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Gender tragedy in George Eliot's "Mill on the Floss"

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GENDER TRAGEDY IN GEORGE ELIOT'S
MILL ON THE FLOSS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Gender Tragedy in George Eliot's
Mill on the Floss

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This thesis centers around the gender roles present during the Victorian era and how George Eliot examined these roles in Mill on the Floss. She did so through her representations of Tom and Maggie Tulliver and by examining how each of these characters deal with the respective roles for his or her gender while living during the Victorian age. Tom strictly follows the imposed roles for his gender, while Maggie refuses to live within the social boundaries set for her own. The societal restrictions and how each deals with them is symbolically represented in their physical descriptions as well. Each character is eventually destroyed by the roles imposed upon them by Victorian society, which is symbolically represented when they drown at the end of the novel.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Home* is clearly Woman's intended place; and the duties which belong to Home are woman's peculiar province. . .And it is in the sweet sanctities of domestic life, — in home duties, - in whatever belongs to and makes the happiness of *Home*, that Woman is taught by the SPIRIT to find scope for her activity, — to recognize her sphere of most appropriate service. ¹

Those living in the Victorian era, both male and female, were enveloped in both formal and social educational agendas which were devised to maintain the social and familial responsibilities of each gender, more especially among the middle and upper classes. As indicated in the quotation above, women were expected to maintain the household. On the other hand, men were expected to provide for their families. In fact, men were socially defined by this ability. If a wife had to supplement income in any form, the husband's position in Victorian society wavered. In *Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot explores these gender roles and the social education which helped to promote those roles during the Victorian Period.

Mothers and fathers, constrained by the definition of roles between the sexes, passed on the social boundaries of their genders to their sons and daughters. Mothers

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and fathers are their sons' and daughters' main teachers, instilling into them the proper ways to carry on their duties within society, that of a wife, mother and homemaker or a husband, father and family provider. Of course, this was due to the sexual division of labor. Sons had to be prepared for their societal roles as family providers and daughters had to be prepared for their societal roles as wives and mothers.

Because the Victorian mindset destined their daughters to be married and carry out their lives within the home, there were those, who cannot necessarily be called "feminist" by late twentieth-century standards, who recognized a need to reform various aspects of Victorian society, thereby giving women more opportunities. But for the most part, those who voiced these various causes did so within the context of the feminine ideal, in that women's duties were primarily those of a sensitive, caring nature, generally as a wife and mother. Most had a difficult time separating themselves from the ingrained definitions that they received from their mothers, fathers and society in general. On top of this, Margaret Forster points out that those working for women's causes "had the greatest difficulty in deciding why woman's lot was so much worse than man's even before they moved on to deciding how it could be improved" (Forster 2). This created further personal complications for these female reformers.

In addition, most saw the concepts lodged behind active, defined feminism as the alienation of men: "If feminism meant being anti-male then they had not time for it...All of them wanted better relationships with men, all of them wanted a better deal for both sexes" (Forster 4). Even though many of the female reformers did all they could to include men, the concept of "feminist as man-hater grew" (Forster 4). For this reason, women working for various causes refused to be thought of as active
Rather, each concentrated on their individual cause and basically worked separate from each other. They were basically worked alone:

Florence Nightingale despaired at her own uniqueness. Nobody, she vowed, would have undertaken what she undertook and she despised her own sex for its craveness...Elizabeth Blackwell wasted no time wondering why no one had gone before her...Caroline Norton loathed putting herself through what she had to endure and swore nobody else would have had the guts. Emily Davies, driven to distraction by the sheer tediousness of her task, stuck to it because, she said bitterly, nobody else would have the patience. (Forster 3)

Each individual woman working to improve aspects of life for women living in Victorian society felt isolated and alone, unsupported by her fellow contemporaries, despite the fact that they were aware of one another and their particular causes. There was no true unification and since the definition of feminism carried negative, anti-male tones, there was no unified cause either. In fact, Nancy Boyd points out that:

...these leaders remained ambivalent. Florence Nightingale said that she wished to make a better life for women yet she also said that she was brutally indifferent to the rights of her own sex. She signed the petition for women's suffrage reluctantly, and she gave little encouragement to women who wished to become doctors. Octavia Hill opposed the extension of the suffrage, she extolled the 'home-making' virtues of women as their primary function.

Even Josephine Butler, who did so much for the advancement of women, was in

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2 "It panicked Elizabeth Blackwell to hear that men had been excluded from some meeting about suffrage in America...Josephine Butler preferred mixed audiences even when she was talking about the most intimate details of prostitution. She thought men as involved in and as concerned with reform as women... Margaret Sanger, although she wanted birth control in female hands, repudiated the notion of keeping male doctors out of the movement." Significant Sisters 4.
some ways conservative. She, too placed a high value on women's traditional role as home-maker, wife and mother. While she believed in votes for women, she was distressed by the suffragists' methods. (Boyd xii)

The writer, George Eliot or Mary Ann Evans, was a contemporary with those seeking to improve conditions for women and struggled with her own views on women issues, and gender issues as well. She experienced Victorian society and was aware of the limitations placed not only on her own gender, but also the male gender. Her own socially defined education began much like any other girl growing up in the Victorian period. Her parents concentrated on providing the right education for her brother, Issac, to prepare him to take over her father's agency work in Warwickshire, thereby fulfilling his eventual role as family provider. When Mary Ann was four, she attended a day school several mornings a week with her brother Issac. When Mary Ann was five, Issac left the day school to go away to a better boarding school, at which time Mary Ann was sent to Miss Lathom's Seminary for Young Ladies in Attleborough, where her sister, Chrissy, was attending.

When Chrissey had reached the ripe age of 14, she returned home to learn more about housekeeping and other homemaking arts so she could take her proper place as a woman in Victorian society. Therefore, Mary Ann was moved to Mrs. Wallington's Ladies' Boarding School in Nuneaton, which had been recommended to her mother. The school was a bit more expensive, however Mary Ann's father, Robert Evans, felt his money was being well spent. He admitted to his wife that he feared for Mary Ann's eventual marriageability. At this point, Mary Ann's educational goals were outlined to provide her with a livelihood as a governess, should no man come forward

to ask for her hand—this being the only acceptable employment opportunity for women at that time.

When Mary Ann returned home, she found things had changed. Chrissey was engaged to be married and Issac had become rather remote. Her mother was very ill and soon died, leaving Mary Ann with the predetermined responsibility of taking care of the home for Issac and her father. As a result of her illness, resulting in part from Mary Ann’s birth, her mother, Christiana Pearson Evans, didn’t play a major role within Mary Ann’s life; she was basically absent from it. As for Eliot’s feelings concerning her mother, we can only surmise. However, much like Mrs. Tulliver’s role in Maggie’s life, she appears to be absent and ineffectual. In Ruby Redinger’s biography, *George Eliot: The Emergent Self*, the author points out that “Of George Eliot’s feelings for her mother, there remains no memento as substantial as even a children’s book (37). In addition, although letters from the two years following her mother’s death are missing, Diana Postlethwaite points out that: “In nine volumes of George Eliot’s letters which remain, there are only two exceedingly brief passing references to Christiana Pearson Evans” (305). Postlethwaite interprets her silence on this subject as killing her mother, making her as absent in her life as possible. The aspect of ineffectual parents is strongly apparent in *Mill on the Floss* and also lends itself to the destructive gender-defined roles each parent lives and teaches within the novel.

Having to take on the standard gender role of housekeeper squelched Mary Ann’s plans to continue her education. Therefore, with Chrissey’s marriage pending, Mary Ann was forced to lay aside her educational goals and begin her training as the next housekeeper. For the next twelve months she learned the tasks ahead of her, but
was keenly aware of their limitations. However, for the next five years, she fulfilled her duties, though she began her self-education. She devoured religious texts, biographies, histories and travel books, with her father always readily picking up the bill.

Robert Evans, seeing Mary Ann's desire for knowledge and continuing his efforts to give Mary Ann a future livelihood, offered to hire a tutor to give her private lessons in French, German and Italian. Signor Joseph Brezzi arrived in March of 1840, and Mary Ann fell in love for the first time. Her attraction to Signor Brezzi caused Mary Ann to work very hard at her lessons and opened her mind to a great deal. Foremost of all, she discovered that men were capable of intellectual discussion. Not all men were narrow-minded, like her father and brother.

Shortly thereafter, Isaac announced his marriage to Sarah Rawlings. This created quite an upheaval in Mary Ann's life. Sarah would take charge of Griff House and where would that leave Mary Ann? Robert Evans answered that question. Hoping to provide Mary Ann with an atmosphere more conducive to finding a husband, he agreed to rent a house in Coventry. In Coventry, Mary Ann met many liberal minds and continue her self-education. Before long, Mary Ann would become agnostic and enter an entirely different pathway than that either her brother or father expected her to follow.

Among the friends and acquaintances she eventually acquired are Barbara Bodichon, Florence Nightingale, Emily Davies, Harriet Martineau, Bessie Parkes and Octavia Hill, all individually active in some aspect of the “woman’s question.” Despite the company she kept, George Eliot has proven very problematic for most feminist historians and writers. George Eliot was living in the midst of a smoldering boiler room full of women pursuing everything from improved education and women’s suffrage to

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4 Taylor 26
changes in marital law and birth control rights. However, all these women were battling rather individually and struggling with the anti-male definition of feminism. Eliot, who enjoyed the company of men and worked closely with them, struggled with the definition as well. Although she lived an unconventional life, largely educated herself, wrote under a male pseudonym, rubbed elbows with the most liberal minds of her time and became a huge success in the male-dominated world of writing, she isn't counted in with the feminist minds of her time, as considered by 20th century standards. She chose to remain on the periphery of "the woman's question," as the issues were discussed openly in public. Her views on the subject are actually very problematic, even contradictory at times. However, Eliot was aware of, and concerned about, several of the disadvantages for women, especially those concerning marital laws which fated her sister Chrissy to live such a difficult life.

There are several reasons why Eliot proves so problematic. In one sense, she was somewhat supportive of women immersed in various causes. She donated 200 pounds per year to Octavia Hill's cause and although she wasn't extremely helpful in the cause of women's education, she donated 10 pounds a year to specific pupils at Girton College. At the same time, she could be very critical of some of her fellow women writers because of her concern for how the position of women was portrayed.

5 Taylor comments that "Feminists at the time and later have felt that Marian let them down. She would have been the best advertisement possible of a woman's intellect and triumph against the odds, yet she refused to help when it mattered (Taylor 189-190). Also, Eliot wrote to a member of the Girton College committee: "I feel too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women and also feel too imperfect a sympathy with many women who have put themselves forward in connexion with such measures, to give any practical adhesion to them. There is no subject on which I am more inclined to hold my peace and learn, than on the 'Woman Question.'" It seems to me to overhang abysses...." George Eliot, "To Mrs. Nassau John Senior," 4 October 1869 of The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon Haight, vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale, 1955) 107.

6 Taylor 202.
In a recently discovered letter, Eliot strongly advises John Chapman not to print a particular article written about George Sands:

Before I had read the article, I supposed her to be a woman of talent; I now think her one of the numerous class of female scribblers who undertake to edify the public before they know the proper use of their own language. The whole of the introduction & every passage where Miss H. launches into more than a connecting sentence or two, is feminine rant of the worst kind, which it will be simply fatal to the Review to admit.

You have opened the subject of Woman's position by a sober, manly article, containing real information...I would not trust the most ordinary subject, still less the most delicate, to a woman who writes such trash as this...Everything she says about George Sand is undiscriminating Bosh....Pray admit nothing that touches on the Position of Women, that is not sober, well thought out, & expressed in good English. (Ashton 121-122)

This illustrates that Eliot was concerned with how the subject of women was portrayed in writing. On the other hand, although she supported what her contemporaries were trying to do for women, she was much like her other contemporaries working for specific causes. She operated individually from the rest. She was doubtful whether those working for women's causes would be effectual. Therefore, she chose to keep her support at a minimum. For example, she donated only $50 to help fund a women's

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7 "The Englishwoman's Journal must be doing good substantially stimulating woman to useful work, and rousing people generally to some consideration of woman's needs. A few mistakes, and rather a feeble presentation of useful matter, will not will not neutralize the good that lies in a great aim and an honest effort; and I heartily wish all connected with the Journal 'God speed.' George Eliot, "To MME Eugene Bodichon," 5 December 1859, of The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon Haight, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) 225-226.
college at Cambridge University, stating that she did not wish to “subscribe too large a sum to the Ladies’ College lest it should prevent her from helping other worthy causes.”

In addition, she believed in women’s greater traits, such as tenderness and kindness, as did many of her contemporary “feminists.” She saw anything that interfered with those traits, including the more radical sides of the women’s movement, as destructive. Despite this, as Ina Taylor points out, although the author wouldn’t attach her name or give money to the “Women’s Movement,” in her writing she was their greatest asset. “No reader was left in any doubt that George Eliot found much to criticize in the behavior of a male-dominated society” (Taylor 200). This is reflected in the Mill on the Floss in which she examines how society is destructive to both Tom and Maggie, or men and women. Having experienced societal expectations herself and watching how these expectations affected her brother, Issac, she was definitely aware of gender-related issues, and Mill on the Floss provides a vehicle by which we can see her exploring these issues. However, there is more time spent on Maggie’s problems in dealing with her role than Tom’s. In fact, two of the proposed titles for the novel named Maggie specifically, “Maggie” and “Sister Maggie,” indicating that Maggie was the main subject. This indicates that her exploration delved deeper into issues which Eliot faced directly.

Since Mill on the Floss is known for being Eliot’s most autobiographical novel and realizing that she lived an unconventional life and strained against societal boundaries set for women, and therefore for herself, gender issues become particularly

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significant. The fact that Eliot, along with her other contemporaries, proves problematic in regards to the 20th century definition of feminism explains why her exploration of gender roles within *Mill on the Floss* is somewhat subversive. Regardless, she uses writing as her vehicle to illustrate that both genders suffer as a result of the societal, gender-biased boundaries placed on men and women. She explores this subject by noting the societal education which Tom and Maggie are subjected to. She also examines how these gender-based concepts and boundaries are passed on from fathers and mothers to sons and daughters.

In chapter one, we will examine the societal concepts and pressures which Maggie and Tom are confronted with. We will then investigate how each character, with a more specific treatment of Maggie, individually deals with these pressures in chapters two and three. Chapter four outlines additional oppression which Maggie encounters as she attempts to function alongside the men in her life. Unfortunately, despite their separate approaches, both Tom and Maggie ultimately drown as a result of having to face Victorian ideals regarding gender, which will be examined in chapter five.

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11 Eliot committed two great wrongs in Victorian society’s eyes. First, she was financially secure as a result of her own work efforts. Second, she lived with a married man. Ina Taylor points out that “She was not a woman received in polite society nor indeed by any person concerned about their good name.” She also cites a letter written by a visiting American who noted that she “is not received in general society, and the women who visit her are either so emanipee [sic] as not to mind what the world says about them or have no social position to maintain...she cut herself off by her own act from the society of women who feel themselves responsible for the tone of social morals in England.” Ina Taylor, *The Life of George Eliot, A Woman of Contradictions* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989) 177, 186-187.
CHAPTER II

SOCIETAL INFLUENCES ON TOM AND MAGGIE

In writing to Mrs. Robert Lytton in July of 1870, George Eliot commented:

We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life—some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed—because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. Yet surely women need this sort of defense against passionate affliction even more than men. ¹²

In Mill on the Floss, Eliot displays the social education and conditioning which takes place in both genders. She does so by showing us the social education and conditioning of both Maggie and Tom Tulliver. When commenting on her purpose in writing Mill on the Floss, Eliot related to Emily Davies that “her sole purpose in writing it [Mill on the Floss] was to show the conflict which is going on everywhere when the

younger generation with its higher culture comes into collision with the older, and in which, she said, so many young hearts make shipwreck far worse than Maggie” (433). She illustrates this collision between Maggie’s fight against her mother’s social conditioning and in Tom’s acceptance of his father’s social conditioning. Maggie balks society’s norms in several different ways and by doing so rejects her mother’s social lessons. Tom, on the other hand, follows the patriarchal directions given to him: “Tom never disobeyed his father” (33). The social conditioning of both Maggie and Tom are examined carefully by Eliot. As Eliot wrote in a letter to William Blackwood dated May 27, 1860, “So far as my own feeling and intention are concerned, no one class of persons or form of character is held up to reprobation or to exclusive admiration. Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie” (430). This “love and pity” is illustrated when the narrator opens Book Four with an explanation of humanity in general, including an important appeal from the narrator asking for the reader’s sympathy for Tom and Maggie and the predicaments they face as a result of the societal boundaries placed upon them:

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie—how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. (222)

The narrator is aware of the boundaries for each gender and names them as “oppressive narrowness.” The narrator wants readers to understand the dilemmas that Tom and Maggie each face and how these engendered expectations have been dealt with throughout “many generations,” that although there is a “tendency” to supersede
with throughout "many generations," that although there is a "tendency" to supersede the generation before them, they struggle because they have been taught by their parents and are therefore tied to fulfilling these expectations "by the strongest fibres of their hearts." There is no escaping the teachings and examples of their parents and families before them. Tom and Maggie must deal with the boundaries set for their genders, each on an individual basis.

