that Maggie swear on the family Bible, "opening it at the fly-leaf where the writing was,"(359) which is the only page to which the novel ever mentions it being opened. On it are recorded births, deaths, marriages and the oath sworn by Tom and Mr.Tulliver concerning Wakem, all of which are of more social than religious importance, and which reinforce a concept of religion which "...consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable."(288) It is significant, therefore, that although Maggie stresses her individaul morality and conscience by stating, "If I give you my word, that will be as strong a bond to me as if I laid my hand on the Bible,"(360) Tom insists on the social ritual, and Maggie acquiesces. But she refuses to submit to Tom's demand that she "renounce all private speech and intercourse with Philip Wakem from this time forth," and promises only "not to meet him or write to him again without your knowledge."(360)

The ensuing discussion between Tom and Philip is, in one sense at least, terribly ironic. Tom concentrates on the social aspects of the situation, Philip on the personal.

> "Mean? Stand father from me lest I should lay hands on you, and I'll tell you what I mean. I mean, taking advantage of a young

girl's foolishness and ignorance to get her to have secret meetings with you. I mean, daring to trifle with the respectability of a family that has a good and honest name to support."

"I deny that," interrupted Philip impetuously. " I could never trifle with anything that affected your sister's happiness...

(p.362)

And again, when Philip tells Maggie,

"......But trust me - remember that I can never seek for anything but good to what belongs to you."

"Yes," said Tom, exasperated by this attitude of Philip's, "you can talk of seeking good for her and what belongs to her now; did you seek her good before?"

"I did - at some risk, perhaps. But I wished her to have a friend for life who would cherish her, who would do her more justice than a coarse and narrow-minded brother that she has always lavished her affections on."

"Yes, my way of befriending her is different from yours; and I'll tell you what is my way. I'll save her from disobeying and disgracing her father; I'll save her from throwing herself away on you, from making herself a laughing-stock, from being flouted by a man like your father, because she is not good enough for his son. You know well enough what sort of justice and cherishing you were preparing for her. I'm not to be imposed upon by fine words; I can see what actions mean. Come away, Maggie."

(p.363)

As coarse as this viewpoint is, it is nonetheless understandable, and some sympathy must be given to Tom's concern. Public opinion is clearly of the same sentiment, and even Philip states it as a social fact.

"...All St. Ogg's, I fancy, would pronounce her to be more than my equal...Find a single person

> in St.Ogg's who will not tell you that a beautiful creature like her would be throwing herself away on a pitiable object like me."
>
> (p.446)

Tom is also disturbed by the deception of secret meetings; but his strongest feelings are aroused by Maggie's disobedience. "...she was disobeying her father's stongest feelings and her brother's express commands, besides compromising herself by secret meetings."(357) This facet of Tom's feelings, and Maggie's reaction to them, form the central theme of the argument after leaving Philip. Maggie admits to her fault in consenting to the meetings, and offers her feelings as justification. But to a man who "can see what actions mean," feelings are a poor defense. Maggie tells Tom

> " I know I've been wrong - often continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them..."
>
> "Well," said Tom with cold scorn, "if your feelings are so much better than mine, let me see you show them in some other way than by conduct that's likely to disgrace us all ... pray, how have you shown your love that you talk of either to me or my father? By disobeying and deceiving us. I have a different way of showing my affection."
>
> "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world."
>
> "Then, if you can do nothing,submit to those who can."
>
> "So I <u>will</u> submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right.I will submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit to it from you..."
>
> (p.365)

This argument establishes a breach between brother and sister that continues throughout the remainder of the novel, until the last moment of their lives in which a brief reconciliation is effected. There are few meetings between the two that do not revert to a discussion of submission. To Tom the situation is clearly that society has placed the female in a position of powerlessness which therefore compels submission to those in power; he demands social submission. Maggie recognizes the desirability of submission as a moral necessity, which must be based on individual feelings, and she therefore pursues a course of financial independence in order to strengthen her moral independence. Although the breach between brother and sister is temporarily bridged by their mutual grief for their father's death, Maggie's continued desire to be independent aggravates Tom's hostility towards her. Later, when Maggie visits Tom during her vacation at Lucy's to ask/inform him of her desire to see Philip again, Tom restates his position.

> Tom looked away from Maggie, knitting his brow more strongly for a little while. Then he turned to her and said slowly and emphatically "You know what is my feeling on that subject, Maggie. There is no need for my repeating anything I said a year ago. While my father was living, I felt bound to use the utmost power over you to prevent you from disgracing him as well as yourself and all of us. But now I must leave you to your own choice. You wish to be independent; you told me so after my father's death. My opinion is not changed. If you think of Philip Wakem as a lover again, you must give me up. (p.409)

He continues in this vein until Maggie, 'subdued' by 'the need of being loved', is reduced to tears.

> The brother's goodness came uppermost at this appeal, but it could only show itself in Tom's fashion. He put his hand gently on her arm, and said in the tone of a kind pedagogue, "Now listen to me, Maggie. I'll tell you what I mean. You're always in extremes you have no judgment and self-command; and yet you think you know best and will not submit to be guided. You know I didn't wish you to take a situation. My aunt Pullet was willing to give you a good home, and you might have lived respectably amongst your relations until I could have provided a home for you with my mother. And that is what I should like to do. I wished my sister to be a lady and I would always have taken care of you, as my father desired, until you were well married. But your ideas and mine never accord, and you will not give way. Yet you might have sense enough to see that a brother who goes out into the world and mixes with men necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind, but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you."
>
> (p. 410)

Later in the chapter Tom assures her, " I wish to be as good a brother to you as you will let me." (412)

Again, a certain amount of sympathy must attach to Tom's opinion. It would have been preferable for a number of reasons that Maggie place herself under Aunt Pullet's protection by becoming a member of her household instead of pursuing financial independence as a governess. Although the prospect of being a poor relation, a dependent, in Aunt Pullet's household is not attractive, it would at least have allowed her the opportunity of existing in a social milieu which was both more familiar and more aesthetically satisfying than the "dreary situation in a school." (381)

Maggie gains independence, but at the cost of music, books, and social intercourse. Her feelings for her position are reminiscent of the earlier feelings that led to her intellectual cleaving to the philosophy of renunciation. The conflict between her situation and her feelings is exaggerated by the contrast of life at her cousin Lucy's where she vacations.

> Memory and imagination urged upon her a sense of privation too keen to let her taste what was offered in the transient present; 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.
>
> (pp.390-91)

The similarity of the sentiments expressed here to those expressed after her father's misfortunes, evoke an echo of the warning voiced by Philip:

> It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now will assault you like a savage appetite.
>
> (p. 345)

The assault does come in the form of Mr. Stephen Guest.

Stephen Guest, and Maggie's attraction to him, is the subject of much critical debate. Leavis writes, for example, "There is Stephen Guest, who is universally recognized to be a sad lapse on George Eliot's part. He is a more significant lapse, I think, than criticism commonly allows." [7] Leavis

7 F.R.Leavis, The Great Tradition:George Eliot, Henry James,Joseph Conrad(New York:New York University Press,1948),p.52.

sees the crux of the problems as a 'lack of self-knowledge' shared by Maggie and George Eliot.

> Obviously there is a large lack of self-knowledge in Maggie - a very natural one, but shared, most remarkably, by George Eliot. Maggie, it is true, has the most painful throes of conscience and they ultimately prevail. But she has no sense that Stephen Guest ... is not worthy of her spiritual and idealistic nature. There is no hint that, if Fate had allowed them to come together innocently, she wouldn't have found him a pretty satisfactory soul-mate; there, for George Eliot lies the tragedy - it is conscience that opposes.[8]

Certainly Stephen is not a particularly appealing character. He is first introduced as Lucy's lover, and the portrait presented by George Eliot is far from charming.

> ...and the fine young man who is leaning down from his chair to snap the scissors in the extremely abbreviated face of the "King Charles" lying on the young lady's feet is no other than Mr.Stephen Guest, whose diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure at twelve o'clock in the day are the graceful and odoriferous result of the largest oil-mill and the most extensive wharf in St. Ogg's.
>
> (p. 378)

Joan Bennet comments on the above passage:

> There is every reason to suppose that George Eliot intends the impression to be disagreeable, he is a vulgarian, compared with Arthur Donnithorne, a coxcomb and an insensitive egotist compared with Philip Wakem, a man without chivalry and without perception compared with Bob Jakin, a man without conscience or principle compared with Adam Bede. As all these impressions

[8] Ibid., p. 56.

> are the direct result of George Eliot's own creative activity, it is unlikely, on the face of it, that they occur against her will. She meant to show the development of better things in Stephen's nature under the influence of his love for Maggie. 9

For Bennett then, the problem, or lapse, is one of development. Once a vague uneasiness provoked by the seeming disregard for the 'intentional fallacy' is quelled by the sheer common sense of her suggestion, Bennett's analysis seems most acceptable.

The mere presence of this type of problem or lapse, magnifies the difficulties in dealing with the question of socialization. There are numerous references to the kind of appeal Stephen had for Maggie. For example, when boating one day and Maggie's foot slips,

> ...but happily Mr.Stephen Guest held her hand and kept her up with a firm grasp.
> "You have not hurt yourself at all, I hope?" he said, bending to look in her face with anxiety. It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind graceful manner by someone taller and stronger than one's self. Maggie had never felt in just the same way before.
> (p. 399)

Clearly from this and other examples involving footstools, music and various other social mechanisms, Maggie is taken with the strength and concern Stephen bestows on her. We sympathize with her; since her father's misfortune there has been no 'typical' male strength to 'take her part'.

9 Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art (Cambridge; At the University Press, 1968), p. 117.

Tom's male strength has always been something to resist, and Philip has not this type of strength to offer. But, as Leavis says, Stephen, " is not worthy of her spiritual and idealistic nature," and Maggie's feelings for him, though romantically conventional, are not emotionally satisfying for the reader.

Whether the problem is one of lack of self-knowledge or of inadequate development, the situation is an ironic one. Much of the irony of the situation (and indeed in the novel) evolves from the contemplation of other possibilities. George Eliot states at one point:

> Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle had died an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity, notwithstanding many solioquies, and some moody sarcasms towards the fair daughter of Polonius, to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law.
>
> (p. 420)

The same type of specualtion lends itself to Maggie's history. Many possiblities present themselves, but the strongest is, if the relationship between Maggie and Philip had been allowed to develop 'naturally', Maggie might have been 'safely' married by the time Stephen appeared. Of course, the same sort of attraction might have occured, but it is more likely that the situation would never have permitted Maggie and Stephen to relate in the same

way, and certainly the social structures would have been much more immediate and finally binding. Even during her growing passion for Stephen, Maggie clings to the relationship with Philip as a possible prevention. But, as illustrated earlier, Tom is as adamantly opposed to this relationship as ever before.

Barbara Hardy points out that Maggie's relationship with Stephen follows precisely the same pattern as her earlier association with Philip. " With Stephen as with Philip she resists, then capitulates, then resists again and renounces him." [10] In the first stages of their attachment Maggie and Stephen go to great lengths to conceal their feelings and deliberately foster an appearance of mutual dislike. This deceives everyone around them except Philip, whose clearer 'vision' and intimate understanding of Maggie's character allow him to discern the true state of affairs. His suspicions cause him such agitation that he is unable to keep his appointment with Maggie and Lucy and asks Stephen to take his place, an ironic turn of events, since Lucy has excused herself from the expedition to allow Maggie and Philp time alone together.

Maggie's apparent elopement with Stephen is directly derivative of the feelings which disposed her to him in the first place.

10 Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot, p. 117.

> Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat, having the cushion and cloak arranged for her feet, and her parasol opened for her (which she had forgotten) - all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic - and she felt nothing else.
>
> (pp. 486-87)

George Levine sees Maggie as encountering three significant "moments of choice: her interview with Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps, her rowing party with Stephen Guest, and her refusal to stay with Stephen after they arrive in Mudport." [11] Maggie 'succumbs' twice, the third time she succeeds. " Thus, in making this third choice, Maggie achieves the highest level of consciousness of which a St. Ogg's citizen is capable."[12]

By refusing to marry Stephen, Maggie indicates a stage of mature morality. Her choice is based not on personal happiness, but on the higher good of the community, in this case particularly Philip and Lucy. But the ironic tension between appearance and reality functions with unabated vigor. It is once again Bob Jakins who, earlier having directed Tom's attention to Maggie's meetings with Philip, now sees Maggie and Stephen in Mudport and innocently alerts the town to a major scandal. Maggie's interview with Tom is predictable.

11 George Levine, "Intelligence as Deception: The Mill on the Floss," PMLA, LXXX (September, 1965), 402-9, rpt. in G.R. Creeger, ed., George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970) p. 115.

12 Ibid., p. 116.

Tom, waiting for news at the Mill, wonders, "Would the next news be that she was married - or what? Probably that she was not married; Tom's mind was set to the expectation of the worst that could happen: not death, but disgrace."(505) Tom will barely hear Maggie out. Her penitence, her desire to, "endure the severity of Tom's reproof, to submit in patient silence to that harsh disapproving judgment against which she had so often rebelled, "(506) do not move Tom. He tells Maggie, " You don't belong to me." (507)

> I loathe your character and your conduct. You struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! I have had feelings to struggle with, but I conquered them. I have had a harder life than you have had, but I have found my comfort in doing my duty. But I will sanction no such character as yours; the world shall know that I feel the difference between right and wrong ....
>
> (pp.507-8)

By following his social conscience, Tom sets the verdict of society.

Society's reaction to Maggie's return as developed in the chapter, "St. Ogg's Passes Judgment," functions as a focal point for most of the themes developed throughout. The chapter begins with the structure of a debate, considering first what Public Opinion would have been had Maggie and Stephen married, and then what Public Opinion actually was in view of the fact that they hadn't married. The quotation below is abridged.

It was soon known throughout St.Ogg's that Miss Tulliver was come back; she had not, then, eloped in order to be married to Mr. Stephen Guest; at all events, Mr. Stephen Guest had not married her, which came to the same thing so far as her culpability was concerned ... if Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest with a post-marital trousseau and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of any only son, public opinion,which at St.Ogg's, as elsewhere, always know what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results...Mr.Stephen Guest had certainly not behaved well, but then, young men were liable to those sudden infatuated attachments; and bad as it may seem in Mrs. Stephen Guest to admit the faintest advances from her cousin's lover...still she was very young ... And young Guest so very fascinating; and they say he positively worships her (to be sure, that can't last!) and he ran away with her in the boat quite against her will - and what could she do? She couldn't come back then; no one would have spoken to her; and how very well that maize-coloured satinette becomes her complexion! It seems as if the folds in front were quite come in; several of her dresses are made so; they say he thinks nothing too handsome to buy for her...What a wonderful marriage for a girl like Miss Tulliver-quite romantic! ... Miss Unit declares she will never visit Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Guest. Such nonsense! Pretending to be better than other people. Society couldn't be carried on if we inquired into private conduct in that way, and Christianity tells us to think no evil.; and my belief is that Miss Unit had no cards sent her."

But the results, we know, were not of a kind to warrant this extenuation of the past. Maggie had returned without a trousseau, without a husband, in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. Could anything

> be more detestable?...to lay the design of winning a young man's affections away from her own cousin, who had behaved like a sister to her! Winning his affections? That was not the phrase for such a girl as Miss Tulliver; it would have been more correct to say that she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion. There was always something questionable about her... As for poor Mr. Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise; a young man of five-and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases, he is really very much at the mercy of a designing, bold girl. And it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself; he had shaken her off as soon as he could; indeed, their having parted so soon looked very black indeed, for her. Why her own brother had turned her from his door; he had seen enough, you might be sure, before he would do that. A truly respectable young man, Mr. Tom Tulliver, quite likely to rise in the world! His sister's disgrace was naturally a heavy blow to him...
>
> (pp. 512 - 14)

The emphasis on appearance is exaggerated throughout, from the concrete images of dress to the abstract judgments of visible behavior. Stephen, unsurprisingly, appears in a kind light in either case, excused either because "young men were liable to those sudden infatuated attachments," or because, " a young man of five and twenty...is really very much at the mercy of a designing, bold girl." For Maggie, however, the question is different; "...and he ran away with her in the boat quite against her will - and what could she do?" She could have either submitted or resisted, and she chose the unsociable but highly moral course of resistance, thus sealing her judgment.

Maggie has a few allies in the midst of this harsh social judgment. Bob Jakins provides material comfort as well as sympathy and respect. Mrs. Tulliver, however bovine, has access to stores of maternal love and goes with her after Tom has disowned her. Philip reaffirms his belief in her via letter, and Lucy in her brief visit. Even Aunt Glegg states a positive view and severely condemns Tom's rejection of her.

> When, at last, she learned from Tom that Maggie had come home, and gathered from him what was her explanation of her absence, she burst forth in severe reproof of Tom for admitting the worst of his sister until he was compelled. If you were not to stand by your "kin" as long as there was a shred of honour attributable to them, pray what were you to stand by?
>
> (p.522)

Aunt Glegg, concerned less with social values than with Dodson values, states a position of community and kinship which is closer to the moral values which led Maggie to her moral decision than anyone else in the novel.

These allies, which include nearly everyone who has known Maggie with any degree of intimacy throughout her life, have little impact on the larger social judgment. The social message that emerges from this is fairly clear. In order to exist in society, a woman must have the protection of a man. As Stephen's wife, Maggie would have been society; there would have been much gossip, but no actual

ostracization by the social forces of St.Ogg's. If Tom had extended his eminently respectable countenance to Maggie, St. Ogg's would have necessarily, if grudingly, allowed her a place in its midst. Without the protection of either husband or brother, Maggie is a social outcast.

There is some possibility that if Maggie had taken advantage of Aunt Glegg's offer of home and protection (and good advice), society might have relented to some extent. But just as Maggie refused Aunt Pullet's household after Tom's rejection following the discovery of her relationship with Philip, she now refuses Aunt Glegg's similar offer. Having been allowed an intimate knowledge of both these women, the reader can easily understand Maggie's objections. But in this second instance, Maggie displays an alarming naivetée in relation to society, since in spite of its many inconveniences, this solution offers Maggie's only hope of social acceptance. (But then, there is no reason to be overly surprised at Maggie's social naivetée at this late point).

Instead, she turns to Dr. Kenn. He is sympathetic to her, male, and commands some social prominence due both to his character and his occupation. When Maggie tells him, "The only thing I want is some occupation that will enable me to get my bread and be independent," (520) he promises his help. But even Dr. Kenn is unable to secure Maggie a

position:

> Dr.Kenn could not be contradicted; he was listened to in silence, but when he left the room, a comparison of opinions among his hearers yielded much the same result as before. Miss Tulliver had undeniably acted in a blamable manner; even Dr. Kenn did not deny that; how, then, could he think so lightly of her as to put that favourable interpretation on everything she had done? Even on the supposition that required the utmost stretch of belief - namely, that none of the things said about Miss Tulliver were true - still, since they had been said about her, they had cast an odour round her which must cause her to be shrunk from by every woman who had to take care of her own reputation - and of society.
>
> (pp.528-29)

He finally engages her himself as a daily governess to his children, left motherless by the death of Mrs. Kenn about the same time as Maggie's disreputable return to St.Ogg's. But the very circumstance that provides this position, ultimately removes it. In the eyes of society Dr.Kenn is neither husband nor brother, but widower, and his countenance, far from protecting Maggie, rather subjects them both to more social criticism.

> Maggie had not taken her daily walks to the rectory for many weeks before the dreadful possibility of her some time or other becoming the rector's wife had been talked of so often in confidence that ladies were beginning to discuss how they should behave to her in that position... What an artful creature she was! What a mother for those children! It was enough to make poor

> Mrs. Kenn turn in her grave that they should be put under the care of this girl only a few weeks after her death. Would he be so lost to propriety as to marry her before the year was out? The masculine mind was sarcastic and thought not.
>
> (p. 531)

Social criticism harms Dr. Kenn as much as Maggie, and he finally finds it necessary to bend under its pressure.

> Dr. Kenn, having a conscience void of offense in the matter, was still inclined to persevere, was still averse to give way before a public sentiment that was odious and contemptible; but he was finally wrought upon by the consideration of the peculiar responsibility attached to his office, of avoiding the appearance of evil, an "appearance" that is always dependent on the average quality of surrounding minds... Perhaps he was in danger of acting from obstinacy; perhaps it was his duty to succumb; conscientious people are apt to see their duty in that which is the most painful course, and to recede was always painful to Dr. Kenn. He made up his mind that he must advise Maggie to go away from St. Ogg's for a time ...
>
> (pp. 536-37)

At this same point Maggie receives Stephen's letter and must relive her moral struggle once more. She successfully resists temptation and is saved from further torment by the somewhat dubious narrative device of death by drowning, reconciled with Tom, who, in his last moments, finally sees through his mistaken reliance on appearance.

> It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water - he face to face with Maggie - that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. - It came with so overpowering a force - it was such a new revelation

> to his spirit of the depths in life that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear - that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other; Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face, Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation.
>
> (p. 545)

In The Mill on the Floss George Eliot presents not only a study of moral development from self-regard to social love, but also the particular conflict of an unusual woman who seeks to be independent in a male society. The 'disability' of class is only peripherally revelant to Maggie's conflicts with her society. The three factors that originally act as limitations on Maggie's sense of belonging and worth in her society are limitations not in terms of class distinctions, but gender. Her intelligence wins her neither recognition nor respect; she is given no formal opportunity to develop or use her talents. Her unladylike appearance receives constant criticism in the early books, which helps to establish her sense of inferiority and alienation. Her need to be loved, the strongest 'feminine' characteristic in her nature, is used by the first subject of her affection, Tom, as a means of punishment and of evoking a submissive response. The family's change of status following her father's financial difficulties does function as a disability but this is due in large part to

the change in the quality of her emotional relationships rather than only to material privation.

In any event, following her father's death, Maggie had the option of residing with Aunt Pullet. Although a dependent, much of the material privation from which she suffers would have been alleviated, and her social position would have been significantly superior to that of a governess in a school. She is encouraged to this course by others of her immediate society as the proper, traditional and social course of action, and yet she adamantly chooses a 'dreary position in a school' in the name of independence. She repeats this choice when disowned by Tom and ostracized by 'society', Aunt Glegg offers to receive her, significantly lessening her chances of 'socialization' in conventional terms. Instead, she again relinquishes this option in the name of independence. There is no social justification for this choice. Peterson points out that,

> The availability of "ladies" to teach the children of the middle classes depended on the one exception to the rule that a well-bred woman did not earn her own living - if a woman of birth and education found herself in financial distress, and had no relatives who could support her or give her a home, she was justified in seeking the only employment that would not cause her to lose her status. She could find work as a governess. 13

13 M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian Governess," Victorian Studies, XIV, No. 1 (September, 1970), p. 10.

Maggie clearly has no social justification for her choice.

Maggie's independence seems to be a function of her moral values. She relies on her intelligent assessment of situations and the guidance of her feelings of social rightness rather than on established traditional codes and values. She is often betrayed by her greater sensibility to the sufferings of others into behavior that is condemned by her society. This behavior is a result of decisions motivated by social altruism, but independent of conventional social mores. In the previous chapter the close relationship between moral and social concerns for George Eliot was established. In The Mill on the Floss moral and social positions are presented in conflict. The ironic structure of the novel seems to suggest the conflict is inherent in Maggie, that apparently she cannot be socialized. However, there are other structures in the novel, for example the temporal structure vectors between fictional pasts and presents, which make clear the social facets of morality, and leave no doubt that Maggie's moral decisions derived directly from the necessities of a larger social sphere; Maggie's love for society so far exceeded her love for self.

