

I. INTRODUCTION: PSYCHO-SOCIAL BACKGROUND

I.I Central Idea of the Research

To track the changes in the portrayal of women and the attitudes of their characters throughout the 19th century, they are evaluated and analyzed within the frame of feminism. Shirley Keeldar from *Shirley* by Charlotte Bronte and Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot are scrutinized according to the degree to which they went against existing social norms, perception of women and morals.

Shirley and *The Mill on the Floss* are the two Victorian novels chosen for this study because each one of them features a woman character that is controversial in one way or another in her thoughts, actions or both. Both protagonists display an independence of thought and behaviour that does not conform to the norms of the age they live in. This is the reason why these novels are set apart from the other novels of the Victorian age which dealt with more conventional women and did not specifically treat women's status in society as an important issue. In order to put these novels in a social and historical context, a full understanding of the psycho-social background which formed their authors' intellectual make-up is necessary. So, the traits of Victorian English society and women's place in it must be examined for a grounded and more informed analysis of the novels in question. To adequately represent this period covered, *Shirley* (1849) is chosen from the first half of the 19th century and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) from the second half.

I. II An Overview on Victorian Era

The Victorian age, beginning in 1837 and lasting until 1901, was a period of massive changes in England, both socially and economically. During this period, the economy grew at a great rate due to the onset of industrialization. More and more

people migrated to the cities for employment and population also increased considerably. Women, as well as men of the working class were employed in factories as workforce, but under miserable conditions and for too little pay. Class distinctions also became more pronounced, and were dependent on the level of a person's income and her/his degree of nobility. The middle class, which consisted mainly of merchants and businesspeople and their families, earned well and gained ascendancy in society. The prosperity of business ventures, which was the reason for the economic growth in the country, also led to a distinction in social sphere. The women, meanwhile, were expected to reign supreme in the house and in all domestic matters, so theirs was the private sphere.

In the Victorian period, work inside and outside the home took up much more time than it does today and working people had far less leisure time. There was little money to spare and no radio, television, cinemas or sports centres. People found all sorts of ways of enjoying what free time they had. Whilst the Victorians dreamt of improvement and progress through work, the years between 1837 and 1901 saw the greatest development in leisure pursuits ever witnessed. The period gave a more structured approach to leisure, with the creation of parks, libraries, art galleries and museums. In most large towns there were theatres and music halls that were popular and cheap. Men played or went to watch rugby, football or cricket. Technology changed as well, allowing the production of cheap books, newspapers and musical instruments. "The National Trust" came into being, which helped conserve the countryside and improved transport, which made days out more accessible to everyone.

Partly in response to a perceived threat of social and political disorder, and partly out of a wish to improve the conditions of working-class life, reformers

embraced leisure as a means of educating and edifying the masses in Victorian England. These “rational recreation” initiatives were one element of a more general social meliorism. They became less didactic as the nineteenth century wore on, but the idea that leisure could and should be used to shape the behavior and attitudes of working people, that it was an important arena in which to effect social “progress,” continued to have a powerful appeal.

The late 18th and early 19th centuries witnessed a remarkable transformation in the organization of social life in England. The rise of industrialization, the urban center and the family wage helped to create a new division between the public world of work and politics and the private world of home and family. Concomitant with these structural changes, an ideology of “separate spheres” developed amongst the middle and upper class which emphasized a division of sexual labor. Men’s roles were transformed from the organizer of family labor to the provider of wage-earned income. Women took increasing responsibility for the training and education of children and for the maintenance of the “domestic haven.” Given the commodification, uncertainties and dangers of commercial life and of the rising urban center, the home became a protected environment, a place where working men could find solace. It also served as a locus of social and personal morality. Barbara Weller opines “the cult of true womanhood came to represent the purity and sanctity of family life and the idealization of the morally responsible mother, wife and homemaker” (342). Leisure figured as a site of identity transformation where women enacted creative, embodied, and connected subjectivities. The performance of gender through leisure enabled women to practice a different ethic of care for self and, hence, different relations of care for others. These stories make visible the cost of women’s

emotion work by identifying how negotiations over leisure and the embodiment of emotion play can facilitate recovery in ways that biomedical treatments cannot.

The separate spheres ideology spilled over from the realm of work to leisure and education as well. In the 19th century, while men's education took place largely in schools and colleges, women were educated in the home – “with instruction largely confined to religious and aesthetic subjects” (Marks 47). In addition to education, there were large differences between men and women in terms of leisure. Men participated in the public amusements of variety houses, minstrel shows, dances, dime museums, circuses, coffee houses, taverns, gentlemen clubs and sports. Women, on the other hand, partook of private amusements within the house -- piano playing, reading, conversation, and crafts.

