

**The Maternal Figure Symbolizes Stability and Continuity in the Novels of George Eliot: a
Close Reading of *The Mill on the Floss***

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate mother-daughter dynamics and societal critiques in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, focusing on the Tulliver women's battle within a patriarchal society. It vividly portrays how Maggie Tulliver's emotional and intellectual needs are overshadowed by Mrs. Tulliver, who places social status and financial security above all, mirroring the deeply ingrained gender norms of their time. The research argues that the novel's exploration of women's confined roles and the enduring influence of maternal figures still strikes a chord, tackling timeless issues of gender and familial relations.

Through the stark contrast between Maggie's rich inner life and her mother's preoccupation with appearances and social standing, Eliot brings to the fore the isolation and hurdles women encounter in asserting their individuality. The thesis posits that Mrs. Tulliver's treatment of Maggie reflects her entanglement in unresolved societal expectations, perpetuating the constraints in which that she has. The analysis uncovers a poignant irony in Mrs. Tulliver's adherence to patriarchal standards, reinforcing the novel's critical stance on Victorian gender limitations and their enduring relevance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Identity and Society in Eliot's Narrative

Maggie was not her pet child and, in general, would have been much better if she had been quite different; yet the womanly heart, so bruised in its small personal desires, found a future to rest on in the life of this young thing, and the mother pleased herself with wearing out her own hands to save the hands that had so much more life in them. – George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, (281)

In the heart of George Eliot's literary universe, where the Floss River hurries on "between its green banks to the sea" (5), lies a microcosm of human emotion, societal pressures, and the inexorable march of change. This vivid imagery from the opening of *The Mill on the Floss* serves not just as a setting but as a prelude to the tumultuous journey of growth, love, and conflict. Eliot, born Mary Ann Evans in 1819, navigated her complex channels in a male-dominated literary world, adopting a male pen name to ensure her voice was heard, not sidelined. Her novels, rich in psychological insight and societal critique, echo her experiences and observations, challenging and reshaping Victorian norms. Henry describes Eliot as "The young Mary Anne was an excellent pupil at the girls' schools she attended and seems always to have had an intense intellectual life fueled by reading of all sorts and by the study of languages. Beginning with French in 1832, she learned (with the help of tutors) Italian, German, Latin, and Greek. Later in life, she would acquire Spanish and Hebrew" (Henry 2). Similarly, Maggie Tulliver exhibits an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a deep intellectual curiosity that sets her apart in her restrictive Victorian environment. Both real and fictional women confront the boundaries imposed by their societies, challenging the circumscribed roles allocated to them by their gender and asserting their right to intellectual and personal freedom.

George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* comprehensively examines Victorian culture's societal conventions and personal desires. This thesis explores the novel's complex socio-cultural fabric and poses research questions about gender dynamics, family responsibilities, and the desire for intellectual freedom in a society that restricts expression. The novel's protagonist, Maggie Tulliver, acts as a prism through which the challenges women face in claiming their identities in the face of Victorian decorum are emphasized.

The story, set in the industrializing English countryside, vividly depicts development upheaval and social tensions. Eliot delicately portrays the Dodson family, with its deep-rooted traditional values and stubborn opposition to change, capturing the more significant social tensions of the day. The underlying ideals guiding domestic life are revealed through a critical investigation of this family dynamic as viewed through the interactions between the aunts and uncles.

In this thesis, I argue that *The Mill on the Floss* mirrors Maggie Tulliver's limits to social struggles, embodying the multifaceted challenges women faced in Victorian England. This study discusses the historical backdrop of the novel, emphasizing its significance as a socio-cultural artifact. Through a detailed examination of the text, I aim to reveal the intricate discourse surrounding women's duties and expectations, the impacts of economic shifts, and the inherent resistance to social norms. The analysis draws upon various critical perspectives—feminist critique, historical analysis, and socio-economic theory—to form a cohesive argument. These perspectives are synthesized to offer a sophisticated critique of existing literature, underscoring the novel's relevance to today's discussions of gender and class. Within George Eliot's literary cosmos, and mainly through the narrative's exploration of character and context, I contend that

the central themes of gender dynamics, familial obligations, and the individual's quest for self are vividly portrayed against the backdrop of the strict societal structures of Victorian England.

Eliot's world, rendered with such intricate psychological depth, is dissected to reveal the undercurrents of women's roles, the class system, and the domestic sphere during the nineteenth century. Maggie's bold act of cutting her hair becomes emblematic of the larger narrative—a symbol of defiance and a clarion call for self-identity against the backdrop of an evolving yet resistant society. This thesis does not merely skim the surface of Eliot's narrative; it plunges into the depths, seeking to resurface with contemporary relevance that echoes today's ongoing dialogues on gender and social stratification.

Motherhood Complexities

Mrs. Tulliver's narrative is a poignant exploration of Victorian motherhood's emotional and psychological intricacies, offering insights into the intersection of personal desires and societal expectations. Mrs. Tulliver's maternal challenge is that she did not want to see her children unhappy; she would instead do anything, even to her discomfort to ensure their happiness. This reflects the profound sense of self-sacrifice and the prioritization of children's well-being that defines her character, illustrating the emotional labor that underpins her role as a mother.

The academic discourse surrounding Mrs. Tulliver's character provides a rich context for understanding her complexities. In "Narcissistic Rage in *The Mill on the Floss*", Johnstone Peggy Fitzhugh highlights the internal conflicts Mrs. Tulliver faces, caught between the societal expectations of motherhood and her own emotional turmoil. Similarly, Elizabeth Langland's analysis in "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel" and Rosemary Mundhenk's "Patterns of Irresolution in Eliot's *The Mill on the*

Floss" contribute to our understanding of the Victorian domestic sphere and the role of women within it. These insights, coupled with the critical perspectives offered by scholars, frame our analysis of Mrs. Tulliver as a character navigating the complexities of motherhood. By examining her character through these lenses, I aim to shed light on the broader themes of maternal duty, personal identity, and the societal expectations that shape the experiences of Victorian mothers.

Education as Emancipation

In this section, I delve into the myriad ways education liberates the mind and soul. Through the allegory of a river, education is likened to a force of nature that carves its path, breaking barriers and nourishing the lands of knowledge and self-awareness. This section richly explores the transformative journey education embarks upon, from the enlightening tales of historical figures who, with knowledge as their sword, fought against the shackles of oppression to the poignant narratives of contemporary learners who navigate the turbulent waters of societal expectations to find their harbor of self-expression and identity. It champions the idea that education transcends the traditional realms of academia, becoming a profoundly personal expedition towards understanding one's place in the world, fostering a sense of agency, and igniting the flames of change.

Gender Roles and Identity

This section unravels the intricate layers of Victorian society, showcasing the clash between individual desires and societal norms through the lives of its women. It complexly examines how the complex interplay of judgments and expectations frame the lives of Victorian women, with Eliot inviting readers to look beyond Maggie's defiance to understand the societal constraints that govern female autonomy. This section highlights the nuanced dialogue Eliot

crafts around the possibilities and limitations of female agency within a patriarchal society, illustrated vividly through Maggie's struggle for intellectual and emotional fulfillment amidst societal expectations of femininity and domesticity.

Eliot's critical eye extends to the economic realm, as seen through Mrs. Glegg, "the most aggressively respectable of matrons" (Kreisel 69), whose character embodies the Victorian valorization of thrift and economic conservatism. Her critique of Mrs. Tulliver's household management becomes a lens to explore broader societal norms, where financial prudence is intertwined with moral virtue. This discourse delves into the Victorian obsession with physical wealth over speculative gains, situating Mrs. Glegg as a custodian of societal values that equate economic stewardship with moral integrity. Furthermore, the tension between individual identity and community expectations is encapsulated in Mrs. Glegg's criticisms of Mrs. Tulliver's domestic and personal choices, as simple as how she wears her hair. While seemingly trivial, this critique serves as a symbolic gesture highlighting the complexities of female autonomy and societal conformity. It illuminates how women's bodies and choices become sites of cultural negotiation and control, subject to the scrutinizing gaze of tradition and expectation.

Death as a Resolution

In the concluding section of the thesis, I will delve into the thematic culmination of Maggie Tulliver's narrative, focusing on the elaborate dynamics of redemption, sacrifice, and the profound impact of familial bonds, as illustrated in George Eliot's nuanced portrayal. Without revealing the precise details of Maggie's fate, this part aims to encapsulate the essence of her emotional and moral journey, reflecting on the complex interplay between individual desires and societal expectations.

This section will also examine Maggie's transformative character through the lens of her relationships, particularly highlighting the pivotal role of her mother. When Mrs. Tulliver observes the changes in her daughter, she remains a steadfast source of warmth and pride.

Further, I will explore Maggie's internal conflicts and her quest for a place within a world that often seems at odds with her innermost desires. The narrative poignantly captures this struggle, as seen in Maggie's reflection on her place in the world and her relationship with her mother in the interplay between societal norms and the profound connection of mother and daughter. The story of Maggie Tulliver is a nuanced testament to the conflicts of heart and duty. This analysis will underscore the tensions between personal aspirations and the weight of external expectations.

Lastly, I will reflect on the symbolic and thematic significance of Maggie's actions and decisions, particularly in moments that underscore the indomitable spirit of maternal love and the quest for redemption. The poignant scene where Mrs. Tulliver, in a gesture of profound love and sacrifice, says, "My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother" (497) highlights the depth of her emotional journey and the redemptive power of love. Through these quotes and thematic considerations, the concluding section will offer comprehensive insight into Maggie's story's resolution. It will emphasize the enduring themes of love, sacrifice, and redemption that resonate through Eliot's narrative while carefully navigating the specifics of the plot's conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: MRS. TULLIVER AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF MOTHERHOOD

The Maternal Ideal and Societal Constraints

Mrs Tulliver was what is called a good-tempered person,—never cried, when she was a baby, on any slighter ground than hunger and pins; and from the cradle upward had been healthy, fair, plump, and dull-witted; in short, the flower of her family for beauty and amiability. (Eliot 13)

In the family dynamics and societal interplay, Mrs. Tulliver is a poignant embodiment of motherhood, characterized by tempered behavior and a perceived lack of intellectual depth. This chapter explores into what Hirsch explored into by noting how "Mrs. Tulliver's instinctive though ignorant and uncomprehending loyalty to her daughter who has been disgraced" (Hirsch 214) illustrates the complex balance between the expected submissive caregiver of the Victorian era and the emergence of a more developed individuality. Mrs. Tulliver's character offers a rich canvas for examining the multifaceted strains of motherhood.

In "Mothers and Daughters", Jung says: "Every mother contains her daughter within herself and every daughter her mother. Every woman extends backward into her mother and forwards into her daughter" (qtd. In Hirsch 209). This concept highlights the intergenerational continuity of womanhood, suggesting an inherent uncertainty regarding the passage of time as women live through the experiences of being both a mother and a daughter. The conscious recognition of these enduring bonds gives the impression that a woman's life is not confined to her lifespan but is distributed across generations. Therefore, the discussion of Mrs. Tulliver's experiences can be enriched by integrating the concept of intergenerational identity and maternal legacy, as it provides a deeper understanding of her navigation through societal norms and maternal connection.

This section will begin by dissecting Mrs. Tulliver's established maternal role within the domestic sphere, identifying her daily practices and the expectations set upon her. It will then examine the societal norms surrounding motherhood in the novel's context and their impact on Mrs. Tulliver's conduct and self-conception. Vaid analyzed this and highlighted the narrowed and specialized functions of the home in the "Victorian period, which were accompanied by a division of labor between the sexes known as the "separate spheres." This concept delineated the roles of men and women, attributing economic wherewithal and public responsibilities to the man while designating the responsibilities for physical comfort, nurturance, and the moral character of the family and home to the woman. This division had acquired the sanctity of religion and tradition" (Vaid 64). A subsequent section is dedicated to the mother-daughter relationship, laying bare the connective threads and points of friction that define their interactions. Then, I pivot to examine the challenges and struggles Mrs. Tulliver endures and how these influence her maternal approach. The penultimate section will contrast moments of conformity and acts of defiance against societal norms in Mrs. Tulliver's life, examining the implications of these behaviors for her familial relations throughout the novel's progression. It will mainly analyze how Mrs. Tulliver's character develops from Maggie's childhood into adulthood, highlighting these dynamics' impact on the evolving mother-daughter relationship. This analysis will shed light on the novel's broader themes and the Victorian understanding of motherhood, offering insights into the plot's portrayal of maternal evolution.

Johnston notes how Mrs. Tulliver begins with a low position in her family: she is compared unfavorably to her sisters and 'is always on the defensive towards [them]' (227). There are many references to Mrs. Tulliver's inferiority: Mr. Tulliver has picked his wife because she is a bit weak' (68); he is proud to have a buxom wife conspicuously his inferior in intellect' (73);

she is the 'feeblest' member of the Dodson family (97). Mrs. Tulliver's sibling rivalry comes out in her worries that Maggie cannot compare to her sister's daughter Lucy: "It seems hard as my sister Deane should have that pretty child" (61). She is always concerned about the impression Maggie will make on her sisters. When Maggie dips her head in a basin of water 'in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day, " Mrs. Tulliver warns Maggie that the aunts won't love her and then adds her fears for herself: "Folks 'ull think it's a judgment on me as I've got such a child—they'll think I've done summat wicked" (78)" (Johnstone 46).

Mrs. Tulliver reveals her position in making a big decision like education by inquiring about her son's potential new school, which exposes her domestic preoccupations. She is concerned whether Tom will be provided with "twice o' pudding" (21), reflecting her anxiety about what can be described as shallow. The pudding is not merely a detail about food; it is emblematic of Mrs. Tulliver's motherly care and interest away from the primary matter. Her focus on such specifics hints at a maternal figure who considers the nurturing role her principal duty and not to be part of the decision-making. This preoccupation with the physical well-being of her son is consonant with the Victorian ideal of the mother as the provider of comfort and sustenance, reinforcing the gender norms of the period. Mrs. Tulliver's emotional investment in her son is further accentuated when she contemplates the distance to Tom's new school after she "hush[es]" Maggie and the impact it will have on her ability to "wash him and mend him" (20). This is a poignant illustration of her desire to maintain an intimate connection with her son, symbolized through the acts of washing and mending quintessential symbols of maternal care. Her concern for the "linen" transcends its materiality to express her wish to continue to envelop

her child in the comforts of home. It metaphorically represents her love and the desire to protect him from the world's harshness.