Despite appearances, Maggie's morality rendered her the most socialized person of St. Ogg's. The conflict then, is only apparently in Maggie; it is actually in the society

of St. Ogg's. As George Levine says, " ... The Mill on the Floss concerns itself with people on a 'lower level generally'- not 'lower' in class but in the development of their moral perceptions - with a society not prepared for the highest sacrament."[14] It is somewhat of a commonplace that Maggie is morally superior to her society; but often, the critical conversation on moral development leads to theories and abstractions about egoism, and ignores the particular social problems faced by a woman like Maggie. For Maggie seeks not only moral independence, but financial independence as well.

Her desire to be financially independent is emphatically stressed in the two final books of the novel, and is a stronger motivation than even 'the image of the intense and varied life she longed for', a longing which would have been at least partially gratified by the social conditions of life with Aunt Pullet. Although the desire to be independent is repeated often in the dialogue in this section, and the determination is illustrated by Maggie's choices, the reasons for her adamant stand is nowhere explicitly stated. However, various structures in the novel, by juxtaposing financial and moral concerns, indicate a direct relationship between them. Morality itself is often presented as a function of economics in the structures of the novel. The scene describing the 'family council' preceeding the bankruptcy sale is an outstanding example, but the same connection

[14] Levine, p. 121.

appears in numerous ironic statements throughout.

> It was not everybody who could afford to cry so much about their neighbours who had left them nothing; but Mrs. Pullet had married a gentleman farmer and had leisure and money to carry her crying and everything else to the highest pitch of respectability.
>
> (p.66)

> There was no humbug or hypocrisy about Mr. Glegg; his eyes would have watered with true feeling over the sale of a widow's furniture, which a five-pound note from his side pocket would have prevented; but a donation of five pounds to a person "in a small way of life" would have seemed to him a mad kind of lavishness rather than "charity", which had always presented itself to him as a contribution of small aids, not a neutralizing of misfortune.
>
> (p.133)

Claude Bissell says, " The passion for money runs through the story like a repulsive disease ... Beneath the casual pleasantries of social life lies a bedrock of economic necessity." [15] It is this necessity which determines much of the quality of the social relationships and, thus, morality in the novel.

The same type of juxtaposition is used to relate financial dependence and submission, implying that financial independence is necessary to the exercise of a morality which functions independently of traditional social codes.

15 Claude T. Bissell, "Social Analysis in the Novels of George Eliot." Victorian Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed., Austin Wright, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.153.

> "I have a different way of showing my affection."
> "Because you are a man, Tom and have power and can do something in the world."
> "Then if you can do nothing, submit to those who can.
>
> (p.365)

Thus, for Maggie, the necessities of conscience urge a course of financial independence. Because of the limited options available to women, this need increases the tension between her and her society. It is true that at this point Maggie's class might be considered a major disability; but even in the upper classes it would be unusual for a woman to exercise the control of her finances. Money would still be settled on her by a father or brother, and pass to the administration of her husband when she married. Maggie's main disability still seems to be the disability of being a woman. "So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right," (365) she tells Tom. But she has not found a man to whom she will submit, and cannot, therefore, establish a relation to society which is satisfactory in traditional social terms.

Bernard Paris says of Maggie, " Her sense of God(mankind) as a sustaining and directing force enables her to transcend the moral provincialism of St. Ogg's and gives her a sense of

religious orientation in the cosmos."[16] There is no argument with Paris, but orientation in the cosmos does not negate, either for George Eliot or for Maggie Tulliver, the desirability of orientation in society. For an intelligent and sensitive woman like Maggie Tulliver, who cannot find the support of a suitable male protector, society offers no place.

[16] Paris, Experiments in Life, p. 168.

CHAPTER III

The Feminine Imperative

THE FEMININE IMPERATIVE

George Eliot's fifth novel, Felix Holt, the Radical deals with a number of themes. Written between March, 1865 and June, 1866, the novel is set in the country village of Little Treby against a political background of the election of 1832. The political theme of the novel is structured around the contrasting ideologies of Harold Transome and Felix Holt and dramatized in the events concerning electoral methods and practices in the town of Treby Magna and the coal mining district of Sprokton. Harold Transome, recently returned to England after acquiring a fortune abroad, proclaims his candidacy as a Radical. His choice of Radicalism is basically opportunistic. Harold employs the lawyer Matthew Jermyn to act as his agent, and Jermyn employs John Johnson, also a gentleman, who apply typical electioneering methods to Transome's radical campaign.

Contrasted to Transome is Felix Holt, a man of education and strong opinions, who chooses to live as a worker, his hereditary background, that he might educate others of his class. He preaches an idealistic philosophy based on disinterestedness and sobriety that transcends class distinctions. He asserts a radical concept based on the

integral relationship between personal individual values and social-political power. "'I'll tell you what's the greatest power under the heavens,' said Felix, 'and that is public opinion - the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful." 1 He acts as the ideological liasion between the classes, calling on each to be more conscientious in themselves, and more conscious of the situation and power and needs of the other. Felix is clearly George Eliot's spokesman in this respect. His attitudes, behavior and conversation all reflect the editorial voice commenting on the organic nature of society. "... there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan, because the cow she milked was one of a herd which had made the pastures bare." (129) This organic overview is sharply contrasted with the narrow vision possessed by many of her characters. Social distinctions and separateness in terms of class, politics and religion are emphasized by most of the characters populating the novel. The narrative events emphasize the interrelatedness of society and the manner in which individual destinies are at least partially determined by larger forces.

1 George Eliot, Felix Holt, The Radical, ed. Peter Coveney (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972), p.121. Subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the paper.

The attitudes displayed by Felix and Harold in their political ideologies are echoed in their personal relationships. Harold relates to other men egoistically and selfishly; Felix, morally and altruistically. Both men are masterful, and both have definite ideas about women. Harold considers them slight things, pleasant diversions from business. Felix considers them temptations, existing to divert men from their 'finer purposes'. Their attitudes toward women are displayed in their interactions with their mothers, respectively, and with Esther Lyon. Mrs. Transome receives considerably more development than does Mrs. Holt; her situation will be discussed in the next chapter.

Esther Lyon is quite unlike Maggie Tulliver. Although they share certain characteristics such as intelligence and sensibility, their appearances, dispositions and basic situations are not the least alike. Esther is dainty and fair, vain and fastidious, and quite well-satisfied with herself, though not with her social position. She is subject to the same limitations and restrictions as Maggie, but does not consciously regard them as disabilities; she sees her main disability as one of class. Esther wants to be a lady, considering herself particularly suited for the role by virtue of her superiority in all lady-like things, except, of course, birth. But she is a lady, she finds halfway through the novel, and heiress to the Transome estates. After this discovery she leaves her home in Little Treby where she

lives with her supposed father, the Dissenting minister Mr. Lyon, and resides for a while with the Transomes. There she is courted by Harold, and through her association with Mrs. Transome, discovers that unhappiness and suffering can exist even in the most elegant surroundings.

Before this, however, she pursues a relationship with Felix Holt, and under the influence of his noble nature, she begins to reassess many of her values and to move from her egoistic self-regard to a more moral position. As her mentor, Felix guides Esther's moral development, teaching her correct values and reinforcing each manifestation of her 'better nature'. Esther falls in love with Felix, and suffers from ' a woman's hunger of heart' under his consistent rebuffs. Ultimately she must choose between Harold and Felix, wealth and poverty. The choice is absolute; although presumably the wealth would be hers even if she did not marry Harold, she knows that Felix's dedication to poverty would prevent him from considering marriage to a woman of independent means. There is no surety that Felix will marry her in any event. Although this is not very convincing in terms of the novel, it is necessary for her moral choice to appear disinterested. The combined influence of Felix's instruction and her association with life at Transome Court prompt her to reject wealth and Harold for the surety of poverty and the possibility of Felix.

Under Felix's influence Esther changes not only her moral values, but her basic feminine values as well. The novel insists on consciousness of this level as well as others, by its language and structure. The acute comparison between Esther in her dealings with Harold, Felix and her father, and Mrs. Transome in her dealings with Harold, Jermyn and her husband, adds emphasis to the dual consciousness and workings of moral and feminine values. In fact, the two are so closely connected that they seem to coexist as one set of values, a kind of feminine imperative. The gradual development of Esther's moral nature has been dealt with by a number of critics (notably Paris and Bennett). This chapter will examine the change in feminine values that occurs simultaneously with the change in moral values, presumably as an effect of the moral change and certainly as a result of her association with Felix, and will consider the function of gender in the attributes of a moral nature.

Esther is first introduced in the presence of Mr.Lyon and Felix, who has stayed for tea, though, "not from any curiosity to see the minister's daughter." (148) This is hardly suprising considering what he expected. "The daughter was probably some prim Miss, neat, sensible, pious, but all in a small feminine way, in which Felix was no more interested

than in Dorcas meetings,[2] biographies of devout women, and that amount of ornamental knitting which was not inconsistent with Nonconforming seriousness." (148) Felix is wrong in his unseen judgment of Esther, but his phrase 'small feminine ways' is the first introduction to his basic scorn and contempt for women, an attitude that is developed in a number of his speeches. He is, of course, incorrect in his assumptions concerning Esther, but although he is surprised by her, it is not a pleasant surprise. "The minister's daughter was not the sort of person he expected. She was quite incongruous with his notion of minister's daughters in general; and though he had expected something nowise delightful, the incongruity repelled him."(148-9) His repulsion is due to the fact that Esther fits his conception of a 'fine lady', and for Felix, " A fine lady was always a sort of spun glass affair - not natural, and with no beauty for him as art; but a fine lady as the daughter of this rusty old Puritan was especially offensive." (149) His scorn for women, if not universal, at least applies to 'prim misses' and 'fine ladies'. His attitude towards Esther at this first meeting underscores his contempt. The accidental discovery of a volume of Byron's poems leads to a conversation in which Felix speaks " in a tone of disgust," (150) "contemptuously" (153) and "triumphantly" (153) to her. But she does arouse his interest, and he is

[2] Meetings of religious women to make clothes for the poor. Dorcas, a woman named in Acts ix, 36, was "full of good works and almsdeeds

quick to judge her and to affirm his own attitude. " 'Ho, ho! thought Felix, 'her father is frightened of her. How came he to have such a nice-stepping, long-necked peacock for his daughter? but she shall see that I am not frightened.'" (151) "'A peacock! ' thought Felix. ' I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off.'"(154) It is generally concluded that the whole force of Felix's desire to change and success in changing Esther is moral,[3] and that his initial dislike of her evolves from her selfishness and social affectations. Even granting that the moral desire may seem tangential and oblique in its dramatic form, Felix's verbal formulations suggest a very different motive. Far from being 'no more interested' in her, he expresses to himself a desire to see her every day in order to scold her, make her cry, and alter the natural beauty of her fine hair. Also, in expressing a desire to prove to her that he is not frightened of her, he seems to be responding to a threat, the nature of which is made accessible to the reader in the concluding paragraph of the chapter.

> I'll never marry, though I should have to live on raw turnips to subdue my flesh. I'll never look back and say, "I had a fine purpose once - I meant to keep my hands clean, and my soul upright, and to look truth in the face; but pray excuse me, I have a wife and children - I must lie and simper a little, else they'll

[3] The critics who have taken this position are too numerous to mention; however examples may be found in Leavis, Paris and Bennett.