The Dodson family serves as the primary example of living successfully and completely within the social boundaries set for both Tom and Maggie:

...and the Dodsons were a very respectable family indeed—as much looked up to as any in their own parish, or the next to it....In short, there was in this family a peculiar tradition as to what was the right thing in household management and social demeanor....and Mrs Tulliver was a thorough Dodson...She was thankful to have been a Dodson, and to have one child who took after her own family.... (37-38)

Mrs. Tulliver is a "thorough" member of a "very respectable family," and as such is an exemplary member of her gender. The Dodson's, symbols of Victorian society, know the right things to do within their households and within Victorian society. Mrs. Tulliver never steps outside of the social boundaries for her gender and is thankful "to have one child who took after her own family, referring to Tom who, like his mother, never steps outside his position in society. Mrs. Tulliver finds Maggie's insistence to do so exasperating, therefore Maggie is without any comfort or support from Mrs Tulliver for her unique approach to life.

On the other hand, Mr. Tulliver recognizes Maggie's uniqueness and ruminates over his observation that Maggie takes after his side of the family, whereas Tom takes after the Dodson family:
"It seems a bit of a pity, though," said Mr. Tulliver, "as the lad should take after the mother's side instead o' the little wench...." The little un takes after my side, now: she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid...." (11-12)

Tom takes after the Dodson family, specifically by never deviating from the proper course for his gender. However, Maggie doesn't follow suit. Mr. Tulliver acknowledges that "she's "twice as 'cute as Tom. "Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid." At the first reading, "'cute" sounds as though the term refers to Maggie's appearance. However, 'cute, is equivalent to acute, which indicates that Maggie is very intelligent, and as such, she won't be accepted into society. She is too smart to operate within her proper role in Victorian society: Women aren't supposed to possess too much intelligence, that is left up to the male gender. Mr. Tulliver also points out that intelligence should be a trait for the male gender and specifically notes that Maggie is more intelligent than Tom, therefore she violates the rules. In addition, by equating Maggie with himself and his side of the family, and therefore with his male intellect, Mr. Tulliver draws attention to Maggie's inability to live within the boundaries set for her gender and states that "an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep" (12). Maggie's intelligence sets her apart from the other sheep, or women within society.

Mr. Tulliver's observation that Maggie follows after his family and Tom follows the Dodson side is reiterated when Mr. Tulliver again notes that Tom follows after his mother and is "stupid," and Maggie follows his side of the family and is "'cute." Mr. Tulliver indicates here that Maggie is more like himself, specifically noting his own male intellect:

13 Mill 12. See footnote concerning the term "'cute," which actually means acute.
"It's a pity but what she'd been the lad... But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, til it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing." (18)

Mr. Tulliver laments that Maggie isn't "the lad" or male. Once again, he recognizes Maggie's intelligence and her subsequent inability to live within the boundaries set for women. If she had been "the lad," her intelligence would be accepted by society. In addition, Mr. Tulliver specifically notes his own "brains" or intellect, stating "there's no knowing where they'll run to." In Maggie's case, he determines that his male intellect was passed onto his daughter rather than his son. This continues Maggie's comparison to male intellect and serves as another indication that she is predisposed to reject the feminine social restraints which are imposed upon her. Mr. Tulliver notes that "the world was turned topsy-turvy" when "lads" are born "stupid" and "wenches" are born "'cute," which comments on the disorder and confusion which occurs in society if genders don't act within the constraints of their respective societal roles. This serves as a foreshadowing of what will ultimately occur: the demise of the individual who chooses to operate outside the proper engendered rules and also the demise of the individual who chooses to adhere too strictly to those rules—respectively, Maggie and Tom.

There is another glimpse into their gender defined futures exhibited in their physical appearances: Maggie looks nothing like the accepted norm for little girls, especially according to Mrs. Tulliver, who as a Dodson is representative of society:

"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... and' there's her cousin..."
Lucy’s got a row o’ curls round her head, an’ not a hair out o’ place. 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).

Mrs. Tulliver points out Maggie’s deficits and notes that Lucy, the epitome of femininity, with “a row o’ curls round her head, an’ not a hair out o’ place,” “takes more after me nor my own child does.” Again, Maggie is outside the physical and societal boundaries of what she’s supposed to look like and Mrs. Tulliver recognizes that she doesn’t identify with her own daughter. Rather, she identifies with the feminine norm that Lucy stands for. On the other hand, Tom remains within engendered boundaries, even in his physical appearance:

He was one of those lads that grow everywhere in England, and, at twelve or thirteen years of age, look as much alike as goslings—a lad with light-brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows—a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character of boyhood; as different as possible from poor Maggie’s phiz, which Nature seemed to have moulded and coloured with the most devised intention. (29)

Tom represents a generic image of boyhood and therefore is within the boundaries for his gender, even in his “indeterminate” description. On the other hand, Maggie’s appearance is one “which Nature seemed to have moulded and coloured with the most decided intention.” She doesn’t fit the “generic” image for her gender, as Tom does. As Tom is younger, his description includes terms which can be construed as feminine. He has cheeks of cream and roses and full lips. This is representative of following after the Dodson family. It would be socially correct for Maggie to do so, but Tom is the one that remains within engendered boundaries, just like his mother and the rest of the
female Dodsons. On the other hand, Tom also serves as a clear-cut example of a Victorian boy, whereas Maggie looks nothing like a normal Victorian girl. This becomes a foreshadowing of how each will deal with the gender-defined society they live in. As his physical description attests, Tom lives his life strictly within his engendered role. Whereas Maggie, being anything but generic, fights her role throughout her existence.

The aunts and uncles provide these societal lessons to both Tom and Maggie as well, specifically on the occasion of Mr. Tulliver's stroke. As they hold a family meeting concerning the tragedy, Mrs. Tulliver is instructed to include her children because "they should hear what their aunts and uncles have got to say..." (174). Tom and Maggie should listen to the family, and therefore to the society they stand for. Mrs. Glegg observes that "it's right as somebody should talk to 'em and let 'em know their condition in life ..." (174). These family figures, representative of common society and its boundaries gather to instruct Tom and Maggie concerning their roles. Tom is instructed first: "[we] must look to see the good of all this schooling, as your father's sunk so much money in... Now's the time, Tom, to let us see the good o' your learning.... But he must do it... whether it's hard or no... he's got to bear the fruits of his father's misconduct, and bring his mind to fare hard and to work hard." (175). The discussion centers on Tom's "learning" which is double in meaning—his learning of his social place as he grew up and the learning he received from his formal education. Both aspects must now come into play as he abruptly enters adulthood earlier than normal and has to "fare hard and to work hard" to provide for the family. Maggie is instructed as well: "[she] must make up her mind to be humble and work; for there'll be no servants to wait on her any more—she must remember that. She must do the work o' the house..." (175). Tom basically accepts the boundaries of his position as foretold.
by the family and submits, although with "trembling in his voice" (176). Tom speaks in a "quiet and respectful manner" (176) to the family/societal members present and they, as well as Maggie, are "astonished at Tom's sudden manliness of tone" (176). Tom accepts the role he now faces and speaks respectfully to the family, and therefore the society they represent.

On the other hand, Maggie doesn't accept their instructions and bursts out against the family, and society: "having hurled her defiance at aunts and uncles in this way, [she] stood still, with her large dark eyes glaring at them," as if she were ready to await all consequences" (177). The Dodson's condemnation is swift:

"You haven't seen the end o' your trouble wi' that child, Bessy," said Mrs. Pullet; "she's beyond everything for boldness and unthankfulness. It's dreadful. I might ha' let alone paying for her schooling, for she's worse nor ever."

"It's no more than what I've allays said," followed Mrs Glegg. "Other folks may be surprised, but I'm not. I've said over and over again—years ago I've said—'Mark my words; that child 'ull come to no good: there isn't a bit of our family in her.' And as for having so much schooling, I never thought well o' that. I'd my reasons when I said I wouldn't pay anything towards it." (177-178).

We are reminded, again, that Maggie is unlike the Dodsons who live their lives within narrowly set gender-biased limits: "there isn't a bit of our family in her." In addition, Mrs. Pullet implies Maggie's formal education should have helped contain her within societal boundaries, as education was designed to do; however, "she's worse nor ever." These observations are directly correlated to the subjects taught to girls, which included only those which would help them in their social roles as homemaker, wife and
mother. Mrs. Pullet recognizes that education didn't help Maggie advance towards her role in society. On the other hand, Aunt Glegg alludes that Maggie has had too much schooling and she "never thought well o' that" (178). When considering that the education at the time was designed to promote specific societal positions for men and women, we see that Aunt Pullet may have thought a proper education would bring Maggie more in line with society whereas Aunt Glegg would have recognized that too much knowledge may have further influenced Maggie's inability to live within proper societal standards. By noting this incongruity, we further note the confusion Maggie faced in Victorian Society and the educational standards they tried to enforce.

This is another illusion to Maggie's intelligence and propensity to step outside boundaries set for her gender. Aunt Glegg, being the most prominent aunt, alludes that Maggie's education is somehow partially responsible, as though knowledge and intelligence give her the power to operate outside of social/societal boundaries. 

When she oversteps those boundaries by not remaining suppressed in her opinions of the family, she is unacceptable to the Dodson family and the society they stand for.

As for Tom, now begins his trials within the boundaries set for his role in life. He will have to take responsibility for the family's disgrace and find a way to make things right again: "A proud sense of family respectability was part of the very air Tom had been born and brought up in" (157). As a result of Mr. Tulliver's illness, Tom now faces the full impact of his societal role and Maggie faces a new, unexpected burden to

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14 The thinking of the time was that women suffered physically and became more masculine when given too much knowledge, as though intellect degraded their ability to act within the proper societal boundaries. Deirdre David writes: "Opponents of serious secondary schooling for girls and higher education for young women almost always adopted three related arguments designed to terrorize their advocates: educated girls have trouble finding husbands, they develop disfiguring masculine traits, and they deplete energy from their reproductive organs through brain work." Deirdre David, Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987) 19.
contend with, in addition to dealing with the social pressures she constantly must confront. This ends the second book and the two of them, Maggie and Tom, like Adam and Eve, leave Eden and enter the next stage of their lives:

They had gone forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of this childhood had for ever closed behind them. (159)

Now, just like Adam and Eve, the first man and woman who were instructed as to their specific roles in life after leaving Eden, Tom and Maggie face their specific roles in adulthood, and unfortunately at a very early age for both of them. As we will see, Maggie makes some attempts to live her role and suppress herself. However, she isn't successful and continues breaking societal rules and boundaries. On the other hand, Tom continues to live within the boundaries of his engendered role in life. Each follows his or her own tragic path alone, Tom within the boundaries set for the male gender and Maggie outside of them. 15

15 Diana Postlethwaite comments on their respective engendered roles: "With his father's death, Tom will inherit the violent patrimony of Mr. Tulliver's vengeful curse on his enemy Wakem, inscribed in the family Bible. Antithetically, Maggie's corresponding inheritance from her mother calls not for aggressive action but passive submission. As they enter adulthood, Tom is required to reenact his father's rage; Maggie, her mother's self-suppression. Diana Postlethwaite, "Of Maggie, Mothers, Monsters, and Madonnas: Diving Deep in The Mill on the Floss," Womens Studies, vol. 20 (1992): 311.
CHAPTER III

TOM

Much emphasis is placed on Tom's formal education, whereas very little emphasis is placed on Maggie's. Tom's formal education is symbolic of Mr. Tulliver's efforts to teach Tom his role within the boundaries set for his gender, that of family provider and patriarchal avenger. From the very beginning of the novel, Mr. Tulliver is preoccupied with Tom's formal education. The story barely begins before his education is discussed. Mr. Tulliver is a product of his generation in his strong desire to provide his son with an education, and therefore help him provide for his future family. It is of utmost importance to Mr. Tulliver:

"...what I want to give Tom is a good eddication; an eddication as'll be bread to him....for he's had a fine sight more schooling nor I ever got: all the leamin' my father every paid for was a bit o' birch at one end and the alphabet at the' other. But I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholard, so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish. It 'ud be a help to me wi' these lawsuits, and arbitrations, and things." (9)

Mr. Tulliver's intentions are similar to those of all parents: to groom Tom so he can provide for himself and family, "an eddication as'll be bread to him." By providing Tom with this education, Mr. Tulliver believes he will help him fulfill his gender-defined role in Victorian society and become a good provider for his family. Mr. Tulliver has an ulterior motive as well; he wants Tom to assist him in his own work, "wi' these lawsuits,
and arbitrations and things" or in other words help him in his lawsuit against Wakem. This is an allusion to Tom's socially engendered education and role as patriarchal avenger against Wakem. In addition, Mr. Tulliver wants Tom to obtain a better level of employment than he had been able to obtain, and in essence become an improved version of himself, with a “fine sight more schooling nor I ever got.” Mr. Tulliver wants Tom to surpass his own social role as the provider in the family and believes the way to do so is through formal education. However, Mr. Tulliver fails and Tom chooses to pursue and remain in the same position and work as his father had before him.

Tom follows his father's patriarchal teachings and example closely—closer than Mr. Tulliver intended. In fact the Dodsons, representative of society and with whom Tom is closely affiliated, admonish Mr. Tulliver to keep Tom in the same position of employment, and therefore within the proper social boundaries. Mrs. Glegg serves as the familial and societal mouthpiece:

“I should like to know what good is to come to the boy, by bringin' him up above his fortin.”

"Why," said Mr Tulliver, not looking at Mrs Glegg, but at the male part of his audience, "you see, I've made up my mind not to bring Tom up to my own business...I want to give him an eddication as he'll be even wi' the lawyers and folks, and put me up to a notion now an' then."

Mrs Glegg emitted a long sort of guttural sound with closed lips, that smiled in mingled pity and scorn. (61)

Mrs. Glegg, the symbol of proper society, brings the issue of remaining in the proper place to the forefront. Tom shouldn't be raised "above his fortin," or above his expected position in society. However, Mr. Tulliver doesn't acknowledge Mrs. Glegg directly. Rather than address Mrs. Glegg, Mr. Tulliver addresses only the "male part of
his audience," indicating that Mrs. Glegg is operating outside of her social role by voicing this strong opinion. However, Mrs. Glegg, and the society she stands for, are not going to be dissuaded, and she responds with "pity and scorn" at Mr. Tulliver's attempts to rise Tom above his proper station in life. As a Dodson, and therefore a proper societal member, Tom ultimately rejects his education in favor of the same employment as his father before him, thereby staying within the boundaries of both his social status and his gender.

In fact, Tom, "who never disobeys his father," enters Stelling's school basically against his will. He would much rather be brought up to his father's business, remain within the boundaries for his station in life, as well as his gender, and be satisfied. Tom notes early on that a formal education won't help him in these efforts:

> When people were grown up, he considered, nobody inquired about their writing and spelling: when he was a man, he should be master of everything....It had been difficult for him to reconcile himself to the idea .... that he was not to be brought up to his father's business.... Thus poor Tom, though he saw very clearly through Maggie's illusions, was not without illusions of his own.... (111-112).

Tom's concept of being a man is that he "should be master of everything." This didn't include "writing and spelling," therefore this knowledge is unnecessary. Tom's concept of manhood and his perception of living in society as a member of his gender doesn't include any other knowledge than what is necessary. During her observations on Tom's formal education, Eliot brings gender to the forefront again. Education diminishes Tom because he struggles with it and as a result, he isn't "master of everything."
In addition, this diminishment Tom experiences through formal education is an attribute that makes him “like a girl” (118). This is illustrated in Tom’s struggles with Latin:

Mr. Stelling was not the man to enfeeble and emasculate his pupil’s mind by simplifying and explaining or to reduce the tonic effect of etymology by mixing it with smattering extraneous information, such as is given to girls.