The contrast between Mrs. Tulliver's domestic focus and her husband's concern for Tom's future career opportunities is stark. Mr. Tulliver's views on education reflect a forward-thinking approach, seeking to prepare Tom for the world. This contrast establishes the different parental roles and subtly indicates Mrs. Tulliver's confined scope within the domestic sphere. Her husband's ambitions for Tom's education and future life depart from her immediate, nurturing concerns. It suggests a potential inner conflict within Mrs. Tulliver, a yearning, perhaps unacknowledged, for a broader role or recognition beyond motherhood. "Freud notes that the pre-oedipal attachment to the mother is never totally superseded by the desire for the father; neither is the oedipal rejection of the mother ever overcome, indicating an ambivalent relationship that dominates a woman's entire life, particularly in her relationships with her husband or lover" (Hirsch 206), which could very well resonate with Mrs. Tulliver's experience.

The novel does not delve deeply into Mrs. Tulliver's inner life, leaving the reader to infer her struggles and aspirations from her actions and concerns, primarily directed toward her children. Spillman, in her article "All That Is Solid Turns into Steam: Sublimation and Sympathy in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*" argued that Mrs. Tulliver's often humorous conversations with her husband, where she appears incapable of dealing with abstractions and is therefore assigned to what Spillman argued as how "Comte's lowest level of the theological stage, fetishism, underline this point. Mrs. Tulliver's primitive materialism proves little more helpful in forging bonds of sympathy than her son's code of ethics. However, Eliot's double narrative perspective invites us to look at these moments with both a sympathetic and a critical eye, understanding that the forms of fetishism like Mrs. Tulliver's household gods served to

obscure the stark realities of life and interpersonal relations" (Spillman 364). In Mrs. Tulliver, Eliot has crafted a character that encapsulates the Victorian maternal ideal while also hinting at the silent struggles such women faced. Her focus on domesticity, her emotional connection to her children, and her deference to her husband's authority on matters of education and career all speak to the societal norms of the time. Nevertheless, Mrs. Tulliver's character is nuanced within these constraints, suggesting an undercurrent of complexity reflective of the broader societal confines imposed on women during the Victorian era.

In George Eliot's Victorian societal backdrop, where gender roles are sharply defined, the Tulliver family's crisis brings these norms into sharp relief. While Mrs. Tulliver's conversations regarding Tom's future occur within the context of their son being groomed as the family legacy's carrier, we see a starkly different approach to Maggie. Eliot presents us with a crucial phase in Maggie's development, at thirteen, in the shadow of the family's bankruptcy. It is a formative time where her intellectual and emotional development stands in contrast to the focused investment in Tom's future. Eliot writes:

This time of utmost need was come to Maggie, with her short span of thirteen years. To the usual precocity of the girl, she added that early experience of struggle, of conflict between the inward impulse and outward fact, which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature; and the years since she hammered the nails into her wooden Fetish among the worm-eaten shelves of the attic had been filled with so eager a life in the triple world of Reality, Books, and Waking Dreams, that Maggie was strangely old for her years in everything except in her entire want of that prudence and self-command which were the qualities that made Tom manly in the midst of his intellectual boyishness (Eliot 280).

This disparity highlights the prioritization of male heirs and underscores the relegation of daughters to the domestic sphere, with limited foresight into their education or ambitions outside the home. Reflecting this sentiment, Hirsch observes, "Mothers of all classes are still primarily concerned about their daughters' future as wives and mothers," which resonates with the Tulliver family's situation and the broader Victorian context (Hirsch 213). This dynamic reveals the societal valuation of sons over daughters, where maternal concerns align more closely with the tangible needs of male heirs.

Navigating Motherhood and Familial Dynamics

Despite the narrative focus on Mrs. Tulliver's attentiveness to Tom, it is crucial to recognize the subtleties in her relationship with Maggie. Instances of care and concern for Maggie, though less pronounced than those for Tom, hint at a complex and multifaceted maternal affection. These moments suggest that Mrs. Tulliver's apparent preference may reflect societal conditioning rather than personal inclination, highlighting the broader Victorian context that shaped maternal roles and familial dynamics. Through the character of Mrs. Tulliver and her interactions with her children, Eliot offers a critique of the societal norms that prioritize sons, often to the detriment of daughters' aspirations and development. This gendered dynamic within the Tulliver family serves as a microcosm of the broader societal practices of the time, underscoring the marginalization of women and the shaping of maternal affection by prescribed roles: "Mrs Tulliver was mute, feeling herself a truly wretched mother. As usual, the thought pressed upon her that people would think she had done something wicked to deserve her maternal troubles" (103). In the profoundly evocative scene, Mrs. Tulliver's reaction to her daughter's actions provides a profound insight into the intricacies of Victorian motherhood, societal pressures, and the nuanced expressions of maternal affection. This moment, when Mrs.

Tulliver is informed that "Maggie pushed Lucy into the mud" and subsequently finds herself grappling with the weight of societal judgment and personal failure: "You know she'll do mischief if there's mischief to be done." (103), encapsulates the complex interplay between maternal instinct, societal expectations, and the internalized fear of moral judgment.

Upon hearing of Maggie's actions, Mrs. Tulliver's "mute[ness]" speaks volumes, serving as a poignant reflection of her internal struggle. This silence is not merely an absence of words but a laden pause filled with the tumult of self-reproach, societal fear, and the overwhelming sense of inadequacy as a mother. The societal expectation for mothers during the Victorian era to produce well-behaved, morally upright children was immense, placing an unbearable weight on Mrs. Tulliver's shoulders. Her mute response, therefore, can be understood as a manifestation of the oppressive societal gaze that scrutinizes and judges maternal worth based on the behavior of one's children. Her internalized fear of societal judgment further complicates the complexity of Mrs. Tulliver's feelings toward Maggie's mischief. The thought that "people would think she had done something wicked to deserve her maternal troubles" reveals a profound fear of moral condemnation, not just for Maggie's behavior but as a reflection of her moral standing. This internalized judgment highlights the Victorian societal norms that unjustly equated a child's misbehavior with a mother's moral failure, underscoring the external pressures that dictated Mrs. Tulliver's maternal experience.

Moreover, Mrs. Tulliver's distressed query to Tom, "Tom, you naughty boy, where's your sister?" underscores her constant worry for Maggie despite the prevailing tensions. This moment of maternal concern, albeit expressed amid disciplinary action, illustrates Mrs. Tulliver's deep-seated fear for her children's safety and well-being. Her insistence that Tom fetch Maggie "this minute" reflects her immediate concern for Maggie's physical safety and her desperate attempt to

maintain a semblance of familial order and societal respectability. Much like the natural world described in the novel, where "nature repairs her ravages" (536) – but not all. The upturned trees are not rooted again – the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. There is no thorough repair to the eyes that have dwelt on the past (542). Mrs. Tulliver's reaction reveals an unspoken acknowledgment that some disruptions, whether in the natural world or family dynamics, cannot be mended to their original state, leaving visible scars that testify to their tumultuous history.

Mrs. Tulliver's concerns are rooted in the material aspects of her family's crisis, symbolizing her status and history. The exchange with Mrs. Deane over her wedding teapot reflects her deep emotional connection to her belongings, representing her married life and identity. When she presents the teapot, hoping it won't end up at the "Golden Lion" to be scratched and seen by strangers, it underscores her sentimentality towards material objects that hold personal history and her fear of losing them, symbolizing a loss of her past and the dignity it carries. The critical moment when Tom speaks up to suggest that the aunts contribute financially to prevent the sale of their belongings shows his emerging understanding of the situation's gravity: "wouldn't it be better to give it now and pay the debt we're going to be sold up for, and save my mother from parting with her furniture?" (216). This exchange illustrates the gender dynamics within the family, where the women are emotionally invested in the household's materials, and the men, represented by Tom, step into the financial and decision-making roles, albeit reluctantly. Tom's proposition is pragmatic, aiming to preserve the family's dignity and Mrs. Tulliver's cherished possessions, yet it also reveals the family's complex interdependence and the emotional labor primarily shouldered by the women.

Aunt Glegg's response to Tom underscores the expectation for him to rise to the occasion and take on the hardships caused by his father's actions. Her emphasis on the need for Tom and Maggie to be humble and industrious, shedding any entitlement to luxury or idleness, indicates the broader societal expectations of gender roles and the transmission of moral values within the family. The aunts' approach to the situation is less sentimental and more practical, prioritizing financial stability and hard work over emotional attachments to objects. Mrs. Glegg's tirade about "best things" like silver and china reorients Mrs. Tulliver's focus from her lost treasures to the grim reality of her family's financial ruin. Mrs. Glegg's harsh words aim to instill in Mrs. Tulliver a sense of humiliation and dependency, which are expected to lead to humility. Mrs. Tulliver's retort, however, reveals her dignity and a sense of injustice as she contrasts her prudent management of her household items with her husband's unremunerated generosity to his sister (210). Mrs. Tulliver's emotional landscape, once scarred by neglect and disregard, cannot be entirely restored to its former state. Analyzing this scene reveals the depth of Mrs. Tulliver's isolation and the gendered expectations of emotional labor within her family. It provides a critical commentary on the Victorian societal norms that dictated the roles and responses of women within their families and the broader community. The emotional toll of navigating these pressures, compounded by her husband's lack of empathy and support, highlights the challenges women face in expressing their needs and finding validation within their own families.

The Dodson family, embodying the quintessence of pre-Victorian societal norms, significantly influences Mrs. Tulliver, shaping her actions and decisions. This influence is not merely a backdrop but a crucial element that navigates through the narrative, highlighting Mrs. Tulliver's struggles and the broader societal themes. The Dodson sisters, with their staunch adherence to propriety and social standing, represent a collective force that often places Mrs.

Tulliver in a precarious position between her familial loyalty and her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Tomlinson notes: "Mrs. Tulliver seeing that everything had gone wrong had begun to think that she had been too passive in life; and that if she had applied her mind to business and taken a strong resolution now and then it would have been all the better for her and her family" (Tomlinson 323). One critical scene that encapsulates this dynamic is when Mrs. Tulliver finds herself torn between her husband's financial decisions and the Dodsons' expectations of fiscal prudence and social decorum. The Dodsons' critical eye and unwavering stance on finance and family honor starkly contrast with Mr. Tulliver's laissez-faire attitude towards debts and social engagements. Mrs. Tulliver's attempt to mediate these conflicting perspectives underscores the emotional labor she endures, striving to maintain harmony within her family while adhering to the stringent expectations of her birth family.

The novel intricately portrays how these familial and societal pressures strain Mrs. Tulliver's personal relationships and impose a significant emotional and psychological toll. Her internal conflicts and attempts at negotiation reveal the deeply ingrained societal norms that dictate the roles and behaviors expected of women during the Victorian era. These moments of conflict and resolution serve as a microcosm for examining the broader themes of gender roles, power dynamics, and the quest for personal autonomy against the backdrop of rigid societal expectations. "Mrs. Tulliver was mother of so extraordinary a child was Maggie's misfortune likewise. It was hard that the child must suffer because of her mother's imbecility; she must be vexed with falling locks, because her mother would have her hair curl" (Tomlinson 324), a reflection of her own "imbecility" rather than as a trait to be cherished and nurtured.

Through a detailed analysis of Mrs. Tulliver's interactions with the Dodson family, George Eliot critiques the societal and familial structures that confine and define women's roles. The narrative

dives into the complexities of navigating these pressures, highlighting the nuanced ways in which individual identities are shaped and constrained by the expectations of family and society. Mrs. Tulliver's experiences offer a poignant reflection on women's emotional labor and challenges in maintaining their sense of self amidst external pressures. In parallel, research in the field of family dynamics supports this depiction. For instance, a study done by Branje has found that "higher duration of active behavior by mothers was significantly associated with less dominance and open communication of daughters as perceived by mothers. In contrast, a higher duration of active behavior by daughters was significantly associated with less criticism and more open communication of daughters as perceived by mothers. Additionally, compliance behavior of mothers was related with less criticism of mothers perceived by daughters. These correlations are of medium effect size" (Branje 1638). Eliot's exploration of the Tulliver family dynamics mirrors these findings, underscoring the emotional and communicative challenges that emphasize the development of individual and family identities within the strictures of Victorian society.

The internalization of societal judgment reflects the pervasive influence of societal norms on individual psychology. It highlights the emotional labor involved in navigating motherhood under the constant surveillance of societal expectations. Hirsch poignantly captures this dynamic, stating: "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy... but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture" (Hirsch 202), underscoring the depth of maternal bonds and the societal failure to acknowledge them.

This internal conflict encapsulates the complex emotional landscape of Victorian motherhood, where love is perpetually entwined with concern for the child's future in a

judgmental society. Through the scene when Maggie pushes Lucy into the pond, the narrative provides a nuanced commentary on the intersections of individual identity, maternal affection, and societal expectations, highlighting the profound internal and external conflicts that define the maternal experience in Victorian society. As noted by Flax, "women's need for nurturance is not neurotic but can lead to self-defeating behavior under certain societal conditions" (Flax 17), echoing the silent turmoil of Mrs. Tulliver as she grapples with her nurturing role within the patriarchal constraints of her time.