As Janet Wolff writes “Women’s leisure was confined to the home [...] the general rule was that any women in a public place of leisure and unaccompanied by husband or a suitable male was considered a prostitute” (59).

Thus, as fiction reading tended to fall within the private, domestic sphere it is not surprising that historians have documented the prevalence of reading among 19th century middle and upper class women. It demonstrates that reading was popular among women not only because it was an activity which could be conducted in the privacy of the home, but also because it was intricately bound up with the ideology of separate spheres. In countless articles and essays in magazines, advice manuals and religious and scientific journals, educators and moralists praised the benefits of reading for women. According to these sources, reading not only served as a means of relieving women’s isolation, but it enabled them to become better mothers (by setting a good example for their children) and better wives (by giving women the cultural capital needed to be more stimulating companions). In short, Kate Flint states

that discussions of women's reading in the 19th century served as "a confirmation and consolidation of the dominant [separate spheres] ideology of the period" (37).

Since the 19th century, the line dividing public and private has increasingly become blurred. At the turn of the century, women used their identity as mothers and homemakers to justify broad interventions into the public realm. In addition, by the beginning of the 20th century there emerged a growing commitment to equal educational opportunities for girls and boys which resulted in the standardization of public education. Finally, there have been wholesale changes in the organization of work and family -- the shift of women into the work place, the rise of single-headed families, changes in patterns of childbearing -- accompanied by shifts in traditional attitudes about the roles of men and women. Given these transformations in politics, education, work and the family, we would expect that the separate spheres ideology would have released its hold on American culture. Why then do women still read more fiction than men? On average, women read more in Victorian period because they had more free time to read.

Liberal bourgeois' leadership in socio-economic field gave way to portray women as leading characters. As authors are naturally affected by the circumstances and the era in which they live, they often draw from their experiences while writing and creating characters.

I.III Introduction to the Novels

In *Shirley* Caroline Helstone, the niece of the rector of Briarfield, Mr. Helstone, is in love with her cousin Robert Moore, whose mother is a Belgian and who has lately come to settle in England with his sister. He, however, does not fully reciprocate her feelings and is beset by troubles at his mill. He has been forced to fire many workers because of a law -necessitated by England's war with the forces of

Napoleon - prohibiting the export of goods to Europe, which has brought him close to bankruptcy. The workers, left without the means to provide for their families, riot and break the new machinery Moore is expecting.

Meanwhile, Shirley Keeldar, a rich heiress who owns an old mansion in the neighbourhood called Fieldhead and Moore's mill, comes to live in her family home. She becomes friends with Caroline and tries to help the community by doing charity work. Rioters attack the mill in their hundreds, but are finally warded off by Moore and some gentlemen of the neighbourhood with gunfire. Backed into a tight corner financially, and thinking she has feelings for him, Robert Moore proposes Shirley for marriage, and is vehemently rejected by her. He goes away to effect the arrest of the ringleaders of the riot. Feeling cut off from Robert and losing hope, Caroline falls dangerously ill. She regains some hope when she finds out that Shirley's governess, Mrs. Pryor, is in fact her mother, and is nursed back to health by her.

On his return to Yorkshire, Robert is shot and grievously wounded. Meanwhile, Shirley's uncle, Mr. Sympson, comes to stay at Fieldhead with his family and with his son's tutor, Louis Moore, Robert's brother. He wants her to make an advantageous match, but she and Louis Moore have secretly been in love for some time. Finally, Shirley has a big quarrel with her uncle on the subject of marriage, where she tells him that she has chosen Louis Moore, and her uncle leaves with his family subsequently. Afterwards, Shirley and Louis declare their love for one another and decide to get married. Robert, having found time to contemplate his mistakes while recuperating, and freed from his financial difficulties with the repeal of the law preventing trade, also proposes to Caroline. The two couples marry on the same day.

Shirley novel was published under her pseudonym Currer Bell in 1849. It never became as famous as *Jane Eyre*, and it is only quite recently that critics began

to appreciate the novel more, either examining it as a ‘condition-of-England novel,’ or reading it from a feminist perspective. With her sisters Emily and Anne and her brother Patrick Branwell, Charlotte Brontë spent her youth at Haworth, a lonely village in Yorkshire, where her father was vicar. The children were left to themselves very much and this isolation led to extensive reading. They started writing stories and poems at a very early age, and later Charlotte, Emily and Anne all published novels. What is particularly noteworthy about all of Charlotte Brontë’s work is the fierceness and passion with which she, as one of the first important women writers of English literature, demands the right of the woman to emotional and sexual independence. This tendency can be traced in *Jane Eyre*, but it is also present in *Shirley*.

