

Tribhuvan University

Portrayal of Women in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

Sailendra Prasad Bag

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

December 2011

**Tribhuvan University**  
**Central Department of English**  
**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Sailendra Prasad Bag has completed his thesis entitled “Portrayal of Women in Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2066/01/01 B.S. to 2067/011/26 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

-----  
Mr. Raj Kumar Baral

Supervisor

Date: -----

**Tribhuvan University**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled “Portrayal of Women in Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*”  
submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr.  
Sailendra Prasad Bag has been approved by the undersigned members of the  
Research Committee.

**Members of the Research Committee**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Internal Examiner

---

External Examiner

---

Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Raj Kumar Baral, Lecturer at the Central Department of English, who supervised this research work. His wide-ranging knowledge and study have led to many improvements in the substance and helped me give the final shape of this thesis.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, former Head of the Central Department of English for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research. I am especially grateful to the present Head of the Department, Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, and lecturer Saroj Ghimire for their valuable suggestions. I would like to thank my friends, Ganesh Prasad Poudel, Kulanand Khadka Mahendra K.C., Mangal K.C., Vagirath Negi, Keshav Phuyal and Hari Budhathoki and all the friends who supported and encouraged me directly or indirectly in this course.

I am indebted to my parents and brothers, brother-in-laws, sisters and my relatives, and all those relatives who extended help and support to carry out this research work.

February, 2011

Sailendra Prasad Bag

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on Maggie in the novel *The Mill on the Floss*, by George Eliot. An examination of her life is presented which is anchored in feminist critical theory and focuses on the ordeal Maggie has to endure in a patriarchal society. The intention is to examine the female's situation through a feminist viewpoint with focus on the stereotypes that emerged about them. From a feminist perspective, the tribulation Maggie endures in a patriarchal society is studied. In the novel, Maggie is often compared to the animal and thus an alien. By implication, she is treated as a secondary being. Eliot uses descriptions of her that are associated with the (othering), animal's stereotypes. This testifies to the fact how oppressively women were treated by patriarchal society in Victorian time.

## Contents

	Page No.
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Chapter I: Eliot's Advocacy of the Women's Rights	1-9
Chapter II: A Study of Gender and Feminism	10-22
Gender Roles	11
Feminism	13
Chapter III: Portrayal of Women in Eliot's <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>	23-46
Chapter IV: Conclusion	47-48
Works Cited	

### **. Eliot's Advocacy of the Women's Rights**

This thesis aims to explore the representation of women in George Eliot's novel, *The Mill on the Floss* which is primarily concerned with the predicament of its heroine and intends to examine the portrayal of the principal female character in the novel to hopefully arrive at a satisfactory understanding of George Eliot's view of women. Maggie, the heroine of this novel, is shown to experience innumerable frustrations which keep her from fulfilling her potentialities. The close examination of Maggie's tragedy and explores the circumstances under which this tragedy unfolds. Maggie's characterization lends itself well to a feminist inquiry, and, therefore, her character will be studied from a feminist angle which will also profit from insights derived from other approaches to properly address the questions it raises with regard to gender.

The heroine of this novel *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie goes through subordination and suppression at the hands of males. The current study endeavors not to wholly confine to a feminist angle but rather it endeavors to draw on any critical approaches that might prove helpful in a meticulous and illuminating investigation of the characterization of women in novel traces the failure of Maggie who fails to fulfill her immense potentials due to the obstacles she encounters in her conflict with societies that are incapable of understanding the women like her. The female like Maggie are bound to be exploited in various forms under patriarchal society, which is portrayed in this thesis.

Despite her astonishing accomplishments, George Eliot has refused to portray successful women in her fiction. Her persistence in depicting women's failures and disappointments has prompted critics to probe into her apparent reluctance to create

independently successful women. Some have attributed her tendency to depict women's subordination to her conservatism. But the majority of commentators have concluded that Eliot has been ambivalent about women. This study tries to resolve this alleged ambiguity. Consequently, it will not confine itself to an exclusively feminist approach; rather it will employ an eclectic approach to acquire a fuller comprehension and achieve better results.

*The Mill on the Floss*, based on George Eliot's own experiences of provincial life, is a masterpiece of ambiguity in which moral choice is subjected to the hypocrisy of the Victorian age. As the headstrong Maggie Tulliver grows into womanhood, the deep love which she has for her brother Tom turns into conflict, because she cannot reconcile his bourgeois standards with her own lively intelligence. Maggie is unable to adapt herself to her community or break free from it, and the result, on more than one level is tragedy.

George Eliot's contribution to the development and expansion of English fiction is enormous. Throughout her fiction-writing career, George Eliot has been obsessed with the plight and predicament of women and this constant preoccupation has found ample reflection and projection in her novels. As a woman she was intimately familiar with the needs, disadvantages, dilemmas and setbacks confronting women in the oppressive atmosphere of the Victorian era, and she drew on her consummate craftsmanship to supplement this intimate familiarity to produce the great masterpieces of English fiction. The present study argues that an investigation of Eliot's representation of women can illuminate various aspects of her artistry because she firmly believes in the interdependence of mankind.

Among different critical approaches that have risen to yield better and more effective interpretations, feminism occupies a significant position. Literature as a



means of promoting and a clear manifestation of culture has always been concerned with women in one way or another. At times, crucial roles and parts have been assigned to women and memorable heroines have always been remembered by the readership. But feminist critics argue that although women have been afforded a voice in literature, they have been treated as inferior and minor characters compared to their male counterparts. Feminist critics have managed to bring about a thorough reconsideration of the status of women in literature. In their efforts to improve the lot of women, feminists have endeavored to root out stereotypical views prevailing in both society and literature. To achieve this aim, they have conducted meticulous investigations of the representation of women in literature because they believe that literature can play a significant role in either perpetuating or eliminating these detrimental stereotypes that account for a major barrier in their path to equality. Feminists believe that literature has contributed to the plight of women by supplying and perpetuating a stereotypical depiction and portrayal of the womankind. In literary feminism, the question of gender has proved both attractive and divisive. Feminists have made a significant distinction between sex and gender; a cursory exploration of this differentiation will illuminate how society has managed to exploit and suppress women. Webster has argued:

Sex is a term which can be used to indicate the biological differences between men and women, but gender signifies the socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. Both femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and invested with various qualities, values, images, and narratives which constantly

circulate in society and which shape and determine people's attitudes and lives. (72)

Abrams also acknowledges the necessity of such a distinction and holds that while it is widely believed that one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender -- of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in identity and behavior -- are largely, if not entirely "cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization" (89). This distinction has divided feminist critics into two camps. Guerin believes that on the one hand, certain theories may be said to have an essentialist argument for inherent feminine traits that have been undervalued, misunderstood, or exploited by a patriarchal culture because the genders are quite different. Opposed to this notion that gender confers certain essential feminine and masculine traits is constructivist feminism, which asks women to consider what it means to be a woman, to consider how much of what society has often deemed to be, inherently female traits are, in fact, culturally and socially constructed.

Eliot is a respected novelist of the late nineteenth century, and her work has been praised for its penetrating psychological analysis and profound insight into human character. Generally played against the backdrop of English rural life, Eliot's novels explore moral and philosophical issues with a realistic approach to character and plot development. *Middlemarch* (1871) is frequently studied by feminist critics for its careful consideration of a woman's place in a male-dominated world, although critics disagree over whether this novel, and Eliot's other works, display proto-feminist ideas or reinforce patriarchal systems.

After her father's death, Eliot moved to London and became acquainted with John Chapman, who hired her as an assistant editor on the *Westminster Review* and

introduced her to his literary circle. This group included the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who introduced Eliot to writer and intellectual George Henry Lewes. Although Lewes was married (he was legally prohibited from divorcing his estranged wife), the two openly lived together until Lewes's death in 1878, defying the strict moral code of the Victorian era. Lewes's influence on Eliot's writing was great: it was he who first encouraged her to write fiction, and he acted as an intermediary between the pseudonymous "George Eliot" and her first publisher, Black-wood's Magazine. Eliot's literary success eventually brought the couple social acceptance, but just over a year after Lewes's death she married John Walter Cross, a banker twenty years her junior, and again met with public outrage. Seven months after her marriage the novelist suddenly died and was buried in Highgate Cemetery, North London.