Yet, strange to say, under this vigorous treatment Tom became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before... and his pride got into an uneasy condition which quite nullified his boyish self-satisfaction, and gave him something of the girl’s susceptibility. (117-118)

Eliot uses terms such as “enfeeble” and “emasculate” as she describes Mr. Stelling’s response to Tom’s inability to understand Latin—words that indicate lack of strength and effeminacy. Also, Mr. Stelling won’t explain Latin by “mixing it with smattering extraneous information, such as is given to girls,” indicating that if Tom is to understand Latin better, he will require a lower level of information, which further emasculates him. As a member of his gender operating within the boundaries set, Tom is supposed to understand a higher level of knowledge than “girls.” By using such terms, Eliot illustrates that Tom’s formal education will not help him in his societal role and since he is “like a girl,” he is no longer operating within the boundaries set for his gender. Tom can’t accept that.

In order to cope with these feelings, he reminisces about the past and his better, more masterful, and therefore more manly, position there:
he couldn't help thinking with some affection even of Spouncer, whom he used to fight and quarrel with; he could have felt at home with Spouncer, and in a condition of superiority. And then the mill, and the river, and Yap pricking up his ears, ready to obey the least sign when Tom said “Hoigh!” would all come before him in a sort of calenture.... (119)

In remembering his superiority over Spouncer and Yap, Tom finds comfort. This is within the scope of his gender, i.e. fighting and quarreling with Spouncer and commanding Yap, and therefore being "master of everything."

As a rejection of something which makes him become "more like a girl" and has him stepping outside boundaries set for his gender, Tom inwardly rejects his formal education. He manages to tolerate his lessons because he "never disobeyed his father." However when Mr. Tulliver arrives for a visit, Tom tells him "there's no sense in it" (121). Tom recognizes his formal education as relatively unnecessary for his role as a man and provider in Victorian society.

This is further illustrated as he approaches his uncle Deane to obtain work in order to provide for the family. Mr. Deane concludes Tom's formal education will not help him achieve in his social role as provider. In fact, Tom's "list of acquirements gave him a sort of repulsion towards poor Tom" (188). Mr. Deane, symbolic of society and the values it holds, feels repulsion towards Tom because he doesn't have any of the necessary skills to act within his social role as provider. Tom recognizes this as well and states:

"I should like to enter into some business where I can get on—a manly business, where I should have to look after things, and get credit for what I did..." I had to do my lessons at school; but I always thought
they'd never be of any use to me afterwards—I didn't care about them.” (189-90).

For Tom to become a man and remain within the boundaries set for him as an upright male member of society, or in other words a Dodson, he needs to work within “a manly business” and quickly forsakes the formal education which made him feel so much “like a girl.” Now it’s Mr. Deane who directs Tom and provides societal lessons in fulfilling his role as family provider. Once again, Tom feels less than he is supposed to be: “Tom had been used to be so entirely satisfied with himself in spite of his breaking down in a demonstration, and construing nunc illas promite vires, as ‘now promise those men;’ but now he suddenly felt at a disadvantage, because he knew less than some one else knew” (192). Tom’s weakness in understanding Latin comes to the forefront again. The phrase “nunc illas promite vires” actually means “now put forth those powers,” however Tom misinterprets the phrase as meaning “now promise those men.” This is exactly what Tom has done. He remains within the role set for him by society and uses his powers within the boundaries set for his gender. He has promised “those men” of society, and thereby is beholden to fulfill his proper role as a man in society. This includes the promises to his father, one of “those men,” to repay his debts, take revenge on Wakem, and provide for Maggie and his mother. By fulfilling the promises he makes to his father, Tom continues to remain within the socially acceptable boundaries for his gender. Tom resolutely follows the lessons he receives in regards to his role in Mr. Tulliver’s revenge plans. Once again, “Tom never disobeyed his father...” (33).

Tom’s lessons in revenge begin even before he meets Wakem’s son. Upon returning home for Christmas, he finds that Mr. Tulliver is immersed in his battle for the water and is made aware of his father’s troubles:
Christmas was cheery, but not so Mr Tulliver. He was irate and defiant, and Tom, though he espoused his father's quarrels and shared his father's sense of injury, was not without some of the feeling that oppressed Maggie.... The attention that Tom might have concentrated on his nuts and wine was distracted by a sense that there were rascally enemies in the world, and that the business of grown-up life could hardly be conducted without a good deal of quarreling. (129)

By observing Mr. Tulliver's conduct, Tom is given a further indication of his expected place within the family and society, which apparently can not be "conducted without a good deal of quarreling." Mr. Tulliver has shown Tom's expected role within society through his "irate and defiant" example. In addition, he verbally admonishes Tom about Wakem's son, Philip, who will soon enter the same school. His admonitions begin simply enough: Tom observes: "You won't like me to go to school with Wakem's son, shall you?" Mr. Tulliver replies: "It's no matter for that, my boy,...don't you learn anything bad of him, that's all" (133). Mr. Tulliver only wants Tom to avoid learning "anything bad of him." As the novel progresses, Mr. Tulliver's admonitions become more and more defined against Wakem and his son.

In the meantime, Tom returns to school and meets Philip Wakem, who "did not seem so spiteful a fellow a might have been expected" (136). In listening to and observing his father, Tom expects something much worse when meeting Philip. However, despite the fact the Philip doesn't fulfill these expectations, Tom believes his father's directions and sees Philip as a "natural enemy." In addition, he is repulsed by Philip's deformity. This deformity inhibits Philip's ability to take part in such normal male activities as fishing (138), which indicates that it represents his inability to fully participate in the activities prescribed for the male gender.
In addition, Tom directly draws the connection between Philip's inabilities and femininity by stating: "You know I won't hit you, because you're no better than a girl" (145). As such, Philip is unacceptable. Also, he adheres “tenaciously to impressions once received...” (138), which are the negative impressions Mr. Tulliver teaches Tom concerning the Wakems. As part of Tom's familial and societal responsibilities, these impressions will eventually prove to be destructive, which is symbolically illustrated in an incident involving a sword. Tom contemplates his drill teacher's sword as a powerful instrument of death and fighting, and therefore a symbol of masculinity: “And this is the real sword you fought with in all the battles, Mr. Poulter? Said Tom, handling the hilt. "Has it ever cut a Frenchman's head off" (143)? In fact, Tom is afraid of the sword's power and when Mr. Poulter draws the sword out suddenly, “Tom leaped back with much agility” and was “a little conscious that he had not stood his ground as became an Englishman” (145). He also “admired [Mr. Poulter's] performance from as great a distance as possible” (146). Tom is in awe of the sword, this symbol of masculine power, but despite his fears, Tom talks Mr. Poulter into lending him the sword for one specific purpose. He wants to “astonish” Maggie and “make her believe that the sword was his own, and that he was going to be a soldier” (146). He wants Maggie to see this symbol of masculinity and equate it with the power that Tom has by virtue of his gender. He wants her to view her true societal position in light of his own.

Despite the show Tom puts on for Maggie, she laughs at him rather than accepting his power or control over her.

He had wound a red handkerchief round his cloth cap to give it the air of a turban, and his red comforter across his breast as a scarf—an amount of red which, with the tremendous frown on his brow, and the decision with which he grasped the sword, as he held it with its point
resting on the ground, would suffice to convey an approximative idea of his fierce and bloodthirsty disposition.

Maggie looked bewildered for a moment... but in the next, she laughed, clapped her hands together and said, "O Tom, you've made yourself like Bluebeard at the show" (149-150).

Tom actually dresses up and performs his role as a man in an attempt to impress Maggie with the idea that he is "fierce and bloodthirsty." However, Maggie doesn't fall for the performance. She is bewildered for a moment as she tries to decipher Tom's reasons. However, just like she doesn't comprehend gender roles in general, she doesn't comprehend Tom's intentions to put on this performance. Instead, she sees through the illusion and sees a theatrical character "at the show." The illusion of masculine power is real for Tom, but dismissed by Maggie as theatrics.

Maggie's reaction is unacceptable to Tom: "It was clear she had not been struck with the presence of the sword [or his masculine power] – it was not unsheathed. Her frivolous mind required a more direct appeal to its sense of the terrible, and Tom prepared for his master-stroke" (150). It is obvious to Tom that the sword will impress Maggie, if the demonstration is strong enough. But despite the fact that he draws the sword, she still doesn't recognize or accept his power. Rather, her fears arise from the possibility of Tom hurting himself: "Tom, I will not bear it—I will scream," said Maggie, at the first movement of the sword. "You'll hurt yourself; you'll cut your head off." Her fears are realized as the sword falls and cuts Tom's foot. It has been argued that this is symbolic of castration revealing Tom's sense of inadequacy (Johnstone 95); however, rather than castration, the wound is symbolic of the future effects he will suffer for strictly adhering to society's definition of his male role. He is unable to control the sword, the symbol of masculinity, just as he is unable to control the defined societal
roles, especially in light of his acceptance of those roles. The societal boundaries of masculinity control him, he can’t control what is expected of him, just as he can’t control the sword. However, by adhering to the boundaries set and the promises he makes to his father and society, Tom’s life is wounded, much like his foot. He doesn’t experience much happiness, just constrained satisfaction in accomplishing the patriarchal goals set for him.

Tom’s first concern is whether the wound in his foot will lame him permanently; however, to his relief his wound will heal, and he will be lame only temporarily, whereas the effects of living his life within the boundaries set for his gender will continue to influence his life. Unlike Philip, who is described as effeminate and whose permanent physical deformity represents his inability to conform to the societal roles of his gender, Tom has a wound that will heal and he will go on fulfilling his masculine position in society. Ironically, it is Philip who ultimately asks the doctor the question and brings the good news to Tom’s attention. Tom “dared not even ask the question which might bring the fatal ‘yes’” (151). He fears a similar fate to the one which Philip experiences due to his deformity. He fears that his ability to operate as a man in Victorian society may be in jeopardy: “Tom was thinking of himself walking about on crutches, like the wheelwright’s son” (151).

Philip’s concern manages to ally the two schoolmates, at least temporarily. However, to further complicate matters, Mr. Tulliver steps up his admonitions to Tom regarding the Wakems. Mr. Tulliver admonishes Tom: “Have as little to do with him at school as you can, my lad,” he said to Tom; and the command was obeyed the more easily because Mr. Stelling by this time had two additional pupils” (155). Therefore, the lessons continue. Any enemies of his father’s are enemies of his own, no matter the reason and despite any positive interaction he has had with Philip. Once Mr. Tulliver
loses his lawsuit and basically goes mad as a result, he gives Tom further patriarchal instructions, this time increasing his demands on Tom to fulfill his obligations as a man in society:

"You'll have to take care of 'em both [Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver] if I die, you know, Tom. You'll be badly off, I doubt. But you must see and pay everybody... Tom—you mind this: if ever you've got the chance, you make Wakem smart. If you don't, you're a good-for-nothing son." (183-184)

His father's instructions have gone from making sure Tom doesn't learn any bad habits from Philip to avoiding any contact with Philip and now to making "Wakem smart—" which Wakem or how is left up in the air. If he doesn't succeed, Tom will be "a good-for-nothing son." Therefore, Tom's role as man of the family has been directed toward revenge upon Wakem and the undoing of all his father's past mistakes and failures in regard to the lawsuit. Mr. Tulliver becomes unable to fulfill his societal obligations to his family. Now Tom must make sure that he takes his father's place, fulfill Mr. Tulliver's familial obligations and take revenge on the Wakems.

Mr. Tulliver's strongest instructions for Tom's patriarchal revenge role involves the Bible. This is significant in that the Bible contains a record of their lives, specifically Mr. Tulliver's, and is a common symbol of patriarchal religion. He commands him to write a pledge in the family Bible concerning the revenge:

"And you mind this, Tom—you never forgive him, neither, if you mean to be my son... Now write—write it i' the Bible.... Do as I tell you, Tom. Write."

"What am I to write, father?" said Tom, with gloomy submission.... "Now write—write as you'll remember what Wakem's done
to your father and you'll make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes.
And sign your name Thomas Tulliver."

"O no, father, dear father!" said Maggie, almost choked with fear.

"You shouldn't make Tom write that."

"Be quiet, Maggie!" said Tom. "I shall write it." (220)

He resolutely writes exactly what his father tells him to write, despite the fact that his "submission" is "gloomy." Once again he remains rigidly within the boundaries his father has set for him and which society has set for the male gender. If he means to be Mr. Tulliver's son, he must pledge outright revenge on Wakem and "his," meaning Philip. In addition, he must fulfill his role in society as the family provider and by doing so absolve his father's debts and buy back the mill. Tom lives his life focused on these societal goals passed onto him by his father.

The direction Maggie must take isn't as defined at Tom's. Tom is given direct, pointed instructions by his father, whereas Maggie must confront somewhat general directions from her mother and society. Maggie isn't provided with specific objectives but still must face the roles of her gender. However she can't accept the consequences of living within those roles.
CHAPTER IV
MAGGIE

Maggie's reluctance to fulfill her purpose in society begins as a child and is illustrated in her constant rejection of symbols of femininity. After her mother asks her to do her patchwork, Maggie responds:

"O mother," said Maggie in a vehemently cross tone, "I don't want to do my patchwork."

"What! Not your pretty patchwork, to make a counterpane for your aunt Glegg?"

"It's foolish work," said Maggie, with a toss of her mane,—"tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again." (13).

This is a direct rejection of sewing, a very common, expected household duty for girls and women of the time. Concerning this episode, Postlethwaite asserts: "This young woman will not devote her energies to the archetypal feminine task of 'patchwork,' piecing together a legacy of scraps she did not herself create; she will build her world anew, out of whole cloth! But from what sources does she spin?" (309). Postlethwaite leaves this question unanswered. Maggie has no other source but herself. There is no one to show her the way, most of all, her mother. Maggie doesn't accept the legacy that is left for her to follow. She doesn't want to continue the past conditions of the past. Rather, she wants to forge a new way to exist within society and its boundaries. Another early indication of Maggie's reluctance to remain within gender boundaries occurs within the conversation she has with Tom's educational advisor, Mr.
Riley. Upon picking up a book which Maggie has dropped, Mr. Riley asks for an explanation of a particular picture and Maggie explains her view:

"O' I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? But I can't help looking at it. 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. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned?" (16)

Maggie is compelled by the picture and "can't help looking at it." She's fascinated with its associated story, which she thinks is "dreadful." If the accused woman takes action and swims, she is considered a witch. If she does nothing and drowns, then she is just a "silly old woman." She recognizes that although the woman would be found innocent, she would be dead and doesn't see what good it would do her then. Like the witch in the picture, Maggie takes action, or swims, so to speak, throughout the novel. She fights the social definitions for her gender, unlike the woman who does nothing and lives within the social definitions, willing to drown just to prove her innocence. However, just as the accused witch must drown to be found innocent, Maggie must drown to finally declare her innocence. She must do so after stepping outside the gender boundaries for a woman by refusing Stephen Guest's proposal and returning to St. Oggs, alone and unmarried. Philip Fisher notes that Maggie is tested twice by the water, one of which "is the boat ride with Stephen Guest, where Maggie faces the choice of the witch: to die socially, her reputation ruined, whether she returned or elopes" (521).

Although Fisher insinuates that Maggie commits the ultimate societal sin regardless of whether she returns alone or elopes, the greater sin against society is
returning alone. By returning alone, she directly rejects marriage and her proper societal place as wife and mother. In addition, even in Victorian times, witches were viewed as having supernatural powers, much more power than any woman living in Victorian society. Within the context of the drowning comparison, Maggie is symbolically compared to a witch, and therefore her personal power is alluded to.