> starve!" or, "My wife is nice she must have her bread well buttered, and her feelings will be hurt if she is not thought genteel." That is the lot Miss Esther is preparing for some man or other. I could grind my teeth at such self-satisfied minxes, who think they can tell everybody what is the correct thing, and the utmost stretch of their ideas will not place them on a level with the intelligent fleas. I should like to see if she could be made ashamed of herself;
>
> (156)

Esther is clearly presented in terms of a temptation if not actually a threat. Although Felix wanders from the particular (Esther) to the general (marriage) and back again, the thought of Esther is inherent in his response to marriage. His thoughts seem to center around subduing the flesh, and being tempted from his finer purposes. These details "...make plain to us what is concealed from Felix himself, that his attraction to Esther is sexual. The mechanism of concealment is to turn the impulse of attraction to a hostile one ..."[4]

Felix does, in fact, come to scold Esther, does reduce her to tears, and does make her ashamed of herself. Her fine hair remains uncut to trouble him in the last chapter(602). The change begins in chapter 10, and the primary reason that Esther is susceptible to him is that he manages to conceal his attraction from her. "Esther had not seen so much of their new acquaintance as her father had. But she

[4] Lerner, p. 48.

had begun to find him amusing, and also rather irritating to her woman's love of conquest."(206) She thinks to herself of the physical attractions that ought to have made him notice her, and repeats to herself the reasons why assertive admiration would have been disagreeable. "But it was quite clear that, instead of feeling any disadvantage on his own side, he held himself to be immeasurably her superior; and, what was worst, Esther had a secret consciousness that he was her superior."(207) It is precisely this 'woman's love of conquest' fought on the battle grounds of physical appearance that is the threat Felix must deal with. Both Esther and Felix consciously perceive physical attractions as commodities, though they articulate the concept in more euphemistic terms. But Felix has forsworn 'wealth' for moral reasons, and though he finds renunciation easy in terms of other commodities, he is clearly tempted by Esther's beauty. In order not to be conquered, he must instill in her a feeling of inferiority and submission, so that her power is kept firmly under the control of his will. Under the guise of moral teaching, he sets about his task. It is facilitated by Esther's greater consciousness of her attraction to him. Knowing that she thinks well of him, she is anxious that he think well of her. Since Felix keeps his interest well concealed, Esther is more prepared to change - to acquire and develop the characteristics that would win her his regard.

Although Felix's 'scolding' is phrased about concepts such as 'right opinions', the language he uses leaves little doubt that he is also discussing the place of women in relation to men. "You have enough understanding to make it wicked that you should add one more to the women who hinder men's lives from having any nobleness in them."(210) Felix's language throughout this scene emphasizes sex role distinctions. He is not speaking of morality in reference to people, but making clear the distinctions of morality in reference to men and women.

> I can't bear to see you going the way of the foolish women who spoil men's lives. Men can't help loving them, and so they make themselves slaves to the petty desires of petty creatures. That's the way those who might do better spend their lives for nought - get checked in every great effort - toil with brain and limb for things that have no more to do with a manly life than tarts and confectionery. That's what makes women a curse; all life is stunted to suit their littleness. That's why I'll never love, if I can help it; and if I love, I'll bear it and never marry.
>
> (p.212)

Most of the basic assumptions underlying Felix's sexual attitudes are revealed in this speech. The key words here are foolish, spoil, petty, curse, stunted and littleness, pertaining to women, and slaves, great effort, toil, brain, and limb, manly life, pertaining to men. He doesn't see women as capable of moral lives themselves, and sees them only as hindrances to the moral lives of men. Felix sets great store on his mastery, and to become a slave because he

can't help loving would, in his eyes, be the most ignoble evil. He is clearly a man who is susceptible to the power (the curse) of women. The poles are clearly established in his mind between master/slave, rule/subjection, superiority/inferiority, in reference to the relationships between men and women. Morality and nobility are not possible for women in his construct, and do not enter into the polar model. Given the absolute dichotomy of the power struggle, Felix's only alternatives are to remain masterly and superior, or to submit and become inferior and a slave. Since he assuredly wants to remain master, the only course open to him in regard to Esther is to destroy her feelings of superiority and masterfulness. Therefore, without admiting to himself that Esther could have any attraction or interest for him other than a sinner in need of a noble teaching, Felix tells her, " I want you to change. Of course I am a brute to say so. I ought to say you are perfect. Another man would, perhaps. But I say, I want you to change."(211) He is convinced that he is speaking on the level of moral imperatives, and in large part he is. However, there exists also a dimension relating to the power struggle which exists in his mind as a function of sex.

The complexity of George Eliot's art presents these dual imperatives in interrelated inseparableness. The change that takes place in Esther leaves her less selfish,

more conscious, and more courageous. But even by the end of Chapter 10 in which Felix scolds her, other changes are evident as well. "There was a strange contradiction of impulses in her mind in those first moments. She could not bear that Felix should not respect her, yet she could not bear that he should see her bend before his denunciation. She revolted against his assumption of superiority, yet she felt herself in a new kind of subjection to him."(213) The author leaves no doubt that this subjection is more than that of a sinner bending before a noble nature. "...yet his indignant words were a tribute to her: he thought she was worth more pains than the women of whom he took no notice." (213) Her speculations at this crisis wander from the contemplation of her own moral limitations to motives for Felix's interest.

> But did he love her one little bit, and was that the reason why he wanted her to change? Esther felt less angry at that form of freedom; though she was quite sure that she did not love him, and that she could never love anyone who was so much of a pedagogue and a master ..."
>
> (p.213)

Felix's mastery is well documented, both dramatically and in the opinions of other characters. Mrs. Holt informs Mr.Lyon, " Mr.Lyon, he's masterful beyond everything..."(136) and this judgment holds true for the entire novel.

Before Esther sees Felix again she is introduced to Harold Transome, who comes to Malthouse Yard to discuss the election with Mr.Lyon. Harold is as much dominated by mastery as Felix. To this point his sexual attitudes are described solely in terms of his mother. Harold's "... busy thoughts were imperiously determined by habits which had no reference to any woman's feelings."(93)

Like Felix he has strong feelings and opinions regarding the disagreeableness of marriage. "Would you have had me wait for a consumptive lackadaisical English woman, who would have hung all her relations around my neck? I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything. They interfere with a man's life. I shall not marry again."(94) He is "...fond of mastery, and goodnatured enough to wish that everyone about him should like his mastery,"(111) and views his world as a function of that mastery; "Jermyn manages the estate badly, then. That will not last under my reign ..."(95) Harold, like Felix, believes that women interfere with a man's life, but where Felix sees them as a 'curse' and feels that 'men can't help loving them', Harold, at this point, does not consider their power to be very great. "Harold Transome regarded women as slight things, but he was fond of slight things in the intervals of business; and he held it among the chief arts of his life to keep these pleasant diversions within such bonds that they should never interfere with the course of his serious ambition."(266)

Esther is as conscious of Harold's admiration of her appearance and manner as she is unconscious of Felix's. Harold is conscious of this too, and does not, like Felix, channel it into hostile and sadistic desires. Although there is no indication that Harold thinks again of Esther, until she is named as heiress to the Transome estate, he is in her thoughts, and the desire to see him again is one of the "Two inconsistent motives," which "urged her" to watch the speeches preceeding the election. The other motive is Felix; not the desire to see him, but, she tells herself, to "try to learn the secret of this ardour" towards larger social life. Nonetheless she is 'sorry' that circumstances prevent her from seeing him. He is much in her thoughts as well and she wishes to see him again to indicate to him that she is not ungenerous and redeem herself somewhat in his eyes. As it becomes clear to Esther that Felix is avoiding calling at Malthouse Yard while she is at home, she feels it must be because of his feelings toward her. She has been greatly affected by his scolding and assumes that he has also. Her desire to see him overcomes her pride and she calls at Mrs.Holt's house.

During this visit she exhibits new characteristics indicative of the change taking place within her. "Esther's expression was appealing and timid, as it had never been before

in Felix's presence ...It seemed to her as if her inferiority to Felix made a great gulf between them. She could not at once rally her pride and self-command ... Poor Esther was quite helpless. The mortification which had come like a bruise ... Was there ever more awkward speaking? - or any behavior less like that of the graceful, self-possessed Miss Lyon..."(321-2) The change, in its early stages, displays the loss of pride, self-command, gracefulness and self-possession, and the acquisition of appeal, timidity, inferiority, mortification, helplessness and awkwardness. Felix is "deeply touched by this manifestation of her better qualities..."(327) and for the first time allows physical contact to take place by grasping both of her hands in one of his. He displays new characteristics during this scene also. "His eyes had an expression of sadness in them, quite new to her."(322) He speaks of Job Tudge and "The exquisite goodness implied in these words of Felix impressed Esther the more, because in her hearing his talk had usually been pungent and denunciatory." (324) This chapter insists on the influence that Felix has on Esther and reaffirms her lack of influence on him. "He had thought a great deal of Esther with a mixture of strong disapproval and strong liking, which both together made a feeling the reverse of indifference; but he was not going to let her have any influence on his life." (327) In this scene also, Mrs. Holt reminds Esther and the reader that "there is nobody else master where he is ..."(324)

The change in Esther is progressive, in terms of both moral and feminine characteristics. George Eliot next presents Esther and Felix together at the scene of Mr. Lyon's debate.

> She looked unusually charming today, from the very fact that she was not vividly conscious of anything but of having a mind near her that asked her to be something better than she actually was. The consciousness of her own superiority amongst the people around her was superseded, and even a few brief weeks had given a softened expression to her eyes, a more feminine beseechingness and self doubt to her manners.
>
> (p.338)

Felix responds to the change by being "more disposed to listen indulgently to what she had to say, and less blind to her looks and movements." (338) Indeed, when Esther and Felix walk out together several chapters later, Felix actually comments on her beauty, and for the first time contemplates a different concept of woman, though he makes clear to Esther that the image he presents of this special woman is primarily theoretical. "'I wonder,' he went on, still looking at her, 'whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measure the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face beautiful - who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life.'" (364) This chapter, 27, is primarily significant in moral meaning. Felix speaks of his visions that guide him toward truth;

"we are saved by making the future present to ourselves," (365) and wishes for Esther a "good strong terrible vision" that could save her from the charm of "some of your atta-of-rose fascination."(366) This anticipates Esther's decision to reject the Transome estate, which she does under the influence of a vision inspired by Mrs. Transome's suffering.(597)

In this scene Felix displays to Esther his moral vision, and she displays to him her moral growth. They walk home arm in arm, and in outlining their thoughts, Eliot again reveals their differing perceptions of the changes in their situation, not only in personal terms but also in terms of their sex roles.

> Felix was struggling as a firm man struggles with a temptation, seeing beyond it and disbelieving its lying promise. Esther was struggling as a woman struggles with the yearning for some expression of love, and with vexation under that subjection to a yearning which is not likely to be satisfied.
>
> (p.368)

The use of language in this description clearly invites comparison and indicates the differing visions of men and women in regard to each other; men see women as things, temptations to be struggled against, and women see men with yearning to be loved and must struggle against that yearning which is prompted by their own desire, not against the men who inspire it.

By their next dramatized meeting, both Esther and Felix realize that their feelings for the other have grown

more intense. However, their reactions to this remain very much the same.

> It was in reality a little heaven to her that Felix was there, but she saw beyond it - saw that by-and-by he would be gone, and that they should be farther on their way, not toward meeting but parting. His will was impregnable. He was a rock, and she no more to him than the white clinging mist cloud.
>
> (p.417)

However, Esther misjudges her effect on Felix. Wanting her to understand the magnitude of his rejection of her, he begins to explain his choice but finds himself unable to continue. "This breaking-off in speech was something quite new in Felix. For the first time he had lost his self-possession, and turned his eyes away ... Esther, like a woman as she was - a woman waiting for love, never able to ask for it - had her joy in these signs of her power..." (418) This is the extent of Esther's power, and marks one of the two times that Felix loses his self-possession in her presence. In this scene Esther responds with "deep yet timid earnestness," and "child-like dependent sorrow." "She desired to be worthy of what she reverenced in Felix, but the inevitable renunciation was too difficult. She saw herself wandering through the future weak and forsaken." (419)

Esther has changed considerably by this time. Morally she has internalized many of the values Felix expounds and these are given dramatic veracity primarily in situations

relating to her relations with Mr. Lyon. If Felix is the model of George Eliot's moral person, it would seem appropriate that the acquisition of like moral values would engender strength and mastery. However, Esther's moral growth does not make her stronger; she feels herself to be weakened, and to be dependent on Felix. Her weakness is clearly a function of the change wrought by Felix, but it would be inconsistent with George Eliot's moral lesson to suppose that weakness is an attribute of femininity. The differing reactions of Esther and Felix to the scene described above reinforces this concept.