Although she was a prolific writer in many genres, Eliot is chiefly known for her sequence of novels that begin by drawing heavily from her rural English background and grow gradually wider in scope. *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) includes three sketches with a provincial setting and is noted for its well-drawn characters and keen rendering of Midland dialect. *Adam Bede* (1859) presents realistic images of daily life in a quiet rural community undercut with unfulfilled love and selfishness resulting in tragedy and hard-won self-awareness. *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) tells the story of Maggie Tulliver's inability to conform to the rigidly traditional society in which she lives, and *Silas Marner* (1861) deals with an alienated miser whose life is transformed by his adoption of an abandoned child.

Eliot broadened her thematic goals with the historical novel *Romola* (1863) as well as *Felix Holt* (1866), which is often characterized as a political novel but features a conventional courtship narrative more typically associated with domestic fiction. *Middlemarch*, widely considered Eliot's finest achievement, presents a comprehensive

picture of English provincial life while developing moral and philosophical issues such as the relationship of the individual to society. Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), examines a broad spectrum of nineteenth-century European society and is regarded as her most ambitious yet perhaps her least successful work.

Eliot's critical acclaim came early, with the publication of *Adam Bede*. During her lifetime, the writer's work generally met with popular and critical success, although novels such as *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* have consistently been considered less accomplished than *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*. Eliot's reputation endured a significant decline, however, from her death through the early twentieth century, when her novels were often dismissed as heavy, didactic, and overly scholarly. However, Virginia Woolf was influential in reviving interest in Eliot's works as early as 1925, addressing Eliot's unique treatment of the nature of femininity, and F. R. Leavis's essays in the 1940s effectively reaffirmed the significance of Eliot's achievement.

The onset of the feminist movement sparked another reevaluation of Eliot's work, although critics have remained sharply divided about the novelist's treatment of women's issues. As Zelda Austen notes in her 1976 essay, feminists have often claimed that Eliot tends to engage in an anti-feminist reinforcement of the systems under which her heroines often suffer. For example, some feminist scholars of *Felix Holt* have criticized Holt's character, claiming his objections to Esther's refinement and aesthetic sensibilities make him no more desirable a suitor than Transome, who believes that women are meant to be decorative rather than functional. Other critics, however, claim Eliot as a proto-feminist figure whose complex thinking about the place of a woman in an oppressive society was instrumental in setting the stage for the women's literary liberation that would eventually follow.

George Levine believes that in spite of her refusal to openly support the feminist cause, George Eliot has managed to serve as a model for women's achievement and although she refuses to create successful women who defy conventions and restrictions, she "brilliantly and sympathetically traced their defeats" (2). He continues to observe that George Eliot's depiction of women has infuriated feminist critics who lament the fact that in spite of her determination in disregarding the restricting conventions, she has never portrayed a heroine like Marian Evans. He believes that her insistence on depicting the failure of women arises from her "resistance to focusing on the extraordinary; he continues to assert that with regard to feminist and many other issues, George Eliot is arguably conservative" (12). He believes that *The Mill on the Floss* is dominated by realism and consequently Maggie ends with no alternative but an inferior role as a wife. Levine concludes that the first struggles but without the resources enjoyed by men and consequently "the realism of her representation leads to the novel's conclusion" which rejects the prospect of heroism on an epic scale (17).

Zelda Austen in her article entitled "Why Feminist Critics are Angry with George Eliot," alludes to a number of eminent feminists who have been enraged by Eliot's heroines. She maintains that "in her novels the woman who breaks the mold of convention is doomed" (550). After briefly exploring the tragedies of some of George Eliot's women, she observes, "the conclusion one might draw from these fictions is that the heroine does better to accept her lot, submit to the yoke of marriage, and curb her desires rather than continue willful, aspiring, unconventional, and impatient of restraint" (551). To account for the fury of feminists with George Eliot, she argues that Eliot has failed to meet their demand for "a literature that will show women active rather than docile, aggressive and ambitious rather than retiring and

submissive, successful in forging their way through the world as heroes are, rather than content to be chosen by successful men" (551). But she goes on to justify Eliot's insistence on depicting the women she did by arguing that her commitment to realism would not allow her to portray the success of aspiring women. She proceeds to cite feminists who believe that "George Eliot should have seen that while she was imitating reality in depicting the misery of the unconventional heroine and the placidity of the conventional wives and mothers, she was also sanctioning the norm and making it normative" (554). She goes on to vindicate George Eliot by asserting that "George Eliot performed a service for women which ought to gain her the feminists' admiration and love rather than their resentment" (557).

Nancy Henry contends that Eliot's women, however rebellious, are never allowed to take part in politics and their yearnings for the achievement of social change is "subsumed and extinguished by their responsibilities to men" (140). Kate Flint in her article, "George Eliot and gender" asserts that Eliot never tried to create idealistic exceptions (161). She maintains that Eliot never neglected her obligation to depict women and men in the unfavorable circumstances under which they actually lived. She believes that George Eliot has been acutely scathing on women's lack of proper education and this is manifested in the representation of Dorothea whose.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a glimpse of George Eliot, her writing and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It basically discusses gender, feminism, the woman question and the gender ideology of the Victorian era and Women like George Eliot.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Eliot traces the failure of the heroine, Maggie who fails to fulfill her immense potentials due to the obstacles she encounters in her conflict with societies that are incapable of understanding the women like her. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

## II. A Study of Gender and Feminism

Gender studies is a field of interdisciplinary study which analyzes the phenomenon of gender. It is sometimes related to studies of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and location. In gender studies, the term 'gender' is used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities, not to the state of being male or female in its entirety. In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Wilfred L. Guerin expresses the same view. He says, “Gender studies examines how gender is less determined by nature than it is by culture” (236). The field emerged from a number of different areas such as the sociology of the 1950s, the later the theories of the psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan and the work of feminists such as Judith Butler. Each field came to regard “gender” as a practice, sometimes referred to as something that is performative.

‘Gender’ is a term used to distinguish social and cultural sexual identity from biological sex. When we talk of gender we discuss the socio-cultural and psychological behavior of people that makes the distinction which is associated with the biology of the individual. Gender studies the roles and behavior of individual that creates a separate identity of man and woman and tries to analyze those situations in detail which otherwise would not have created. According to Joan Scott, “Gender becomes a way of denoting ‘cultural construction’ – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for men and women. Gender is in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body” (1056).

While sex is biological, gender is psychological and cultural term which the individual learns from the society in the process of socialization and is not



the same in every society. It differs from society to society and culture to culture that creates distinct feature and a separate identity of an individual. So it is implied that the sex which we carry from birth is biological and universal – same all over the world – and cannot be changed whereas gender, socially constructed is not the same throughout the world. This is the reason why we find different cultural practices and different roles of men and women in various societies and cultures. This can be implied that gender is socially or culturally constructed behavior of individual man and woman and can be changed according to the need and desire of the individual and society. History shows that gender roles have been changing over time and as required by the circumstances. The concept of gender is based on stereotypes of male and female behavior that are often associated with female sex. For example, in most of the cases women rear children and do the household chores because they get hardly any time and opportunity to work outside. This has created a big gap between man and woman in terms of areas ranging from household works to office works to other social works. This has led to the discrimination between the two sexes.

### **Gender Roles**

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify such inequities, which still occur today, excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making position – in the family as well as in politics, academia and the corporate world – paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job – if women are even able to obtain the job – and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and

engineering. Many people today believe such inequities are a thing of the past because anti-discriminatory laws have been passed, such as the law that guarantees women equal pay for equal work. However, these laws are frequently side-stepped. For example, an employer can pay a woman less for performing the same work as a man simply by giving her a different job title. So, women still are paid poorly in every society in comparison to their male counterparts.

Patriarchy is, thus, by definition sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of women is called “biological essentialisms” because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women (84). A striking illustration is the word hysteria, which derives from the Greek word for womb (hystera) and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by over-emotional, extremely irrational behaviour. Feminists do not deny the biological differences between men and women; in fact, many feminists celebrate those differences. But they do not agree that such differences as physical size, shape, and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women; for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders. Feminism therefore distinguishes between the word ‘sex,’ which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are categories created by society rather than by nature.