Mrs. Tulliver's distress is further compounded by the societal echo chamber, represented by Mrs. Pullet's remarks, which reinforce the dread of social fallout from Maggie's actions. This external validation of her fears underscores the pervasive nature of societal judgment and its profound impact on maternal experiences. Flax also argued, "Some mothers consciously encourage their daughters to succeed. However, even they are likely to convey another covert message: to be a woman means to make compromises, to fail, to give up one's dreams, to settle for less than one wishes. Women who refuse to do this call into question the meaning of their mothers' lives and risk the hostility that arises from the mother's own anger at her situation" (Flax 181). Mrs. Tulliver's character unfolds through her conversations and the familial dynamics presented, offering insights into the multifaceted nature of motherhood within the societal and familial constraints of her time. Her dialogue with Mrs. Moss, expressing concern over her husband's obsession with litigation and its toll on her peace, underscores the emotional labor inherent in motherhood and spousal relationships. She mentions, "I think sometimes I shall be drove off my head with the talk about this law and erigation, and my sisters lay all the fault to me" (157). This quote reflects the burden of responsibility often placed on mothers to maintain

familial harmony and the internal struggle they face in navigating their husband's decisions that impact the family's well-being.

Mrs. Tulliver's role as a mother and wife weaves together the themes of emotional resilience, the burden of societal expectations, and the silent sacrifices that characterize her experiences. These aspects of her life reflect broader societal norms and expectations of motherhood, offering a critical analysis of the gender dynamics and familial relationships of her time. This exploration can underscore motherhood's timeless and universal aspects, such as love, sacrifice, and resilience, while highlighting the unique challenges women like Mrs. Tulliver face in their historical and social contexts.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION AS EMANCIPATION

Defying Expectations: Maggie's Early Acts of Rebellion

Maggie Tulliver emerges early on as a young woman struggling to have an identity of her own. Throughout this section, Maggie's desires for personal freedom and intellectual growth become more apparent as she resists the traditional roles that society has assigned to her. One of the key themes in this section is Maggie's struggle to assert her autonomy in a world that expects her to conform. From the beginning, we see Maggie's rebellious spirit when she cuts off her hair in defiance of her mother. This act of defiance symbolizes Maggie's desire to break free from the expectations placed upon her as a young woman. She longs to be seen and valued for her intelligence and spirit rather than her appearance. Another aspect of Maggie's struggle for autonomy is her thirst for knowledge and intellectual growth. She is portrayed as a passionate and curious individual eager to learn and explore the world around her. Although the limited opportunities available to women often stifle her desires, Maggie remains determined to pursue her education and expand her mind.

The central tension in this section could be reframed within the theme of Maggie's quest for autonomy and the insufficient educational support she receives. This quest for autonomy is reflected in the fraught dynamics between Maggie and her mother, which symbolize the broader societal constraints that stifle Maggie's intellectual growth and self-determination. Mrs. Tulliver represents the traditional expectations placed upon women in society, and she often tries to suppress Maggie's independent spirit. This creates tension between mother and daughter as Maggie yearns for the freedom to be herself and pursue her dreams. Maggie's struggle is depicted as a "thirsty, trackless, uncertain journey" (292) toward selfhood, during which she confronts real-life dilemmas with little guidance, trying to form what Bushnell describes as: "a unified vision which

would make an unstable world stable" (Bushnell 385). Maggie Tulliver, ever in pursuit of intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment, yearns to express herself through the arts. Her ambitions are evident when she confesses, "I delight in fine pictures—I long to be able to paint such. I strive and strive and can't produce what I want" (309). Among the individuals who profoundly influence her aspirations is Philip Wakem, the son of Mr. Tulliver's adversary. Despite the family's enmity, Philip becomes Maggie's close friend and intellectual companion, fostering her talents and understanding her complex character. His encouragement plays a pivotal role in reviving Maggie's quest for an "intense and varied life" and her ambition to attain the "greatest and best on this earth," offering solace and support against the stifling fanaticism of her immediate environment (293). These dreams and the pain of unfulfilled aspirations signify Maggie's enduring fight against the societal norms that seek to deaden her feelings and diminish her quest for autonomy.

This section shows Maggie's struggle to assert herself and find her place. She is torn between her desire for personal freedom and her love and respect for her family. Maggie's thirst for knowledge is contrasted with her mother's more practical concerns. Mrs. Tulliver does not prioritize intellectual pursuits for her daughter, reflecting the social norms of the time, which dictated that a woman's place was in the home. In this context, Mr. Tulliver's quoted reflection on Maggie being clever, "A woman's no business wi' being so clever," and her brother Tom calling her a "silly thing" exemplify the gendered barriers to education. These sentiments acknowledge Maggie's intellect while simultaneously relegating it to a curiosity rather than a virtue, thereby highlighting the paradoxical nature of her situation: she is intellectually capable yet socially restrained.

One of the primary ways in which Maggie seeks personal fulfillment is through the "nibble at this thick-rinded fruit of the tree of knowledge" (287). Despite her limited access to formal

education, Maggie is a voracious reader and constantly seeks to expand her understanding of the world. She is particularly drawn to books that challenge conventional wisdom and offer new perspectives. This eagerness to learn is evident in her fascination with controversial subjects such as the existence of witches and the nature of evil, as seen in her passionate defense of *The History of the Devil* and her interpretation of the book's illustrations. As Maggie explicates the images in her book to Mr. Riley, she reveals an ability to synthesize and interpret information, transforming static pictures into dynamic narratives. Maggie explains the book's pictures to Mr. Riley, and she brings the static images to life with her vivid imagination and interpretative flair. As she gazes at a picture, she says, "Oh I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture isn't it? But I can't help looking at it," before delving into the story of the witch trials depicted within (17).

Maggie's commentary transforms the illustration of an old woman in the water into a heart-wrenching narrative. She explains the barbaric logic of the trial by water: "That old woman in the water's a witch they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no; and if she swims she's a witch and if she's drowned and killed you know she's innocent and not a witch but only a poor silly old woman" (17). Here, Maggie narrates what is happening in the picture and critiques the cruel irony of the trial's outcome. Her following question, "But what good would it do her then you know when she was drowned?" (17) is profound, highlighting her ability to empathize and question the morality of the situation.

Intellectual Growth Amid Emotional Conflict

Maggie's intelligence allows her to see beyond the simplistic dichotomy of witch or not and ponder the human cost of such superstitions and injustices. Maggie's description of the blacksmith, "And this dreadful blacksmith with his arms akimbo laughing—oh isn't he ugly?" (17), is not just an observation but a moral judgment. She brings the blacksmith to life as a character,

embodying the malice and cruelty of those who perpetuated such trials. Her use of language, her tone, and the questions she raises all contribute to a rich, complex narrative infused with moral sensibility. Through this scene, Eliot illustrates how Maggie's intelligence is not confined to mere book learning. It extends to a sophisticated moral and emotional intelligence that allows her to engage with and critically interpret the world around her, be it through the lens of a book or the reality of her own life. Maggie's ability to transform pictures into narratives showcases her intelligence, compassion, creativity, and desire to understand human nature's and society's complexities.

Furthermore, Maggie's love for learning is further emphasized by her ability to make connections and draw conclusions from the information she gathers. For instance, she connects the Devil to the blacksmith in the picture, demonstrating her ability to analyze and interpret what she sees. This critical thinking skill allows her to make sense of complex concepts and develop her ideas. For example, the narrator states: "She was not to see after her mother, she compromised the matter by going into a dark corner behind her father's chair, and nursing her doll, toward which she had an occasional fit of fondness in Tom's absence, neglecting its toilet, but lavishing so many warm kisses on it that the waxen cheeks had a wasted, unhealthy appearance" (18). This quote demonstrates Maggie's intense focus on her reading and implies her disregard for traditional femininity and her preference for intellectual pursuits.

Maggie's intelligence is also revealed through her questioning nature. She inquires about the peculiar animosity of an astronomer towards women: "The astronomer who hated women generally caused her so much puzzling speculation that she one day asked Mr. Stelling if all astronomers hated women or whether it was only this particular astronomer." This question is not trivial. It cuts to the core of understanding a broader historical context and reflects her ability to

connect individual narratives to larger patterns of human behavior. Furthermore, her interactions with Tom also showcase her intelligence. When Tom uses the word "peccavi," Maggie immediately seizes the opportunity to learn:" 'What's that?' said Maggie" (146). Upon Tom's explanation, "Oh it's the Latin for a good scolding," (146) Maggie does not just accept this new piece of knowledge; she turns it into a reflection on gender and behavior, comparing the temperaments of her aunt and mother with her father and uncle Glegg. Her interpretations are not confined to literal readings; instead, they transcend the immediate, venturing into the realm of moral and philosophical inquiry. Maggie's intellectual pursuits are thus a form of liberation, an assertion of her agency in a world that often dismisses the intellectual capacities of women.

Throughout the novel, Maggie's intellectual pursuits shape her identity and contribute to her growth and development as a character. Mr. Riley describes her as being "allays at her book" (16) and having the ability to read "straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand" (16). This love for reading is evident in her eagerness to share her knowledge with others, as she eagerly explains the pictures in her book to Mr. Riley. It is also illustrated by her desire to educate herself and improve her understanding of the world. Maggie's interaction with Mr. Riley is a dance of intellect and intuition, where her perceptive questions and profound understanding reflect an innate intelligence that belies her young age. Her ability to read "straight off, as if she knew it all beforehand" is not merely a reflection of a precocious child's mimicry but speaks to a deep-seated understanding and a voracious appetite for knowledge that extends beyond the words on the page. Her inquiries about the Roman Empire or the nature of Latin are not just questions but her grappling with the essence of historical consciousness and linguistic evolution. These are not the musings of a naïve child but the probing of a thoughtful mind seeking to unravel the tapestry of human history and experience.

As Eliot depicts, Maggie's intelligence is emotional, rational, imaginative, and analytical. Maggie's intelligence is woven with threads of emotion and reason, imagination and analysis. Her emotional intelligence is palpable when she experiences deep mortification upon realizing that her lifelong pride in her quickness is seen as a flaw rather than a virtue. However, this quickness leaves a void when absent, highlighting her emotional significance to Tom. Maggie's imaginative prowess is showcased in her interactions with Mr. Stelling, where her speculative questions about astronomers' disdain for women reflect an engaging and creative mind, conjuring visions of scholars isolated in their celestial pursuits.

Analytically, Maggie delves into Latin grammar with a passion that contradicts Tom's claim that it is beyond a girl's capability, deriving pride from her understanding and enjoying its intellectual stimulation. Her rational intelligence is demonstrated in her logical approach to Euclid, confidently navigating through its concepts and asserting her ability to grasp what is traditionally considered beyond her reach. Despite this, the gender prejudices of her time are starkly evident as her abilities are trivialized. Mr. Stelling labels her cleverness as superficial and shallow, a sentiment reflecting societal underestimation of women's intellectual capacities, yet contradicted by Maggie's demonstrated intellectual depth. This rich complexity makes Maggie a compelling character whose intellectual journey is as much an internal struggle for self-definition as it is an external battle against the societal constraints of her time. Her conversations with Mr. Riley thus testify to her multifaceted intelligence and unwavering quest for understanding, affirming her place as a character of profound intellectual depth and resilience.

In examining the intricate dynamics of familial relationships portrayed in the novel, a particular point of interest is the interaction between Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver. Specifically, Mr. Tulliver's words about his wife, Mrs. Tulliver, offer a profound insight into the gender dynamics

within the Tulliver household and reflect broader Victorian attitudes toward women's intellectual capabilities and roles:

As I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er' cute—bein' a good-looking woman too, an' 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 agoin' 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 an' cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing. (Eliot 19)

This statement allows us to scrutinize not only Mr. Tulliver's perception of his wife but also the environment in which Maggie was raised, an environment that is not conducive to fostering a woman's intellectuality. It reveals his desire for domestic harmony as he understood it, free from the challenge of a wife's intellect. However, as he muses, this choice has had unintended consequences: "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 was turned topsy-turvy" (19). Here, Mr. Tulliver acknowledges, albeit with a tinge of irony, the unpredictability of inheritance, where his preference for a "soft" wife result not in the simple replication of traditional gender roles but in a daughter who defies his expectations through her intellectual acumen.

The apparent lack of encouragement from Mrs. Tulliver for Maggie's intellectual pursuits may stem from more than just her inclinations. As Mr. Tulliver chose, her position is not one of intellectual autonomy, so she cannot provide a model of intellectualism or support for Maggie. The absence of choice or support from Mrs. Tulliver for her daughter's education is thus not just a reflection of societal norms but also a consequence of her own constrained role within the

marriage, a role deliberately chosen by her husband to maintain his authority, which inadvertently set the stage for the intellectual awakening of his daughter.

Mrs. Tulliver's attitudes towards education reflect the broader societal views of her time, especially regarding girls' education. Her focus is predominantly on domestic skills rather than intellectual development. This perspective is illustrated when Mrs. Tulliver expresses her contentment with Mrs. Stelling's domestic capabilities and shared experiences in household management. Her satisfaction with Mrs. Stelling's understanding of practical matters, such as the airing of linen and managing a growing boy's hunger, along with her appreciation of Mrs. Stelling's youth and motherly demeanor, underscores Mrs. Tulliver's prioritization of domestic knowledge over intellectual pursuits. Further emphasizing this societal inclination, Mrs. Tulliver's attention to appearances and material possessions is evident in her remarks about Stelling's well-maintained house and expensive attire. She notes the house's niceness and the costly nature of Mrs. Stelling's watered silk dress, highlighting a societal preference for material wealth and appearances rather than intellectual enrichment .

This focus contrasts with boys' education, as exemplified by Mr. Stelling's rigorous academic approach to educating Tom Tulliver, Maggie's brother. Mr. Stelling's insistence on traditional subjects like Latin Grammar and Euclid, which he regards as the only solid foundation for instruction, dismisses other educational forms as inadequate and superficial. This distinction underscores the gender-based disparity in educational expectations during this period, with boys receiving more rigorous academic training compared to the lack of emphasis on intellectual pursuits for girls.