> She heard the doors close behind him and felt free to be miserable. She cried bitterly. If she might have married Felix Hold, she could have been a good woman. She felt no trust that she could ever be good without him...And Felix wished Esther to know that her love was dear to him as the beloved dead are dear. He felt that they must not marry - that they would ruin each other's lives. But he had longed for her to know fully that his will to be always apart from her was renunciation, not an easy preference. (p.419)

The fact that Felix's choice is renunciation, not an easy preference simply underlines his strength, which for Felix is an affect of morality. His strength and her weakness are emphasized in the concluding sentence of this chapter. "...and Felix felt for Esther's pain as the strong soldier, who can march on hungering without fear that he shall faint, feels for the young brother - the maiden cheeked conscript whose load is too heavy for him." (419-20)

Even in this image of two soldiers engaged in the same battle the concept of weakness is associated with feminine characteristics.

In the following chapter, Felix becomes involved in the unfortunate riot scene and is jailed. Esther sees him only twice before their reunion at the conclusion of the novel, once at a brief meeting at the jailhouse before his trial and once at the trial itself where she speaks in his defence. In the interim the estate circumstances come to fruition and, recognized by Harold and Mrs. Transome as the legitimate claimant to the Transome estate, Esther is invited to Transome Court. This episode in the novel allows Esther both the final lesson in her moral development and the test of her moral values and ability to choose renunciation.

Here she is exposed to a real approximation of the fantasy she has dreamed for herself, though,

> In her daydreams she had not traced out the means by which such a change could be brought about; in fact, the change had seemed impossible to her, except in her little private Utopia, was filled with delightful results, independent of processes.
>
> (p. 473)

Her fantasy is based in, "the signs and luxuries of ladyhood, "(473) and at Transome Court she is surrounded by these signs and luxuries which George Eliot systematically

develops as symbols of surface illusion and bondage. The plot suggests that Esther regards her acquisition of the estate as a great hardship for the Transomes, and that her greatest anxiety at this point is due to the 'process' by which she attains her station. Her veneration of wealth and station would make any indication of their vulnerability a shock to her, and the shock would be all the greater if she were the cause. Her anxiety is logical under the circumstances, but the emotional development of this point is quite weak (as is the plot). Mrs. Transome is clearly too preoccupied with her situation and the impending clash between Jermyn and Harold to be overly concerned with problems of estate, and Harold, once he is aware that, "...the new claimant was a woman - a young woman, brought up under circumstances that would make the fourth of the Transome property seem to her an immense fortune," (454) is much relieved. Calculating that, "Both the sex and social condition were of the sort that lies open to many softening influences," (454) Harold contemplates a compromise which leaves him feeling, "satisfied with himself and light-hearted." (455) The veracity of Esther's character development loses much ground here; she manifests relatively little concern over Felix's imprisonment, quite suddenly leaves Mr. Lyon, toward whom she has been steadily feeling more dutiful and

loving , and indicates that her greatest anxiety is the possible displacement of the Transomes.

The compromise considered by Harold is, of course, marriage:

> ...Harold did not care to be married until or unless some surprising chance presented itself; and now that such a chance had occurred to suggest marriage to him, he would not admit to himself that he contemplated marrying Esther as a plan; he was only obliged to see that such an issue was not inconceivable.
>
> (p.455)

Although Harold does not admit to the plan, he is clearly striving to secure Esther's affection.

Harold's general attitude toward women is much like Felix's. And, as it is Mrs. Holt who consistently reminds the reader of Felix's love of mastery, so Mrs. Transome reveals Harold's in response to Denner's communication...

> 'But the servants all say he's in love with Miss Lyon.'
> ' I wish it were true, Denner,' said Mrs. Transome, energetically. ' I wish he were in love with her, so that she could master him, and make him do what she pleased.'
> 'Then it is not true - what they say?'
> 'Not true that she will ever master him. No woman ever will. He will make her fond of him, and afraid of him...
>
> (p.488)

The differences in attitude between Felix and Harold are subtle. Felix fears that a woman might master him and distract him from his finer purpose; Harold instills fear

in (at least certain types of) women. It comes as no surprise to the reader to learn that Harry's mother was a slave, or that he brought with him to England a dark-haired mistress. Having already established in fact rather than in metaphor a master/slave relationship with women, Harold does not suffer from Felix's anxiety. "To be deeply in love was a catastrophe not likely to happen to him; but he was readily amorous. No woman could make him miserable, but he was sensitive to the presence of women, and kind to them;"(497) Harold is drawn to Esther, "this bright woman who was not at all to his preconceived taste."(502) The fact that marriage would end the dispute concerning the estate is a potent factor in Harold's admiration, and is insisted upon by the verbal structures whenever Harold considers the situation.

The courtship between Harold and Esther is not particularly passionate. Harold is very conscious of the business-like nature of the situation, and is careful to calculate the probable effects of any of his actions relating to Esther. Esther has already declared her love for Felix and has already modified many of her values concerning love, wealth and marriage. Harold, in his perception of Esther, recognizes a certain reticence, which when viewed in the light of the feminine imperative he can not fully account for.

> There was something about Esther that he did not altogether understand. She was clearly a woman that could be governed; she was too charming for him to fear that she would ever be obstinate or interfering. Yet there was a lightning that shot out of her now and then, which seemed the sign of a dangerous judgment; as if she inwardly saw something more admirable than Harold Transome. Now, to be perfectly charming, a woman should not see this.
>
> (p.525)

Nonetheless, Harold is confident of his ability to win Esther. "...he was one of those men who are liable to make the greater mistakes about a particular woman's feelings, because they pique themselves on a power of interpretation derived from much experience."(537) "...he saw the effect he produced on Esther by the light of his opinions about women in general."(577)

Esther is not insensible to Harold's suit, but sees it from a double perspective, phrased, as usual, in terms of a power struggle.

> She felt pleased with him; she was open to the fallacious delight of being assured that she had power over him to make him do what she liked, and quite forgot the many impressions which had convinced her that Harold had a padded yoke ready for the neck of every man, woman and child that depended on him.
>
> (p.538)

At this point Esther is toying with the idea of power as she is toying with the idea of wealth. The narrative

framework leaves little doubt of her choice. It is intimated in Chapter 21 in a description of her mother. "Annette Ledru was her name. She was of a good family, and they had made up a fine match for her.But she was one of your meek little diablesses, who have a will of their own once in their lives - the will to choose their own master."(314) Esther makes her choice on these grounds:

> More than all there was this test; she herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome; there were even points in him for which she felt a touch, not of angry, but of playful scorn; whereas with Felix she had always a sense of dependence and possible illumination.
>
> (p.523)

In spite of the separation and changed circumstances, Felix's effect on Esther has not diminished. As she waits for her brief interview with him before the trial, "She had lost complete consciousness of everything except that she was going to see Felix. She trembled." (554) In this interview Felix reaffirms his higher purpose to her and 'innocently' refers to the probability of her marriage to Harold, which makes Esther 'miserable'. At the conclusion of the interview Felix calls her, "with an entreating cry, and she went toward him with the swift movement of a frightened child towards its protector."(558) Esther regains enough courage to speak for Felix at his trial. Her testimony is predictable; of major interest is the impact her speech has

on the men who hear her. George Eliot explains the nature of the impact.

> When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences; she is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience. Her inspired ignorance gives a sublimity to actions so incongruously simple, that otherwise they would make men smile.
>
> (p.571)

Esther is to some extent successful in her aim. Using the only tools within her feminine means, that is, her ardour and inspired ignorance, she promotes a positive effect on the men with power, primarily, it would appear from the linguistic structure, due to the incongruity of the situation.

> The three men in that assembly who knew her best - even her father and Felix Holt - felt a thrill of surprise mingling with their admiration. This bright, delicate, beautiful-shaped thing that seemed most like a toy or ornament- some hand had touched the chords, and there came forth music that brought tears.
>
> (p. 573)

It seems somewhat ludicrous that these men, especially Felix and Mr.Lyon, could still think of Esther as a 'thing' a 'toy' and an 'ornament' after knowing her so well and working for her moral and spiritual development so assiduously. However, Esther's impact stirs the gentlemen who meet after the trial to exert themselves on Felix's

behalf. She is considered, " A fine girl! something of the thoroughbred in the look of her," and elicits reactions such as, "That girl made me cry ...She's a modest, brave, beautiful woman. I'd ride a steeplechase, old as I am, to gratify her feelings."(576) Her influence, though not of a particularly enviable kind, has had the desired effect, and Felix is released by special pardon after a short internment.

In the interim Esther has made her choice to renounce both Harold and all claims on the estate. This decision is basically a function of the moral dimension of the novel, which has allowed Esther the ability to perceive the 'silken bondage' and 'well cushioned despair' of such a life. Her sensitivity to others, which has expanded as a result of her moral growth, allows her to perceive Mrs. Transome not only as a lady, but as a woman who is suffering from some great unhappiness, in spite of the material comforts that in Esther's fantasy were the requirements of happiness. She sees Mrs. Transome at the height of her despair, and the image leads her to a firm resolution concerning the values she desires as the foundation of her life.

> Esther found it difficult to speak. The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come

> as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love.
>
> (p.597)

Esther and Felix are reunited in the final chapter of the novel, in which Esther convinces Felix of her moral stature by her renunciation of wealth, and dramatically reaffirms the feminine imperative.

> Esther said all this in a playful tone, but she ended with a grave look of appealing submission -
> 'I mean - if you approve. I wish to do what you think it will be right to do.'
> 'I am weak - my husband must be greater and nobler than I am.'
>
> (pp.602-3)

Esther has changed considerably in the course of the novel, and this change is usually perceived in its moral dimension. Bernard Paris calls the 'unregenerate Esther' a, "...vain, petty, and self-satisfied,"woman.[5] She had, in fact all the attributes that Felix detested as characteristics of a fine lady. George Eliot described her as:

> ...alive to the finest shades of manner, to the nicest distinctions of tone and accent; she had a little code of her own about scents and colors, textures and behaviour, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned

[5]Paris, Experiments in Life, p. 229.

> all things and persons. And she was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard.
>
> (p.159)

Clearly Esther had to change in order to gain the larger organic, social vision that George Eliot presents as the highest development of a moral nature. Joan Bennett describes the change. "Esther, who is a charming and intelligent, but unconsciously selfish girl at the beginning of the book, develops selflessness and courage under the influence of the right choice, towards which she is gradually moving throughout the story."[6] She has, indeed, developed these qualities as part of the moral consciousness which Felix instills in her. But she has developed other characteristics as well. She has become appealing and submissive, childlike, dependent and weak. She is conscious of feelings of inferiority and subjection. It is this syndrome which comprises the feminine imperative. In the case of Esther, at least, it is an adjunct of a moral nature for a woman, as opposed to the strength, mastery and self-determination exhibited by Felix, the masculine model of a moral nature. The frameword of Felix Holt, The Radical, clearly suggests a sexual distinction in the attributes and effects of morality.

[6] Bennett, p. 157.