The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying

them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power. That is, the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically, produced. For example, it is a patriarchal assumption, rather than a fact, that more women than men suffer from hysteria. But because it has been defined as a female problem, hysterical behavior in men won't be diagnosed as such; instead, it will be ignored or given another less damaging name, for example, shortness temper. Of course, not all men accept patriarchal ideology and those who don't – those who don't believe, for example, that because men generally have been endowed by nature with stronger muscles, they have been endowed with any other natural superiority – are often derided, by both patriarchal men and women, as weak and unmanly, as if the only way to be a man were to be patriarchal man.

### **Feminism**

This gender role created gender discrimination. As a result, feminist movement emerged which seeks equal right and status with men to decide on their careers and life. The patriarchy considers women weaker in every sphere of familial and social life. Because of this biological or physical construction and deep-rooted gender conception, men dominate women. Thus, the main objective of feminism has been to revolt against such ideology and parochial gender construction. Nowadays, the female writers have begun writing advocating for the emancipation of women from the oppressive patriarchy and have tried to establish women's position in male-dominated society.

Feminine and masculine relation has got predominance over the nature based male and female sexual relation at present. Domination of men over women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life has

precipitated the hierarchical power relation. This partiality, historically current, sustains itself in the form of male-domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy fosters the gender-based inequalities that describe man as superior and women as inferior, man as powerful and the woman as powerless. One of the leading American feminists, Kate Millett, sees patriarchy as “grotesque, increasingly militaristic, increasingly greedy, colonialist, imperialistic, and brutal, with a terrible disregard of civil liberties, of democratic forms” (511).

As time passes, feminine consciousness gradually emerges among women and makes them realize the inhuman treatment of patriarchal system. From antiquity, women have gradually felt a need to launch a united movement against these injustices, inequalities and violence so as to eliminate discrimination and narrow the hierarchy between the two sexes, as Millett believes: “You don’t have any oppressive system without its continuance being assured by members of the oppressed groups, that’s true of oppressed people” (511). This led to the birth of feminism.

Feminism is concerned with women's voices, which are silenced in the patriarchal ideology. The feminists try to break the silence of women. So, feminism is a political movement which has become successful in giving due place to the writing of non-canonical women writers. Feminism has come into practice as an attack against female marginalization as our society and civilization is pervasively patriarchal, that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic (Abrams 89). It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature-

which is described as feminine. By this cultural process the masculine in our culture has come to be widely defined as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

Feminism deals with the norms and values that belong to the women's issues. Despite the diversity, feminism is often demonstrated as a single entity and somehow concerned with gender equality and freedom. Chris Beasley defines feminism as a "doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and as advocating equal opportunities for men and women" (27). The main common theoretical assumption as shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been a historical tradition of male exploitation of woman.

By the time women became conscious of their position and discrimination in society, many feminists raised their voice to end this discrimination between men and women. It shows the consciousness of women who have begun to reject their own passivity. Feminism came into existence for the sake of women rights and human equality. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. It, therefore, studied women as people who were either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggled against patriarchy to contain their womanhood were generally, considered feminist. Men may also be feminists but they cannot be feminists in the real sense of the term because of lack of feminine experience. That's why, unlike ancient women, today feminists are proud of their existence. In this regard, Toril Moi, a feminist has written: "the word feminist or feminism

are political labels indicating support for the aim of the new women's movement" (187).

In fact, feminism has probably existed as long as there have been women, even if the word did not really enter the English language. Many people consider that Mary Wollstonecraft, a British political thinker, was the first woman who raised her voice against the patriarchy and for the rights of women. In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), she says that "the neglected education of many fellow creatures is the grand source of the misery [. . .]" (Ruth 44). She also argues in the same essay that women are turned into weak and petty creatures by sheer neglect of proper education and by the moral and manners which are setup by the society. The issues for the rights of women had been raised by some of male writers as well as women writers earlier. John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller's, *Women in Nineteenth Century* (1845) are good examples.

In 1960, with the advent of post modernism and post structuralism feminist study also found a significant place in literary theoretical front. Besides, its political and cultural alignment in several streams emerged to define women's studies and it received a notable form of a theory named "feminism" which is such an elusive, elaborated and diversified field. Feminist criticism which enunciated as a movement in literary criticism since 1960s emphasizes a different kind of reading to literature breaking the traditional monolithic way of examining literature. Although numerous writers were raising question against patriarchy yet some of the outstanding feminist writers of the twentieth century are Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Marry Ellman, Julliet Mitchell, Helene Cixous, Troil Moi, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, Mary Ellman are the feminists who brought a new consciousness in women's mind generating new ideas in women's movement. They denied the belief, assumption and values defined by patriarchal institution, which validate the vulnerability of male domination and female oppression. Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics*, focuses on the idea of ideology in 'sexual politics.' "The unequal relation of domination and subordination is what Millett called sexual politics" (Seldon 138). Millett opines that sex is biologically determined and gender is cultural concept. She used the term patriarchy to describe the course of women's oppression.

The first blow on patriarchal structure was given by Virginia Woolf in her famous work *A Room of One's Own* (1928). She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambition. She was also very conscious of the imposed limitations of her own education. In this book she explores deeper concerns- men's anger to women, misunderstanding between the sexes and above all psychological conditions under which women were brought up.

Looking at the conditions of women writers in the past Woolf portrays very pitiable condition of theirs. She says that to write anything at the time was considered a sin for their attempt was not only criticized and condemned but also at the same time they were disfigured and deformed. Society had prevented a woman writer from writing openly. So, she had to write surreptitiously: "She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps though her husband was of the kindest and their married life – perfection" (819). In the past, a woman writer was not taken

positively and provided a separate room for literary creation. Her talent was not counted and valued; so it did not get ground to flourish. As a result, it ultimately turned dull and uncreative.

Simon de Beauvoir, an existentialist feminist critic and writer of France, strongly opposed the tendency of viewing women as 'second sex' born to assist their male guardians. She believes that existence always precedes essence. Beauvoir objects to men's attitude of discriminating between sexes as 'self' and 'other' men being the former and women the latter. Men writers have described women as 'flesh' the one related to 'nature'. In the feminist world, a subtle and radical critical mood was launched by Simon de Beauvoir with her book entitled *The Second Sex* (1949). Through this book, Beauvoir established the principle of modern feminism. She focuses upon pitiable conditions of women in patriarchal society stating that where a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying "I am a woman; no man would do so . . . man defines the human, not women" (Selden 134). It reveals the fundamental asymmetry between masculine and feminine; she argues that "men define the human, not women. Woman is riveted into a lopsided relation with man, he is the one, she is the other" (135). According to her, all the male writers assume the female as negative. In the book, the problems Beauvoir emphasizes is that women perceive man as self (as subject) and themselves as other. And she explicitly exposes the condition of women so that they could realize their existence. She says:

Women have been essential as the one born. To be a wife or a mother. But she is stripped off motherly rights because motherly rights overpowered by fatherly rights. A wife's duty is to be in the



bed to gratify the husband's lust but the husband is not aware whether he is gratifying the lust of his wife. (145)

Therefore, the woman is inessential in the eyes of men who want to accept her as "other". She vociferously refuges the motion of female essence prior to individual existence and attacks the patriarchal myths of women that presume the false essence.

Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist and literary critic, has formulated three categories to adjust British women writers in the past and present according to their intensity of female voice in her book, *A Literature of Their Own* (1986). They are feminine, feminist and female phase. The first phase dated 1840 to 1880, includes the major writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Bronte sisters imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic standards. Their works dealt with the domestic and social background. Women wrote with an effort to equal those intellectual achievements of male culture. They were so curious that they imitated the masculine mode which they tried to perform it in feminine concern. The second phase dated from 1880 to 1920, was a challenging period for women for self demand and to protest upon their cruelty. It includes the writers such as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner, who protested against male values. The third phase is dated from 1920 onwards. Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson were the feminist writers of this period. In this period, women were more aware of their genders. They realized their importance in society and so, this phase is a phase of self discovery in which women's experiences are their main purpose, they rejected both imitation and protest.