Maggie's quest for education is a radical act of autonomy. It is not just an individual struggle but a challenge to the patriarchal structures that seek to delineate the contours of her

existence. Bushnell argued that "Maggie recognizes only too painfully the limitations placed upon her from outside, the inability of conventions and stereotypes to allow for her uncharacteristically wide-ranging aspirations" (Bushnell 383). Mrs. Tulliver's inability to support Maggie's educational aspirations is a poignant reminder of the systemic nature of women's oppression during the era, oppression internalized and perpetuated within the family unit yet challenged by the next generation. Maggie's intelligence, nurtured despite her domestic environment, becomes a beacon of change due to her struggle against the heavily influential and sexist social norms of St. Oggs. These norms render her in Ermarth's words "inferior dependent creature who will never go far in anything" (Ermarth 587), effectively denying her full humanity and leading to a fatal weakness as she learns a habit of self-denial instead of self-actualization and a subtle indictment of the gendered limitations of her time. Maggie's quest for autonomy is further complicated by her emotional vulnerability, particularly her need for love and acceptance. Ermarth notes, "The love she gets is nearly always payment for humiliation" (Ermarth 594). Ermarth is highlighting the emotional toll of her quest for independence. This dynamic results in a "fatal sense of the sweetness of submission" for Maggie, who, despite her internal aspirations for a broader life, is continually hampered by her conditioned habit of self-denial.

Maggie's reaction to the educational limitations imposed by her environment and her mother's lack of support is a complex blend of determination, emotional struggle, and self-guided learning. She showcases her determination to become educated despite these constraints when she asserts her ambition to be a clever woman. This statement displays her confidence in her intellectual abilities and her defiance of the societal and familial norms that try to limit her.

However, Maggie's journey is not without emotional challenges. She experiences significant frustration and mortification, particularly in response to societal views on women's

education. For instance, when Tom and Mr. Stelling dismiss the capability of girls in subjects like Euclid: "They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (150), Maggie feels deeply humiliated, especially since her natural quickness, previously a source of pride, is derided as superficiality: "It would have been better to be slow, like Tom" (150). This incident is a poignant reflection of the emotional toll that societal and educational barriers can have on her character and self-perception. The imagery of "losing the simplicity and clearness of her life" speaks to the internal clarity Maggie risks by pursuing her desires, which are deemed "unreasonable" and "unchristian" by her community. The internal conflict is heightened by the temptation of "illimitable wants" suggesting that societal constraints are in place to curb behavior and the very wants and aspirations that drive such behavior. Therefore, Maggie's internal strife is emblematic of the Victorian woman's dilemma between the allure of personal desires and the oppressive weight of societal and familial expectations. Ermarth encapsulates this with Maggie's sentiment: "a woman can do no more nor she can" (591). This reveals the poignant resignation to the limits of her autonomy within her society. Maggie's life, thus, becomes an emotional and intellectual striving, a narrative of self-emancipation that is as compelling as it is tragic.

Maggie's engagement with literature and her incessant questioning of the world around her are not simple acts of rebellion but are imbued with a deeper significance. They represent a profound assertion of her agency in a world that seeks to confine her spirit to the prosaic roles of domestic life. Her intellectual endeavors are acts of defiance against the constricting forces of her environment, and each page turned is a step towards an autonomy that the Victorian age is reluctant to afford her. Alley points out that "very little is made of Maggie's formal education" (191). Her intellectual growth and the maturation of her sensibilities are given considerable attention in the

novel. Maggie's emerging intelligence and her interactions with literature are presented in contrast to her brother Tom's experiences, underscoring her distinct path and unique challenges. She exhibits a deep fascination with Latin Grammar, finding solace and delight in new words despite being initially discouraged by her struggles with mathematics. This fascination is particularly notable as she engages with a subject traditionally deemed unsuitable for girls, as reflected in her pride upon finding Latin Grammar interesting, a subject her brother Tom claimed no girls could learn. Her desire for learning extends beyond mere curiosity; upon seeing a bookcase full of books in the study, Maggie expresses a fervent wish to access as many books as possible, confidently asserting her ability to understand even those in Latin, a language she is not formally taught. This quest for knowledge is interwoven with her emotional landscape. Maggie's journey is fraught with the affective labor of negotiating the love she craves from her family with the intellectual freedom she seeks. Alley captures this emotionally, noting, "Although Maggie grows into larger and larger sensitiveness through a ready sympathy with the double contexts of past and present, her inability to discriminate between the two becomes an increasing danger" (Alley 192). Her struggle is thus rendered in vivid strokes, highlighting the intersectionality of gender, education, and emotional fulfillment in the Victorian psyche.

One of the first indications of Maggie's longing for independence is her willingness to fulfill her societal obligations despite her desire for personal freedom. The "rocky wall" (322) symbolizes the barriers of Maggie's circumscribed life, and the "narrow valley of humiliation" (322) connotes the limited scope of her existence. The opportunity to escape into "books, converse, affection" represents the allure of a broader, more fulfilling life. Yet, the "unfathomed sky" indicates the unknowns and risks of stepping beyond her familiar constraints. Maggie's contemplation of friendship with Philip is tied to her intellectual and emotional growth, suggesting

that she sees her relationship with him as enriching to her mind and spirit. However, the repetitive "severe monotonous warning" (322) signifies the ingrained voice of societal norms that champion simplicity and renunciation, which, for women of her time, often meant the sacrifice of personal ambitions for the sake of familial and societal propriety.

Maggie's intellectual vibrancy is thus an academic pursuit and an exploration of human and social dynamics. Maggie's attentiveness to Philip during his lessons with Mr. Stelling transcends mere curiosity; it is a critical engagement with the intellectual capabilities of her peer, underpinned by a desire for mutual intellectual esteem. Her wish for Philip to find her clever is not rooted in vanity but in a search for an egalitarian intellectual relationship, an acknowledgment of her cerebral prowess that would place her on equal footing with someone she perceives to be of superior intellect.

Furthermore, Maggie's reflections on the injustice of Philip's association with his father's reputation showcase her ability to dissect and challenge societal predispositions critically. In *The Inner Conflicts of Maggie Tulliver* by Paris illuminates her cognitive dissonance with the prevailing moral determinism because "She cannot be loyal to her father without giving up Philip, and she cannot see Philip without feeling very sinful" (Paris 185), instead proposing a more nuanced understanding of individual moral agency. This reflects a sophisticated level of abstract reasoning and a compassionate worldview, emphasizing her deep-seated inclination toward equitable judgments that transcend inherited biases.

The dichotomy of learning approaches between Tom and Philip serves as a scene for Maggie's intellectual philosophy. Her silent observation of Philip's contented diligence compared to Tom's laborious study habits delineates an appreciation for intrinsic motivation and a self-directed pursuit of knowledge. This scene is emblematic of her ability to discern and value different

intellectual temperaments and methods, indicating a rare metacognitive awareness of her age and social context. Moreover, Philip's introspective analysis of Maggie's gaze laden with "unsatisfied intelligence and unsatisfied beseeching affection" (180) articulates the emotional complexity of Maggie's intellectualism. It is a profound recognition of her inner turmoil, characterized by an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a yearning for empathic connection. This suggests that Maggie's cognitive pursuits are inextricably tied to her emotional fabric, rendering her intellectual vibrancy not merely academic but profoundly human and relational.

Furthermore, Maggie's pursuit of personal happiness is also tied to her desire for independence and autonomy. She resents the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman and longs for the freedom to choose and determine her destiny. This desire for independence is exemplified in her relationship with her brother, Tom, who often acts as a surrogate parent and attempts to control her actions. Maggie's rebellion against Tom's authority and refusal to conform to societal norms highlight her determination to forge her path and live on her terms. As Postlethwaite states "Maggie will appropriate Tom's masculine strength as a surrogate for her own lack of agency" (306), this longing is palpable when Ermarth describes Maggie as having "no adult reserve about her feelings" (Ermarth 592), suggesting a profound need for autonomy that is thwarted by her surroundings. Her relationship with Tom underscores this conflict. Tom's insistence that she submit to his will is met with resistance from Maggie, who is what Ermarth shows as "strong enough to be suffocated by her narrow life but not strong enough to escape it" (Ermarth 591). Maggie's rebellion against Tom's authority and her refusal to conform to societal norms are not just acts of defiance but are manifestations of her struggle to assert her identity. As Ermarth reflects, "Whatever she attempts the withdrawal of approval is so great a threat almost an ontological threat that she cannot proceed in the face of contradiction" (Ermarth 592).

Postlethwaite metaphorically describes Maggie attempts to appropriate Tom's masculine strength, seeking to claim for herself the agency she is denied. However, Maggie's pursuit of personal happiness is often thwarted by external circumstances and the expectations of those around her. Her family's financial struggles and social status limit her growth and fulfillment opportunities. Additionally, Maggie's unconventional nature and refusal to conform to societal norms often result in conflict and misunderstanding with those around her. This is particularly evident in her strained relationship with her aunt Glegg, who disapproves of Maggie's independent spirit and outspokenness. Maggie's relationship with her Aunt Glegg is emblematic of the broader societal constraints that chafe against her quest for education and self-definition. Aunt Glegg, a stringent upholder of the Dodson family "religion" that reveres "whatever... [is] customary and respectable" (277), represents the societal norms that Maggie finds herself at odds with. This tension is not merely about familial disagreements but also about Maggie's longing for education to escape the confines of her prescribed role. Her mother's threat to inform Aunt Glegg of her "naughtiness" is a manipulative tool used to pressure Maggie into submission, which not only undermines her autonomy but also reflects the punitive measures used to ensure adherence to societal expectations. This elucidates how Aunt Glegg's intolerance for deviation from established patterns and her insistence that Mrs. Tulliver "take pattern" by: "aunt Glegg is the eldest of the Dodson sisters and the voice of the law within her clan" (Fuchs 430). The expectation for Maggie to submit and her mother's willingness to enforce these norms even at the cost of Maggie's individuality, as shown when Mrs. Tulliver threatens to withdraw love for nonconformity, exposes the deep-rooted resistance to the idea of a woman, particularly one as young as Maggie, seeking an education that might lead her beyond the family's traditional values.

Maggie's initial encounters with Aunt Glegg are a stark reflection of her youthful battle against the confining tides of patriarchal expectation—a society that views her intellectual aspirations skeptically. Yet, time weaves its transformative threads, and the narrative arc reveals Aunt Glegg in a different light, transitioning from a symbol of constraint to an unexpected pillar of support. This nuanced shift illustrates the development of individual characters and the potential for change within the stringent educational and societal norms of Maggie's world. This evolution adds depth to the thematic exploration of education in the novel, underscoring that growth and learning are not static but as dynamic and changing as the characters themselves.

As we circle back to a crucial moment in Eliot's narrative, situated in the middle of the novel, Maggie's inner world is drawn with exquisite tension. Faced with the decision to say "an affectionate farewell to Philip" (332), Maggie stands at the crossroads of personal desire and societal expectation. The "evening walk in the still, fleckered shade of the hollows" (332) symbolizes the life of fulfillment she could have, a stark contrast to "all that was harsh and unlovely" (332) in her current situation. However, her resolve to part ways is not simply a resignation to duty but a testament to her complex emotional and ethical intelligence. Paris remarks on Maggie's internal conflict that "She feels that her impoverished existence is "like death," but she is fearful of anything that might rouse her to life" (Paris 184), revealing her paradoxical dread of both societal rejection and the guilt of self-assertion. Eliot's depiction of Maggie's struggle is deeply connected to the era's moral fabric, where the ethic of self-sacrifice was paramount—"both in the dominance of Atonement theology [and] the pervasive...emphasis on personal sacrifice in imitation of Christ" (Harrison 372). Yet, in this depiction, Maggie is not reduced to a symbol of martyrdom; instead, she emerges as a character of profound depth, negotiating her values amidst the prevailing currents of her time.

Despite their stifling nature, Maggie's decision to adhere to societal expectations is presented as a conscious, if painful, choice. Paris notes how it is "the rights of others but insists upon one's own rights as well. The alternative to seeing Philip secretly is giving him up. It occurs neither to Maggie nor to the author that Maggie might assert her right to a relationship with Philp" (Paris 183). Her firmness in the face of sadness reveals her strength and the depth of her character, marking her as both a product and a critic of her time; and, Harrison depicts it as "renunciatory imperative" that saw "any taint of egoism as fundamentally incompatible with the social ethic of altruism" (Harrison 372). Her internal conflict and eventual choices underscore the negotiated truce between altruism and self-interest that Victorian novelists like Eliot often portrayed.

Delving back into the intricacies of Maggie's psyche reveals fresh facets of her dilemma when we examine her rapport with Philip Wakem. The dynamic between them crystallizes the core of what was described by Paris: "Eliot speaks of the 'painful collisions' bound to occur when there is a marked "contrast between the outward and the inward" (239). Paris says: "The collisions in Maggie's case are, at least initially, between her given nature and the rigid ideas held by her society and her family of what she ought to be. Not only are Maggie's aesthetic and intellectual faculties starved in the oppressively narrow medium of St. Ogg's, they are regarded as inappropriate for a girl and hence contribute to Maggie's uncertainty about her worth. She is not only a girl, an inferior being; she is an inferior" (Paris 173). She feels a strong sense of duty and responsibility towards her family, particularly her father, and often sacrifices her wants and needs for the sake of others. Despite her intense feelings for Philip, Maggie ultimately sacrifices her happiness for her family's reputation and her brother's future. In this context, Levine's analysis that "Maggie, then, must learn what other characters suffer by not learning that everything must be judged on its unique merits, that no laws, habits, or traditions can apply indiscriminately in all situations" (404), becomes

particularly poignant. Maggie's struggle embodies the realization that the path to personal autonomy and moral integrity is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a complex navigation of individual circumstances, familial obligations, and societal norms.