It would be unfair, however, to suggest that Felix does not change in the course of the novel. That he marries at the conclusion, after swearing that he will never marry at the beginning, indicates a significant transformation. It could even be inferred that Felix modifies his opinions concerning women, and by the conclusion sees them as capable of both attaining a moral nature themselves, and of helping rather than hindering the moral lives of men with whom they associate. But this inference must come from the fact of his marriage; there is nothing in the language that he uses or in the authorial descriptions of his thoughts that indicate any change in his attitudes. By the end of the novel he no longer states his negative attitudes, but neither does he state any positive opinions concerning women. His"transformation" is relatively undocumented in comparison with Esther's. It is quite clear that he does change, since he does marry, but the novel offers little information regarding the moment of change, the cause of change or the type of change. Esther's "transformation" is well documented in these regards. Descriptions such as the following, clearly stating cause and effect, abound in the novel.

> But he wanted her to change. For the first time in her life Esther felt herself seriously shaken in her self-contentment. She knew there was a mind to which she appeared trivial, narrow

> selfish. Every word Felix had said to her seemed to have burnt itself into her memory.
>
> (pp.213-14)

This type of description is totally lacking in reference to Felix.

David R. Carroll suggests that Felix's "transformation", or development, occurs simultaneously in two spheres, personal and political.

> At the center of Felix Holt is the titular hero engaged in a private and public relationship. He is trying to reform both Esther and the working class. He sees the two roles as being quite separate and incompatible, and his development through the novel is from his initial scorn of her and of women in general, as being obstructive to his larger aims, to his final realization that his relationship with her is inseparable from those aims of social reform. At the end of the novel, Felix achieves a more mature political outlook simultaneously with his marriage to Esther.

Carroll's points are well taken. However, even he does not explicate the ways in which this development is effected. He discusses a number of flaws in Felix's character and illustrates how these lead to his part as mob-leader in the election riot and the accidental death of Constable Tucker, and that Felix, on his release from prison, appears changed. He attempts to relate this to Felix's attitude toward women by drawing a number of rather questionable parallels between Esther and Treby Magna (which he credits to George Eliot). In all, his general statement of relationship is

[7] Carroll, p. 126.

more acceptable than his attempt to demonstrate it. Where, for example, does the 'final realization' with which he credits Felix occur?

Part of Carroll's difficulty, and that of anyone else who attempts to trace Felix's development, is the total lack of consciousness in Felix concerning his own feelings. Just as he cloaks his initial attraction to Esther under an intensity of moral indignation, so he 'consciously' negates his growing love. Even in their brief meeting at the jailhouse, their last contact before the concluding chapter when somehow they reach an understanding, Felix refuses to consciously consider his own feelings for Esther.

> One thought in the mind of Felix was, that Esther was sure to marry Harold Transome. Men readily believe these things of the women who love them. But he could not allude to the marriage more directly. He was afraid of this destiny for her, without having any very distinct knowledge by which to justify his fear to the mind of another. It did not satisfy him that Esther should marry Harold Transome.
>
> (p.557)

Of course, it is not necessary that a character be self-conscious. But even in dramatic terms Felix gives little indication of his feelings; while Esther pales and blushes, cries and trembles, Felix only rationalizes. "It did not satisfy him that Esther should marry Harold Transome," but it did not make him jealous or despondent either. When he reappears at Malthouse Yard after his

imprisonment, assuming that Esther is still at Transome Court, still with Harold, and still planning to marry him, he is as cheerful as ever. Perhaps this is meant as an indication of his strength of character. The fact that Felix literally disappears for the latter third of the novel does not make his 'development' any easier to trace, either in political or personal terms.

It is necessary in terms of narrative structure that Felix change his conceptions, perceptions and behavior toward women, and especially Esther. That he does is equally clear, also in terms of narrative structure. But the nature of this change, the specific attributes and characteristics which comprise a 'correct' attitude for a man toward a woman in a moral relationship, is given little (or no) development. Felix, from the first, is 'socialized' in the larger moral sense. His relationship to society is certainly neither conventional nor traditional, but in most respects it represents a model of socialization superior, or more evolved, than the relationships enjoyed by most other characters. However, his attitude toward marriage is anti-social in either sense. Both the maintenance and evolution of society depend on legitimate succession through generation. Therefore, in terms of socialization, Felix must change his attitude toward marriage, and

consequently, toward at least one woman. It is an external, rather than internal necessity which requires correction, and his 'development' reflects this in that he changes externally but without any discernible modifications of his internal values.

And so, from his initial contempt for all women, Felix moves to a theoretical conception of an exceptional woman, and finally to the perception of Esther as an exceptional woman. The theoretical image he presents has already been quoted. It was inspired by his recognition of Esther's beauty, and posits the 'force' there would be in the combination of a noble mind and a beautiful face. Beauty has been presented throughout the novel as a commodity, a power, and a temptation. For a woman, nobility is not enough; she still must present a beautiful appearance. But this beauty is a power which must either conquer or be subdued. Thus, in order to be the ideal woman Felix envisions, Esther must acquire not only a noble mind, but also a sense of subjection. The noble mind is a function of moral values and operates similarly for men and for women. The sense of subjection is an adjunct of moral values, but operates differently for men and for women. When Felix learns to submit to the larger forces of society and an uncaring universe, Esther learns to submit to Felix.

This is described for Esther as a "sense of inferiority and just subjection," of "dependence and possible illumination." Felix has no feelings of inferiority or dependence towards

Esther, or for anyone else. But the focus of this description falls on the word 'just'. Esther's subjection is 'just' because Felix is more noble than she at this point, which Harold is not. Esther's sentiments in this passage echo Maggie's statement to Tom, " So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right."[8] Although Esther's moral growth is as yet unfulfilled in terms of the novel, her association with Felix has sensitized her to recognize her own moral feelings. These feelings conflict with her previous values which would have favoured Harold as a potential husband. When Esther judges Harold and Felix in terms of 'right feelings' instead of her previous ' little code ' of ' scents and colors, textures and behavior', she realizes that Felix deserves her love and submission and Harold does not. By the end of the novel, however, Esther has presumably attained the same stature as Felix. George Eliot stresses the fact that at the moment of her great moral choice Esther has no certainty that Felix will marry her, and renounces her worldly goods from a disinterested moral standpoint. It is essentially the same choice that Felix made, though materially Esther's renunciation was of greater magnitude, and, in moral terms, would seem to indicate an equal level of nobility. But the conclusion of the novel does not offer any indication of

[8] The Mill on the Floss, p. 365.

equality; Esther continues to exercise her new feminine values, and to submit to Felix as her superior, appealingly and timidly. The implications here seem to be that a woman is incapable of achieving the same degree of moral nobleness possible for a man; that her 'force' depends not only on a noble mind, but also on her physical beauty; and the characteristics of a moral nature vary depending upon gender.

In the story of Esther Lyon and her relationship to her society, George Eliot presents a very different perspective than that presented in the story of Maggie Tulliver. Esther does not rebel against any of the social restrictions or limitations specific to women; her sex functions as a disability primarily in that she cannot achieve the same degree of nobility available to Felix and must place herself in subjection to him. She doesn't feel this to be disabling, however, and willingly accepts her position. But Esther is not the only woman in the novel to receive extended development and many of the themes concerning women and society treated in The Mill on the Floss, appear in Felix Holt in the parts dealing with Mrs. Transome. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Powerlessness

POWERLESSNESS

F. R. Leavis comments, in The Great Tradition, " Felix Holt is not one of the novels that cultivated persons are supposed to have read, and, if read at all, it is hardly ever mentioned, so that there is reason for saying that one of the finest things in fiction is virtually unknown."[1] This judgement is passed in spite of a number of criticisms relating to the main theme and plot of the novel ... for example, Leavis says of Esther Lyon, " Esther, the beautiful and elegant young lady ... is interesting only in relation to other feminine studies of the author's, and to her treatment in general of feminine charm."[2] For Leavis, the 'fineness' of the novel results from George Eliot's treatment of Mrs. Transome; "...it is in the part of Felix Holt dealing with Mrs. Transome that George Eliot becomes one of the great creative artists."[3]

Mrs. Transome's role in the novel is not one of moral development, but of moral consequences. Though she is an older woman and has already adjusted to her society

[1] Leavis, p. 74.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

[3] Ibid., p. 68.

as much as she ever will, she is one of George Eliot's most vocal characters concerning the position of women in Victorian society. Her voice is bitter, as is her life, and yet it speaks 'truth' from a certain perspective. George Eliot reminds us throughout of the narrowness of her vision.

> Here she moved to and fro amongst the rose-coloured satin of chairs and curtains - the great story of this world reduced for her to the little tale of her own existence - dull obscurity everywhere, except where the keen light fell on the narrow track of her own lot, wide only for a woman's anguish.
>
> (p.438)

> She had never seen behind the canvas with which her life was hung.
>
> (p.494)

But although her vision is narrow, it is seen from an entirely feminine perspective. Mrs. Transome is keenly aware of her own responsibility in the molding of her life, but she is also keenly aware of the way in which the limitations of being a woman restricted her power to find satisfaction or prevent further suffering. She complains to her maid, Denner, " What is the use of a woman's will? - if she tries, she doesn't get it, and she ceases to be loved. God was cruel when he made women." (488)

Her story is simple and common.

> Forty years ago, when she came into this country, they said she was a pictur';but

> her family was poor, and so she took up with a hatchet-faced fellow like Transome.
>
> (p.82)

Little is revealed about Mr.Transome's past. At the time of the narrative, " he was as poor, half-witted a fellow as you'd wish to see."(82)

> A man nearer seventy than sixty ... His pale mild eyes, receeding lower jaw, and slight frame, could never have expressed much vigour, either bodily or mental; but he now had the unevenness of gait and feebleness of gesture which tell of a past paralytic seizure...But when Mrs. Transome appeared within the doorway, her husband paused in his work and shrank like a timid animal looked at in a cage where flight is impossible.
>
> (p.88)

He is also referred to as a "frightened old man," and "her imbecile husband." Mrs. Transome clearly despises him. Their eldest son, Durfey, " just such another as his father, only worse - a wild sort of half-natural, who got into bad company," has died prior to the narrative after squandering what financial resources the estate retained from its history of law-suits. The second son, Harold, "this best-loved boy," is of a different cast, which is not surprising since his natural parents are Mrs. Transome and the lawyer Matthew Jermyn. Years ago Jermyn and Mrs. Transome, "had seen no reason why they should not indulge their passion and their vanity, and determine for themselves how their lives should be made delightful in spite of

unalterable external conditions. The reasons had been unfolding themselves gradually ever since..."(318) The relationship between Jermyn, Mrs.Transome and Harold is not explicity revealed until chapter 47; however, the language throughout is replete with intimations.

Joan Bennett points out, "The reader first becomes aware of Mrs.Transome as a woman who is cruel, bitter and proud....As the story of her past is gradually revealed and the reader discovers how her character has been formed and hardened, she elicits his compassion, not because the the author pleads for it, but because the situation demands it." [4] Mrs. Transome's situation prior to the events of the narrative are given only brief development. We are told that, "For thirty years she had led the monotonous narrowing life which used to be the lot of our poorer gentry, who never went to town, and were probably not on speaking terms with two out of the five families whose parks lay within the distance of a drive."(104) She rebelled against this life by taking Jermyn as a lover and bearing his son, whom she loved 'rapturously'. " She had thought that the possession of this child would give unity to her life, and make some gladness through the changing years that would grow up as fruit out of these early maternal caresses."(97) But Harold brings neither

[4] Bennett, p. 154.

unity nor gladness to her life.

> It is a fact, perhaps kept a little too much in the background, that mothers have a self larger than their maternity, and that when their sons have become taller than themselves, and are gone from them to college or into the world, there are wide spaces of their time which are not filled with praying for their boys, reading old letters, and envying yet blessing those who are attending to their shirt-buttons. Mrs. Transome was certainly not one of those bland, adoring and gently tearful women. After sharing the common dream that when a beautiful man-child was born to her, her cup of happiness would be full, she had travelled through long years apart from that child to find herself at last in the presence of a son of whom she was afraid, who was utterly unmanageable by her, and to whose sentiments in any given case she possessed no key.
>
> (p.198)

Her situation in the narrative is to be caught up in the irony of a bitter feud between Jermyn and Harold. At the beginning of the novel Mrs. Transome awaits Harold's return after an absence of fifteen years, with both joy and trepidation.