Mr. Tulliver is very aware of Maggie’s personal power, making such verbal observations as: she is too “cute [acute] for a woman” (12), “a woman’s no business wi’ being so clever” (16), “It’s a pity but what she’d been the lad... But you see when a man’s got brains himself, there’s no knowing where they’ll run to” (18), and other such commentary. In addition, he continues to compare Maggie to his side of the family, drawing more attention to the fact that she doesn’t resemble the socially correct Dodson family. This includes a direct comparison between Maggie and Mr. Tulliver’s sister, Mrs. Moss. This is an important observation because we see what the future could hold for Maggie if she remains within the socially correct fetters of her gender. The comparison between Mrs. Moss and Maggie illustrates the situation Maggie may have to face if she lives within societal boundaries and marries. Mrs. Moss notices the similarities between herself as a younger woman and Maggie: “‘Moss says she’s just like what I used to be,’ said Mrs. Moss, ‘though I was never so quick and fond o’ the books’” (68). However, Mrs. Moss, who was once much like Maggie, has been so oppressed by the boundaries of her marriage and her social place as a woman that she “had quite thrown herself away in marriage, and had crowned her mistakes by having an eighth baby” (66), and is “too fagged by toil and children to have strength left for any pride” (69). Bushnell draws the connection between Mrs. Moss and Maggie as well when she states: “But her [Mrs. Moss’s] ‘half-smothered fire,’ though it flares so seldom, signifies a kind of energy which no other woman in the novel possesses—no
other woman except, of course, Maggie...Like her Aunt Moss and as a female, Maggie encounters various pressures to smother her energies, both mental and physical.

Unlike her aunt...her fires are the fires of youth which her aunt has lost" (382). Maggie is young and still has the energy to fight the efforts to smother her. Unfortunately, Aunt Moss has succumbed and lost those abilities over the years. Now she endures in a broken, worn-out state. Eliot doesn't provide any explanation for Aunt Moss's nickname, Gritty. It is as though her nickname represents tenacity and endurance. She grits her teeth and bears her lot. We see Maggie doing the same in her efforts to adopt Thomas a' Kempis and actually uttering "I will bear it to death" (417) in reference to what she determines is a cross laid upon her by God.

In addition, When Mr. Tulliver experiences his first episode of illness, we get a physical comparison between Aunt Moss and Maggie:

   The tall, worn, dark-haired woman was a strong contrast to the Dodson sisters as she entered in her shabby dress, with her shawl and bonnet looking as if they had been hastily huddled on, and with that entire absence of self-consciousness which belongs to keenly felt trouble. (178)

There are definite similarities in the physical descriptions of Maggie and Mrs. Moss. We have already gotten glimpses of Maggie's physical description and see that both are tall, dark-haired, and "strong contrast[s] to the Dodson sisters." Again, the parallel is drawn and we see what might await Maggie if she lives within her proper role as wife and mother in society. Mrs. Moss goes on to describe some of the burdens and troubles she has experienced in her life:

   "O, sir, you don't know what bad luck my husband's had with his stock. The farm's suffering so as never was for want o' stock; and we've
sold all the wheat, and we’re behind with our rent. . . not but what we’d like to do what’s right and I’d sit up and work half the night, if it ‘ud be any good. . . but there’s them poor children . . . four of ‘em such little uns. . . .”

“Don’t cry so, aunt—don’t fret,” whispered Maggie, who had kept hold of Mrs Moss’s hand. (179)

Maggie listens to her aunt’s troubles and attempts to comfort her, seeing how difficult Mrs. Moss’s life is. Not only is she a concerned mother, but she is also a wife who shoulders financial burdens as she tries to support her husband and his efforts to provide for the family. Maggie takes action to avoid the same type of fate. In later portions of the story, we see that one way in which Maggie does so is by remaining outside societal boundaries and insisting on making her own income, thereby providing for herself. Another way is by rejecting Stephen Guest’s marriage proposal. It is not a far stretch to consider that Maggie recognizes the future which may await her as she sees her Aunt Moss struggle and further balks at her future role as wife and mother.

Mr. Tulliver notes Maggie’s dismal future as well. During his illness, Mr. Tulliver comments: “. . . and there’s the little wench, she’ll get married. . . but it’s a poor tale” (184). He worries again later and states that Maggie may “marry poorly, as her aunt Gritty had done: that would be a thing to make him turn in his grave—the little wench so pulled down by children and toil as her aunt Moss was” (228). Maggie’s fate seems to be determined. If she remains within the societal boundaries set for her gender, she will lose her power and become completely oppressed, like her “[a]unt Gritty.”  

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16 We get both an autobiographical glimpse at Eliot again, along with a look at Maggie’s probable fate if she remains within societal gender boundaries. First, there is a correlation between Mrs. Moss’s experience with married life and Eliot’s sister, Chrissey’s, experience. Ruby Redinger makes this connection. (Redinger) 32-33.
Johnstone observes the insinuation as well: "The implication is perhaps that her aunt's existence is what awaits Maggie" (93). Johnstone goes on to assert that this possibility is not only recognized by Maggie but is a "source for Maggie's rage" (93). However, rather than a source for rage, Mrs. Moss serves as an example for Maggie. She is "cute" and "clever" enough to see the fate that awaits her by observing her aunt Moss's life and recognizing the similarities with her own expected future. She takes action to avoid such a fate, which doesn't result from rage but from her desire to live a different way from the one which she is bound to by societal standards.

The oppression created by society and its boundaries for Maggie's gender is symbolized by Maggie's head of hair and its various aspects of control. It is important to note that Maggie's hair symbolizes her personal power. Eliot accomplishes this comparison by comparing Maggie to Medusa. Tom takes Lucy, symbolic of complete compliance with feminine ideals, on a walk, excluding Maggie entirely. During this ordeal, Maggie lingers at a distance, "looking like a small Medusa with her snakes cropped" (83)—a reference to female power and Maggie's hair. Of course, Medusa's power came from having a head of snakes which turned any man who dared look upon her to stone. Medusa's power is derived from the snakes upon her head, which are free and unconstrained. When Maggie's hair is free, and not constrained beneath the outward feminine restraints of bonnets and hair that "won't curl" (12), her personal power to withstand the boundaries set for her gender is much more evident. It is when her hair is unconstrained that her true, fighting personality comes out. Therefore, attempts to control Maggie's hair (or snakes) and therefore her power are attempts to subdue Maggie's personal power beneath the restrictions of feminine symbols.

Maggie is directly compared to Medusa again after she pushes Lucy, symbolic of femininity, into the mud. This also serves as another example of Maggie's rejection
feminine symbols. By pushing Lucy, and therefore femininity, into the mud, Maggie is empowered:

There were passions at war in Maggie at that moment to have made a tragedy...the utmost Maggie could do, with a fierce thrust of her small brown arm, was to push poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow-trodden mud.... she was glad to spoil their happiness—glad to make everybody uncomfortable. Why should she be sorry?....

Maggie sat on the roots of the tree and looked after them with her small Medusa face. (85-86)

Once again, Maggie rejects something that stands for femininity in pushing Lucy off the grassy bank and into the mud. In addition, Maggie is again compared to the powerful image of Medusa as she watches Tom lead the muddied Lucy away, proud that she was able to "make everybody uncomfortable" and not sorry she had done so. These comparisons to Medusa illustrate Maggie's personal power, which is represented by her hair, symbolic of Medusa's snakes, or the power of a female goddess. There are continual references made to the oppression, and exhibition of her personal power, through references to Maggie's hair.

In fact, the reader's first encounter with Maggie as a child illustrates Mrs. Tulliver's focus on Maggie's outward, less than feminine, socially unacceptable appearance, specifically in regard to her hair: "But her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzly about having it put l' paper, and I've such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with the' irons" (12). Maggie's hair is symbolic of her rejection of feminine boundaries. Her hair not only won't comply with feminine physical standards by curling naturally, but Maggie fights having curls forced onto her
head by having them "pinched" with irons. It is as though the irons represent a type of constraint as well, such as manacles.

There are several references to Maggie's hair and head throughout the novel. It is no secret that George Eliot became very interested in phrenology, the study of bumps on the head to determine a person's make-up. In her references to heads in regard to Maggie, Eliot brings attention to coverings over Maggie's head, which are her hair and the bonnets she wears. These coverings symbolize the suppression Maggie experiences by societal definitions for her gender, as though Maggie is hidden under the constraints of her hair, when controlled by curling and smoothing or by wearing bonnets. When we are initially introduced to Maggie, she immediately throws off her bonnet, a rejection of a feminine article of clothing covering her head. By throwing off this constraint, Maggie exposes her unruly head of hair: Maggie's hair, as she threw off her bonnet, painfully confirmed her mother's accusation" (12)... Maggie reveals her Medusa snakes and confirms her non-compliance to feminine standards. When Maggie is more of herself, her hair is uncovered and generally unruly, like Medusa's snakes. As Maggie is more oppressed, her hair is placed under more control.

As a child, with a child's inhibitions, Maggie pointedly fights the oppression of societal standards, such as throwing off her bonnets and refusing to have her hair

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17 She became interested in phrenology through her friend, Charles Bray, and was actually analyzed herself. In fact, Bray kept a cast of her head in his possession. Gordon Haight's biography of Eliot discusses Phrenologist George Combe's findings after examining Eliot's head. (Haight 51, 100-101)

18 Borrowed from a reference of Diana Postlethwaite's: "In her free-ranging meditation of Gothic 'demonism, witchery and vampirism' in The Mill on the Floss, Nina Auerbach takes particular notice of Maggie's unruly locks: 'the turbulent hair that is her bane as a child is an emblem of destructive powers she is only half-aware of and unable to control; its roots reach back to the serpent tresses of the Greek Medusa, peer through the wanton ringlets of Milton's Eve, and stretch down from mythology into Gothicism.' "The Power of Hunger: Demonism and Maggie Tulliver," in Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts (New York: Columbia, 1986) 235-36.
curled. One of the most important scenes and illustrations of Maggie's literal rejection of a feminine symbol is noted during the “fetish” scene. Postlethwaite attributes this scene to Maggie’s self abuse of her own knowledge and intellect (309);\(^{19}\) however, it is actually a sign of power and rejection of a standard feminine symbol, a doll with the “roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks” (Mill 25). The scene begins by Maggie’s refusal to allow her mother to curl her hair, a symbol of the oppression she experiences by gender-defined stereotypes:

... and it was a direct consequence of this difference of opinion that when her mother was in the act of brushing out the reluctant black crop, Maggie suddenly rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water standing near—in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day. (24)

Maggie determines that she won’t allow “curls that day.” She won’t allow Mrs. Tulliver to impose the physical representation of femininity upon her “reluctant black crop,” which is as reluctant as her spirit. As stated previously, Mrs. Tulliver’s first comments were concerning Maggie’s hair as she lamented that she couldn’t make Maggie’s hair curl. Now Maggie vehemently rejects conformity to Mrs. Tulliver’s attempt to curl, and therefore reshape, her hair into curls, curls which are another symbol of Mrs. Tulliver’s desire to have Maggie accommodate society by allowing Mrs. Tulliver to curl her hair and therefore reshape Maggie’s image.

The hair-curling scene continues with Maggie rushing up to the attic and beating up the “Fetish:"

\(^{19}\) Postlethwaite questions whether this is “a self-destructive turning against her own male identified intellect.” Postlethwaite 309.
...and here she kept a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks; but was not 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 early struggle; that luxury of vengeance having been suggested to her by the picture of Jael destroying Sisera in the old Bible. (25)

Directly following her pointed rejection of having her hair curled, she runs up to the attic and beats on the "Fetish" a doll which once had femininity painted on its face and which Maggie has managed to erase. Rather than abusing her own intellect, as has been asserted by Postlethwaite, who wonders whether this is "a self-destructive turning against her own male-identified intellect?" (309), Maggie's reaction toward this doll is a rejection of the social ideals and gender boundaries she is to live up to and within. She has defaced an image of those ideals—a doll with the "roundest of eyes" and "reddest of cheeks." Now, after Maggie's abuse, the doll is faceless, with three nails driven into its head. There is no reference to hair on the doll; however, since Maggie knocks the doll's head against the wall, the doll has not only been defaced but attacked about the head as well: "Since then she had driven no more nails in, but had soothed herself by alternately grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimney ...." (25). Maggie not only rejects and defaces "the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks" but also beats and grinds the head. Since the doll is a standard symbol of girls and femininity, the entire abusive fetish scene is an entire rejection of this symbol. In addition, the reference to Jael, in the passage is an allusion to one of the very few women in the Bible to exert any type of power. Jael helps to release the Israelites from bondage to the Canaanites by murdering Sisera with a hammer and a
nail. Here, Maggie is compared to a woman of power, one who helps release her people from bondage. In this comparison to Sisera, a man holding the Israelites in bondage, the doll becomes the object of oppression and Maggie becomes the savior by driving nails into its head. She is saving herself, and perhaps her gender, from the bondage of socially engendered boundaries by attacking a symbol of those boundaries. Again, this is not self-mutilation or self-punishment as has been discussed, it is a direct rejection of what the doll stands for, and that is what she rejects and rages against.

Following this bout with the fetish, Maggie “tossed her hair back and ran downstairs, seized her bonnet without putting it on, peeped, and then dashed along the passage lest she should encounter her mother, and was quickly out in the yard, whirling round like a Pythoness” (25). Once again, Maggie rejects her bonnet. She seizes it but doesn’t put it on her head. In addition, she makes sure her mother doesn’t see her so she can remain free of having curls or bonnets imposed upon her. She is also compared to a woman of power—A “Pythoness” or a feminine derivative of snake. Like a snake, Maggie is able to move about undetected by her mother and is therefore able to take independent action and revel in her accomplishment.

Maggie rejects her hair as a symbol of the social constraints upon her, almost as though if she gets rid of the social feminine constraints her hair stands for. Medusa’s influence will reign and Maggie’s own powerful snakes will emerge from her head. Maggie’s hair, and therefore the social constraints upon her, is described as heavy: “Maggie was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark, heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes” (13). She has both dark eyes and dark hair, both contrary to the blond, blue-eyed ideal of femininity. In fact, her eyes are black, which carries a connotation of being impenetrable and therefore secretive. By looking into her gleaming black eyes, one would see a reflection of themselves rather see into Maggie,
which indicates that neither her family or society can comprehend her. They only see what she should be because they see images of themselves. Plus, these images connote evil which indicates that Maggie is transgressing gender rules and is therefore evil in the eyes of society. In addition, the reference to heaviness connotes the heaviness of exhibiting her personal power to a socially determined society.

The only way she can physically reject socially correct feminine characteristics is by insuring her hair, or personal power, is not manipulated and curled into feminine shapes, which she does first by throwing her hair in a basin of water, as noted previously, and then by cutting off her locks of hair altogether. Just as she pounds the head of her fetish, Maggie determines to cut her hair and remove those restraints. First, she cuts the front by herself and then invites Tom to be a part of it:

"Here, Tom, cut it behind for me," said Maggie, excited by her own daring, and anxious to finish the deed.... One delicious grinding snip, and then another and another, and the hinder-locks fell heavily but with a sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain. (55)

Maggie is the one in control of this particular destiny. The cutting of her hair is done with Maggie's own purpose and intent. She becomes her fetish, in that now the offending feminine symbolism isn't removed from her doll, but from herself. Just as she destroys the doll's round eyes, rosy cheeks and head, she attempts to destroy her hair, so it won't be able to be formed, controlled or restrained by feminine societal standards:

She had thought... of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty—that was out of the question—she only
wanted people to think her a clever girl, and not to find fault with her.

(55)

By taking "this very decided course of action," cutting her hair so it wouldn't "look pretty," she triumphs "over her mother and her aunts," the symbols of society and the feminine standards it adheres to. She wants her power recognized, like Medusa, "she only wanted people to think her a clever girl." Therefore, by cutting off her hair and insuring it won't comply with socially acceptable standards for a feminine young girl, she once again rejects a symbol of her social conditioning. This gives her a "sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain" (55), as though she is allowing her power, or Medusa's snakes, to emerge by removing the possibility of having restraints placed upon her. This gives her freedom to be herself, without being encumbered by trees which block her sight and her way. She emerges from this wood into a clear, open area, where possibilities exist. In "The Blank Page," Susan Gubar argues that Eliot's "female characters squander their creativity on efforts to reconstruct their own images" (297). However, in Maggie's case, she searches for "a blank page" (or an open plain) to allow her creativity to pour forth. She does not need to reconstruct her image. She only needs the freedom to allow both her power and creativity to be realized.20

As Maggie gets older, her hair seems to be more under control, but her spirit, which balks at social restraints, continues to shine forth despite this. Maggie has

shown her strength and intelligence by refusing to allow Tom to put her down or put her in her place, so to speak. At this point, he notices her head of hair:

“Now, then, come with me into the study, Maggie,” said Tom, as their father drove away. “What do you shake and toss your head now for, you silly?” he continued; for though her hair was now under a new dispensation, and was brushed smoothly behind her ears, she seemed still in imagination to be tossing it out of her eyes. “It makes you look as if you were crazy.”