Ultimately, Maggie Tulliver's narrative arc is not just a personal journey but a mirror reflecting the broader societal struggle between the rigid expectations of the time and the individual's search for self-determination. Her story encapsulates the delicate interplay between societal norms and personal desires, leaving readers with a poignant understanding of the courage it takes to seek one's path in the face of daunting constraints. As she threads her way through the labyrinth of Victorian society, Maggie's experiences serve as a resonant reminder of the enduring quest for identity and the power of the human spirit to aspire beyond the boundaries set before it.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY

Societal Expectations and Familial Dynamics

Incorporating Langland's observation that "The movement toward narrative closure in the daughter's story is contradicted by the opposing impulse toward radical instability and openness in the mother's tale" (Langland 384), we can frame a nuanced argument around Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver. The complex interplay between Maggie's evolving narrative of self-discovery and her mother's experiences is marked by unfulfilled potential and societal constraints. Mrs. Tulliver's life, shadowed by traditional roles and missed opportunities, contrasts with Maggie's quest for identity and autonomy, reflecting Victorian society's generational and ideological shifts. Maggie's story, while seeking closure, is continually reshaped by her mother's "instability and openness," underscoring the tensions between societal expectations and personal desire. This dynamic highlights the broader theme of female agency and the struggle for self-definition within the confines of a rigid social order.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, this societal paradigm manifests in the intricate dance of compliance and resistance within the Tulliver family. Mrs. Glegg, an embodiment of the era's prescriptive decorum, wields her influence like a scepter, shaping the expectations placed upon her sister, Mrs. Tulliver. Mrs. Tulliver, in turn, is caught in the tidal forces of familial duty and societal approval as she strives to navigate the expectations of her station and the well-being of her children, which is poignantly reflected in her own words about the importance of familial appearance and financial security. This section will unravel the layers of Victorian propriety as represented by Mrs. Glegg, whose austere vision of womanhood pressures Mrs. Tulliver to conform and, in turn, The environment that shapes Maggie's reality, as envisioned by her mother,

demands self-denial and a pursuit of values that may conflict with Maggie's own aspirations "a high degree of self-denial" mark the path to social ascent.

Thus, the historical context of Victorian England provides a critical lens through which we can examine the societal constructions that shaped the actions and choices of these characters. By delving into this period's gender roles, we uncover the layers of complexity that govern the interplay between societal norms and individual identities in *The Mill on the Floss*. This exploration enriches our understanding of Eliot's work and illuminates the historical forces that continue to resonate with contemporary discussions on gender and society. The tension between Maggie and Aunt Glegg offers an intricate study of the internalized societal expectations that dictate feminine propriety. Eliot does not merely present Aunt Glegg's criticisms as superficial admonishments; instead, they are symptomatic of a pervasive cultural ideology that seeks to define women by their adherence to social decorum. Aunt Glegg's insistence on sartorial and physical neatness transcends mere vanity, embodying the period's moral and behavioral codes that were projected onto the female body. For instance, when Aunt Glegg pointedly criticizes Maggie's appearance, urging her to "put [her] hair behind [her] ears" and keep her "frock on [her] shoulder," (61) it serves as a direct representation of the societal pressures to conform to a particular feminine ideal. Maggie has dark black hair "Black hair is portrayed as having its inherent wildness. Maggie's "jet-black hair" as Gitter describes "being associated with emotional volatility and inner turmoil" (Gitter 941). Maggie's defiant response, manifesting in the shearing of her locks, is not just an act of youthful rebellion but a declaration of self, challenging the societal edict that conflates a woman's worth with her appearance and docility.

Maggie Tulliver's cutting her hair is a nuanced exposition of nonconformity within the repressive confines of Victorian society. The act of cutting, rendered with almost tactile precision, "One delicious grinding snip and then another and another" (63), is an assertion of self-determination. The locks falling to the floor do not represent liberation in themselves; they are tangible evidence of Maggie's radical choice to assert control over her body in defiance of societal expectations. This decisive act gives her a fleeting sense of triumph over the matriarchal figures in her life, "the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action" (64) is a decisive, if transient, victory.

The family's reaction to Maggie's self-fashioned coiffure articulates the multifaceted pressures and constraints exerted upon women. Mrs. Tulliver's scream, which causes all eyes to turn, manifests the shock such an unfeminine act elicits: "Mrs. Tulliver's scream made all eyes turn towards the same point as her own" (67). This response illuminates the depth of gendered norms, where a woman's appearance is inextricably linked to her family's honor. Mr. Tulliver's laughter, laced with derision, is a complex mixture of amusement and contempt "Why she's gone and cut her hair herself said Mr. Tulliver in an undertone to Mr. Deane, laughing with much enjoyment." His comment, referring to Maggie pejoratively as "such a little hussy," dismisses the seriousness of her action, suggesting that such acts of defiance can be trivialized and mocked, undermining the gravity of Maggie's agency. Aunt Glegg's severe reproach, "'Fie for shame!'" (67), reverberates as the voice of societal norms, a verbal lash that seeks to shame Maggie back into conformity. This sharp criticism reflects a society that maintains strict codes of conduct for women, and any deviation from these is met with censure and humiliation.

Eliot's narrative skillfully captures the undercurrents of this domestic crisis, focusing not on the overt symbolism of the act but on the subtleties of the family's response. The silent

exchanges and unspoken judgments following Maggie's act are significant. These reactions collectively critique the societal expectations placed on women, emphasizing the courage required to defy them. The power of Eliot's narrative lies in its vivid portrayal of Maggie's personal and social repercussions of her act of defiance. The author invites the reader to look beyond the action itself to the complex interplay of judgments and expectations that frame the lives of Victorian women. Through this lens, *The Mill on the Floss* emerges as a profound exploration of the struggle for personal autonomy against the backdrop of societal constraint.

The underlying critique in Eliot's narrative goes beyond simply condemning societal norms; it explores how they are internalized, challenged, and sometimes subtly subverted. As I have been arguing throughout this paper, through the character of Maggie, Eliot articulates a nuanced dialogue on the possibilities and limitations of female agency within a patriarchal society. Juxtaposed with the societal expectations of femininity and domesticity, Maggie's intellectual and emotional depth is a poignant exploration of the conflict between individual aspiration and social obligation.

Kreisel describes Mrs. Glegg as "most aggressively respectable of matrons," while Eliot describes her as a hoarder. Eliot describes her with a kind of relish that borders on the erotic, finding a "pleasure of property" that is almost gastronomic in nature" (Kreisel 69). In the context of financial prudence, as exemplified by Mrs. Glegg, the critique directed towards Mrs. Tulliver's management of household finances becomes a focal point for examining broader societal norms. Mrs. Glegg, emphasizing her perspective on financial management, states, "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. I wonder you don't take pattern by your sister Deane; she's far more sensible. 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 "(55). Mrs. Glegg's admonition not only underscores the valorization of thrift and economic conservatism within familial settings but also situates her as a custodian of such values. This discourse reflects a deeper societal undercurrent where economic stewardship is intertwined with moral virtue. Kreisel notes the "The Dodsons' conviction in saving is allied with their need to see their money physically" (85), which aligns with the Victorian obsession with gold and distrust of promises-to-pay. Mr. Tulliver becomes fixated on seeing the growing pile of money, indicating a preference for physical wealth over speculative gains, which is characterized as unnecessary caution in the novel. Mrs. Glegg's stance, while seemingly rooted in personal judgment, mirrors the collective ethos of her time, where financial discretion is not merely a private affair but a public testament to one's adherence to societal expectations. Kreisel notes that "Mrs. Glegg's "secretion" (Kreisel 87) of funds underscores money as an extension of her body, making her a "fetishist of the first order" (Kreisel 87). The criticism she levies against Mrs. Tulliver transcends personal rebuke, serving as a microcosm of the pervasive tension between individual agency and the prescriptive norms governing economic behavior within the social fabric. This interaction, thus, offers a lens through which to understand the intricate dance between personal desires and the hegemonic moral economy that seeks to regulate them.

In George Eliot's narrative, Mrs. Tulliver often upholds the societal norms of her community, yet she is not immune to their weight herself. The critique by Mrs. Glegg over something as personal as Mrs. Tulliver's choice on how to wear her hair reveals the layered complexity of social expectations: "especially not at Mrs. Tulliver's who since her marriage had hurt her sister's feelings greatly by wearing her own hair" (53). While Mrs. Tulliver generally acts to maintain and enforce the conventions of her time within her family, her decision to

display her natural hair rather than conform to the fashionable wigs or hairpieces is a subtle deviation that indicates her struggle with the strictures of conformity. This juxtaposition of her roles, in one light as a guardian of social decorum and another as a quiet rebel through personal choices, offers a nuanced portrayal of a woman navigating the narrow corridors of autonomy in an era that closely scrutinizes and often dictates female behavior. Mrs. Glegg's steadfast resistance to change manifests as a pivotal force within the familial landscape of George Eliot's narrative, particularly affecting Mrs. Tulliver and Maggie. Her unwavering commitment to traditional values and societal norms underscores the generational rifts within the family and catalyzes conflict and personal growth. For Mrs. Tulliver, Mrs. Glegg's criticisms and expectations represent a constant pressure to adhere to established standards, highlighting the struggles faced by women to balance personal desires with societal expectations. Maggie, in contrast, encounters these traditionalist views as obstacles to her intellectual and emotional development, exemplifying the broader thematic concern with individual agency versus societal constraint. Through the lens of Mrs. Glegg's character, Eliot intricately explores the tensions between tradition and change, illustrating how resistance to the latter impacts individual trajectories, familial relations, and societal progression. This complex interplay between characters offers a critical examination of the roles and expectations assigned to women in Victorian society, revealing the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate and sometimes challenge the confines of their social environments.

In the intricate dynamics of familial relationships depicted, Mrs. Glegg's authoritative stance emerges as a compelling force, notably influencing Mrs. Tulliver through the strategic deployment of her wealth and the moral high ground she occupies. This relationship exemplifies the potent combination of economic leverage and social standing as tools for exerting control and

molding behaviors within the family sphere, thereby ensuring the perpetuation of established values and norms. Mrs. Glegg's influence, underscored by her financial resources and perceived moral superiority, acts as a microcosm of the broader societal mechanisms that regulate individual actions and reinforce traditional expectations, highlighting the nuanced ways in which power dynamics and societal pressures intertwine to shape personal identities and relational hierarchies.

In the framework of Eliot's narrative, the scene in which where Mrs. Glegg offers financial assistance to Mr. Tulliver is emblematic of the intricate interplay between economic power and familial dynamics. This act of lending, ostensibly a gesture of support, is imbued with layers of control, as Mrs. Glegg's conditions for the loan reflect her broader exertions of moral and social authority within the family; Kreisel shows a parallel between the "Victorian anxieties about the liquidation of debt [and the] Dodson family's reluctance to destroy a note of debt" (88). Mrs. Glegg's ability to dictate terms underscores the leverage that economic resources provide in shaping family decisions and behaviors, starkly illustrating how societal norms and personal agency are often at odds within the Victorian family structure. This episode highlights the tensions between personal desire and social expectation. It offers a critical lens through which to examine the complexities of gender roles and the mechanisms of power and influence within familial relationships. Through a close reading of this interaction, one can discern the subtle ways Eliot critiques the societal constraints imposed upon individuals, particularly women, and their nuanced strategies to navigate these pressures.

Mrs. Tulliver is depicted metaphorically as a goldfish confined within its glass bowl, constantly circling yet finding itself within the same limited space, which suggests a sense of confinement and fruitless struggle in her character's experience: "as a patriarchal goldfish

apparently retains to the last its youthful illusion that it can swim in a straight line beyond the encircling glass. Mrs. Tulliver was an amiable fish of this kind, and after running her head against the same resisting medium for thirteen years would go at it again to-day with undulled alacrity" (75) is a compelling illustration of the existential and societal confines within which women of the Victorian era were expected to navigate their lives. This metaphor reflects Mrs. Tulliver's relentless optimism and Eliot's keen critique of the restrictive social norms that bound women to predetermined paths devoid of personal fulfillment or escape.

Unlike the simplistic view of Mrs. Tulliver's character as merely amiable and acquiescent, this metaphor invites a deeper exploration of her resilience and the tragic optimism that defines her existence. It speaks to the broader condition of women who, despite recognizing the barriers to their ambitions and desires, continue to exert effort and hope towards achieving them, only to find these barriers as impenetrable as the glass of a goldfish bowl. This imagery poignantly underscores the cyclic nature of such struggles, where the initial rush against limitations is met with the cold reality of societal and familial expectations, leading to a Sisyphean cycle of effort and setback.

Through this lens, Mrs. Tulliver's actions and motivations can be seen as emblematic of the societal pressures on women to conform to roles that suppress their autonomy and aspirations. Her character becomes a vessel through which Eliot examines the nuances of gender roles, the limitations of domestic life, and the invisible yet omnipresent boundaries imposed by societal norms. This analysis goes beyond the superficial to uncover the layers of restriction, resilience, and resignation that characterize Mrs. Tulliver's life and the lives of many women of her time.

The scene in which where Mrs. Tulliver and Mr. Tulliver discuss the hiring of a wagoner and the education of their son, Tom, further deepens the critical examination of Mrs. Tulliver's character as a product of her time. Mrs. Tulliver's dialogue, infused with domestic concern and a subtle, perhaps unconscious, challenge to her husband's authority, illuminates her complex position within the patriarchal family structure. Her reference to a past decision about hiring a wagoner based on the absence of a mole, a seemingly trivial detail, serves as a metaphor for the superficial bases on which more significant family decisions are made, revealing her nuanced understanding of her husband's decision-making process: "when did I iver make objections to a man because he'd got a mole on his face? I'm sure I'm rether fond o' the moles; for my brother, as is dead an' gone, had a mole on his brow" (9). This conversation, ostensibly about moles and wagoners, subtly critiques the arbitrariness of Mr. Tulliver's decisions, mirroring the deeper issue of Tom's education. Mrs. Tulliver's interjection demonstrates her capacity for independent thought and her constrained ability to directly influence her husband's decisions. Her approach is indirect, adorned with personal anecdotes, and seemingly acquiescent; it highlights the limited avenues available to women of her time to assert their perspectives within the family.

Moreover, the transition to Mr. Tulliver's musings on Tom's education and his subsequent decision-making process, devoid of Mrs. Tulliver's input, further exemplifies the gendered division of authority and knowledge. Mrs. Tulliver's preparations for Mr. Riley's visit, focusing on domestic arrangements and the best Holland sheets reserved for death, juxtapose with her husband's preoccupations, emphasizing the stark division of male and female spheres. The mention of the sheets, "mangled beautiful, an' all ready, an' smell o' lavender as it 'ud be a pleasure to lay 'em out," (10) is particularly poignant, symbolizing Mrs. Tulliver's preoccupation

with her family's well-being even in death, her meticulous care for domestic matters, and her acceptance of her mortality and legacy within the confines of her domestic role.