Harold is the one person in her life for whom she still feels pride and love.

> Could it be that now - when her hair was grey, when sight had become one of the day's fatigues, when her young accomplishments seemed almost ludicrous, like the tone of her first harpsichord and the words of the songs long browned with age - she was going to reap an assured joy? - to feel that the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result, since a kind Providence had sanctioned them? - to be

> no longer tacitly pitied by her neighbours for her lack of money, her imbecile husband her graceless eldest-born, and the loneliness of her life; but to have at her side a rich, clever, possibly a tender, son?
>
> (p.89)

Harold is, in his own way, all of these things. He is wealthy and immediately sets about refurbishing the estate. He is clever in that, " he had the energetic will and muscle, the self-confidence, the quick perception, and the narrow imagination which make what is admiringly called the practical mind." (196) He is also, within the limits of his personality, tender. "Harold, on his side, had no wish opposed to filial kindness, but his busy thoughts were imperiously determined by habits which had no reference to any woman's feeling." (93) Still, he thinks about his mother with kindness.

> Poor mother! I confess I should not like to be an elderly woman myself. One requires a good deal of the purring cat for that, or else of the loving grandame. I wish she would take more to little Harry. I suppose she has her suspicions about the lad's mother, and is as rigid in those matters as in her Toryism. However, I do what I can; it would be difficult to say what there is wanting to her in the way of indulgence and luxury to make up for the old niggardly life.
>
> (p.437)

But this sort of tenderness and indulgence is misplaced. Mrs. Transome does not have the purring cat qualities that

would make this type of existence pleasant. She had that quality which fits with the male role, but not the female role, masterfulness. "...she had been used to rule in virtue of acknowledged superiority... Her part in life had been that of the clever sinner, and she was equipped with the views, the reasons, and the habits which belonged to that character; life would have little meaning for her if she were to be gently thrust aside as a harmless elderly woman."(91) But that is precisely what Harold plans for her.

> 'Bravo, mother! said Harold, putting his hand on her shoulder. 'Ah, you've had to worry yourself about things that don't properly belong to a woman - my father being weakly. We've set all that right. You shall have nothing to do now but to be grandmamma on satin cushions.'
>
> 'You must excuse me from the satin cushions. That is a part of the old woman's duty I am not prepared for. I am used to be chief bailiff, and to sit in the saddle two or three hours every day.'
>
> (p.95)

In this respect Mrs. Transome's situation is reinforced by the situation of Mrs. Holt. She, since being left a widow, had managed the patent medicine business her husband had left her while Felix, her only son, was away. Upon his return he had put a stop to her occuption, not because he wanted to manage the business himself, but because he believed that it was harmful and immoral. In spite

of his lofty motives, Mrs. Holt's complaint sounds similar to Mrs. Transome's.

> 'You'll excuse my going away, I know, Miss Lyon. But there were the dumplings to see to, and what little I've got left on my hands now, I like to do well...But when you've been used to doing things, and they've been taken away from you, it's as if your hands had been cut off, and you felt the fingers as are of no use to you.'
>
> (p.323)

Both women express loss and resentment at being relieved of their activities by the return of their masterful sons. But Mrs. Holt, unlike Mrs. Transome, does have some things to do. She cleans a house made particularly dirty by Felix's young pupils and cares for Job Trudge, the orphan Felix brought home. Mrs. Transome has servants to do her cleaning, and she dislikes and is disliked by Harry, the young grandson Harold brought to her. She literally has nothing to do.

In one sense at least Mrs. Transome's disability is accentuated by class. She has not only the limitations and restrictions of being a woman but also of being a lady, and a lady is purely a commodity, a product of society rather than a producer. Mrs. Transome has far less freedom than Esther, and is more dependent on traditional social bonds. Esther as a working woman, can, to a limited degree,

gain satisfaction by the exercise of her talents. She is particularly adept in French language skills, and can exploit this talent to her advantage in a real way as a governess. "... and she had secured an astonished admiration of her cleverness from the girls of various ages who were her pupils; indeed, her knowledge of French was generally held to give a distinction to Treby itself as compared with other market towns."(157) Like Mrs. Holt, Esther enjoys doing her work well. Even Denner, Mrs. Transome's maid, expresses the same sentiment.

> 'Oh, there's pleasure in knowing one's not a fool, like half the people one sees about. And managing one's husband is some pleasure; and doing all one's business well. Why, if I've only got some orange flowers to candy, I shouldn't like to die till I see them all right. Then there's the sunshine now and then; I like that, as the cats do. I look upon it, life is like our game at whist, when Banks and his wife come to the still-room of an evening. I don't enjoy the game much, but I like to play my cards well, and see what will be the end of it;...'
>
> (pp.103-4)

Even before Harold's return Mrs. Transome's opportunities for 'doing all one's business well' are severely compromised by her relationship with Jermyn. "... those relations which had sealed her lips on Jermyn's conduct in business matters,"(202) negate for her any

possibility of managing the estate well. They also add to the hardships of her life. "She knew that she herself had endured all the more privation because of his dishonest selfishness."(202) The bitterness she feels because of this is due not to moral repentance for her sin, but the social fact that she is now in his power.

Harold, whose basic attitude toward women was discussed in the previous chapter, dismisses his mother further by his conception of what is the proper sphere of men and women. For example, he responds to his mother's pleas that he reconsider his decision to stand as a radical:

> 'Mother,' said Harold, not angrily or with any raising of his voice, but in a quick, impatient manner, as if the scene must be got through as quickly as possible; 'it is natural that you should think in this way. Women, very properly, don't change their views, but keep to the notions in which they have been brought up. It doesn't signify what they think - they are not called upon to judge or to act. You must really leave me to take my own course in these matters, which properly belong to men. Beyond that, I will gratify any wish you choose to mention.
>
> (p.117)

The result of this attitude is that Harold accepts completely the fact that Jermyn has mismanaged the estate during his absence; to him it is natural that a man would take advantage of a woman in this situation, and just as

natural that the woman would allow it. He looks no further for possible reasons, nor will he listen to his mother's attempts to prevent legal proceedings against Jermyn.

> Harold thought it was only natural that his mother should have been in a sort of subjection to Jermyn throughout the awkward circumstances of the family. It was the way of women, and all weak minds, to think that what they had been used to was inalterable, and any quarrel with a man who managed private affairs was necessarily a formidible thing.
>
> (p.194)

> The fact that she had been active in the management of the estate - had ridden about it continually, had busied herself with accounts, had been head-bailiff of the vacant farms, and yet allowed things to go wrong - was set down by him simply to the general futility of women's attempts to transact men's business. He did not want to say anything to annoy her: he was only determined to let her understand, as quietly as possible, that she had better cease all interference.
>
> (p.193)

Mrs. Transome realizes very quickly that, "her son's return had not been a good for her in the sense of making her any happier."(97) From the moment of their first meeting she feels a shadow which, " was the presentiment of her powerlessness. ... If things went wrong, if Harold got unpleasantly disposed in a certain direction where her chief dread had always lain, she seemed to foresee

that her words would be of no avail."(101) She can only think that, "The best happiness I shall ever know, will be to escape the worst misery."(107) Her chief dread is a clash between Harold and Jermyn, which she anticipates because she is very well aware of Jermyn's selfish mismanagement of the estate. But for her, "It was a resolve which had become a habit, that she would never quarrel with this man - never tell him what she saw him to be."(201) Joan Bennett describes Jermyn as, "... a good husband and father, a successful business man, not more than averagely unscrupulous, but notably insensitive and impercipient." [5] George Eliot describes him:

> Jermyn was able and politic enough to have commanded a great deal of success in his life, but he could not help being handsome, arrogant, fond of being heard, indisposed to any kind of comradeship, amorous and bland towards women, cold and self-contained towards men.
>
> (p.384)

It is his blandness and insensitivity that particularly irritate Mrs. Transome, and the fact that he has so carelessly taken advantage of her. Their first private meeting after Harold's return indicates the nature of their relationship.

[5] Ibid.

> To-day she was more conscious than usual of that bitterness which was always in her mind in Jermyn's presence, but which was carefully suppressed: - suppressed because she could not endure that the degradation she inwardly felt should ever become visible or audible in acts or words of her own - should ever be reflected in any word or look of his. For years there had been a deep silence about the past between them: on her side, because she remembered; on his, because he more and more forgot.
>
> (p.201)

Mrs. Transome, realizing that she has no influence with Harold and could not prevent him from quarreling with Jermyn over the management of the estate, attempts to elicit a promise from Jermyn, that he will, "Bear anything from him rather than quarrel with him."(203) But Jermyn is not prepared to bear anything. Mrs. Transome is in a particularly binding situation with Jermyn , "...this man who was to pass with those nearest to her as her indebted servant, but whose brand she secretly bore. She was as powerless with him as she was with her son."(203)

It is the powerlessness of her situation which is the focus and dread of her life. George Eliot insists on this in her language throughout the novel, and Mrs. Transome is keenly aware of it. She is made more bitter by this impotence because she is a , "...woman who loved rule," but also because, as narrow as her vision is, she can see

farther than either Harold or Jermyn. She can see the impending catastrophe; she can also see the possiblity of avoiding it. But she is powerless to do so; in part because in George Eliot's scheme Nemesis is inevitable but in part, and also as part of the nature of the Nemesis, as a woman she has no voice or influence with either Harold or Jermyn. Harold has his fixed ideas about women, and dismisses her attempts with condescending kindness. Jermyn, whom she once loved, has taken advantage of his position in regard to her with egotistical self-righteousness. It was not the adultery that promoted the situation of the disagreement between the two men, but Jermyn's greed. When the quarrel reaches the point where Harold can seriously and adversely affect Jermyn, he tries to save himself by persuading Mrs. Transome to confess the relationship to Harold. His approach infuriates Mrs. Transome. When he offers to, "...withdraw any words that have offended you," she replies,

> 'You can't withdraw them. Can a man apologise for being a dastard?...And I have caused you to strain your conscience have I? - it is I who have sullied your purity? I should think the demons have more honour - they are not so impudent to one another. I would not lose the misery of being a woman, now I see what can be the baseness of a man. One must be a man - first to tell a woman that her love has made her your debtor, and then ask her to pay you by breaking the last poor threads between her and her son.'
>
> (p.519)

Although in this instance Mrs. Transome mistakes Jermyn's crassness for a characteristic of men in general, she comes more to the point when later she says, " If I sinned, my judgment went beforehand - that I should sin for a man like you."(519) This distinction is made again later, when Mrs. Transome tells Esther,

> 'Men are selfish. They are selfish and cruel. What they care for is their own pleasure and their own pride.'
> 'Not all,' said Esther, on whom these words fell with a painful jar.
> 'All I have ever loved,' said Mrs. Transome.
> (p.597)

This distinction is necessary to the larger moral [redacted]cture of the novel, in which a larger social vision, su[redacted] the one possessed by Felix Holt, permits personal mastery in the male-female relationship without detracting from other cares and concerns of social importance.(See previous chapter).

Mrs. Transome, whose story is singularly uncomplicated by overt moral development, is a study in powerlessness. On the surface it would appear that the source of her impotence lies in the past adultery with Jermyn. But it is not the adultery per se, rather it is the consequence of that act, the birth of Harold, that sets up the specific circumstances of her particular situation, and allows the possibility of the revelation of the act which would condemn

her in the eyes of a society that, "stands as judge and jury...". But George Eliot does not develop this theme particularly moralistically. As Leavis says, "It is remarkable - and it is characteristic of George Eliot's mature art - that the treatment of Mrs. Transome's early lapse should have nothing in it of the Victorian Moralist. There is ... an intently matter-of-fact directness; this is human nature, this is the fact and these are the inexorable consequences."[6] The adultery is perhaps the medium of her powerlessness, but its source lies elsewhere.