“O, I can’t help it,” said Maggie, impatiently. “Don’t tease me, Tom.” (121)

By this time, Maggie has experienced further suppression by her aunts, her mother, her father and Tom. They have all told her that she is unacceptable in one way or another. So, this symbol of her personal power, her Medusa snakes, is symbolic of having been placed under more control. It has been smoothed and tucked behind her ears, as though her very strong, independent nature was smoothed and tucked. However, her strong, independent nature still flashes out from beneath and “still in imagination she tosses it [her hair] out of her eyes.” She doesn’t allow the fact of her smoothed hair, or the burden it stands for, to get into her eyes or affect her true sight or vision. This is irksome to Tom who attempts to control Maggie and keep her within gender boundaries for women. He asks her why she tosses her head “now,” implying that having her hair smoothed and tucked should oppress and prevent her from exhibiting her nature. He wants her to submit to her smoothed hair, or the symbolic burden of her social place. But Maggie “can’t help it.” She can’t help exhibiting her strong, independent nature.
As she ages and has to deal with the oppression she faces, the condition of her hair symbolizes her dilemma. For example, when Maggie arrives to tell Tom about their father’s stroke, the description reads:

...she “was tall now, with braided and coiled hair...She had thrown off her bonnet, her heavy braids were pushed back from her forehead as if it would not bear that extra load...” (156)

Now, Maggie's hair is under even more control, it is “braided” and “coiled,” and therefore forced to remain within physical boundaries. However, at the same time it resembles Medusa's snakes even more. This indicates that her power is still present, despite the fact that under the “weight” of what has happened, her spirit is oppressed and her braids, her heavy hair, symbolic of her proper place in life and society, are pushed back “as if it [her head] would not bear that extra load.” She is already dealing with the “load,” or oppression, of feminine societal standards. The “load” of dealing with her father’s stroke is an “extra load,” on top of dealing with socially engendered boundaries for women.

As noted previously, bonnets serve as a particular symbolic restraint. Once again, the reference is to covering the hair and head. We have already seen that Maggie prefers not to wear this item, which is again a rejection of something that stands for femininity, an item of feminine clothing stifling Maggie’s Medusa-like powers beneath social constraints. A clear, precise example of this occurs as Mrs. Tulliver muses about Maggie's rejection of this item:

... Mrs Tulliver had really made great efforts to induce Maggie to wear a leghorn bonnet... but the results had been such that Mrs Tulliver was obliged to bury them in her maternal bosom; for Maggie... had taken an opportunity of basting it together with the roast-beef the first Sunday
she wore it, and, finding this scheme answer, she had subsequently pumped on the bonnet with its green ribbons, so as to give it a general resemblance to a sage cheese garnished with withered lettuces. (51)

Once again, Maggie rejects Mrs. Tulliver’s attempts to make her conform to the physical image of femininity, in this case by wearing a “leghorn bonnet.” Rather than accepting her mother’s “efforts,” Maggie destroys the bonnet, just as she destroys her “Fetish” and cuts her hair. All three are symbolic of the societal, engendered restraints upon her. Once again, Maggie has disobeyed all of her mother’s instructions and balked at societal boundaries.

The symbolism of this item of clothing continues and is greatly emphasized in interaction between Mrs. Tulliver and Mrs. Pullet. Mrs. Pullet has a new bonnet and showing the bonnet is described as though it’s a sacred religious artifact from a saint long dead, and is even described funeral-like.

... they went in procession ... it was really quite solemn. Aunt Pullet paused and unlocked a door which opened on something still more solemn than the passage: a darkened room, in which the outer light, entering feebly, showed what looked like the corpses of furniture in white shrouds. Everything that was not shrouded stood with its legs upwards.... Aunt Pullet half-opened the shutter and then unlocked the wardrobe, with a melancholy deliberateness which was quite in keeping with the funereal solemnity of the scene... the sight of the bonnet at last was an anticlimax to Maggie.... (76)

The funeral-like, worshipful description recognizes the bonnet as powerful, in and of itself. Mrs. Tulliver and Aunt Pullet worship the bonnet, as they do the socially acceptable feminine roles it stands for. However, the bonnet is anti-climactic for
Maggie. Neither the perfect bonnet, nor the feminine restraints it stands for, impresses Maggie. In addition, the religious symbolism throughout this passage points towards funerals and death: They walk “in procession” into a room full of furniture corpses covered in “shrouds.” The “un-shrouded” furniture lies “with its legs upwards,” like dead animals. There is even a “funereal solemnity” of the scene, as though the bonnet stands for death—as though it smothers the life within the head that lies beneath it—as though it is a symbol of the boundaries placed upon the woman whose head it covers—as though the bonnet is a coffin, signifying the death of the spirit.

Maggie ultimately attempts to stifle her spirit by working to accept Thomas a’ Kempis’ philosophies of self sacrifice. At this point, her hair becomes even more controlled, by being “plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head” (240): . . .

Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be ‘growing up so good;...’ The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl... and Maggie... was obliged to give way to her mother about her hair, and submit to have the abundant black locks plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head... Mrs Tulliver liked to call the father’s attention to Maggie’s hair and other unexpected virtues, but he had a brusque reply to give.

I know well enough what she’d be, before now—it’s nothing new to me. But it’s a pity she isn’t made o’ commoner stuff—she’ll be thrown away, I doubt: there’ll be nobody to marry her a is fit for her. (240)”

Maggie has attempted to subdue her true nature by adopting Thomas a’ Kempis’s philosophies. In doing she, she has attempted to comply with the gender boundaries set by society. Not only does she submit to the once dreadful act of sewing but also having her hair put into place by her mother, both acts which she determinedly rejected
as a child. By seeing her submission, Mrs. Tulliver becomes "fond of her." She finally sees her daughter approaching an acceptable submissive lifestyle. Mrs. Tulliver grows "fond" of Maggie because Maggie finally relents to the societal teachings her mother has provided, that of sewing and submission. This submission is reflected in Maggie's hair becoming controlled and "plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head." 21 Maggie has now begun to follow her mother's matriarchal teachings, and Mrs. Tulliver recognizes this.

According to Christine Sutphin, this is where Maggie commits a crime against herself: "Maggie commits the greatest wrong, in her own and Eliot's eyes, when she is passive, when she abdicates responsibility, when she is most traditionally feminine (344)." At the same time, Sutphin also states: "The feminist critic must see Eliot in the context of her time; only then can we fairly judge her often veiled feminist message and see how much or how little Eliot's women departed from the popular Victorian ideal of the essentially passive lady whose major activity was domestic service to a husband and children" (342). Sutphin goes on to say that Eliot presents forced submission as evils the heroine must struggle against... (342)." These statements offer conflicting views of the same subject, Maggie's attempt to submit. As Sutphin says, Eliot is a product of her time and one has to seek for the "veiled feminist message" (Sutphin 342). However, if we accept this statement, we can not see that Maggie's most serious fault is accepting this "passive feminine ideal." Maggie, like Eliot, is a product of her generation. As Sutphin also asserts, Maggie is trying to struggle against "forced

21 Postlethwaite notes that "Medusa has become Madonna; the serpentine locks, a queenly crown. But, revealingly, Maggie 'steadily refuses to look at herself in the glass.' In her 'mother's eyes,' Maggie appears to Mrs. Tulliver as a reassuring reflection of herself. But Maggie dreads the monster in the mirror, so like her mother. 'Volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions' lie beneath the serenely frozen plaits of the virgin mother" (312).

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submission” (342), and effectively does so. This illustrates that although she may temporarily submit to the demands of the societal boundaries placed upon her, it is only temporary and only as a result of being a product of her time. In fact, Eliot responds to criticism she received on Maggie by writing to John Blackwood that:

> If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error—error that is anguish to its own nobleness—then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology (431).²²

Here, Eliot comments that Maggie is noble but “liable to great error—error that is anguish to its own nobleness.” Maggie may be a product of her time and err, but ultimately she rises above this societal level, or boundary of submissiveness, and retains her powers, without committing any wrong against herself or Eliot, as Sutphin suggests.

In fact the narrator describes Maggie in passionate terms “with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it. No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it” (194). The contrast of outward and inward is the difference between who Maggie is inside, beneath the social constraints symbolized by having her hair controlled or covered by bonnets, and who society says she should be, should act and should look like. Interestingly, when her hair is controlled and plaited, Maggie refuses “to look at

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herself in the glass" (240), as though she can't abide seeing herself put under such control.

Therefore, Maggie fights the restraints that her hair and bonnets both symbolize and continues to fight the boundaries set for her gender in various ways. This includes her refusal to allow Tom to place her back within proper feminine boundaries or take care of her financial needs. She also refuses marriage to Stephen Guest. She determines to take care of herself, remain single, and use her strength and determination, rather than allowing herself to become suppressed by obligations to societal standards. For Maggie to move towards independence, she must refute attempts made to control her personal power and self-reliant nature, specifically those made by Tom, Philip and Stephen.
CHAPTER V

TOM AND MAGGIE

Unfortunately for Maggie, she begins dealing with this oppression as a child playing alongside Tom. In fact, from their first interaction in the novel, we see Tom's concepts of men and women as he recognizes that she is "only a girl" (31):

What for?" said Tom. "I don't want your money, you silly thing. I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy. I always have half-sovereigns and sovereigns for my Christmas boxes, because I shall be a man, and you only have five-shilling pieces, because you're only a girl." (31)

Tom notes that he will always have more money, and therefore a better position in society, because he is a boy and will become a man, whereas Maggie will not become anything but will remain "only a girl." Basically, in their first interaction since Tom has returned from school, Tom verbally puts Maggie into her proper place, so to speak. He voices his narrow view of where each of them will fit in the world. Even at this early age, Tom determines to make sure that Maggie will remain within the concepts of this narrow view, which coincides with society's concept as well.

Tom continues his attempts to oppress Maggie throughout their childhood and considers Lucy, the epitome of femininity, as the antithesis for Maggie. As the three of them build card houses, Maggie's "would never bear the laying on of the roof" (73) and she fails to build the houses properly. However, Lucy asks Tom to teach her how to build the houses correctly, thereby adhering too the concept that boys have more
knowledge than girls. Therefore, Lucy “proved wonderfully clever at building,” and Tom “condescended to admire her houses as well as his own” (73). Despite Lucy’s ability to follow his direction and build proper card houses, Tom retains his superior position as a male and condescends when he admires her ability. As for Maggie, who isn’t instructed and builds her own way, she is unacceptable once again. Tom laughs when Maggie’s houses fall, and he calls her stupid. She is stupid for not being able to complete a card house with an intact roof. Her inability to do so is another symbolic indication that she fights against personal oppression and Tom’s attempts to control her.

Just as the hair on her head serves as an oppressive restraint, Maggie’s houses fall when she attempts to place roofs, or top restraints, upon them. Tom can not accept this fact and ridicules her for being incompetent. However, Maggie will not stand for this. She exceeds her proper place and speaks out against Tom’s attempt to mock her and put her back within social boundaries: “Don’t laugh at me, Tom!” she burst out, angrily; “I’m not a stupid. I know a great many things you don’t” (73).

By so stating, Maggie not only asserts her equality with Tom but asserts her intellectual superiority. When she does so, she further alienates Tom and his efforts to check Maggie become more pointed; he basically disowns her in favor of the much more feminine Lucy:

“O, I daresay, Miss Spitfire! I’d never be such a cross thing as you—making faces like that. Lucy doesn’t do so. I like Lucy better than you: I wish Lucy was my sister.” (73)

Just like Mrs. Tulliver, representative of society as a Dodson, who recognizes Lucy, representative of femininity, as a better illustration of a daughter than Maggie, Tom, who follows after the Dodson family and as such is representative of society, now
asserts that he wants Lucy to be his sister. Maggie has not only been rejected by Mrs. Tulliver and Tom individually, but has also been rejected by the society they stand for. This is because she does not fit the socially correct image for her gender, like Lucy does.

Tom's outright rejection continues as he shows even more favoritism towards the socially correct, feminine Lucy. He takes Lucy on a walk, deliberately leaving Maggie out. As Lucy and Tom walk along, Tom takes great care of Lucy, unlike when he is with Maggie. He makes sure Lucy steps carefully because girls are “unfit to walk in dirty places” (85). Maggie, however, seems to be the acceptance in this instance. She has walked in dirty places with Tom several times, an indication that Tom does not consider her a “girl” in the same feminine sense that he sees Lucy. Rather, Lucy remains within the boundaries of the feminine ideal whereas Maggie does not, therefore Maggie doesn’t require the same socially correct consideration as Lucy does:

“Here, Lucy!” he said in a loud whisper, “come here! take care! keep on the grass—don’t step where the cows have been!” he added, pointing to a peninsula of dry grass, with trodden mud on each side of it; for Tom’s contemptuous conception of a girl included the attribute of being unfit to walk in dirty places....“Now, get away, Maggie; there’s no room for you on the grass here. Nobody asked you to come.” (85)

The grassy area is a peninsula with “trodden mud on each side of it,” as though it symbolizes a socially correct area upon which Lucy should stand. Tom makes sure Lucy remains on the peninsula, bordered by mud. However, there is no room on the grass for Maggie. She is not equated with Lucy’s socially correct femininity and therefore doesn’t belong on the grassy peninsula. In addition, since Maggie fights the boundaries set for her gender, she is unacceptable to society and therefore must stand
in the mud, physically outside of the place where Lucy has the right to stand. Maggie recognizes this on some level. She knows Lucy is somehow more acceptable to Mrs. Tulliver, Tom, the family, and therefore society. Much like Maggie’s doll fetish, Lucy stands for femininity and therefore becomes contemptuous to Maggie: “...the utmost Maggie could do, with a fierce thrust of her small brown arm, was to push poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow-trodden mud” (85). Once again, Maggie rejects a symbol of femininity. She shoves Lucy off the grass and into the muddy area that exists outside societal correctness, where the unacceptable Maggie has been banished by Tom. In response, Tom slaps Maggie, rushes to Lucy’s aid and determines that even though it is not his custom to tell, “Maggie should be visited with the utmost punishment” (86) for what she has done. Tom takes Lucy, determined to see this punishment is given. However, Maggie is “glad to make everybody uncomfortable. Why should she be sorry”(86)? Although Maggie always rushes to regain Tom’s approval, in this instance she refutes Tom and his concepts of femininity and is not sorry she does so.

Tom determines to depreciate Maggie’s intelligence as well. However Maggie’s abilities to operate outside gender boundaries continue to come forth, despite Tom’s efforts to surpass Maggie’s intelligence by showing off his knowledge. Interestingly, during his attempts to do so he reads from a passage of “Rules for the Genders of Nouns” and gender comes directly to the forefront. As Tom begins reading, he does well, which gives Maggie the opportunity to speculate over what the word “mas” means, because it came “twice over” (124). The word “mas,” meaning masculine, is one which Tom doesn’t struggle with, indicating that Tom understands the word, masculine, and therefore his role within that term. Maggie puzzles over what the word means and in so doing what “masculine” actually means. However, Tom begins stumbling through
the passage as the terms become more natural, such as the names of various trees and animals. Here, Maggie points out his many errors, until once again, he reaches masculine terms and it is Maggie who stumbles:

"Mascula nomina in a," he began.

"No Tom," said Maggie, "that doesn't come next. It's Nomen non creskens genittivo.

"Creskens genittivo," exclaimed Tom, with a derisive laugh...Creskens genittivo! What a little silly you are, Maggie!" (125)

Once he reaches the term "Mascual nomlna" [masculine nouns ending in a], Tom has the opportunity to put Maggie back into her place again. Tom can convey masculine terms, however Maggie stumbles over the pronouncement of Creskens genittivo (a noun not increasing in the genitive) and he points out her errors and shows his superiority, both intellectually and his understanding of his masculine place in society. Therefore, their rightful positions are restored. Despite Maggie's corrections and assistance with a portion of his lesson, Tom states "I told you girls couldn't learn Latin. It's Nomen non crescens genitivo" (125). Tom stumbles on some of the words but knows the pronunciation of masculine and possessive terms just as he understands and follows his role in Victorian society. These masculine terms symbolize his comprehension of his role whereas other terms are superfluous and therefore not necessary to understand. On the other hand, Maggie wants to explore knowledge beyond the confines set for her. She wants to understand what "mas" means, a term she doesn't readily understand, just as she doesn't understand socially sanctioned roles.