Another scene vividly encapsulates the nuanced dynamics of gender expectations and familial roles through the lens of Maggie's upbringing and Mrs. Tulliver's concerns for her daughter. Mrs. Tulliver's dialogue reveals the internalized societal pressures of maintaining appearances and the complexities of maternal expectations in a patriarchal society. Mrs. Tulliver's lamentation, "But her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzy about having it put i' paper, and I've such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with th' irons," (12) is not merely about hair but serves as a metaphor for Maggie's non-conformity to societal and familial expectations. Hair, often a symbol of femininity and order, becomes the battleground for Maggie's individuality versus her mother's desire for conformity. Mrs. Tulliver's frustration over Maggie's hair—its refusal to curl and thus align with "other folks's children" (12) mirrors her more profound anxiety over Maggie's future role in society. The unmanageable hair signifies Maggie's divergent spirit, challenging the rigid molds set for women and girls of her time. Gitter states how "the tangled, disorderly hair of the sexually and emotionally volatile women" (Gitter 941).

Mr. Tulliver's commentary, "Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid...an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep," (11) juxtaposed with Mrs. Tulliver's fretting, highlights the gendered expectations that constrain Maggie. Mr. Tulliver's analogy underscores the societal view that a woman's intelligence or 'cuteness' was deemed surplus to requirements, likening it to a physical deformity in sheep that would devalue them in the market. This perspective reflects the broader societal apprehension towards women who exhibit too much intelligence or individuality and fear compromising their marriageability or social acceptance.

Furthermore, Mrs. Tulliver's concern for Maggie's appearance and behavior and her comparison with Lucy "It seems hard as my sister Deane should have that pretty child; I'm sure Lucy takes more after me nor my own child does" (12) reveals the social dynamics of comparison and competition among women, mediated through their children. Gitter, in her analysis, contends that "the artfully arranged curls of the girl—woman like Lucy—even conventional, elements in Victorian character description" (Gitter 941). This comparison highlights Mrs. Tulliver's insecurities and desires for social approval. It illuminates the pressures on women to produce and mold children who fit societal norms, reflecting on the mother's status and familial honor.

The scene culminates in Mrs. Tulliver's exasperated remonstrance towards Maggie's disobedience and her appearance by the water, feared as a prelude to a tragic accident. This anxiety, though immediate in its concern for Maggie's safety, also metaphorically fears Maggie's deviation from the path laid out for her, potentially leading to her social demise. Mrs. Tulliver's attempts to mold Maggie, from her appearance to her hobbies and obedience, underscore a deep-seated anxiety about her daughter's fit within the social fabric, reflecting the limited scope of agency afforded to women and the vicarious fulfillment of societal expectations through their offspring.

In this scene, Eliot uses the domestic and mundane concerns over hair, obedience, and comparisons with cousins to explore the profound implications of gender expectations and the shaping of female identity within the restrictive societal norms of the time. Mrs. Tulliver, in her concern for appearances and conformity, embodies the struggles of many mothers navigating the patriarchal landscape, desiring both to protect and prepare their daughters for a world that values compliance over individuality. In one telling scene, "Maggie shut up the book at once, with a

sense of disgrace, but not being inclined to see after her mother, she compromised the matter by going into a dark corner behind her father's chair, and nursing her doll, toward which she had an occasional fit of fondness in Tom's absence, neglecting its toilette, but lavishing so many warm kisses on it that the waxen cheeks had a wasted, unhealthy appearance" (18-19). Maggie's reaction to shutting the book "at once, with a sense of disgrace" immediately situates her in a society that constrains female intellect and curiosity. The act of reading, a symbol of Maggie's desire for knowledge and her intellectual ambition, becomes a source of shame in a milieu that devalues such qualities in women. This moment of self-censure reveals the deep internalization of external judgments, suggesting that Maggie is acutely aware of the boundaries set for her gender and is beginning to grapple with the friction between her personal inclinations and societal expectations. Returning "into a dark corner behind her father's chair" rather than seeking out her mother after feeling disgraced further illustrates Maggie's conflicted identity. This physical action of hiding symbolizes her psychological state caught between the visibility of conformity and the invisibility of her desires and intellect. The space behind her father's chair, a place of obscured visibility within the familial and social structure, becomes a refuge for Maggie, signifying her struggle to find a place where her intellectual and emotional complexities can coexist without censure.

Maggie's engagement with her doll during this moment of isolation is also profoundly telling. The doll, traditionally a symbol of domesticity and maternal practice for young girls, becomes an object of an "occasional fit of fondness in Tom's absence." Maggie's neglect of the doll's "toilet" juxtaposed with her "lavishing so many warm kisses on it" reveals a dichotomy within Maggie herself. On the one hand, her neglect reflects a disinterest in or rebellion against the domestic and maternal roles prescribed to her. On the other hand, her affection demonstrates

a deep capacity for love and connection, albeit directed toward an inanimate surrogate, without a more acceptable outlet for her emotional depth and intellectual energy. The "wasted, unhealthy appearance" of the doll's cheeks, transformed by Maggie's kisses, metaphorically mirrors the effects of societal constraints on Maggie herself: her vibrancy and vitality are being wasted on roles and expectations that do not nourish her true self. Postlethwaite discusses the complex interplay of identity and representation in "Her Fetish," saying, "Maggie both obliterates the face of her mother (those roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks) yet also becomes her mother. Not the 'real,' diminished mother - so unable to sympathize with her dark-eyed, passionate daughter - but the all-powerful, nurturing preoedipal mother" (Postlethwaite 309). This scene, rich in symbolic detail, underscores the complex interplay between individual identity and societal norms that Maggie navigates. The social expectations of her time dictating passivity, domesticity, and emotional restraint for women cast a long shadow over Maggie's development, influencing her self-perception and actions. Eliot uses Maggie's interactions with her environment and its objects to reveal the internalized conflict and the toll of attempting to conform to an ill-fitting societal mold. Maggie's story thus becomes a critical exploration of the stifling effects of gender norms on female intellect and agency, highlighting the personal and societal consequences of forcing complex individuals into reductive roles. Ermarth, in her critique, observes the impact of societal expectations on the protagonist's growth in *The Mill on the Floss*, noting, "George Eliot makes it clear that the social norms of St. Oggs exert a heavy influence on Maggie's development. These norms are according to which she is an inferior dependent creature who will never go far in anything and which consequently are a denial of her full humanity" (Ermarth 587). Ermarth's analysis points to Eliot's commentary on the restrictive social conventions of the time, which limit Maggie's potential and deny her the opportunity to

realize her full self. The passage detailing Maggie's interaction with her doll not only illuminates her non-conformity in a patriarchal society but also serves as a poignant commentary on the internalized aggression resulting from stringent social pressures and the absence of nurturing maternal care. The description of the doll, "This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks; but was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie's nine years of earthly struggle; that luxury of vengeance having been suggested to her by the picture of Jael destroying Sisera in the old Bible" (27-28) is rich in symbolic resonance, revealing the depths of Maggie's psychological turmoil and resistance against her circumscribed existence. The doll's "long career of vicarious suffering" under Maggie's hands is also emblematic of Maggie's own suppressed anguish and rebellion against the confines of her gendered existence. The doll, once pristine in its representation of idealized femininity—with "the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks" now bears the marks of Maggie's frustration and anger. The defacement of the doll reflects Maggie's internal defacement; her vivacity and potential are marred by the societal expectation to conform to a passive, ornamental femininity, much like the doll's original state.

This act of aggression towards the doll, a substitute for Maggie's self in many ways, also hints at the impact of the lack of maternal care and understanding. Maggie's destructive behavior towards the doll signifies her anger towards a society that seeks to confine her and a cry for attention and care that she does not receive. Postlethwaite draws a parallel between past nurturing acts and the complexities of filial relationships, stating, "Maggie applies poultices to the broken doll, much as she once did in her high attic; she mothers her own (diminished) mother, as compensation for the nurturance (the ideal mother) she herself desires" (Postlethwaite

311). The maternal figures in Maggie's life fail to nurture her intellect and spirit; instead, they impose the same constrictive norms they have internalized. Maggie's aggression can thus be read as a form of self-harm, a manifestation of the pain of being misunderstood and constrained by her own family and society at large.

Through this vivid depiction of Maggie and her doll, Eliot critically examines the psychological effects of non-conformity in a patriarchal society. Maggie's destructive interaction with her doll not only serves as a metaphor for her struggle against the oppressive gender norms but also highlights the profound sense of isolation and misunderstanding she experiences. The societal pressure to conform, coupled with the absence of empathetic maternal care, leads Maggie to a path of internalized conflict, where her acts of rebellion against her doll mirror her tumultuous journey towards self-definition in a world that offers her little space to grow and flourish as her true self.

The passage detailing Maggie's conflicted relationship with her doll, especially her reflection on the consequences of driving nails into it, provides a deeper insight into Maggie's psyche and her struggle with the societal and familial expectations placed upon her. The quote, "But immediately afterward Maggie had reflected that if she drove many nails in she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor to comfort it, and make believe to poultice it, when her fury was abated; for even aunt Glegg would be pitiable when she had been hurt very much, and thoroughly humiliated, so as to beg her niece's pardon," (28) reveals a profound tension between Maggie's impulse for rebellion and her inherent empathy and desire for reconciliation. The mention of "fancy that the head was hurt" and her desire to "comfort it, and make believe to poultice it" after her "fury was abated" illuminates Maggie's deep-seated empathy and her conflict with her acts of rebellion. This

oscillation between anger and compassion reveals Maggie's internal struggle with expressing her discontent and anger towards the restrictions placed upon her and her natural inclination towards care, healing, and the restoration of relationships. It underscores the emotional labor Maggie undertakes in reconciling her impulses for self-assertion with the ingrained values of care and empathy traditionally associated with femininity.

Furthermore, the reference to Aunt Glegg in Maggie's reflections is particularly poignant. Aunt Glegg, often a representation of the rigid societal and familial expectations, becomes, in Maggie's imagination, a figure capable of vulnerability and repentance. Maggie's ability to imagine even Aunt Glegg as "pitiable" and in need of comfort after being "hurt very much, and thoroughly humiliated" suggests a maturity and depth of understanding that transcends mere rebellion. It signifies Maggie's capacity for forgiveness and her desire for a world where understanding and compassion can bridge the chasms created by conflict and misunderstanding.

The conclusion: "She never thought of beating or grinding her Fetish; she was too miserable to be angry," (36) transcends a mere depiction of a young girl's despair, offering a profound critique of the insidious nature of societal constraints on individual identity, particularly for women in a rigidly patriarchal context. Through Maggie's relationship with her doll, her "Fetish," George Eliot masterfully encapsulates the intricate web of societal expectations that ensnare and suffocate, transitioning from external acts of defiance to an internalized struggle marked by a profound, consuming misery. This doll, once a recipient of Maggie's confused aggression, now symbolizes the enormity of the forces against which she contends, forces so overwhelming that they eclipse the fiery spirit of resistance, leaving in its wake a profound desolation.

This shift in Maggie's emotional landscape from anger to a pervasive sense of misery illuminates the psychological impact of her non-conformity. It is not merely the physical doll that Maggie can no longer bring herself to attack; it is what the doll represents: the unyielding, omnipresent societal expectations that dictate her every boundary and limit her every ambition. The phrase "too miserable to be angry" marks a critical juncture in Maggie's psychological journey, revealing a resignation to the futility of her defiance in the face of an implacable societal order. This realization does not denote weakness but rather a poignant acknowledgment of the weight of the struggle for autonomy and recognition within an oppressive societal framework.

Furthermore, Eliot's use of "Fetish" imbues the passage with a more profound significance. Traditionally associated with an irrational reverence or obsession, the term here may be interpreted as Maggie's forced reverence for societal norms that she neither fully accepts nor understands yet finds herself unable to escape. Her inability to "beat or grind" her Fetish reflects a critical moment of self-awareness and disillusionment, where the external battles with dolls and societal norms give way to an internal reckoning with the harsh realities of her condition. Postlethwaite probes the complexity of Maggie's inner world, noting, "the uneasy mirroring which took place between daughter and mother, as Maggie both nurtured and destroyed that doll-like image that was both self and mother" (Postlethwaite 313).

The Internal Struggle for Self-Definition

The intricate dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship between Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver are poignantly encapsulated in the observation of the contrast between Maggie and her cousin Lucy. Mrs. Tulliver's expectations for Maggie, whether explicitly communicated or implicitly conveyed through disapproving glances and sighs of resignation, are laden with the

societal ideals of femininity that valorize physical appearance and demure behavior ideals that Maggie perpetually finds herself at odds with. Paris explores the familial tensions arising from differing values, stating, "Mrs. Tulliver gets her sense of worth and of orientation in the world through her conformity to the ways and values of the Dodson clan. Maggie's deviations from the Dodson ideal fill her with anxiety, and she is deeply ashamed of her daughter" (Paris 173). Maggie's unruly hair, impetuous nature, and intellectual curiosity starkly contrast with Lucy's "natty completeness" (60), that aligns with the Victorian archetype of the ideal woman. This dichotomy between Maggie and Lucy not only foregrounds the external pressures of societal conformity but also internalizes within Maggie a sense of inadequacy, a perpetual sense of falling short of an unattainable standard set not just by society at large but by her mother.