Helene Cixous is a modern critic, who like Showalter and Beauvoir gives importance to women's existence and her participation in society. According to her, “Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible and her writing is wonderful like music and painting” (541). Elsewhere, she writes, “I write women, women must write women and man, man”. She further expresses her experience of a woman who is a unique being. In her famous essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous calls for women to put their bodies into their writing. She says: “A woman’s body with its thousand and one threshold of order [ . . . ] will make the old single grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language” (151). Here, Cixous emphasizes the power of women’s body.

To sum up, the term "feminism" explores the domination, exploitation, injustice and inequality prevalent in male-dominated society where women's rights are violated in different terms and conditions. It also attempts to end various kinds of oppressions against women for their emancipation. From the short discussion done above, it can be summed up that feminism is not a simple or unified philosophy. Many different women – and even men – call themselves feminists, and the beliefs of these groups of people vary quite a bit.

Throughout history, women have always aimed for a recognized place in society. Guided by their own field of knowledge and expertise, women like Marie Curie in science, Mary Wollstonecraft in literary writing, Simone de Beauvoir in philosophical existentialist debate, and Marie Stopes, in medicine, to name a few, have brought about an awareness of the role of women in any walks of life. The Feminist movement has forced the issue of women's rights to come into people's awareness. Many feminist thinkers and writers have helped redefine and consolidate the nature of women's place in society. Today the spread of global women's

organizations and the impact of women's contributions to society show that progress has been made.

Today, as a direct result of feminist theory the women's liberation movement of the 1960s—which urged the passage of antidiscrimination laws in the workplace and challenged societal beliefs that “a woman's place was in the home”—the barriers that prevented women from seeking careers have been eliminated. Although many feminists maintain that women still do not have full equality in the professional world, most people agree that feminism has dramatically expanded women's job opportunities. Over half of the work force is now composed of women, and many women have attained positions of prestige.

Clearly, the advancement of women within the workplace is among feminism's many accomplishments, successes that include voting rights, economic independence and property rights for women, equal opportunities for education, and a greater awareness of rape and domestic violence. However, not everyone agrees that women's entrance into the workplace has been entirely beneficial to women. Some contend that women are now forced to sacrifice their personal lives—either by choosing not to have families or by severely restricting the time spent with their families—in order to survive within a competitive workplace. As columnist Suzanne Fields explains:

Feminists' changes have made it easier for my daughter to have broader choices than women had growing up when feminism was in its insurgency. She knows she has work options if she chooses them, options that the 1950s generation of mothers did not have. But she has no illusions about what it means to be a working mother. A pressured

and stressful job can't compete in the quality of life categories with cooking for her husband and son. (11)

Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in a wide range of areas within both Western and Eastern society, ranging from culture to law. This theory has inspired many feminist activists around the world to campaign for women's legal rights – rights of contract, property rights, voting rights, for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights, including access to contraception and quality prenatal care. It has also motivated women to seek protection of them from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women. For all these things, the credit goes to feminism which has brought about a massive transformation in the role and status women in all kinds of society.

Now to return to the study of Jane Austen, she reappraised and had the esteem for women's value advocating the development of women's liberation. She possessed a keen realistic insight and she ruthlessly exposed and severely criticized some maladies of the society, so her novels are characterized by the unique feminine and keen realistic insight. Her novels are concerned about women's lives and their unfair conditions in society, especially in education, marriage, etc.

This thesis is concerned with equality and independence as the feminist elements reflected through the character of Maggie as seen in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.

### III. Portrayal of Women in *The Mill on the Floss*

In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot presents a picture of a life in Warwickshire that is full of ignorance and oppression. It is clear that the author closely identifies with the character Maggie. Therefore, Maggie's struggles represent those of the author. Both must overcome the peculiarities of their family lives, peculiar religious beliefs, social class, poverty, and the problems of acquiring an education. Both must overcome their femaleness in a world dominated by men. Feminist criticism includes a variety of approaches and the area of focus for this essay is the Anglo-American version of feminist criticism, where the focal point lies in examining portrayals of characters, textual ideas and intention.

The author describes Maggie's family as "emmet-like." This is their "mental condition." Unlike Maggie, they do not question life; they accept traditions and are content with their lot. The author wants her audience to see how she and Maggie felt "stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, or noble." She feels that she and Maggie must somehow overcome her life with these people "out of keeping with the earth on which they live" (363). Maggie, like the author, is a being of nature, with an intellect stifled by her family's poverty and quaint conception of the world. In order to obtain the mental stimulation and sympathy ("sympathy" in the Victorian sense of the word) she must break with her family. She must make a choice, which ultimately she cannot do without self-destructing.

Young Maggie attempts to establish herself as "clever." She likes to be thought of in this way. She cannot fit into the Dodson family mold, she is not disposed to be well-behaved, pale and pretty as Lucy Deane; so she runs away to join

the Gypsies, sure that they will accept her as she is. She learns a hard lesson: She has no place. She is too clever and too odd. Her intellect causes her to behave in a manner that appears "willful" (123).

She tries to find power in her situation as a little child by punishing her fetish doll. She is not willing to let things be taken away from her. She demonstrates this unwillingness when she cuts her hair before one of the aunts has an aunt to force her will upon her. She engages in self-denial so that she can make appear to herself that she is not being denied, but is acting upon her own free will. When Tom offers to take care of her she refuses and insists on sewing or teaching to earn her own living. In each of these cases she tries to establish herself so that others have less control over her.

She identifies herself as a person who is loyal to her family and early-established relationships. Maggie and George Eliot both were loyal to their families to the end, even though they were rejected by them. Both needed to overcome their feelings of exaggerated family loyalty that limited them. Maggie never did; but George Eliot lived with her married lover in spite of her family's rejection of her. However, her family's denial of her was clearly a secret torture.

Maggie may have achieved some self-identification by refusing to marry. By refusing the marriage, she also refused a subordinate position. She needed to overcome the conventionality of her provincial country life. Maggie manages to his to some degree through education. We are not told this explicitly, but she must surely have had to overcome a terrible regional accent.

It is unfortunate that Maggie was never able to overcome her need for religion. She was never able to eschew her attachment to her brother, which was almost like a religion to her. She is never able to overcome her half-belief that Tom has a right to

pass judgment on her or to hold her to a Satanic vow. She is an enabler. She could have escaped Tom's power over her in a number of ways. She could have taken a teaching position far away or she could have married Phillip Wakem or Stephen Guest. Instead she went back to her brother, hoping for approval, which she would never fully obtain.

The author's subconscious motives in writing the abrupt ending may have been either to reconcile the brother and sister in death, which is at appears at first. Or, her motive may have been to exact revenge on Tom for always denying her the love she desired. The strong incestuous undertones in the book are difficult to ignore. She may have been playing out the opposite of, "If I can't have you no one else will." Instead, she is saying " If you won't love me, I won't allow anyone else to" (68). His lack of acceptance of her, partly owing to his weak intellect and position of power as the eldest male child, is the first source of her misery.

Maggie cannot learn to trust herself first. If she had followed her own inclination and married Stephen Guest, all would have turned out well. Lucy and Philip would have forgiven her, Tom would have accepted her, her reputation would not have been sullied, and she and Tom would probably still have been alive. She would have been safe from the flood with Stephen Guest in Mudport and Tom would have been safe on the second floor of the house at Dorclote Mill. But George Eliot did not see fit to reward her patient reader with a logical and happy ending. All the more, this makes *The Mill on the Floss* seem like an exercise in revenge.

Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* explores the pathetic story of a young girl, Maggie who leads a very troublesome life filled with passionate emotions and unfair treatment at a time where the position of a young girl in society is problematic. We, through the character of Maggie, encounter the problems faced by women in

patriarchal society. This study examines how women are likened to animals as they are made victims of persecution and segregation. They become a symbol of the unknown, alien the “Other” as they suffer from subordination. As a female character, Maggie suffers from humiliation as she is stereotypically labeled as someone inhuman and different. What is comprehended as an accurate word to describe someone can function to marginalize and demean “the others”. Stigmatized words function as a means to separate people from others, to confirm their identity and others in relation.