Even in the face of her family's ruin, Maggie continues to violate her proper position. Being faced with the consequences of her father's lawsuit, she doesn't
remain quiet and submissive. Rather, she directly confronts both Mrs. Tulliver and Tom, the symbols of society. Once again she disregards imposed boundaries for female behavior and speaks her mind:

"Mother how can you talk so? as if you cared only for things with your name on, and not for what has my father's name too—and to care about anything but dear father himself!....Tom, you ought to say so too—you ought not to let any one find fault with my father." (169)

By confronting Tom, Mrs. Tulliver and the society they stand for, Maggie has taken the more powerful, out of bounds approach to her position and points out their faults. Again Tom is surprised and "a little shocked at Maggie's outburst—telling him as well as his mother what it was right to do" (169). As a woman, Maggie has no place voicing her opinion to either her elder mother or Tom, the man in the family. Rather, "She ought to have learned better than have those hectoring, assuming manners, by this time" (169).

Tom defines Maggie's response as being rather arrogant and readily recognizes that Maggie has overstepped her bounds and is asserting power over him, his mother, and the society they stand for: Despite all of Tom's efforts, the family efforts and society's efforts to teach Maggie about her proper place, she does not "learn better" (169).

Rather than learning her place, Maggie fights society. On the other hand, Tom does not and tries to force Maggie to take his path of acceptance. The narrator not only recognizes Tom's efforts but also points out that living within socially conceived gender roles takes its toll on Tom, and will do the same on Maggie:

While Maggie's life-struggles had lain almost entirely within her own soul...Tom was engaged in a dustier, noisier warfare, grappling with more substantial obstacles, and gaining more definite conquests. So it
has been since the days of Hecuba, and of Hector, Tamer of horses:
inside the gates, the women with streaming hair and uplifted hands
offering prayers, watching the world's combat from afar, filling their long,
empty days with memories and fears: outside, the men, in the stronger
light of purpose, losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the
hurrying ardour of action. (251)

Maggie's struggles lie within her own individual soul, as she struggles against the social
standards set for her gender. Meanwhile Tom, like the women and men of the past,
living "inside the gates," or inside the boundaries for their respective genders, does the
same and attempts to force Maggie to do the same: the women basically filled their
days remembering the past while the men take action and have no fears to address.
Men are required to forget fear while women are obligated to worry enough for both
genders. While Maggie refuses to accepts the "memories and fears" of the past. Tom
languishes, losing sense of the resulting wounds on his life and relationships. In
addition, the illusion of "Hector, Tamer of horses" is a direct allusion to Tom as "Tamer
of horses" and Maggie as the horse. Throughout the novel, Maggie's hair is described
as a "mane." In addition, she is directly described as having the "air of a small Shetland
pony" (13). Tom attempts to tame Maggie and become Hector, the "Tamer of horses,"
attempting to place her back within socially prescribed gender boundaries and within
submission to those boundaries.

As they grow older, Tom's attempts become more determined and direct. He
tells her: You ought not to have spoken as you did to my uncles and aunts—you
should leave it to me to take care of my mother and you, and not put yourself forward"
(191). Tom ends Maggie's quasi-romantic relationship with Philip in another
determined attempt to control her actions. Maggie recognizes the obvious male
engendered power that allows him to do this it and states:

"Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, [you] can do
something in the world."

"Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can."

"So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right. I will
submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit
to it from you (282-283).

This is Maggie's ultimate rejection of Tom and what he stands for as a strict member of
Victorian society. She pointedly rejects Tom and even calls him a Pharisee,
representative of too strictly adhering to the law in the New Testament. She doesn't
acknowledge that she can do nothing. Rather, she only acknowledges the fact that
men "can do something in the world." She has learned from experience that her
position as a woman in Victorian society does not allow her to have power. Maggie will
submit to what she feels "to be right," including "what is unreasonable from my father,"
but she will not submit to Tom. What Tom is trying to force her to do is to submit to
social gender boundaries. Maggie refuses to do so. She will not allow Tom to control
her personal power.

As part of these efforts, Maggie also continues seeking after independence and
self-employment, which is taboo in Tom's book and in Victorian society. In addition,
she pursues the right to make her own decision in regards to her relationship with
Philip. However, Tom pointedly admonishes her in these regards and tells her: "You
know what is my feeling on that subject, Maggie... You wish to be independent—you
told me so after my father's death. My opinion is not changed" (317). On both
subjects, Tom's opinion doesn't change. Regardless, Maggie continues to seek financial independence and continues to defy Tom.

For all of his efforts to suppress Maggie, Tom is only trying to fulfill roles presented to the two of them by society. He is so adherent to those roles that he can't allow Maggie to defy them or himself. Fisher notes that Tom "is [the] self-made man of the book, the man who, by will and singleness sets out to project and become what he projects, his case is, as Eliot said, of equal importance with Maggie's" (523). In his efforts to become what he, and therefore society, projects, he needs Maggie to do the same. In other words, she needs to become what society projects in order for him to fulfill his gender duties as the head of the family. It is his responsibility to ensure that societal standards continue within his realm of endowed control.

By continually forcing societal definitions on Maggie, he damages the closest relationship he has without realizing it. He doesn't recognize Maggie as an individual and tries to force her to become another solid member of society in order to fulfill his duties. Thus, he never recognizes her importance in his life as an individual and therefore suffers a loss that is never explained by Eliot. We only know that Tom is lost. His future lies only in obtaining material possessions, such as the mill. Society has given him the task of restoring material wealth to his family, but he can do so only by sacrificing his emotional well-being and personal connections with the people around him, especially Maggie.

Tom has been deeply affected, and even damaged, by having to remain within the boundaries for his gender and fulfill the patriarchal goals which Mr. Tulliver has set for him. His landlord and friend, Bob Jakin, notices Tom withdrawing from life. Bob tells Maggie in hopes that she can help:
An' it worrets me as Mr Tom 'ull sit by himself so glumpish, a-
knittin his brow, and a-lookin' at the fire of a night. He should be a bit
livelier now—a fine young fellow like him. My wife says, when she goes
in sometimes, an' he takes no notice of her, he sits looking' into the fire,
and frownin' as if he was watchin' folds at work in it.

"He thinks so much about business," said Maggie.

"Ay," said Bob, speaking lower; "but do you think it's nothin' else,
Miss?..

"I'm afraid I have very little power over him, Bob," said Maggie... It
was a totally new idea to her mind, that Tom could have his love
troubles. Poor fellow!—and in love with Lucy too! (316)

This is the last true glimpse we see of Tom's individual life, and the only brief,
brief allusion we receive to the idea that he may be in love with Lucy, though she is the
epitome of the feminine ideal. Hereafter, it becomes more of Maggie's story. Tom's
story is lost within his role in society. He is a man of business, a man accepting
boundaries set for him, a man who was given directions to buy back the mill and
revenge his father and who does exactly that. Through all of his efforts to accomplish
the goals set out for him by his father, he loses his life, which eventually becomes literal
when he drowns alongside of Maggie. Basically, when he lives, if it can be called living,
he lives his life to accomplish his father's goals, which he accepts as his own. On the
other hand, Maggie sets out to live her own life and accomplish her own goals. As a
result of doing so, she fights Tom's attempts to control her. She will not accept the
burden of accepting societal goals for herself.

As the book progresses, Tom slowly wills that his relationship with Maggie will
deteriorate for the sake of his role as leader and family provider. First, she is defiant in
the face of the family losses and openly defends her father. Second, he discovers her relationship with Philip. Finally, she allows Stephen to take her away and then returns to St. Ogg's ruined because she is unmarried and judged by the "world's wife" (397-399), or in other words the society that Tom embraces. Basically, Tom has made the firm choice to adhere to society and sacrifice personal relationships in order to do so, including his relationship with Maggie. In fact, once she commits the ultimate sin against society by leaving with Stephen and returning to St. Ogg's unmarried, Tom is compelled to completely sever the relationship. He is concerned for Maggie, but only in light of her position in society as a fallen woman, including how this will affect his own position:

... by years of steady self-government and energetic work [Tom] had brought himself near to the attainment of more than the old respectability which had been the proud inheritance of the Dodsons and Tullivers.

But Tom's face, as he stood in the hot still sunshine of that summer afternoon, had no gladness, nor triumph in it. His mouth wore its bitterest expression, his severe brow its hardest and deepest fold... No news of his sister had been heard since Bob Jakin had come back in the steamer from Mudport, and put an end to all improbable suppositions of an accident on the water... Tom's mind was set to the expectation of the worst that could happen—not death, but disgrace.

(391)

Even though Tom has fulfilled his duty as a man in Victorian society, he feels no gladness or triumph because Maggie isn't a part of his success. Despite his severity, she is still an important part of his personal life. She is an important key to enjoying
what he has accomplished. Unfortunately, his failure is two-fold. First, he was unable
to force Maggie to join him within societal boundaries. Second, he has lost his personal
connection with her and is emotionally bankrupt—unable to recognize the dilemma
Maggie not only must face, but is determined to face.

To Tom, it is justice to reject Maggie. In his mind, he has "had a harder life than
[Maggie has] had," but has found "comfort is doing [his] duty" (393). Tom finds that
adhering to society's restrictions is more difficult than allowing oneself to live outside
those restrictions, as Maggie has done. For Tom, this is reason enough to claim
superiority over Maggie and to reject her societal peril as less than his own. The
narrator reiterates Tom's position:

And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the
minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules,
thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent
method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination,
impartiality—without any care to assure themselves whether they have
the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or
from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling
with all that is human. (403)
The narrator doesn't clarify that this description belongs to Tom, however it fits him well.
He is a man of maxims and hasn't earned the right to determine what temptation is. He
can't understand Maggie or her temptations and doesn't recognize that he is subject to
faults of his own. He hasn't lived a "vivid" or "intense" life and therefore can't
understand humanity. He has missed out on that kind of life as he has lived by the
rules that society gave him. He can't even recognize aspects of a life living outside of
those rules, which means he can't understand Maggie. By being unable to understand
Maggie or recognize that her life is as difficult as his own, Tom banishes her from his life throughout the novel. As will be examined in a later chapter, it isn’t until their deaths that Tom is finally able to recognize Maggie’s trials and can see what he lost.

On the other hand, although there are other men in Maggie’s life, Tom remains the most important. It is her relationship with Tom that motivates Maggie for most of the novel and its Tom she seeks when the floodwaters come. Also, it is this relationship that Eliot focuses in on, though she also examines Maggie’s interactions with other men. Perhaps this serves, in part, as a comparison to Maggie’s relationship with Tom and illustrates his importance in her life.
CHAPTER VI

MAGGIE'S LOVERS

Tom's rigidity in regards to Maggie affects both of their lives a great deal. However, in addition to dealing with Tom's injustice and facing standard societal pressures, Maggie also faces oppression by two other concurrent men in her life, Philip and Stephen. Each of them attempts to assert their individual wills and obtain Maggie's submission. Interestingly, just as Maggie pounds three distinct nails into the head of her fetish, there are three distinct men which attempt to stamp their own power onto Maggie, as though they are trying to force their own socially influenced ideals and concepts into Maggie's head. Tom is the first, Philip is the second and Stephen is the third. However, she stands strongly against each of them as they try to control her personal power and destiny. Maggie rails against their efforts, just as she rails against her doll and the femininity it stands for.

Philip attempts to control Maggie's personal power, but in quite a different way than Tom, in that he doesn't want to force her into social boundaries. Rather, once she attempts to subdue herself under Thomas a' Kempis' influence, Philip tries to force Maggie to give up her efforts. Whereas Maggie has the option of making choices that keep her living outside the social and societal boundaries set for her, Philip is forced to live outside the boundaries set for men due to his physical deformity. Unlike the assertions made by Peggy Ruth Fitzhugh Johnstone that Philip's deformity "represents Maggie's low self image" (96), Philip's deformity is a physical representation of his
inability to operate on equal grounds with his fellow men. This is confirmed by James Diedrick, who states "The fact that Philip is humpbacked indicates that one aspect of his development has been retarded" (31). This aspect is his ability to operate within the boundaries of the male gender world. However, he recognizes Maggie's personal power and her defiant ability to do what he cannot.

Philip recognizes her personal power within her eyes, a power which he does not possess but wishes to. Upon first meeting Maggie, he wondered "What was it that made Maggie's dark eyes remind him of the stories about princesses being turned into animals?..." (148). She represents some type of mysterious, animal-like power for Philip, which he sees not in the "roundest of eyes," like those of her doll fetish, but dark, deep, incomprehensible eyes that evade comprehension or understanding. By recognizing this power, he sees Maggie as a way for him to enter the world of his fellow men on equal footing with them. He is not understood by the masculine world just as Maggie is not comprehended by society. If he can conquer her and accomplish what Tom could not, perhaps he can enter the masculine world.

Following Tom's accident with the sword, Philip wants Maggie to love him better than she does Tom. He has seen Maggie's strength of spirit and recognizes that she is "quite unlike her brother; he wished he had a little sister" (148). He wants to usurp

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23 Barbara Guth construes: "In addition to his deformity, his interests in music, art, and literature separate Philip from people such as Tom who value only practical achievements." Therefore, Philip is separated from Tom and the society of men that Tom stands for. In addition, she goes on to state that: "Philip is a male counterpart of Maggie in that his handicap and his exceptional nature separate him from the male-dominated, mercantile society around him...Clearly, Maggie and Philip feel out of place in their society...because they do not fit the cultural norms for members of their sex." Barbara Guth, "Philip: The Tragedy of The Mill on the Floss." Studies in the Novel, vol. 15 (1983): 359.
Tom's position in Maggie's life and wants the same type of claim to Maggie as Tom has:

“Maggie,” said Philip after a minute of two, still leaning on his elbow and looking at her, “if you had had a brother like me, do you think you should have loved him as well as Tom?”

Maggie started a little on being roused from her reveries, and said, “What?” Philip repeated the question. (153)

Here, Philip is pushing Maggie to accept him on equal grounds with her own, very masculine brother. If he could become Tom’s equal within Maggie’s life, he would then be on more equal footing with Tom, despite his effeminate handicap, and in addition, he would have more influence on Maggie’s life as it relates to his own. In Maggie, he has found a kindred spirit. Someone who doesn’t fit the gender-defined norm of society, just as he does not: He is “by nature half feminine in sensitiveness,” and “had some of the woman’s intolerant repulsion towards worldliness and the deliberate pursuit of sensual enjoyment; and this one strong natural tie in his life—his relation as a son—was like an aching limb to him” (269). Having these feminine tendencies speaks to his inability to be a “son,” therefore his “relation as a son” painfully reminds him of his inability to operate within boundaries set for his gender. Tom becomes an object to contend with as Maggie’s brother and also in his ability to operate as a “son” and carry out the masculine legacy by following his father’s patriarchal instructions to take revenge upon the Wakem’s. Therefore, his effeminate tendencies are a handicap to him whereas Maggie’s resistance to taking her proper place in society empowers her. Barbara Guth notes that: “Clearly, Maggie and Philip feel out of place in their society... because they do not fit the cultural norms for members of their sex” (359). However, where Philip feels crippled by his inability to fit cultural norms, Maggie is empowered.
He recognizes this ability and power within her, and he wants it for himself but is unable to produce it from within. Rather, he needs Maggie to provide it for him, by allowing him to replace Tom in her life and by leaning on her strength.

Since Philip is effeminate and also unable to generate the power to accept this part of himself, he has to seek for this power outside of himself. Therefore, he purposely seeks Maggie out in the Red Deeps, knowing she will be there. Upon meeting Philip for the first time in the Red Deeps, she “looked down” (243) at him, symbolic of being stronger and more powerful than he is. However, he attempts to assert his power when Maggie discloses her attempts to submit to the philosophies of Thomas a’ Kempis:

“I’ve been a great deal happier,” she said at last, timidly, “since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn’t have my own will...Our life is determined for us...

“But I can’t give up wishing,” said Philip, impatiently. “It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?” (246)

Maggie is attempting to accept that “life is determined” for her. She believes that by doing so she has been happier; however, in a sense this is the easy route. It is easier to give in and accept the restrictions society puts forth. The boundaries for her gender are set and she must submit to her determined fate of living within them. Fighting against this is what is hard; it becomes easier when she ponders giving up the fight.
However, Philip can’t do the same; he can’t accept living his life outside of the masculine world.