The word "conspicuous" underscores the visibility of Maggie's non-conformity, placing her under the scrutinizing gaze of society and her family, amplifying her sense of otherness. This external scrutiny is mirrored in Maggie's internal struggle, where the desire for maternal approval clashes with her intrinsic qualities and inclinations. Paris delves into the deeper psychological aspects of Maggie's character, suggesting that her reactions to criticism go beyond mere sensitivity, asserting, Paris noted how: "Maggie's vulnerability to criticism is not simply a sign of her sensitive nature; it is also a manifestation of her profound insecurity. Since she has never been able to develop a healthy self-esteem" (Paris 174), causing her sense of worth to soar or plunge by the treatment she receives. This phrase suggests that beneath the surface-level judgments lies a depth and complexity in Maggie that holds the potential for a richness of character unappreciated by those adhering to conventional standards. The notion of a "higher promise for maturity" (60) in Maggie, as opposed to Lucy's "completeness," is emblematic of the tension between becoming and being, between the potential for growth and the stasis of

conformity. Mrs. Tulliver's inability to recognize or nurture this potential in Maggie not only stifles Maggie's development but also perpetuates a cycle of misunderstanding and emotional distance within the mother-daughter relationship. The implicit comparison with Lucy, who embodies the quintessential qualities celebrated in their society, alienates Maggie further, pushing her toward the margins of familial and societal acceptance.

In Maggie Tulliver's familial relationships, Mrs. Tulliver's perspective on her daughter, as articulated in the observation "but I'm sure the child's half an idiot i' some things; for if I send her upstairs to fetch anything, she forgets what she's gone for, an' perhaps 'ull sit down on the floor i' the sunshine an' plait her hair an' sing to herself like a Bedlam creatur,' all the while I'm waiting for her downstairs. That niver run i' my family, thank God! no more nor a brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter. I don't like to fly i' the face o' Providence, but it seems hard as I should have but one gell, an' her so comical" (12) starkly contrasts with the narrator's more nuanced and empathetic portrayal of Maggie. Mrs. Tulliver's commentary reflects a superficial and limited understanding of her daughter, foregrounding Maggie's deviation from normative behavioral and physical traits without grasping the underlying richness of her character. Yet, Mrs. Tulliver is not an aberration but rather symptomatic of a more significant societal condition; Manheimer engages with the trope of the 'Terrible Mother' within Victorian literature to explain her, contending that this character type extends beyond personal pathology to reflect societal dysfunction, as the essay elucidates: "The Terrible Mother, far from being an individual deviant, frequently embodies a radical indictment of her society" (Manheimer 530). This broader context invites a re-examination of Mrs. Tulliver not merely as a flawed individual but as a figure shaped by the very fabric of her time, mirroring the complex struggle of women caught in the crossfire of maternal expectations and individual identity. Mrs. Tulliver's assessment of Maggie as "half

an idiot" for her forgetfulness and daydreaming captures a dismissive attitude towards Maggie's introspective and imaginative nature. Postlethwaite examines Maggie's self-perception and its formation about her mother's view, stating, "Maggie has made herself into the 'idiot' mirrored in her mother's eyes" (Postlethwaite 310). This dismissal is not merely a critique of Maggie's failure to perform mundane tasks; it indicates a broader inability to recognize or value the intellectual and emotional depth that fuels Maggie's distractibility. The comparison to a "Bedlam creatur" further devalues Maggie's introspection and creativity, pathologizing her deviation from expected domestic efficiency and attentiveness. This harsh judgment reflects a failure to see beyond conventional metrics of intelligence and utility, overlooking the potential inherent in Maggie's reflective and unconventional disposition.

Furthermore, Mrs. Tulliver's lamentation over Maggie's physical appearance, particularly her "brown skin," which she unfavorably compares to a "mulatter" and her characterization of Maggie as "comical," reveal a superficial concern with societal perceptions and a preference for conformity over individuality. This concern underscores a preoccupation with external appearances and societal judgments rather than an appreciation for Maggie's unique qualities and potential. Mrs. Tulliver's discomfort with Maggie's nonconformity in terms of traditional aesthetic standards betrays a shallow valuation of her daughter, one that prioritizes adherence to societal norms over the cultivation and appreciation of personal identity. Mundhenk delves into Maggie's character development and the impact of external forces, noting, "The description of Maggie's childhood and her reactions to societal expectations and personal disappointments showcase the complex nature of social pressures. From an early age, Maggie's impulsive nature and her internal struggle with societal norms and expectations lead to a pattern of resolution and vacillation that continues into her adult life" (Mundhenk 22).

Mrs. Tulliver's characterization of Maggie as a "small mistake of nature" (12) further illuminates the cruel extent to which societal expectations can permeate and distort maternal perception, leading to painful othering of her child. This phrase, steeped in the language of error and natural aberration, reveals a deep-seated conflict within Mrs. Tulliver: a struggle between her inherent maternal affection for Maggie and the societal pressures compel her to view her daughter through a lens of normative deficiencies. This internal conflict is expressed outwardly through her fretful admonitions to Maggie, which, while ostensibly concerned with Maggie's safety near the water, also metaphorically signal Mrs. Tulliver's anxiety over Maggie's inability to navigate the societal currents that dictate feminine propriety and decorum.

The dialogue "Maggie, Maggie" followed by a "half-coaxing fretfulness" captures the essence of Mrs. Tulliver's conflicted emotions, her maternal instinct to protect and nurture, clashing with frustration and disappointment born of societal influence. This tone of fretfulness, tinged with coercion, encapsulates the emotional labor involved in raising a daughter who defies societal norms, highlighting the constant tension between the desire for Maggie's safety and conformity and the painful awareness of her nonconformity. Hirsch, in her article "Mothers and Daughters", said, "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter is the essential female tragedy" (Hirsch 202), and through this intricate portrayal of Mrs. Tulliver's perspective on Maggie, George Eliot delves into the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship against the backdrop of societal expectations. Mrs. Tulliver's struggles to reconcile her affection for Maggie with her disappointment and societal pressures reflect broader themes of identity, conformity, and the impact of social norms on familial bonds. This passage, rich in its depiction of maternal conflict and societal influence, invites a nuanced analysis of how

societal expectations shape and often distort parental perceptions and relationships with children who diverge from the norm.

This passage vividly encapsulates the tension between Maggie's individuality and the social norms represented by her mother and extended family. Mrs. Tulliver's admonition to Maggie "Oh, dear, oh, dear, Maggie, what are you thinkin' of, to throw your bonnet down there? Take it upstairs, there's a good gell, an' let your hair be brushed, an' put your other pinafore on, an' change your shoes, do, for shame; and come an' go on with your patchwork, like a little lady," (12), serves as a microcosm of the broader societal pressures exerted on young women to conform to a particular model of femininity: orderliness diligence in domestic tasks, and compliance. Mrs. Tulliver's urging Maggie to engage in patchwork, a traditionally feminine and domestic activity, not only highlights the expectations placed on Maggie to adhere to gender norms but also underscores Mrs. Tulliver's anxiety about upholding these norms within the familial and social sphere. Ermarth says of Maggie that her "dependency is reinforced continually by ridicule disapproval [and resistance]," which is confirmed in her refusal to continue the patchwork. She expressed disdain for Aunt Glegg, "It's foolish work...And I don't want to do anything for my aunt Glegg. I don't like her" reflects a more resounding rejection of the values and expectations embodied by her aunt and, by extension, the societal norms she represents. Maggie's defiance is not merely a childish rebellion but a profound assertion of her autonomy and a rejection of the restrictive roles and activities prescribed to her by her gender and social standing. Her exit, here "dragging her bonnet by the string" symbolizes her refusal to be bound by these expectations, a physical manifestation of her desire for freedom and self-determination.

Mr. Tulliver's laughter in response to Maggie's defiance is juxtaposed with Mrs. Tulliver's fretful reaction: "I wonder at you, as you'll laugh at her, Mr Tulliver" (13), highlights a division in parental attitudes towards Maggie's nonconformity. Mr. Tulliver's amusement suggests a tacit endorsement of Maggie's spirit. At the same time, Mrs. Tulliver's concern, "You encourage her i' naughtiness. An' her aunts will have it as it's me spoils her" (13), reveals her apprehension about the social judgment not only on Maggie but on her maternal competence. Mrs. Tulliver's worry about being judged by her sisters for spoiling Maggie underscores the broader social pressures that dictate not only Maggie's behavior but also Mrs. Tulliver's identity and success as a mother.

The aunts, particularly Aunt Glegg, represent societal repression and the enforcement of strict gender norms. Their judgment, or the anticipation of it, acts as a powerful force shaping Mrs. Tulliver's actions and attitudes towards Maggie. This dynamic illustrates how societal repression is externally imposed, internally mediated, and reinforced within family structures. Mrs. Tulliver's concern with maintaining appearances and adhering to social expectations, even at the expense of her daughter's individuality, highlights the pervasive influence of societal norms on personal relationships and self-perception.

Maggie Tulliver's navigation of the social expectations placed upon her, particularly those emanating from her family and society at large, is poignantly encapsulated in the observation that "her own keen sensitiveness and experience under family criticism sufficed to teach her this as well as if she had been directed by the most finished breeding" (185). This reflection not only underscores Maggie's acute awareness of the restrictive norms surrounding her but also illuminates the internalization of these norms through the crucible of familial criticism. Maggie's "keen sensitiveness" reveals her profound capacity for emotional and

psychological insight, allowing her to perceive and internalize the myriad expectations placed upon her as a young woman in Victorian society. This sensitivity, however, is not merely a testament to her depth of feeling; it also signifies the vulnerability that comes with such acute awareness. The weight of "family criticism" is a relentless mirror, reflecting and reinforcing societal norms and expectations. Through this lens, Maggie learns to see herself and her place in the world. This process is as involuntary as it is pervasive, illustrating how societal norms are imparted and entrenched within the individual psyche.

The comparison to "the most finished breeding" introduces an ironic contrast between Maggie's intuitive grasp of societal expectations and the formal, deliberate process of social conditioning typically reserved for those of higher social standing. Despite the lack of formal "breeding" in the conventional sense, Maggie's experiences of criticism and censure within her own family serve a similar function, shaping her behavior and self-perception in profound ways. This dynamic highlights the ubiquity of social conditioning, transcending class boundaries to affect individuals based on gender and familial roles.

Maggie's reaction to these imposed expectations is multifaceted, embodying both resistance and resignation as Szirotny describes it: "Maggie comes to grief not because she is faulty but because the world is... hers is a soul 'by nature pitch'd too high' in a vulgar world" (Szirotny 190). Her sensitivity and intelligence equip her to see the arbitrariness and constraints of the roles she is expected to play. Yet, these same qualities also render her acutely aware of the personal and social costs of deviating from these roles. Maggie's internal struggle is not simply against the external imposition of norms but also against the internalized voices that echo these norms, making her resistance a battle fought on both external and internal fronts. The phrase "as well as if she had been directed by the most finished breeding" subtly underscores the paradox at

the heart of Maggie's predicament: her natural intelligence and emotional acuity, which could have been her most significant assets in a more progressive society, instead become sources of pain and conflict in the context of the restrictive social environment in which she finds herself. Szirotny touches on the theme of despair in Maggie's character, emphasizing, "The idea of ever recovering happiness never glimmered in her mind for a moment" (Szirotny 189). This irony captures the essence of Maggie's struggle, highlighting the tragic misalignment between individual potential and societal expectations.

Through this analysis, it becomes evident that Maggie's experiences and reactions to societal expectations are emblematic of the broader challenges women face in navigating the prescribed roles and norms of Victorian society. Her story is a poignant exploration of the internal and external conflicts engendered by these expectations, offering a nuanced critique of how societal norms can shape and stifle the development of the individual self.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the harrowed whispers of Maggie Tulliver, as she seeks the solace of familial embrace in her final moments, we hear the culmination of a life spent in the turbulent quest for acceptance. "O God, where am I? Which is the way home?" (531). Maggie's cry, shrouded in the dim loneliness of her ultimate journey, echoes the profound yearning for a destination that has eluded her—a haven of unconditional love and understanding within the maternal fold. The scope of this analysis endeavors to trace the sinuous path of Maggie's relationships, with an acute focus on the filial bond that both anchors and, at times, ensnares her. It excavates the profound and often unspoken dialogues between mother and daughter, which persist beneath the narrative's surface like a hidden stream, shaping the landscape of Maggie's existence.

This thesis posits that Maggie's untimely demise by drowning in the river Floss is not merely an end but a metaphorical immersion into the acceptance she sought from her mother—a return to the proverbial womb of maternal love.

Nature repairs her ravages,—repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden cornstacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading (536).

Her death emerges as a poignant allegory, a final enfolding within the love that had been her compass through the stormy waters of life. We shall unfold the layers of this allegory, exploring how Maggie's life and death become a testament to the complexities of maternal bonds and their enduring influence on the odyssey of the self.

In Maggie Tulliver's life, the threads of familial expectations and individual desires are intricately woven, creating a complex portrait of a young woman grappling with the confines of her world. "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" (299). This observation by Mrs. Tulliver captures the heart of Maggie's transformation—a metamorphosis from the defiance of youth to a subdued existence under the heavy oppression of her family's expectations. As Maggie matures, the innate fire that once fueled her contrarian spirit seems to dim, eclipsed by the realization that her individuality often clashes with the prescribed roles laid out by her family and society. Houser captures a moment of self-realization and growth for Maggie, saying, "Maggie like the beautiful swan enjoys her outward transformation and the new awareness of being appreciated" (Houser 559). The once vivacious girl, who would have challenged the currents, now flows with them, albeit with a sense of resignation rather than peace. Her mother, accustomed to her younger daughter's spirited debates and willfulness, now watches with pride and confusion as Maggie dons the mantle of docility.

Maggie's journey into "goodness" is not merely an acquiescence but a strategic retreat into the internal fortresses of her mind, where battles of the self are fought in silence: "Hanging diligently over her sewing, Maggie was a sight any one might have been pleased to look at. That new inward life of hers, notwithstanding some volcanic upheaving of imprisoned passions, yet shone out in her face with a tender soft light" (299). This poignant image captures the duality of Maggie's existence: the outward calm, inner turmoil, societal acceptance, and personal rebellion. However, in this very conflict, Maggie's character is fleshed out, revealing the depth of her internal struggle. Her submission is not a defeat but a tactical maneuver, enabling her to navigate

the expectations of her world while secretly nurturing the embers of her intellect and desire. Each act of obedience is a reluctant step on a path she treads, not out of choice, but out of necessity—a reflection of her times and the rigid structures that dictate a woman's place and purpose.