Maggie, the protagonist in *The Mill on the Floss*, is on many occasions described like an animal and thus secondary being. The members of her family have light complexion, light hair and eyes. She, on the contrary, has dark skin, black hair and dark eyes. It is not only her appearance that evokes the likeness to the animal, but her manners as well, which are far from appropriate. She is compared to her brother Tom, who has the advantage of being a boy and is courteous, and her cousin Lucy who is her polar opposite; she is fair-skinned and well-mannered; the ideal young girl of that era. Maggie’s life is filled with hardship; her family loses the ownership of their mill to Mr. Wakem and they are forced to sell most of their valuable possessions, which is overwhelming for her mother who becomes indifferent and depressed. Her father is forced to work for Mr. Wakem, which causes him to grow increasingly bitter over time. Maggie becomes submissive in order to please and ease the burden on her parents. She begins having secret meetings with Philip Wakem, the son of her father’s worst enemy, where they discuss music and art, the things of most value in her life. His friendly intentions soon turn into love for her, and she is confused how to respond to this. When Tom learns about their secret meetings he is furious and confronts her. Her dear father turns ill and eventually dies. Tom is now the head of the family and he harshly declares that Maggie should answer to him. Maggie’s troubles with the male



inhabitants does not end at that; she gains another admirer in her cousin Lucy's fiancé Stephen, whom she finds herself falling for, and in a moment of weakness she elopes with him. On their return, she is despised and discarded by the people in the village, including her brother Tom. Still, in the end, when the village is subject to a great deluge, it is Tom she tries to rescue.

In this study it is be argued that she embodies the stereotypes of alien being in her interaction with different characters throughout the novel. She represents the romantic adventurer with Phillip, whom she has secret meetings with although they belong to rival families. She signifies the seductive enchantress with Stephen, who, despite the fact that he is engaged to her cousin Lucy, cannot resist falling under her spell. Lastly, she symbolizes the "Other" in connection to her family and foremost in comparison to her brother Tom, who is obedient and well-mannered, her opposite. She is also described as a wild animal, a worshipper of witch-craft, and a force of nature. She does not concur with patriarchal society, and she is also rejected by it. Her relatives ridicule her appearance and behavior, and compare her to an animal when they describe her. Eliot applies powerful words that have obvious schemata attached to them; one word or small phrase can trigger a certain feeling or paint a clear picture in our mind. She plays on fears of the unknown, or "otherness"; she uses words like "demons", "fetish", and "wild" to display that Maggie is far from the ideal of a young woman. With these powerful words she creates the very eccentric character of Maggie and through all of her links to the animal, the mystery of her being is intensified.

When we look closely at how Eliot describes Maggie, the undertones of dramatic irony becomes apparent. All the stereotypes are exaggerated to the fullest. She needs the analogy of the Roma (Gypsy) animal to be true to the stereotypes, in order for Maggie to become the ultimate outcast with a fluid identity that does not

belong anywhere. Eliot chooses to portray the lesser fortunate in society in her writing, her own motivation being to make people more understanding of each other and to encourage integration of all different classes and cultures in society.

In this study of *The Mill on the Floss*, the impediments that Maggie has to face in a patriarchal society are remarkable. So, this study explores how gender plays a part historically, culturally and politically. Deepika Bahri states that focus lies in the study of "gender differences and the power struggles that occur and how these affect the lives of men and women in different times and parts of the world" (200). In feminist criticism, the representations and experiences of women in literature are compared to "real life, and not as fabricated and untouchable and the thorough examination of the text is the most important aspect of the area" (Barry 124). The intention is to uplift women's experiences from being subordinate to men's, to reveal oppression and dominance of women. Maggie is not taken seriously and she tries to resist the presupposed position she is to have in life simultaneously as she struggles with her passionate emotions that control her. Moreover, she is strongly influenced by the men in her life that try to control her in different ways. However, it is not only men that try to transform her into a compliant woman; the women are equally guilty of this.

Whenever Maggie is described in the novel, it is with words that have a close connection to the wild and mysterious, and she is described like an animal on numerous occasions. She is described like an animal instead of a human being: "Maggie was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark, heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes – an action which gave her very much the air of a small Shetland pony" (10). The women have often been compared to animals on several occasions in patriarchal society in many societies. Giving Maggie the resemblance of an animal

serves as a means to belittle and alienate her especially from her mother. It is a way for her mother to distance herself from her child. Her mother does this in order to avoid taking responsibility for Maggie's actions and having to defend her to the relatives. The secure feeling of being superior to the "Other", in the patriarchal ideals are right, is a way of justifying the right to suppress the "Others". This brings a sense of security; they cannot be seen as a real threat, and thus no struggle of power will arise. Maggie's mother often informs Maggie of how unfortunate she herself is; having to struggle with her hair and having Maggie often sabotage her work. On one occasion, while wetting her hair after her mother has been trying to make it curl, Eliot describes her to be "shaking the water from her black locks as she ran, like a Skye terrier escaped from his bath" (24). Thus, in the novel Maggie is given the likeness to an animal, something uncontrollable. Moreover, the long black hair represents the feminine in the erotic fantasies of the males. It is a symbol of passionate emotion that needs to be controlled. An uncontrollable woman with her hair hanging down was seen as a threat to the normative ideal of a woman under patriarchal norms. A woman should have control over her body as well as her manners; her hair should be perfectly shaped and still, as should her mind.

If the woman is kept quiet, bodily and spiritually, she is regarded as a person of strong character; she is seen as reliable and confident. She should not defy these rules; else she would be seen as a menace to the patriarchal society where the men are supposed to be in control of their women; an uncontrollable woman is evidence of a powerless man, an immense humiliation. The female body is seen as something that is needed to be under constraints, to be in the ideal shape of femininity, the opposite of the male adventurous spirit. The men often tend to belittle and objectify women in order to be seen as great; therefore the women were destined to play the appropriate

submissive and passive role in society. No natural explanation is given for Maggie's odd manners, only the notion of her likeness to an animal, a lower race, something they can distance themselves from, which is very pathetic situation. Prejudices arise out of fear of the unknown and the less we know of someone, the more we find them odd.

Maggie is an example of how women are treated as secondary citizens or in much harsher terms as animals. This is enough to justify the inhumane treatment of them. It validates that what is being decided about them is in their best interest; stating that they are too primitive to understand the matters themselves. It serves as a means to achieve a clear conscience and the sentiment of acting morally correct. The struggle to take bodily control over Maggie, of the way she wears her clothes and her hair, is eventually too much for her to bear, and she tries to free herself from patriarchal social restraints by cutting her hair off. Tom is eager to help, anticipating the outcome, and while he is cutting, a sense of liberty comes over Maggie, a sense of cutting the ties that hold her down.

She is attempting to emancipate herself from the social ideal of a woman, she desires normative femininity. Maggie believes that with her hair gone, which has been the focus of much of her mother's complaints and worries, the comments about it will end, but the outcome is not what she would have liked, instead, matters turn worse and the things said of her are all but comforting: "She's more like a Gypsy nor ever", and "She's a naughty child, as'll break her mother's heart" (65). Maggie's similarity to the animal is not only her resemblance to them, but her actions as well.

Nature has a strong presence in Maggie's life, it is often where she reconciles with her emotions, and Eliot often refers to nature in her descriptions of her. She describes her as a "wild thing" (9), and "a small mistake of nature" unmanageable (9).

People try to control Maggie's body, mind and spirit, to transform her into the appropriate model of a young girl. She is seen as a person who is possessed by greater forces because she very often lets her emotions take charge of her and she does not try to oppose them, thus being true to her own self. She represents the wild, the unfamiliar, the "Other", in that they could not be placed in a category, hence the connection to the untamed and treacherous. The mystique around Maggie is deepened by the fact that she has her sanctuary in the attic where she exercises the fetish of piercing nails into the head of a doll.