He “can’t give up wishing” and states that: “I strive and strive, and can’t produce what I want” (246), including being accepted into the bonds of masculinity:

“Then there are many other things I long for”—here Philip hesitated a little, and then said—“things that other men have, and that will always be denied me. My life will have nothing great or beautiful in it; I would rather not have lived.” (246)

Philip voices his resentment that he will be denied “things that other men have,” because he recognizes that he does not live within the boundaries for his gender and therefore does not have the opportunity to participate in certain “things” within those boundaries. Maggie not only stands for one of those “things,” both as a beautiful young woman and as Tom’s sister, but she also possesses the strength and power to endure life outside gender boundaries. On the other hand Philip resents his position outside those boundaries. Unlike Johnstone’s assertion that Philip is a symbol of Tom, a surrogate brother that Maggie rages against to exact revenge, Maggie is the symbol and subject of Philip’s innermost needs. Rather than Maggie “giving Philip hope and then rejecting him” (96) to lash out symbolically towards Tom, it is Philip who uses Maggie. Philip wants to usurp Tom’s position within Maggie’s life and thereby not only be on more equal ground with Tom as an individual adversary but also take part in life within masculine boundaries. Also, Maggie doesn’t punish Philip as a surrogate for Tom as Johnstone asserts, but rather fights against his desire to control her personal power.

One way in which he attempts to control her is to redirect her efforts from submitting to Thomas a’ Kempis to rebellion against her brother. By accepting Thomas
a' Kempis' philosophy, it appears that she is submitting to the societal boundaries placed upon her gender, which is something which Tom has been insisting that she do. Philip not only depends on Maggie's strength, example and insistence to remain outside gender-defined boundaries for his own necessary efforts to do the same, but he also wants to replace Tom's influence in Maggie's life. His conquest in usurping Tom's position, and thereby conquering the masculinity Tom stands for is dependent upon his ability to control Maggie's submissive tendencies and insure she continues to assert her personal power against Tom's wishes.

He also continues to lament his place outside of the boundaries set for his gender, making particular note that:

"It might be a happiness to have many tastes if I were like other men," said Philip, bitterly. "I might get some power and distinction by mere mediocrity, as they do; at least I should get those middling satisfactions which make men contented to do without great ones. (266)

Once again, Philip recognizes that he isn't "like other men" and feels bitter about that fact. He believes that he will be denied certain rights he should receive by being a member of his gender. If he could manage to live within social gender boundaries set, he "might get some power and distinction." He is unable to accept his inability to live within societal boundaries. Barbara Guth points out: "In addition to his deformity, his interests in music, art and literature separate Philip from people such as Tom who value only practical achievements" (359). She goes on to assert that his interest in culture brings him "close to contempt for the people around him" (359). However, the contempt he feels isn't directed toward feeling superior to those around him but rather it is his frustration at not being allowed into the masculine world in which Tom enjoys "some power and distinction." Whereas Maggie is able to live within the boundaries for
her gender if she chooses to, Philip can not do so, both by virtue of his deformity and
by virtue of his interest in the arts. Philip recognizes this and when Maggie attempts
live by Thomas a' Kempis and subdue herself, thereby moving toward living within the
boundaries set for her gender, Philip cannot allow her to do so. He angrily protests: "It
makes me wretched to see you benumbing and cramping your nature in this way," and
he asks her to allow him to be her "brother and teacher" (268). If Maggie remains
submissive, it will affect Philip on two levels. First, if he is to take Tom's place in her
life, and therefore usurp Tom's influence and power over Maggie, thereby entering
Tom's masculine world, he needs to wield power over the true, defiant Maggie and
persuade her to give up her attempts to submit. He must become Maggie's "brother
and teacher" and succeed where Tom has failed. Second, since he directly relies on
Maggie's strength, she must continue to fight gender constraints or his strength to do
the same is compromised. Plus, if she submits, he will lose opportunities to see and
converse with Maggie and thereby lose any chance at influencing her or relying on her
personal strength. Therefore, Philip is perpetually angry at Maggie's attempts to
subdue herself. By urging Maggie to discard any efforts at submission, Philip becomes
Tom's opposing enemy. This is his effort to place himself in Tom's masculine world by
controlling Maggie, especially since Tom was unable to control her.

As the relationship between Maggie and Philip continues, instead of being
satisfied with attempting to control Maggie by replacing Tom as her brother and primary
influence, Philip wants an even deeper relationship and more influence over her life:

"No, Maggie, I can't give you up—unless you are deceiving me—
unless you really only care for me as if I were your brother...I will ask
nothing—I will bear everything—I'll wait another year only for a kiss, if
you will only give me the first place in your heart." (273)
It is not enough to usurp Tom's position as brother: he needs to go a step further and
become Maggie's lover and take the "first place" in her heart. Then he can also take
part in the male engendered world as the lover of a young, beautiful woman. Philip is
minimally successful in his manipulation to bring his status from "brother" to lover, but
Maggie naively suggests her acceptance of this role:

“Yes, Philip: I should like never to apart: I should like to make
your life very happy."

“I am waiting for something else—I wonder whether it will come.”

Maggie smiled, with glistening tears, and then stooped her tall
head to kiss the pale face that was full of pleading, timid love—like a
woman's. (274)

Once again, Maggie has to stoop down to Philip, indicating her more powerful nature.
Once again, we see Philip's face is compared to a woman's, indicating his effeminate
nature. It is as though he is half Maggie and half Tom— the effeminate half of his
nature must abide outside social/societal boundaries set for his gender, as Maggie
chooses to do, while half of his nature wants to live within the boundaries set for his
gender, as Tom does. However, Tom, who lives completely within the boundaries for
his gender, thwarts Philip's attempts to enter his masculine world. Tom discovers Philip
and Maggie's relationship and nullifies Philip's attempts to not only usurp Tom's
position as brother in Maggie's life but also to take it one step further and become her
lover. This makes Philip's failure even more poignant. Tom walks with Maggie to meet
Philip in the Red Deeps, meaning "to do the duty of a son and a brother" (280):

“Do you call this acting the part of a man and a gentleman, sir?”

Tom said, in a voice of harsh scorn, as soon as Philip's eyes were turned
on him again.
“What do you mean?” answered Philip, haughtily.

“Mean? Stand farther from me, lest I should lay hands on you, and I’ll tell you what I mean.” (280)

Tom directly confronts Philip’s efforts to be a “man and a gentleman” and Philip quickly responds to the confrontation with the question, “What do you mean?” Philip automatically feels defensive and needs Tom to clarify his statement, feeling as though Tom’s actions are not in Maggie’s defense but in an attempt to question Philip’s masculinity. Philip goes on to claim he honors Maggie more than Tom ever could, thereby attempting again to usurp Tom’s position in Maggie’s life. However, Philip is unsuccessful and Tom’s discredits him.

Although Maggie is appalled at how Tom treats Philip, ultimately, she can’t help but feel relieved by Tom’s discovery and interference:

And yet, how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip?

Surely it was only because the sense of a deliverance from concealment was welcome at any cost. (283)

Maggie doesn’t fully recognize the reason she feels relieved when Tom forces a separation but still feels a “sense of deliverance.” Basically, Tom has freed Maggie from Philip’s attempts to manipulate her and use her position and personal power for his own purposes to transcend gender boundaries and take part in the masculine world.

As their relationship begins again, Philip continues his efforts to claim Maggie for his wife, going as far as directly confronting his father: “I might answer your angry words by still angrier—we might part—I should marry the woman I love, and have a chance of being as happy as the rest” (344). Once again, Philip identifies himself as
separate from the rest of his sex and wants to experience that world by marrying Maggie.

What Philip does not count on is Stephen's influence, but he is quick to recognize that there is a stronger magnetism and effect at work between Stephen and Maggie than either he or Tom managed to obtain. Stephen also has a different goal from either Tom or Philip. His attempts are actually directed toward influencing Maggie to accept his personal power as greater than her own. Just like Philip, Stephen wants to reach the true, defiant Maggie and obtain her submission.

However, Stephen exists primarily within Maggie's fantasy. The only way she can ever participate in her gender role is through fantasy. She is sexually attracted to Stephen but can never realize the reality of her attraction since she will not accept the subsequent consequences of becoming a wife and mother in Victorian society. The only option she has left is to fantasize that this place in society will be all that her high, independent expectations need it to be. She can not knowingly make real life decisions that may bring her to experience the fate of her Aunt Moss.

Inwardly, she recognizes the difference between reality and fantasy, but finds herself living in a dream world whenever Stephen is around. Therefore, she dreams of having Stephen "at her feet, offering her a life filled with all luxuries...and all possibilities of culture" (353). She walks with him at a dance and the trees and flowers look "strange and unreal, while the lights place among them "look as if they belonged to an enchanted land, and would never fade away" (357).

Even Stephen is aware of the dream and that he is participating in it somehow. While sitting by Maggie and petting a dog seated in her lap: "It seemed to Stephen like some action in a dream, that he was obliged to do, and wonder at himself all the while" (328). When Stephen violates Maggie's dream world by bringing in reality, Maggie
responds with strong anger. Stephen kisses her arm and she glares at him "like a
wounded war-goddess" (358). Thereafter, she considers her attraction to Stephen a
"hateful weakness" (359). Whenever Maggie awakens from the dream, she refuses
Stephen’s advances. This dichotomy between the dream world and the real world
culminates during their sojourn on the river. Unlike either Tom or Philip who only exist
in reality, the Stephen who exists in Maggie’s dream world can override Maggie’s
personal power with his own:

Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the
roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat, having the
cushion and cloak arranged for her feet, and her parasol opened for her
(which she had forgotten)—all by this stronger presence that seemed to
bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which
comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic—and she felt
nothing else. Memory was excluded. (376)

Just as Eliot used Edenic imagery when Maggie and Tom pass through “the golden
gates of childhood” and “enter the thorny wilderness” following their father’s stroke,
now Stephen is the way back to paradisiacal ease after living with life’s struggles.
Stephen leads her back down into the “garden among the roses,” where memories are
excluded. Here, she can experience her fantasy and forget all about reality and
memories. Therefore, accepts Stephen’s power and direction. She can allow him to
make decisions for her because the situation isn’t real for Maggie, its only a dream.
“Thought did not belong to that enchanted haze” and Maggie floats along the river in
this “haze,” “only dimly conscious of the banks (376).”

In this position, Maggie is literally contained within physical boundaries,
symbolized by the banks of the river. She is not completely aware of this at first. She
know the banks are there, however she is not totally conscious. By living in her fantasy, she has allowed Stephen to bring her literally within social/societal boundaries. Stephen controls the boat and therefore its destination, placing Maggie in a vicarious position, especially in regards to place in society. Once Maggie becomes aware that he has allowed the boat to move past their destination, she is awakens from her dream and becomes totally aware of the riverbanks. She recognizes that the banks “were entirely strange to her” (376) and she becomes terribly alarmed. Stephen acknowledges his goal is to take advantage of her vicarious position and perhaps force her to acknowledge her proper place and become his wife. Allowing herself to be controlled in this manner is completely out of character for Maggie. She has always been engaged in battles to keep her personal power and remain outside prescribed gender boundaries. For the first time, she has yielded and “All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance; it is the partial sleep of thought; it is the submergence of our own personality by another (378).” While Maggie is in her dreamy state on the river, part of her independent, strong nature is basically asleep. This allows Stephen the opportunity to control Maggie’s destination and to attempt to control her destiny. Once physically placed within the boundaries of the river banks, or within gender roles, Maggie allows a man to control her destiny.

As Helen V. Emmitt writes: “While the tide may enact Maggie’s unconscious desires, Stephen has engineered the trip, and the river enacts his will, thus becoming another mirror that does not reflect Maggie truly” (318). Maggie’s true independent self still reigns within her. Even though Stephen has “engineered the trip” in a way to control Maggie’s destiny, he will ultimately fail. Despite the fact that Maggie is being “Borne Along by the Tide” of a river enacting Stephen’s will and contained within the river banks, or social/societal boundaries, it is only because she vacillates between
fantasy and reality. As she continues to vacillate, she continues to allow Stephen to influence her decisions while operating within her fantasy: "Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive" (378). She is not conscious of having made any reality-based decisions, because she hasn't. Once contained within societal boundaries, there is not a need to. Stephen is fully conscious at all times and chooses for her. She flows along within the boundaries of the riverbanks, "being upheld by his [Stephen's] strength" (379).

However, Maggie knows her passiveness and willingness to be contained is only temporary and her true self awakens periodically as she flashes back and forth between fantasy and reality:

Let me go!" she said, in an agitated tone, flashing an indignant look at him, and trying to get her hands free. "You have wanted to deprive me of any choice. You knew we were come too far—you dared to take advantage of my thoughtlessness. (377),

Maggie arises from her reverie long enough to reproach Stephen for bringing her so far along the river. He has taken advantage of her decision to temporarily allow him some control. However, once she determines that he has taken her too far down the river, confined within the river banks, she upbraids him for going further than she wished and accuses him of trying to take away her choice, which is exactly what he was trying to do. Sutphin states that Maggie "cannot finally submerge herself in another. To do so is to live life with a less vivid consciousness, to let others decide. Maggie attempts to resist Stephen because she resists the abdications of moral choice which is the abdication of identity" (344). Living life less consciously would be to accept the Stephen's offer and allow her true self to remain partially asleep. She can not do that. In addition, this abdication "would not only hurt others but would be a kind of self-
mutilation" (345). The abdication of "moral choice" and "identity" would be the acceptance of social boundaries placed upon her gender. If she allows Stephen to deprive her of choice and decide her destiny, she will be accepting societal constraints and allow her destiny to flow back into the boundaries for her gender, like water flows within the constraints of the river banks. By so doing, she would lose her identity and become just another woman living within proper Victorian roles, and therefore would perform a type of self-mutilation.

When faced with this reality, Maggie can’t allow it to happen. In the following chapter, appropriately called “Waking,” Maggie literally wakes up from her dreaming and faces her true nature and the consequences of allowing Stephen to control her destiny: “Stephen was not by her now: she was alone with her memory and her own dread. The irrevocable wrong that must blot her life had been committed (381).” The wrong she speaks of is actually the wrong she committed against herself by allowing her fantasy to override her true independent nature, thereby allowing Stephen so much control. Without Stephen’s physical presence and subsequent influence, she awakens and is no longer drifting along, confined within the river banks in a dreamy state: “There was at least this fruit from all her years of striving after the highest and the best—that her soul, though betrayed, beguiled, ensnared, could never deliberately consent to a choice of the lower” (382). She has been striving after the highest and the best, which does not include accepting societal constraints for her gender.

She considers marrying Stephen and taking her place as wife and mother within social boundaries as “a choice of the lower” and considers that the vicarious position she finds herself in is as a result of being “betrayed, beguiled and ensnared” by Stephen. She is still physically traveling within the river banks, but Stephen begins to see “some resistance in Maggie’s nature that he would be unable to overcome “(382).
As soon as they see the village where they will depart the boat, Maggie states her intentions to return home without having married Stephen: "But neither of them dared to say another word, till the boat was let down and they were taken to the landing-place" (383). Now Maggie stands physically outside the river banks and is now back to reality, having awakened from the partial sleep of her true nature. Therefore, she again operates outside engendered boundaries. She rejects Stephen, despite his most desperate attempts to control her:

"Maggie! Dearest! If you love me, you are mine. Who can have so great a claim on you as I have...?"

Maggie was still silent for a little while—looking down. Stephen was in a flutter of new hope: he was going to triumph. But she raised her eyes and met his with a glance that was filled with anguish of regret—not with yielding (386).

Maggie has undergone "an inward as well as an outward contest" (385) up to this point. She struggles with her true independent self and wants to continue yielding to fantasy. However, as soon as Stephen asserts that Maggie is a possession, her determination to remain outside social boundaries, avoiding the fate of Mrs. Moss by doing so, becomes even stronger. Maggie becomes silent, and therefore Stephen believes he has triumphed. However, this is where his failure is complete. Maggie is faced with reality again. She will become a possession and lose her identity. Her look at him is full of regret but “not with yielding.” She can’t allow him to "claim" her and asserts that she has not agreed to their union: "No—not with my whole heart and soul, Stephen," she said, with timid resolution. "I have never consented to it with my whole mind... My whole soul has never consented—it does not consent now" (386-388).
She can't consent because she is unwilling to submit to any of the men in her life who are trying to control and contain her, including Stephen. She has to fight against marital consequences and the possibility of becoming her Aunt Moss or she "shall feel as if there were nothing firm beneath my feet," as she experienced when dreamily floating along the river. She recognizes that she must face the reality of living in Victorian society, not drift along within its boundaries by accepting Stephen's proposal.