Within *Shirley* this struggle is depicted through two main characters. The female protagonists of the novel are Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. Overall, the opposite traits of passionate feeling and excitement, of individual freedom and fulfilment, on the one side, and those of “self-transcending or self-denying duty and moral responsibility,” on the other, are distributed over two separate characters in this novel. Shirley Keeldar embodies hope, love, feeling, and high spirits, devotion to personal satisfaction and freedom, and total rejection of social conventionality. Caroline Helstone, on the other hand, conscientiously adheres to the rules belonging to her social role; she is the typical ‘Angel in the House.’ She tries to suppress her feelings, and represents endurance, moral and social duty and a sense of responsibility. Shirley, however, is not a dependent member of the family, a housekeeper, or a housewife. She is a wealthy heiress who owns her own house, the ancestral mansion usually reserved for the hero. And she clearly enjoys her status as “lord” of the manor as well as its ambiguous effect on her role in society. In general,

she is the rebel character in the story. However, it would really be going too far to call her a “monster”, since her looks and her behavior are both far from “monstrous.”

The Mill on the Floss is mainly the tale of Maggie and Tom Tulliver's lives. The two are brother and sister, the children of Mr. Tulliver, who owns Dorlcote Mill, and his wife, Mrs. Tulliver. As a miller, Mr. Tulliver wants Tom to have a good start in life and eventually assume an advantageous position in society, so he sends him to a private tutor. Maggie, meanwhile, stays at home. Mr. Tulliver, as he is in the habit of doing, opens a lawsuit against one of his neighbours, claiming that the neighbour's irrigation is causing loss of waterpower to his mill. When he loses the lawsuit, and learns that the mill has become the property of a man he hates - the opposing side's lawyer, Mr. Wakem - he suffers an attack and becomes incapacitated for a while. He is finally forced to accept operating the mill for Mr. Wakem in return for a salary, but declares his undying enmity for the man, and even has this recorded in the family Bible. Tom, who finds a job with the help of his uncle, also works to help his father reclaim the mill.

Meanwhile, Maggie decides to follow the path of self-denial after the misfortunes that befell their family. However she secretly furthers her friendship with Philip Wakem, Mr. Wakem's hunchback son whom she had first met as Tom's fellow-student. Tom learns of their meetings and forbids Maggie to see him again, because of the enmity between their families, also making her promise to stay away from him. Later, Mr. Tulliver attacks Mr. Wakem in a fit of anger and causes him to fall from his horse. He has a stroke immediately afterwards and dies within a few hours. When Maggie is invited by her cousin Lucy to a social gathering where Philip will also be present, she asks Tom to free her of her promise not to see him and Tom consents.

During her visits to Lucy's house, Maggie meets Stephen Guest, whom Lucy expects to marry. The two become attracted to one another, although Maggie considers herself engaged to Philip. One day, the two are left alone to go on a boat trip together, when both Lucy and Philip excuse themselves from coming. They go too far down the river to go back on the same day, and return to town by a different boat, where Stephen refers to her as his 'wife'. He pleads with her to marry him, telling her that their excursion will be considered an elopement and that people will expect them to marry. Maggie refuses because she thinks they would be wronging Lucy and Philip, and leaves Stephen. When word of their excursion and its not resulting in marriage spreads in the town, she is treated coldly and shunned by almost everyone, but most importantly by her brother. The only people who look on her kindly are her mother, Dr. Kenn and Bob Jakin, who takes her into her house. One night, while she sits thinking, she sees the flood waters entering Bob's house. She gets hold of one of the boats, and her first thought is to go to the mill to save her mother and brother. When she gets there, she finds only Tom. She takes him into the boat, but it capsizes when it hits a huge piece of machinery carried along by the flood. Brother and sister drown together.

The Mill on the Floss articulates the tension between circumstances and the spiritual energies of individual characters struggling against those circumstances. A certain determinism is at play throughout the novel, from Mr Tulliver's grossly imprudent inability to keep himself from "going to law", and thereby losing his patrimony and bankrupting his family, to the series of events which sets Maggie and Stephen down the river and past the point of no return. People such as Mr Tulliver are presented as unable to determine their own course rationally, and forces, be it the drift of the river or the force of a flood, are presented as determining the courses of people

for them. On the other hand, Maggie's ultimate choice not to marry Stephen, and to suffer both the privation of his love and the ignominy of their botched elopement demonstrates a final triumph of free will.