Maggie also bangs her doll's head against a wall, which gives the reader the impression of an inhuman being, a rebellious force, rather than a little girl. Just as quick as the emotion of rage takes over, as quickly is the "spell" broken by the sunlight entering the room and she forgets what caused it from the beginning, hence giving us a sense that nature calls on her. Maggie is fascinated by witches and the devil, and she is reading *The History of the Devil*, by Daniel Dafoe, to the adults' dismay. Maggie describes the devil in her book to Mr. Riley: "the body all black, you know, and the eyes red, like fire, because he's all fire inside, and it shines out at his eyes" (15). Maggie is also described in a similar way, with "gleaming black eyes" (10). Furthermore, after playing in the mill, her hair gets whitened by dust: "that made her dark eyes flash out with new fire" (25), which gives her a connection to the devil. Moreover, Maggie is described as a person whose appearance will deceive you, who hides incredible forces: "that same nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies" (29-30). People in the village are devoted to God and the church, and

Maggie is the opposite of the good faith. She is seen as a person possessed by non-conformity nature. This is the stereotypical representation of Maggie under patriarchy.

Maggie does not do well in social gatherings, to her family's disappointment. The Tullivers have to present a family that resembles the standards of society; else it could damage their good name. It was essential to present a beautiful home, including expensive furniture, china, and well-behaved children. When the relatives are visiting, it is one of the occasions where Maggie needs to be on her best behavior, but she cannot help to feel uneasy and she struggles to be still. She listens and enjoys Mr. Pullet's music box and lets the delight of hearing the music take control of her and throws herself at Tom with such ecstasy that it causes him to spill his wine. She is then told she is not suited for social interaction and that she should try to behave in an appropriate manner. "Poor Maggie sat down again, with the music all chased out of her soul, and the seven small demons all in again" (92). It is reminiscent of something less than human that takes control over her, and when Tom departs with Lucy without asking Maggie to accompany them, she observes them in anger: "Seeing this, Maggie lingered at a distance, looking like a small Medusa with her snakes cropped" (97). She is compared to the Goddess who, when looked at, could turn people into stone, and when she later pushes Lucy into the mud, she is conducting an act which will be seen as pure evil. Making Lucy, with her fair complexion, perfect hair and beautiful clothes, bathe in mud, is a performance of repressed frustration. Maggie displays her hate and despise for people's unfair treatment of her. Lucy is a symbol of everything that Maggie is not; in body and mind she represents the ideal of how a girl should appear and behave and thus, everything that Maggie tries to resist. Lucy symbolizes the normative in society, the western norm that all women should strive for, whereas Maggie represents the "Other", an outcast of society that should be avoided. Maggie

knows that this act of defiling Lucy will not go unpunished, and she sees no other choice but to run away and since she has been frequently compared to the alien, it is with them she seeks refuge.

In the Rom camp, Maggie sees the resemblance between her and one of the women in particular with her “bright dark eyes and the long hair” (106), but she observes, to her annoyance, that the woman is dirty. Here, the fantasy starts to discolor; Maggie has secretly been making up a story in her head about how her life with the Roma would unfold, but she slowly realizes that the truth is something quite different. They seem to have no manners and they do not possess anything she can eat. They offer her old bread from a bag, and this gives the reader the idea of waste that one would feed an animal. Evidence that the Roma are indeed thieves is also displayed; as Maggie is first approaching them, she notices how one of the young girls is feeding a donkey “excellent stolen hay” (107), and one of the first things that happens to her is that someone empties her pocket without her awareness, showing the reader that they are in fact the most disgusting people, who would not hesitate to steal from anyone, not even a child.

At the end of her stay with them, Maggie is frightened of the Roma, she suspects that one of the men is the devil himself:

The suspicion crossed her that the fierce-eyed old man was in fact the devil, who might drop that transparent disguise at any moment and turn either in the grinning blacksmith or else a fiery-eyed monster with dragon’s wings. It was no use trying to eat the stew, and yet the thing she most dreaded was to offend the gypsies, by betraying her extremely unfavorable opinion of them; and she wondered, with a

keenness of interest that no theologian could have exceeded, whether, if the Devil were really present, he would know her thoughts. (111).

She expects them to do her harm, thus the novel states that most of our prejudices about the Roma are true. They are thieves that will rob you if given opportunity, the only reason they did not kill Maggie was in the prospect of collecting a finder's fee from her father. Thus, Eliot reinforces the stereotypes of the Roma; she does this in order to make it clear that Maggie does not feel solidarity with them, nor with her family. She has a fluid identity which makes her the ultimate outcast. Eliot also challenges these stereotypes in her exaggerated descriptions of them, as in: "excellent stolen hay", where one wonders how Maggie knows it is stolen, and the fact that they steal from her (a child), as soon as she arrives, and that one of the men are probably the devil himself. All of these descriptions display the sarcastic undertone in Maggie's perceptions of the Roma.

Maggie's encounter with the Roma is crucial to her. It becomes clear that the situation in the Rom camp is the opposite of her fantasies about them. She realizes how she has been recognized in the eyes of others; she has been described as someone who is dirty, poor, a thief, and an animal, someone primitive that has a close connection to the devil and should be banished. She carries this notion with her for the remainder of her life and projects this notion onto others. The need to separate people into "us" and "them" derives from the notion that "they" are considered deviant, people who differ from the norm, someone who can be seen as a threat to the values and beliefs, the foundations of society. When these values and beliefs are threatened or questioned the feeling of safety and stability lessens and the need of defense arises. The weapons for such a challenge are definitions of what is right and wrong in



society; how to act, dress and behave, and if not followed, one will face rejection and segregation.

Maggie lives in the shadow of her older brother Tom, and in comparison to him she is seen as the “Other” who deviates from the norm; she is seen as a criminal in the sense of transgression; she challenges and breaks the principles set by patriarchal society. She adores her brother and wants to be his equal, and she constantly tries to impress him, in order to gain his love and respect. She wants to experience all that he does, which is not appreciated by everyone. She despises the woman’s role in society which is dedicated to domestic tasks; instead, she prefers to be occupied with matters appropriate for a boy; to play or to study. She also believes that she is very clever and she challenges the patriarchal society by interfering and interrupting the discussions of the adults, whereupon she is quieted and put in her place. Her father alone is aware of her knowledge and often praises her, but he is also aware of the troubles that she will face should she try to get an education. He states: “But it’s bad – it’s bad . . . a woman’s no business wi’ being so clever; it’ll turn to trouble, I doubt . . . she’ll read the books and understand ’em better nor half the folks as are growed up” (13-4). The only person who appreciates her intelligence and wit is forced to acknowledge that she will have no use of it, being a female; she has a life of domestic obligations ahead of her.

Maggie offers to help Tom with his studies, being convinced that she can be of valid help to him, but she is soon rejected with Tom’s harsh words: “You help me, you silly little thing...I should like to see you doing one of my lessons! Why, I learn Latin too! Girls never learn such things. They’re too silly” (145). She is repeatedly discouraged regarding her future education and the excellence of her mind. She is of the weaker sex and does not allegedly have the ability to become a great intellectual.

Tom is aware of her intellectual capacity, but in order to not be seen as inferior to her, he ridicules and degrades her, knowing that every such remark is devastating to her confidence. Maggie asks Mr. Stelling if she could learn all that Tom has and if she could be his student, he replies: “They [girls] can pick up a little of everything, I dare say . . . [t]hey’ve a great deal of superficial cleverness, but they couldn’t go far into anything. They’re quick and shallow” (151). Education of women was regarded as a necessity in order to become a suitable conversationalist to men, and to be an asset in entertaining guests. It was not in their ability to pursue a career, the only appropriate situation a woman could obtain was that of tutoring children. Even though Maggie is superior to Tom in intelligence, she is still considered as a “silly girl” by others. Women are silly and need men to teach them right from wrong. Men learn this from experience, women need to be taught. The conviction is that a woman will not know when making a mistake, nor can she avoid it. The act of demeaning someone is a result of envy and a need to silence their voice. If a woman is provocative, and consequently threatens the norm, she must be put in her place, her place being to take care of the domestic world; the house, the domestic labor and the children. Tom means to take care of his sister, in supplying shelter and food, but in return he expects her to take care of his household and work for him, and he believes it is his responsibility to discipline her when she has faltered. Maggie does not want to be dependent on any man, including her brother; therefore she continues to educate herself. Her situation is miserable.