Maggie's relationship with her mother becomes a sanctuary, albeit a complicated one. Mrs. Tulliver's bewilderment at her daughter's "goodness" is laced with a maternal warmth that becomes Maggie's only solace in a world that continuously disappoints and misunderstands her. "The mother was getting fond of her tall brown girl—the only bit of furniture now on which she could bestow her anxiety and pride" (299). Mrs. Tulliver's affection, though expressed through the lens of domestic expectations, becomes a beacon for Maggie, a reminder that within the confines of her home, there lies a form of acceptance, if not complete understanding, as Ermarth observes: "her rebelliousness was weaker than her need to be loved and it has turned into a strange passivity" (Ermarth 595).

In the reflection of her mother's eyes, Maggie sees not only what she has become but also what she has lost—the freedoms of her youth, the joys of her unbridled spirit: "She craved that outward help to her better purpose which would come from complete, submissive confession; from being in the presence of those whose looks and words would be a reflection of her own conscience" (496). The intricate dance between compliance and resistance defines Maggie's relationship with her mother, a dynamic that ebbs and flows with the tides of their shared experiences. As they navigate the complexities of their bond, they unwittingly prepare for the ultimate test of their love—a test that will culminate in the heart-rending climax of Maggie's life.

Maggie Tulliver's story is not a simple tale of a girl growing up; it explores the sacrifices made at the altar of societal norms, offering a probing inquiry into the cost of "growing up so good." Her relationship with her mother is a poignant backdrop to this exploration, highlighting

the silent negotiations and unspoken understandings that often define the mother-daughter dynamic. In Maggie's world, where the currents of change are both feared and inevitable, Ermarth addresses the emotional turmoil presented in the climax of Maggie's narrative, noting, "The confusion and ambivalence we feel so keenly in the final chapters reflects accurately Maggie's own confusion and ambivalence at the painful conflict in her life between aspiration and fact" (Ermarth 599). the complexity of her character development mirrors women's struggles between the tides of self and society.

In the delicate embroidery of familial relations, the interwoven threads of Maggie Tulliver's bonds with her mother gleam with the variegated hues of complexity and silent understanding. The narrative begins to unfurl with Maggie's contemplative moment under the jasmine-shrouded porch, where her eyes search beyond the chestnuts and the horizon for solace in the familiar yet distant embrace of maternal love. In the shadow of her father's rage, Maggie's fear is palpable—not merely for herself but for her mother, the silent bearer of potential wrath and undeserved shame.

As the family's fortunes fluctuate, so does the nature of the relationship between mother and daughter. Puzzled and bewildered, Mrs. Tulliver witnesses the metamorphosis of her once "contrary" child into a figure of submission and restraint. The mother's pride in Maggie's "growing up so good" is tinged with a quiet perplexity, revealing the deep but unvoiced current of maternal love beneath their everyday interactions. This affection is a quiet haven, a whisper of acceptance that starkly contrasts with the cacophony of societal expectations and familial duty that often dictates Maggie's path. However, even as Mrs. Tulliver observes the changes in her daughter, she remains a steadfast source of warmth and pride. Maggie's transformation, marked by plaiting her black locks into a coronet atop her head, symbolizes her mother's simple joys

amid their shared long days. This outward alteration of Maggie's appearance for her mother's pleasure belies an inner resistance, a refusal to gaze upon her reflection that speaks to the sacrifice of self that Maggie is all too willing to make. Maggie's internal struggle, the yearning for an explanation of "this hard real life," finds no solace in the trappings of knowledge or the emulation of school. In her solitude, in the quiet spaces shared only with her mother's confused glances and ruminative thoughts, Maggie seeks a key to understanding her place in the world. The parental home, with its "childish bewildered mother" (291) and the "unhappy-looking father" (291), becomes the stage upon which Maggie's drama of self-denial and longing for affection unfolds.

As the narrative progresses, we are drawn deeper into Maggie's introspective journey. Her desperate wish to escape the dreariness of her existence and to find a sanctuary in intellectual pursuits or the recognition of a kindred spirit like Walter Scott leads her to the precipice of her imagination. Yet, the reality of her father's voice, the mundane request for slippers, pierces her reverie, grounding her once more in the unyielding present. The interplay of Maggie's aspirations with the obligations of daughterly duty creates a poignant chiaroscuro of hope and resignation. Tomlinson speculates on the unrealized potential of Maggie, reflecting, "One can easily imagine the glorious creature Maggie would have been if her need for some tender demonstrative love, her thirst for all knowledge, her love of beauty had been satisfied; it is easy to imagine the blossoming out of her soul" (Tomlinson 326). Her quest for personal redemption and accepting her mother's unwavering yet silent love becomes the crucible in which her character is forged. In this landscape of familial expectations and individual desires, Maggie's relationship with her mother is both a beacon of quiet acceptance and a mirror reflecting the complexity of her inner life.

Between societal norms and the profound connection of mother and daughter, the story of Maggie Tulliver is a nuanced testament to the conflicts of heart and duty. She stands at the confluence of personal aspiration and the rigorous demands of society, where her relationship with her mother becomes both a sanctuary and a site of silent struggle. Maggie grapples with discovering herself and the conflicts with her loyalty to family and the memory of her mother's subtle yet steadfast love:

Maggie, all this time, moved about with quiescence and even torpor of manner, so contrasted with her usual fitful brightness and ardor that Lucy would have had to seek some other cause for such a change if she had not been convinced that the position in which Maggie stood between Philip and her brother, and the prospect of her self-imposed wearisome banishment, were quite enough to account for a large amount of depression. Nevertheless, under this torpor, there was a fierce battle of emotions, such as Maggie, in all her life of struggle, had never known or foreboded; it seemed to her as if all the worst evil in her had lain in ambush till now and had suddenly started up full-armed, with hideous, overpowering strength! (Eliot 471)

Amidst this, she faces the prospect of self-imposed exile, a testament to the weight of familial judgment. Her mother, a figure of comfort and confusion, remains an anchor, embodying the unconditional acceptance that Maggie desperately seeks. This juxtaposition of maternal tenderness against societal disapproval paints a poignant picture of the struggle for personal happiness within the rigid frameworks of Victorian morality.

The narrative also weaves a compelling account of Maggie's inner conflict over the allure of a fuller existence, a life brimming with love, ease, and refinement – the things her soul craves

but is urged to renounce. It highlights the stark contrast between the life Maggie envisions for herself and the sacrifices she is expected to make in the name of familial loyalty and societal acceptance. In this struggle, because of the feud between Tulliver and Wakem, her need for goodness and love—both aspects of her self-effacing solution—is in conflict.

Through the lens of this complex mother-daughter relationship, we explore the societal constraints that bind Maggie and the ultimate act of drowning, which serves as a metaphorical release. It is an escape into the embrace of her mother's love, a return to a primal source of acceptance, and a tragic yet transformative resolution to her lifelong conflict between desire and duty. This exploration not only delves into the emotional depths of Maggie's character but also reflects on the broader societal norms that govern women's lives in her time.

In George Eliot's emotionally charged narrative, the interplay of societal norms and profound familial connections is vividly portrayed through Maggie Tulliver's tumultuous relationships, particularly with her mother and brother. The meticulously examined scenes reveal these relationships' complexity and depth, oscillating between societal condemnation and the sanctuary of maternal love. The narrative begins with Maggie's reflective solitude, hinting at her internal struggles and yearning for a maternal embrace amidst familial turmoil. Her journey, marked by personal aspirations and societal pressures, unfolds in the shadows of her family's expectations, especially her mother's subtle yet unwavering support amidst the challenges they face together. Mrs. Tulliver found herself returning to the Mill, thus leaving Maggie to grapple with the silent weight of her sorrow. It was a solitude she had yearned for, a period to process the churning emotions that the departure of Stephen had precipitated—emotions now ebbing into a hollow ache of absence. The text delineates, 'Between four and five o'clock on the afternoon of the fifth day from that on which Stephen and Maggie had left St Ogg's' (495), setting a precise

temporal marker for the reader. Maggie's state, 'She had desired to be alone after the first violent outburst of feeling had passed, and she no longer had any active purpose to fulfill' (499), further encapsulates the transition from her initial emotional maelstrom to a more subdued introspection. However, this stint of seclusion, amid the familiar surroundings of the "old sitting-room that looked at the river" (499), was destined to be short-lived, a testament to the continuous ebb and flow of external demands and internal reckonings that characterized her journey.

A tap at the door and the sight of Bob with a baby named after her in his arms reminded her of the unspoken bonds of sympathy and respect that remained. Maggie could not speak but put out her arms to receive the tiny baby, and at that moment, "the poor frightened mother's love leaped out now stronger than all dread. 'My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother' Oh, the sweet rest of that embrace to the heart-stricken Maggie! More helpful than all wisdom is one draught of simple human pity that will not forsake us" (497). This poignant moment encapsulates the essence of Maggie's quest for redemption, highlighting the indomitable spirit of maternal love against the backdrop of societal judgment.

This intricate analysis of familial dynamics, societal expectations, and the quest for personal redemption within the Victorian moral framework offers a profound exploration of Maggie's character. It underscores the enduring conflicts between individual desires and societal dictates, championing the transformative power of maternal love as an enduring force against the torrents of social ostracism. Through this lens, Maggie's tragic end is seen not merely as a defeat but as a poignant reconciliation with her beginnings' pure, unjudged love, offering a critical reflection on gender, morality, and the indelible impact of maternal bonds in shaping one's destiny.

Tom's response to Maggie's return is emblematic of Victorian England's rigid moral codes and societal expectations. His words, "You have disgraced us all...I wash my hands of you forever," (496) resonate with the cold finality of societal condemnation, mirroring the broader community's unforgiving stance towards perceived moral failings. Tom's inability to extend forgiveness or understanding to Maggie not only underscores the gendered moral strictures of the time but also highlights the profound isolation and vulnerability that Maggie faces in her quest for redemption and self-determination.

In stark contrast, Mrs. Tulliver's reaction to Maggie's return embodies the unconditional nature of maternal love. Her initial shock gives way to a resolute declaration of solidarity: "My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother" (497). This moment of maternal embrace is a powerful counterpoint to the harsh judgment Maggie encounters from the rest of her family and society. Mrs. Tulliver's unwavering support serves as a poignant testament to the enduring strength of maternal bonds, offering Maggie a semblance of solace and acceptance in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Maggie's internal conflict, stemming from her struggle with societal expectations and her yearning for personal redemption, is exacerbated by her family's reactions. The scene becomes a microcosm of the novel's broader thematic concerns, exploring the tension between societal norms and individual desires, the nature of sacrifice and redemption, and the societal constraints on women. The rejection Maggie faces from Tom upon her return, juxtaposed with her mother's unwavering support, further emphasizes the conflict between societal expectations and the sanctuary of maternal love. Tom's harsh words, "You have disgraced us all," contrast sharply with Mrs. Tulliver's compassionate assertion, "My child, you're not alone," underscoring the novel's exploration of familial bonds and societal judgments.

Maggie's tragic end, intertwined with her brother in the floodwaters, serves as a symbolic culmination of her struggles, illustrating the profound impact of her quest for acceptance and the complexities of her relationships. Eliot's use of the flood as a literal and metaphorical force reflects the inevitable convergence of Maggie's desires and the societal pressures that shape her fate. The article by Archer et al. emphasizes that "watermills situated on tidal rivers and their tributaries have always been and always will be prone to flooding and that people who inhabit those watermills are at risk of drowning during a flood" This recognition of the inherent dangers of the watermill's location underscores the fatalistic elements of the narrative, as the strength of the current reflects the unstoppable forces shaping Maggie's life, leading to an ending where "flooding and threat to life are not improbable but inevitable" (Archer et al. 710).

In the novel, George Eliot profoundly explores familial bonds, societal constraints, and the quest for personal identity. Maggie Tulliver's relationship with her mother stands at the heart of this narrative odyssey. Through their interactions, Eliot reveals the complexities of maternal bonds—marked by moments of profound connection and poignant misunderstanding—that shape Maggie's tumultuous journey toward self-discovery.

This thesis has delved into the nuanced dynamics between Maggie and her mother, illustrating how these relationships reflect broader Victorian anxieties about gender, morality, and individual autonomy. Maggie's struggles against the societal currents of her time, seeking her mother's approval and a sense of personal fulfillment, underscore the novel's enduring relevance to contemporary discussions on identity and familial roles.

Reflecting on Eliot's narrative, it becomes evident that the struggles and aspirations of Maggie Tulliver resonate with the universal human condition, bridging centuries with their thematic relevance. The novel invites readers to consider how familial relationships, particularly

the foundational yet complex bond between mother and daughter, influence our understanding of self and society. As we conclude, *The Mill on the Floss* not only mirrors the Victorian era but also offers timeless insights into the human heart's intricate workings. Maggie's journey, enriched by her deep, albeit fraught, connection with her mother, offers a powerful commentary on the search for identity amidst the confines of societal expectations, reminding us of the enduring power of familial bonds in shaping our destinies.

Reflecting on Maggie Tulliver's fate in *The Mill on the Floss*, her early musing on the witch trials casts a shadow that poignantly prefigures her destiny. Her words, "That old woman in the water's a witch,—they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned—and killed, you know—she's innocent," (17) encapsulate a haunting parallel to her tragic end. This analogy not only enriches our understanding of Maggie's character as one caught in the relentless currents of societal judgment but also amplifies the critique of the moral dichotomies of her time. In her earnest quest for autonomy and understanding, Maggie becomes emblematic of the innocent "witch"—misjudged and ostracized, her purity of intention submerged beneath the surface of Victorian society's turbulent waters. Her story, a poignant exploration of innocence, judgment, and the ultimate quest for redemption leaves us pondering the true nature of justice and understanding in a world quick to condemn. Through Maggie's journey, Eliot masterfully interrogates the societal constructs that dictate moral righteousness, inviting a deeper contemplation on the intricacies of human empathy and the tragic beauty of seeking solace in an unforgiving world.

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