It has been argued with excellent discrimination that the Nemesis of Mrs. Transome's life has its roots in her egotism and moral narrowness,[7] and this, in one sense, is so patently true that it needs no further development here. But it is clear from the ironic structure that Mrs. Transome's sufferings occur at least in part because she is a woman - because her marriage of convenience and necessity placed her in an intimate relationship with a man whom she despises; because, by taking a lover, she has placed herself in his power; because the issue of that adultery, a son whom she wishes to adore and be loved by, dismisses her as a harmless elderly woman.

The parallel between Esther Lyon and the young Mrs. Transome is clear in the novel. Their educations and dispositions are very similar, and their choices concerning marriage, the primary choice in a woman's life in the

[6]Leavis, p. 70.

[7]Many notable critics take this position, for example, Bennet and Leavis.

framework of George Eliot's fiction, are the same. The Esther presented before she begins to change under Felix's influence, whose fantasy life so closely resembles Mrs. Transome's actual life in outward detail, would easily have succumbed to the temptation of marriage to Harold, a marriage without love, in order to gratify her desires for wealth and station. Essentially it is the same kind of choice given to Maggie and to Gwendolen, and is a very real reflection of the basic choice offered to women in Victorian society. By the time Esther is given this choice, her values have already been modified by Felix's instruction. But Mrs. Transome had no Felix to teach her either the larger social vision or renunciation that is the result of a moral nature.

Mrs. Transome is influenced to some extent by Esther during their brief association. Her greatest suffering occurs at the conclusion of Felix Holt and though there is some indication that she will gain moral stature because of it, this does not receive treatment in the bounds of the novel. Her socialization occurs not in the moral realm, but in the growing consciousness and forcible knowledge of what it is to be a woman in a society of men. For Mrs. Transome this is a consciousness that has grown with her into age. She tells Denner, "'A woman never has been the worst till she is old," and for her at least, this is true In an early description of her George Eliot says:

> There were piteous sensibilities in this faded woman, who thirty-four years ago, in the splendour of her bloom, had been imperious to one of these men, and had rapturously pressed the other as an infant to her bosom, and now knew that she was of little consequence to either of them.
>
> (p.114)

As a mother and lover Mrs.Transome did have some power. It is only in age that the full extent of her powerlessness in a male society becomes clear to her.

In Felix Holt the stories of Esther Lyon and Mrs. Transome cannot really be separated; they are structurally dependent on one another. Although the actual association of Esther and Mrs. Transome is brief, their situations are woven in a carefully balanced counterpoint throughout the novel.

Most of Mrs. Transome's bitterness is the result of her inability to accept the restrictions of her sex; the moral consequences from which she suffers are of a particularly feminine kind. It is true that she 'brought it on herself'; and yet George Eliot's sympathetic treatment of her somehow always looks behind her mistakes to the society which not only allowed them, but in a sense, encouraged them. Her education in particular is the subject of George Eliot's marked irony. The description of her marriage of convenience and necessity is not; it is stated so plainly

and with such lack of emphasis, that when considered in the light of subsequent events its significance is all the more chilling. This topic receives development in Daniel Deronda. Gwendolen is urged into marriage with Grandcourt by both her mother and her uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, a minister in the Church of England. When she hesitates in accepting Grandcourt, he tells her,

> You hold your fortune in your own hands, - a fortune such as rarely happens to a girl in your circumstances, - a fortune in fact which almost takes the question out of the range of mere personal feeling, and makes your acceptance of it a duty. If Providence offers you power and position, especially when unclogged by any conditions that are repugnant to you, - your course is one of responsibility, into which caprice must not enter. [8]

To her society, Esther's rejection of Harold and of her hereditary position and wealth might easily seem capricious, and certainly unconventional. Marriage for love was very much the exception in Victorian England,[9] and a match that entailed so large a renunciation was, no doubt, quite exceptional. George Eliot insists on the role of feeling in marriage by the juxtaposition of Esther and Mrs. Transome. Without the 'vision' afforded by Mrs. Transome, Esther's choice would seem no more than a romantic fairy tale, charming, but lacking the intensity of grave danger averted. In the novel it is precisely the vision

[8] George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 104.

[9] Houghton, p. 381. He quotes G.R. Drysdale who wrote in

of Mrs. Transome's suffering that alerts Esther to the dangers of what is for her the realization of her fantasies, literally her dreams come true. Esther is spared many of the disabling effects of being a woman by placing herself in willing subjection to a man who is morally acceptable and whom she loves. Thus, she is spared both Maggie's fate, and Mrs. Transome's.

Esther achieves a moral nature and accepts a role that satisfies the traditions of society, although in a somewhat unconventional way. She pays the price of subjection, but she does not regard this as a disability. It is Mrs. Transome who illustrates the disability of being a woman, and around whom George Eliot develops her ironic criticism of society and its relationship with women. In the carefully structured comparison between Mrs. Transome and Esther, George Eliot illustrates both the disability and the resolution for women in society.

1854, " A great proportion of the marriages we see around us, did not take place from love at all, but from some interested motive, such as wealth, social position, or other advantages; and in fact it is rare to see a marriage in which true love has been the predominating feeling on both sides."

CHAPTER V:

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The 'disability of being women', the formal device which functions in the novels of George Eliot as a focus of suffering and, in some cases, tragedy, does not cease to function as a determining factor in the lives of Maggie, Esther, and Mrs. Transome as a result of increased socialization. The moral development of Maggie and Esther which opens their vision to the human condition and prompts their response of a religion of humanity does not affect society's relation to them as women. Mrs. Transome's socialization, different from Maggie's and Esther's in that it lacks an explicit moral dimension, leads her to a clear, bitter perception of a woman's place in society when the illusory power of youth and beauty no longer apply. In some respects Mrs. Transome and Maggie are very similar. Both initially find the social restrictions of their lives intolerable, and succumb, in one sense, to the same temptation. It is true that Mrs. Transome meets Jermyn for sexual intercourse whereas Maggie meets Philip for social intercourse, but Tom's reaction to the meeting clearly indicates the sexual interpretation which is the social norm; the same norm that interprets Maggie's elopement with Stephen as a sexual fact,

socially if not actually. For both Maggie and Mrs. Transome the consequences of their actions are the necessary submission to men who are their inferiors. The fact that Maggie's position is finally morally defensible and Mrs. Transome's is not, in no way affects the situation of either in relation to society. Both, finally, are powerless. Presumably Maggie suffers willingly and Mrs. Transome unwillingly, but Maggie does not appear particularly happier than Mrs. Transome because of this.

For Esther the situation is different. She willingly submits to a man who supposedly is her superior. Submission outside of self is, of course, basic to moral development, but whereas the morally motivated men submit to authority larger than an individual, society or, for Mr. Lyon, spiritual authority, the morally motivated woman submits first to a man. This submission involves not only a moral dimension, in which a woman places herself under the guidance, direction and authority of a man, but an economic dimension as well. Harold Transome did not consider Esther a suitable candidate for marriage until she acquired wealth. Felix Holt did not consider her a suitable candidate for marriage until she disposed of it. Esther's choice was presented as a decision between two options; marriage to Harold and life at Transome Court, or marriage to Felix and poverty. However, it is entirely possible in the terms presented by the novel

that Esther accept wealth but not Harold or Transome Court, and live as a middle-class woman of independent means, or as Felix's wife, in the class structure of his choice, but still with independent means. Felix cannot accept this, presumably because of moral and political scruples. But Felix is the 'ideal' man whose moral and political attitudes are superior to the norms of society; yet, he is to Esther as society is to Maggie, and he does to Esther what society does to Maggie - remove the option of economic independence. For Maggie this is presented as a crushing disability, as it is for Gwendolen and, peripherally, for the young Mrs. Transome. Clearly, a woman's only hope is to find a morally superior man who will guide her to morality and mediate between her and society.

Both the effects and characteristics of socialization differ depending upon the sex of the individual. This is clear, at least for the novels in this study, despite an equally clear tendency on George Eliot's part to extrapolate from the particular, in these cases the 'disability of being women', to the general, human condition. For George Eliot there seems to be no contradiction or conflict in these two notions. She writes to Miss Emily Davies:

> And there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be 'unsexed'. We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing

> a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character, than we can afford to part with the human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman - which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history.
>
> The answer to those alarms of men about education is, to admit fully that the mutual delight of the sexes in each other must enter into the perfection of life, but to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgment may be as far as possible the same. [1]

Her discussion here of the mutual subjection of soul, and the clear advocation for 'the same store of acquired truth or belief' and the same 'grounds of judgment' for women and men, sounds very much like John Stuart Mill's marriage between intellectual and emotional equals. Yet, as Haight reports,

> When John Stuart Mill introduced his amendment to extend the franchise to women, Mrs. Peter Taylor urged Marian to lend her influence in support of the cause. It was impossible to move her. To John Morley, who had discussed the issue with her, she wrote: 'If I were called on to act in the matter, I would certainly not oppose any plan which held out any reasonable promise of tending to establish as far as possible an equivalence of advantages for the two sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development.' But the very fact that 'woman seems to me to have the worse share in existence', she thought, should be the 'basis for a sublimer resignation in women and a more regenerating tenderness in man.' [2]

[1] Haight, p. 397.

[2] Ibid., p. 396.

The pious idealism of her statements rings less than true when applied to her own life, for Mary Ann Evans was hardly sublimely resigned to the restrictions imposed on women by Victorian society. Calvin Bedient discusses the contradiction as it appears between the larger themes of her fiction and her life.

> As for the 'irresistible power' of the 'general' George Eliot was only too eager to demonstrate and affirm it. She never questioned it, she could not afford to. She wrote not only out of a pious memory but out of guilt, out of unexamined guilt, paying in her fiction a debt that she had incurred by her own independent life - the life, first of an agnostic in a pious family, and, later, of an unmarried Victorian wife'. [3]

Bedient, in his reading of George Eliot, seems to miss much of the subtleties in her position regarding the general. Certainly the sarcastic treatment of 'Public Opinion' in The Mill on the Floss implies a questioning of the values presented, mingled with a sympathetic pity at the unevolved morality displayed by the community. But it is also true that Maggie dies, dies a social outcast, and in one sense, this is a direct consequence of 'her own independent life.'

The contradictions evident in the study of George Eliot, both in the relationship between her philosophy and her life, and in the relationships between her women

[3] Bedient, p. 38.

characters and their societies, are characteristic of the transitional ambiguities of her age. Basil Willey states,

> From the very outset, however, she showed the instinct - which was deeply imbedded in the consciousness of the century as a whole - to see both sides of any question: to tolerate the ordinary while admiring the ideal, to cling to the old while accepting the new, to retain the core of traditions while naturally criticizing their forms. [4]

She was a Victorian woman and a Victorian writer. But just as in her life she rebelled against the restrictions of her 'lot' while prostelytizing for sublime resignation, so in her fiction she rebels against the specific situations of women while generalizing the problems into the larger sphere of the human condition. Although, as Hardy points out, the conclusion of Middlemarch was revised, changing the focus from a keen inspection of the particular to a glance at the general, the "Prelude" to Middlemarch remains a lasting statement of George Eliot's concern for the place and opportunities of women in society. Here, too, she begins with a statement of the particular, in this case Saint Theresa: "Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa..." But here her

[4] Willey, p. 205.

movement to the general is not in terms of 'man' or 'mankind', but most definitely to the general relationship between society and women.

> Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion. With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistancy and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse.
>
> Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse... Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hinderances, instead of centering in some long-recognisable deed.

George Eliot was not a 'feminist', but her fiction as well as her life stands as an appeal for changes in society which would give greater scope to the lives of women.

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