Tom knows that Maggie adores him and he uses her love to control her. He teases her and frequently calls her stupid and when she does not obey his will, he declares he would rather prefer Lucy for a sister over Maggie. He is aware of how deep these words hurt her, and he causes the exact effect he is looking for; causing her

to lose control. As mentioned above, Lucy is everything Maggie is not; she is beauty itself, she has a small figure, hazel eyes, and light brown hair that never seem to uncurl. Her manners are also what are desired of a young girl; she is quiet and does not interfere with the adults; her body and her mind are quiet. Mrs. Tulliver complains over the fact that Maggie is the cause of much grief in her life, and how she wishes she would be more like Lucy: “And there’s Lucy Deane’s such a good child – you may set her on a stool, and there she’ll sit for an hour together, and never offer to get off. I can’t help loving the child as if she was my own” (39-40). Maggie has brought nothing but trouble for her mother, and she has always known her mother loves Tom more than her; firstly, because he is a boy, secondly, because she does not resemble her mother’s side of the family.

Tom is jealous of Maggie’s passion, which has been her drive in life, for good and bad; it has led to many sorrowful moments, but also to great affection, foremost from her father, something Tom has never been the object of. He envies their relationship, of the open display of their love; he can never be seen as needy of such superficial matters, it would damage his status. He covets her want for a fuller life; he does not have that same courage to rebel against what is expected of him. When Tom hears of Maggie’s secret rendezvous with Philip, the siblings are even more estranged. He is no longer the focus of her love, to his distress. His rage is a verification of his hidden feelings for her; he adores her, but has rarely shown it, being the older sibling and a boy made this impossible. Very few moments of affection have been showed to Maggie. When done so, it was always in hiding, with no witnesses to condemn his actions. He is aware of the power he has over his sister and he uses his knowledge of her most vulnerable sensation, namely her respect and love for her father, to dominate her.

Tom has always been a role-model for Maggie, but she realizes all the wrongdoing he has done her. He has never defended her in hard times, he has always been quick to judge and punish her for any misbehavior. He has always relied on and used the power he has over her. When he forces her to choose between him and Philip, she pleads for his understanding, he replies: "But I have no confidence in you. . . . You're always in extremes – you have no judgement and self-command; and yet you think you know best and will not submit to be guided" (401). Tom plays the martyr of the family; he has sacrificed plenty in order to support the family. He was the one who went out to seek a situation, he was their hope of regaining the family honor, it is with him the hope of a brighter future lies. Little acknowledgement is given to the labor Maggie contributes with and he accuses Maggie of having no honor, no feelings for her family. He makes her appear like a person eager to turn on her own kin, in order to fulfill her desires. He knows that Maggie would not deliberately hurt anyone and with this knowledge he accuses and manipulates her to get the result he wishes for.

Maggie longs for someone to understand her, to love and care for her: "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" (238). When Maggie meets Philip Wakem she sees in him much of herself; they share the same passion for music, art and literature, they are both victims of discriminatory treatment by society and judged by their appearance. Meeting Philip, Maggie has finally found a loving brother who respects her, and he a sister he has always longed for. He is mesmerized by her: "What was it, he wondered, that made Maggie's dark eyes remind him of the stories about princesses being turned into animals? I think it was that her eyes were full of unsatisfied intelligence and unsatisfied, beseeching affection" (179). With Philip, Maggie symbolizes the romantic Rom woman with a

sense of adventure surrounding her, and the notion of fairy-tales is bona fide in her presence; they have secret meetings although belonging to rival families. She reminds him of a princess in need of saving; he wishes to free her from her imprisoned life and fill it with culture and love. He, as well, has been starved for affection his whole life and he is overjoyed to have found his equal. He gains her trust, yet it becomes clear that he has a hidden agenda, in making her fall in love with him. He manipulates her through feelings of guilt, in the sense that he claims she is the only kind relationship he has in his life and should she deny him that, he would have nothing left to live for.

In her miserable life, with a depressed father, a sorrowful mother and a brother that does not speak to her, Maggie is forced to give up hope of ever finding happiness and becomes submissive to her mother's and others' wishes. She feels imprisoned; her sentence being a life of domestic chores, which she despises, and she feels her joy for life slowly diminishing. She becomes the woman they had always wished for her to be; sitting quietly, doing her needlework, letting her mother braid and tend to her hair. In giving in to their wishes she finally receives approval from her mother. A woman's house, her name and reputation was of most value to her. With Mrs. Tulliver's furniture and linen sold and gone, and her family name disgraced, she has nothing left to live for. When Maggie changes her manners and appearance she finally finds something she can be proud of. She watches Maggie with a sense of wonder: "The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now on which she could bestow her anxiety and pride" (299). For Maggie, she has advanced from being the root of all evil, to a piece of wooden material of some value, it is the first time she experiences any compassion from her mother. Maggie struggles inside to keep her quiet posture:

She rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness; and fits even of anger and hatred towards her father and mother . . . towards Tom . . . would flow out over her affections and conscience like a lava stream, and frighten her with a sense that it was not difficult for her to become a demon. (292)

She suppresses her love for life. She is aware of her strong emotions that she keeps concealed from everyone and she feels abandoned by her family that seem to accept her change without question. Her only wish is for someone to help her escape her restraints. Maggie feels frightened in front of men. Eliot writes:

Maggie, now really faint and trembling with fear, was taken on board, making an interesting object of contemplation to admiring Dutchmen. The mate feared the lady would have a poor time of it on board, for they had no accommodation for such entirely unlooked-for passengers,—no private cabin larger than an old-fashioned church-pew. But at least they had Dutch cleanliness, which makes all other inconveniences tolerable; and the boat cushions were spread into a couch for Maggie on the poop with all alacrity. But to pace up and down the deck leaning on Stephen—being upheld by his strength—was the first change that she needed; then came food, and then quiet reclining on the cushions, with the sense that no new resolution could be taken that day. Everything must wait till to-morrow. (322)

When seeing Philip again, her wish is granted. He evokes feelings of loving what is beautiful in life; she finds hope close to her again and questions why she should deny Philip a life of love. She has craved it all her life, but rarely received it; she cannot do the same to him. She sees her own pain in Philip; he, as well, is an

outsider, his deformity is deviant from the accepted norm of masculinity set by society. Her resemblance to the alien and his deformity is what separates them from the others and his unanswered love is reminiscent to her love for her brother Tom. However, opening that secret door also has its dangers; she knows that her still life will be full of passion and emotions again. The life she has now is quiet with no temptation and also no risk for disappointment from her family, who need her the most. She has finally taken the role of the normative acceptable woman and there she is safe. With no passionate feelings that can disturb the peace, she cannot do any harm to herself or others. Her actions and appearance are what everyone in her surroundings expect from her, there are no disruptions. Yet these disruptions are what Maggie considers most valuable. She believes that life without passionate emotions and a free mind is not worth living. She can endure the struggle to be submissive, in her loneliness, but after meeting Phillip, a kindred spirit, her emotions are difficult to deny.

He is possessed by her; she has him under a spell he cannot break: “To see such a creature subdued by love for one would be a lot worth having – to another man” (Eliot 419). She is desirable, but inapt to play the part of a wife. Stephen has no control over his actions, he understands that Maggie is far from an ordinary woman, she resembles a force, an animal: “Her lips and eyelids quivered; she opened her eyes full on his for an instant, like a lovely wild animal timid and struggling under caresses, and then turned sharp round towards home again” (460). She evokes his strongest, darkest desires, and in order to justify his far from radical behavior, he declares she must be something other than human. As mentioned, the Rom woman is often portrayed as sensual, seductive and cunning; she has been the embodiment of both men’s and women’s fantasies in various plays and literary texts. She is known

for her outstanding beauty, her close contact to nature, animals and spirits. Stephen tries his best to fight the urge to submit to her and leave Lucy, but eventually he finds himself too weak: “Was it possible to quarrel with a creature who had such eyes – defying and deprecating, contradicting and clinging, imperious and beseeching, full of delicious opposites” (418-9). Maggie is the symbol of the unknown, the adventurous and dangerous, someone he would discard of if he had any control over himself. He is willing to give up anything of value in his life: his home, his family and his name to be near the woman who has such power over him. Stephen realizes that if he is to make her leave the people she loves and force her to elope with him, she will become despondent; she will never allow herself happiness if knowing she has been the cause of someone else’s misery. Yet, he cannot resist loving her; she is the stark contrast of his fiancée Lucy, who stands for the normative, the safe and predicted.