Maggie has progressed through Tom's attempts to keep her within social gender boundaries, her own attempts to subdue her nature by accepting Thomas a' Kempis, Philip's attempts to control her nature and use her to enter the realm of male defined boundaries and now Stephen's attempts to persuade her to "submerge her own personality" (378). She has battled fiercely against their attempts to bring her within the feminine role, or in Philip's case to use her ability to remain outside those boundaries and to enter within the boundaries set for his own gender. Now Maggie faces society head on. She returns to St. Oggs unmarried, which is the ultimate sin against her position as a woman in Victorian society. She is considered tainted because she spent the night in Stephen's company without the correct act of marrying him. Now she must face the consequences.

Eliot brings society and its pressures on Maggie directly to our attention:

Public opinion, in these case, is always of the feminine gender—not the world, but the world's wife...and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind.

(398)
In regard to Maggie, the personification of the social/societal boundaries is "the world's wife." It is this personification that judges Maggie as unacceptable because she lives outside engendered, societal boundaries and her "conduct had been of the most aggravated kind." This judgment occurs because she doesn't allow anyone, including Tom, Philip or Stephen, to interfere with her true independent, rebellious nature.

Ultimately, refusing marriage to Stephen, and therefore balking at society, will be one of the last things Maggie does before she drowns. He writes one final letter imploring her to come to him, which she contemplates one last time before the flood.
CHAPTER VII

THE DROWNING

Maggie's refusal to live within societal boundaries for her gender eventually results in her drowning. As Helen V. Emmitt states, "As long as society maintains its boundaries and the river maintains its, Maggie has nowhere to go" (318). Since the river is representative of Maggie overflowing her societal boundaries, we see that Maggie truly has "nowhere to go." Like the river, she overflows her banks rather than finding a confined place to exist in society. In regard to her daughter, Mrs. Tulliver delivers a prophetic line: "where's the use o' my telling you to keep away from the water? You'll tumble in and be drowneded some day an' then you'll be sorry you didn't do as mother told you" (12). Maggie doesn't do as her mother tells her. Rather than staying within the boundaries of her gender, as her mother directs, Maggie overflows them, like the river overflows its banks.

The culmination of the drowning which takes place can be seen as the symbolic smothering by the social orders imposed on both Maggie and Tom. Where Maggie is concerned, she knows her nature will not allow her to succumb to her proper place in society, including marriage to Stephen Guest. She is very tempted to accept Stephen's offer of marriage, but the consequences will be that she will live within societal boundaries as a wife and mother, and perhaps become like the beaten down Aunt Moss, who represents what could await Maggie if she submits to society. She refuses Stephen one last time, directly before the flood occurs. Marriage, and the compliance to the proper place in society that it represents, is contradictory to "her past
self" (416), which is also her true self. The child that fought the physical compliance of her hair and the restraints of wearing bonnets, is her true inner self. She remembers words from Thomas a' Kempis, but we see a stronger view of them as the storm begins to rage outside:

The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart, rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the wind: "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou has laid it upon me (417)."

Thomas a' Kempis' submissive words come to mind and she utters them, but she does not hear them because they were "lost in the driving of the rain." The rain, representative of Maggie's pent up energies, emotions and personal power, which will eventually cause the river to flood, are louder and more powerful than her words of submission. Rather than submitting to feminine ideals, Maggie receives the "Cross" of living outside of acceptable, gender perimeters. Just as she does so, she notices the rain and wind raging outside, as though the words of determination that "found vent for themselves" is now venting within the storm as well, the storm which will cause the floods. She burns Stephen's letter, which contains another marriage proposal, and with that action confirms her inability to accept marriage and life as a wife and mother in Victorian society. She vows to bear her life outside societal boundaries "and bear it till death" (417).

As Maggie ponders her despair at the trial of living outside of societal boundaries, she notices water pouring into her room. The river has exceeded its
banks, just as Maggie has exceeded her engendered boundaries and her subsequent emotions begin to flow. This directly follows her final decision to refuse marriage and all the socially correct standards that marriage stands for. As Maggie feels the water beneath her, "She was not bewildered for an instant—she knew it was the flood" (417)!

Maggie recognizes the flood as an extension of her choice to live outside of societal boundaries and her "flood" of emotions and strength. It is natural for her not to be "bewildered for an instant..." Once again, Maggie finds herself inside a boat, and she is "driven out upon the flood" (418). However this time, she controls the boat's destination, not Stephen or the oppressed destiny he represents: "she stood in the rain with the oar in her hand and her black hair streaming (418)." Her hair, the symbol of society's engendered rules and constraints is loose and "streaming" freely; therefore, her Medusa-like power emerges and gives her strength to take control of the boat:

Onward she paddled and rowed by turns in the growing twilight:
her wet clothes clung round her, and her streaming hair was dashed about by the wind, but she was hardly conscious of any bodily sensations—except a sensation of strength, inspired by mighty emotion. (419)

Her hair, and her Medusa-like power, flow freely and her power is unleashed. She is conscious of her strength while she takes control of the boat and her destination. As she directs the boat, she sees a "dark mass in the distance (419)." The "dark mass" is St. Ogg's, and the societal constraints it stands for. Recognizing St. Ogg's shows her the way to the mill and to Tom, "now she knew which way to look" (419).... As she commands the boat's destination and heads to the mill, her power and strength increase:
More and more strongly the energies seemed to come and put themselves forth, as if her life were a stored-up force that was being spent in this hour, unneeded for any future... (419)

Just as the flood waters continue to pour outside of its banks, Maggie's "energies" and "stored-up force" is pouring forth, symbolized in the flood. As John Bushnell states, "No longer adrift, she travels purposefully through chaos when others cannot" (379). Basically, Tom cannot maneuver through the chaos of a society in disorder, but since Maggie's power has been unleashed, she is able to maneuver the boat through the floodwaters. In addition, she knows how to maneuver through the floodwaters because they are an extension of herself. As she directs the boat towards the mill, she notices "there were floating masses in it, that might dash against her boat as she passed, and cause her to perish too soon. What were those masses" (420)? Just as the "mass" of St. Ogg's, these masses represent society and its boundaries, which Maggie is unable to comprehend, just as she was unable to understand the Latin word meaning masculine, "mas." She asks "What were those masses...Those heavy fragments hurrying down the Ripple—what had they meant (420)?" Bushnell asserts that St. Ogg's is a "industrial center which has represented throughout the novel a nemesis to the rural setting of the mill" (379). However, rather than industrialization, St. Ogg's is the center of society, where all factions of society meet for their various, defined purposes. It is this that Maggie does not understand. Just as she questions the word "mas," as she heads towards her demise, she once again questions society and its boundaries for her gender, "what had [those masses] meant?" In addition, these masses have invaded Maggie's life. She is the river overflowing its banks and these fragments of society are encumbering her. Now, as Maggie steers and controls the boat's destination, she physically avoids these "heavy fragments" of town and society.
and eventually reaches Tom. The "fragments" of societal boundaries and expectations separate the waters between her and Tom, just as they have throughout their lives. However, Maggie uses her power to maneuver around these obstacles and reach Tom.

Tom has lived his life strictly within the social constraints for his gender, which has affected his personal relationship with Maggie. Now, when he steps into Maggie's boat, he is stepping outside of the boundaries and onto the flood, which is representative of Maggie's unwillingness to live within feminine constraints. In the face of this crisis, he accepts Maggie, just as she is. In addition, he accepts the fact that she was able to maneuver the boat around the obstacles of society, as she attempted to do so throughout her life. Tom couldn't do the same but allowed himself to be absorbed by society. In addition, when he asks Maggie to hand him the oars, and basically give over control of the boat, he realizes "the full meaning of what had happened" (421). He sees Maggie for who she is as an individual rather than seeing her as another member of her gender who must operate within social constraints:

...it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear—that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutually gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face—Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. Thought was busy though the lips were silent: and though he could ask no question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort. But at last a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes, and the lips found a word they could utter: the old childish—"Magsie!" (421)

Maggie's individuality and personal power has existed all along; however Tom has never recognized them. Tom finally sees Maggie's true, powerful nature and
contemplates her "with a certain awe and humiliation." It is as though in this moment Maggie's life's struggles become clear to him. He now realizes what she has had to accomplish to live with gender constraints and "guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort." When he realizes that Maggie is an individual and can't be a stereotype, he realizes that she deserves his respect. The resulting emotion is so powerful that Tom gets tears in his eyes. Perhaps the tears are a sign of regret for never recognizing Maggie's individuality. The effort he "guessed at" is too powerful to be considered only an effort to physically direct the boat to the mill on this one occasion. The "effort" he recognizes is the direction that Maggie has had to follow throughout her life as she struggled against societal pressures, including those imposed upon her by Tom. Now he can see that she had a hard life, just as he had.

Ironically, it is a portion of society which destroys them both. Pieces of St. Ogg's, representative of society and its engendered standards, continue to float in the water:

Nothing else was said; a new danger was carried towards them by the river. Some wooded machinery had just given way on one of the wharves, and huge fragments were being floated along... Huge fragments, clinging together in fatal fellowship, made one wide mass across the stream.

"It is coming, Maggie!" Tom said, in a deep hoarse voice, loosing the oars, and clasping her....

The boat reappeared—but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted....In their death they were not divided. (422-423).
"Nothing else was said," because everything had been said in Tom’s recognition of Maggie’s efforts. They see the “wooded machinery” and Tom recognizes that their destruction by societal standards is eminent—“It is coming, Maggie!” The pieces of society, the society which Tom has adhered to vehemently, come together to destroy them both, those aspects that reject Maggie and those aspects that accept Tom. Both Tom and Maggie have suffered in life as a result of their choices in regard to society and now they are both destroyed by the society’s “fellowship.” Society is more powerful than the individual. Symbolically, different aspects of society destroy them both. Maggie overflows her boundaries, symbolized by the flood. Basically, Maggie is the flood. The aspects of the society to which Tom adheres so strongly is representative in the wreckage floating in the water. When the two come together—wreckage and floodwaters, independence and societal standards, Tom and Maggie are destroyed.

The two are destroyed but not before their relationship is healed. Tom finally recognizes Maggie as an individual with struggles of her own and Maggie, who always forgives Tom, does so once again. She forgives him for treating her strictly in regards to societal standards and not in light of her individuality and personal power. By doing so, they both become individuals experiencing life, not just members of Victorian society dealing separately with engendered stereotypes and rules. Therefore, “In their death they were not divided.”

Postlethwaite notes that following their death “The patriarchy is back in place: ‘grassy order and decent quiet’ have been restored, firm ground rebuilt over the dangerous watery depths” (313). Everything is back in societal order and it has all begun again. This is especially in light of Bob Jakin’s daughter, who he names after Maggie. Now the struggle will begin anew in Maggie’s namesake, another little girl who will have to find her place in society. Basically, when Maggie overstepped specific,
gender bounds, a flood ensued that destroyed societal concepts. The town of St. Ogg's and its society was temporarily in chaos as a result. Now, all has been relatively restored. However, a new Maggie has been born and shoulders the burden of coping with society. The novel asserts that floods have occurred in St. Oggs on occasion, as the legend of its namesake attests: "This legend, one sees, reflects from a far-off time the visitation of the floods" (99). Perhaps this is because someone like Maggie comes along every once in a while and upsets the natural order of things.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Just like Maggie Tulliver, Eliot struggled with her problematic, intellectual, powerful side.\(^1\) Eliot resolved this problem, in part, by writing under a male name—recognizing the boundaries placed on herself by societal standards and knowing that only by breaking the gender-defined roles and boundaries could she become a successful writer and surmount those boundaries. Unfortunately, the only way she could accomplish this within the Victorian society was initially to take on a male name. As far as Eliot was concerned, the boundaries were that defined for her. She managed to overflow the banks of the river, so to speak, but only by tricking society and its boundaries by using a male name. Eliot lived most of her life living outside of societal boundaries, like Maggie. However, she can not be considered a feminist when compared to contemporary women actively engaged in changing women’s status. Whether they were working on educational issues, employment issues, or other

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\(^1\) Deirdre David makes note of this: “That [Eliot] so regularly returns to this [intellectual] conflict reveals a great deal about the career of a woman who achieved a remarkable degree of independence and recognition in the cultural formations of her time. Eliot’s career tantalisingly reminds us of Maggie Tulliver’s unhappy life in the sense that both novelist and female character possess sharp minds and desires for intellectual recognition, but where the novelist transforms herself from provincial young woman to metropolitan intellectual, she relegates her character to the rushing waters of the Floss.” David points out Eliot’s intellectual side, as well as Maggie’s, making specific note that Maggie fared worse in life than Eliot managed to. I believe Eliot uses Maggie to point out the intellectual plights of girls and women in general, whereas Eliot’s success in the intellectual world was an exception to the rule. Therefore Maggie meets a common demise for girls and women operating in Victorian society. (David) 162.
reforms for women, George Eliot did not directly involve herself in active causes. She socialized with many who were involved, but did not choose to do so herself. Still, as an intelligent woman living on the periphery of Victorian society, unmarried with a successful career, Eliot was aware of the dilemmas faced by both genders and the constraints placed upon people's lives as a result. While many of her contemporary women delved directly into reform, Eliot explored these dilemmas in her novels and characterizations. Bushnell notes: "She [Maggie] begins her journey believing that she is 'alone in the darkness with God.' She ends it, I think, discovering her godhead, her own creative, capacious soul" (391). Like Maggie, Eliot contended "with imposed repression," but discovered "her own creative capacious soul" (393). She began writing fiction, explored her own deep questions regarding gender roles, and provided us with a view of the intricate emotional difficulties faced by both men and women living in Victorian society.

The Eliot dilemma arises in full force when we realize that although she recognized the engendered dilemmas faced by Victorian women (and men) and chose to live a very unconventional life by disregarding many of society's rules, she also recognized the dangers for women that decided to balk society, including herself. She illustrates that Maggie's pains and struggles are a direct result of her unwillingness to conform. Maggie's death by drowning is not caused by any choice or suicidal wish; it is, rather, a consequence of living outside societal boundaries. As Bushnell states, "Despite the general critical stance to the contrary, she [Maggie] chooses life in the end, not death or the death-in-life of self-renunciation" (392). George Eliot lived most of her life without accepting "death-in-life" or "self-renunciation." Rather than subduing or renouncing herself, Eliot lived with an already married man and fought for a place in the male-dominated, professional world of writing. Basically, she lived her life outside
of proper engendered rules, but when it came right down to it, she experienced the same intense pressures that Maggie did. Rather than drowning in them, Eliot ultimately ended her life safely encased within the very boundaries which Maggie balks at. She marries the much younger John Cross, takes his name, and becomes a socially acceptable, very legitimate Victorian wife.

Eliot was definitely a contradiction, but in *Mill on the Floss*, she closely examines the ways in which Tom and Maggie deal with the boundaries set for their respective genders. By so doing, she brought gender, and its questions, to the attention of her Victorian readers. If we again note that *Mill on the Floss* is considered Eliot’s most autobiographical novel and even mark that Eliot and her brother Issac were born in the same years as Tom and Maggie,\textsuperscript{25} we can’t help but note that Eliot examined the ways in which Eliot and Issac were faced with their own societal boundaries and how the ways in which each handled their respective gender roles deeply affected their relationship and lives. By doing so, Eliot contributes to the knowledge we have concerning gender rules in Victorian society, more specifically in regards to the proper role of women. Therefore, she takes her rightful place alongside her contemporaries who were considered to be active in women’s issues and who were more directly questioning gender and its subsequent complications.\textsuperscript{26} She may not have been considered an active feminist, but she constantly rubbed shoulders with those who were. She had similar issues and questions but took a more subdued, subversive, individual approach. However, she approached and examined gender issues none-the-less.

\textsuperscript{25} Haight 5.

\textsuperscript{26} Primarily Barbara Bodichon and Emily Davies. Redinger 362-63.
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