When being swept away by Stephen, Maggie is at first relieved to find she has escaped her life of restrictions where she is expected to act the appropriate role of the submissive woman and where her emotions constantly have to be denied and restrained. She soon recognizes the damage they have done and she realizes that he has taken advantage of her being so passionate; Stephen did not ask for her opinion, he acted on his will only. He spoke for her, as many others have done before, so she accuses him: “You have wanted to deprive me of any choice . . . you have dared to take advantage of my thoughtlessness. It is unmanly to bring me into such a position” (478). Philip, Stephen and Tom have tried to play on her emotions, to appeal to her sensitivity in order to fulfill their needs and wishes, while Maggie has always been too considerate of other people’s feelings to enjoy what she wanted in life. She would rather suffer and be unhappy, than bring pain to others. She would not deliberately



choose a selfish path, but she is repeatedly a victim of men's oppression, where the male voice dominates the female.

After her disappearance with Stephen, she is given the biggest blame of the two; Stephen is a man and cannot resist falling under her spell. Among various things, people were accusing her of having planned the escape herself, it was her doing alone, and little blame could be put on Stephen, who is considered the victim. The thought that Stephen would act in this senseless way on his own free will was unthinkable, so the blame was put on Maggie. Stephen disappeared after their return and did not stay to defend her against the accusations; as a result the people in the village silenced her voice and spoke for her. If she had done something that was considered positive or negative in the eye of others, the attitudes would alter. Maggie is accustomed to being the Other in society; much like the Roma, people were eager to draw conclusions about her, they did not want to know the truth, and consequently the rumors about her began to form, rumors that soon became truths. Everywhere Maggie goes, she is given looks of wonder and desire from the male population. Even Philip's father, who has been fighting the Tullivers all his life, cannot help to notice Maggie's beauty; no ordinary man can. Even the most respected man in the village, the priest Dr. Kenn, is amazed by her, and rumors quickly start to form about their relationship when he offers her a safe haven. Thus, Maggie is seen as a Rom woman; she will put men under her spell and they will have no power to fight her. The seductive Rom woman can make any man do as she pleases, even men of great honor. Maggie, the seductress, will not only take your man, she will do so in a most cunning, deceitful way. She will not hesitate to betray her family or friends to get the man she desires. She is classified as a criminal, a house-breaker; the worst kind there is.

When the siblings are united with all of their earthly possessions lost and all the restraints of society vanished, Tom can finally show his love for his sister. Prior to this, he could only be gentle in hiding. He could not be taken as a weak boy who adored his odd little sister; he needed to play his part in a patriarchal society that expected him to instruct his sister, to show his power over her, not his affections. When they stand with no one to condemn them he can be true to his feelings for his troublesome sister. He will not be judged by the values of a society that forced him to estrange himself from her, a society that demanded him to oppress and deny her, a society he yielded to. He was not strong enough to stand by her in need. Maggie has always adhered to him obsessively, as she was predicting they would part later in life. She has showered him with affection, but has always been rejected, except for those precious moments of solitude when they were free to show their true emotions: “he behaved with a weakness quite inconsistent with his resolution to punish her as much as she deserved; he actually began to kiss her in return” (36). Maggie did not want to, nor was she able to, restrain her thoughts or emotions; she was frank about her feelings and did not understand why displaying signs of love were inappropriate behavior.

All the men are at the end gathered around her; her father and brother by her side and Philip and Stephen at her feet. The two men who survived her, struggle with the polar emotions connected to her: “[they] felt that their keenest joy and keenest sorrow were forever buried there” (535). In cohesion with the alien, Maggie cannot survive society and Eliot lets her protagonist die a tragic death. Outcasts or “Others” should not intervene with the rules of society, they should keep to their own kind; else they will be punished accordingly. One should know one’s place in life and not

challenge it, or else tragedy is to follow. In this way, this study draws a pathetic portrayal of woman in *The Mill on the Floss*.

#### IV. Conclusion

In this thesis on *The Mill on the Floss*, it is argued that Maggie, a female character, embodies the stereotypical discrimination through her encounters with different characters in the novel. The intention is to examine the female's situation through a feminist viewpoint with focus on the stereotypes that emerged about them. From a feminist perspective, the tribulation Maggie endures in a patriarchal society is studied. In the novel, Maggie is often compared to the animal and thus an alien. By implication, she is treated as a secondary being. Eliot uses descriptions of her that are associated with the (othering), animal's stereotypes, such as: "her gleaming black eyes", "like a lovely wild animal", and "looking like a small Medusa".

However, after her literal encounter with the Roma in the Roma camp, she realizes how people have viewed her. The fact that she is seen as untrustworthy and as a criminal is shocking for her and instead of feeling safe she is frightened by them and fears they will harm her. Eliot reinforces the stereotypes of the Roma. We are given evidence that they are a filthy, primitive and deceitful people that one should avoid. This is essential in order to illustrate the difficulty Maggie has to face under patriarchy; being rejected by her family who see her as an alien, who do not see her as a kin of theirs, to emphasize her fluid identity and her "Otherness". Yet, in Eliot's sarcastic undertone she proclaims we should challenge these stereotypes. They are

embroidered in order to demonstrate how absurd they are, and to point out that we live in a society with preconception and bigotry. Eliot demonstrates this foremost in the exaggerated stereotypes and in the presupposed apprehensions that several characters in the text have.

Another example in the text is how the relatives view Maggie; they judge her to be an obedient silly girl, yet we learn otherwise; she is sensitive and caring, and far more intelligent than her brother Tom. Maggie challenges the principles of patriarchal society, by her actions and her language, and she imposes on territories that are more suiting for a boy, she is therefore rejected and belittled. Eliot also points out a prejudice conception of matters in the episode when the people of the village turn against Maggie after her disappearance with Stephen. They assume Maggie is to blame for the escape and no one is interested to hear her version. Since Stephen is a respected man there is no need to question him. Maggie's voice is silenced.

Maggie is oppressed by different men in her life that in several ways try to control her by manipulating her passionate emotions. Maggie is affectionate and sensitive, but also an intelligent young woman who struggles to keep a calm disposition in order to be accepted in society, where the ideal woman is her opposite. The women in the Victorian age were marginalized and oppressed. Their position in society was to take care of the house-hold and the children, to stand behind, not beside, their husbands. Maggie has been victims of oppression and domination in a patriarchal society. Society felt the need to educate and teach Maggie right from wrong, sensing that her beliefs were abnormal and that her only salvation was to convert into the woman that was the norm. She needed to change her identity in order to be accepted in society. The act of coercion arises in order to gain power and control

over someone. So, as Maggie is treated as an alien by patriarchal society, she acts strangely; it reflects the portrayal of miserable condition of Victorian women.

## Works Cited

- Adams, Hazard, ed. *Critical Theory since Plato*. Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich inc., 1992.
- Austen, Zelda. "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot." *College English*. 37.6 (1976): 549-61.
- Bahri, Deepika. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Beasley, Chris. *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*. London: Sage Publication, 1999.
- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.
- Cixous, Helen. "Stories." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1998. 287-93.
- Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980
- Fields, Suzanne. "Feminism: For Better and for Worse." *The Washington Post*. 26 March 1997. 1-16.
- Flint, Kate. "George Eliot and gender." *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Ed. George Levine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 159-80.
- Guerin, Wilfred and et al. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Henry, Nancy. *George Eliot and the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Lerner, Gerda. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1998. 330-51.
- Levine, George. *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Gardencity Double Day, 1970.

- Moi, Toril. "Feminist Literary Criticism." *In Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Ann Jeferson. Lanham: Barnes Imports, 1987.
- Ruth, Sheila. *Issues In Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000.
- Seldon, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Harvester Wheat Sheaf Press, 1992.
- Showalter, Elaine. "A Criticism of Our Own." *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 181-205.
- Webster, Wendy. *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-war Britain*. London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Ed. Ashley Tauchert. London: University Exeter, 1995.