Furthermore, the novel, 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 to her community or break free from it, and the result, on more than one level, is tragedy.

This novel is revolutionary in the sense that it takes the stereotypical notion of the typical family and delves into the psychological nature of each character, illustrating that suffering from childhood lingers into adulthood and leaves traces. The painful events that occur during childhood, which are usually brushed off as unimportant or miniscule, in fact carries strong psychological relevance into late life.

Altogether, the both women (Shirley and Maggie) are involved in modes of behaviour and speech that can in some aspects be termed "feminist." In using the term, the period in which each novel was written needs to be kept in mind, as what was later called the feminist movement did not exist when those were written. Nor were social or legal conditions ripe for the envisioning of such women characters as modern feminists would like to see portrayed in literature.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many critics are of the opinion that the character of Shirley Keeldar was probably based on Emily Brontë. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also voice the same suggestion: “[...] in *Shirley* [Charlotte Brontë] is presumably depicting an Emily Brontë born under happier circumstances”(374).

The reasons for the adoption of a pseudonym also need some consideration. Given the male-dominated condition of the literary sphere and the world of publication in that period, this method can be seen as a means to an end. A means to be taken seriously, to be evaluated without bias and to put forward her own thoughts through the medium of the written word. Another critic Sonjeong Cho makes a similar claim:

Sharon Marcus stresses [...]. “The name Currer Bell enabled Brontë to materialize her professional self in abstract form, to put herself forward while simultaneously receding from view, a paradoxical strategy of self-promotion through self- effacement.” [...] As if emulating Brontë’s own painful self- effacement, her fictional heroines [...] are characteristically reserved [...]. (101-102)

Brontë herself states her own strong views on the matter and on the reception of *Shirley* in a letter to the critic G. H. Lewes:

I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. (*Brontë* 305)

As religious identity emerged as a significant category of cultural analysis at the very end of the twentieth century, scholars of the Brontës began to consider the relationship between the religious beliefs of the members of that highly theologically literate family and the novels that they wrote. Marianne Thormählen states: “The problematic curates with which *Shirley* opens, and who have puzzled many readers, do have one clear literary function, even if it is one that is not developed in the expected direction as the novel proceeds” (45). He furthers “*Shirley* was published at the end of a decade that saw the conclusion of the Tracts for the Times, the conversion of Newman to Rome, Kingsley's Christian Socialist solution to the problems of the nation, and an outpouring of religious fiction” (46). According to him, by focusing on the curates at the beginning, Brontë leads her readers to expect a religious novel, although their awareness that *Shirley* was a work by the author of *Jane Eyre*, as the title page announced, may have resulted in some confusion. The ironic manner with which Brontë's narrator treats practices and beliefs dear to the Oxford Movement makes it clear from the beginning that *Shirley* will not be a work of Tractarian fiction.

The biblical references to the Passion are appropriate for a novel in which each main character endures a more or less serious illness or injury, while the reference to the Passover meal typologically links England with Israel. Furthermore, the tone of slight irony toward Anglo-Catholics suggests that the narrator of *Shirley* is not to be identified with the beliefs of the Oxford Movement.

As George Eliot's readers have generally recognized, *The Mill on the Floss* is permeated by its author's memories of infancy and of childhood. By drawing on her memories, Eliot created a myth of loss which she retells in many versions throughout this novel. The critic Eva Fuchs opines:

In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot has badly damaged or else shadowed by the possibility of early separation. Mrs. Tulliver, the maternal figure who looms largest, is too cold and self-centered to nourish her children. [...]Whether because of illness or indifference, the mothers in the novel are for the most part remote from their children. (422)

Maggie and the characters with whom she has an affinity have been starved in their relationships with their mothers. As a result, they are unable to part from the persons who they first loved or from their childhood homes. Eliot describes these characters as crippled or immobilized.

Eliot's portrayal of the grisette is much more compelling than anything to be found in her works. The word *grisette* is a 19th century French slang for a working class woman much more conducive to physical intimacy than her middle class counterpart. One reason for its superiority is that Eliot provides, through the character of Maggie, the most wondrous portrayal of sexual passion in the nineteenth-century English novel. Eliot takes quite seriously the grisette she is determined to repulse; as a result, her Maggie is like Milton's Satan, a character who might lead a Romantic reader to infer that its author was secretly of the devil's party, in Maggie, the grisette's pleasure-seeking nature is allowed to be powerful, complex, and aesthetically significant. Its promise of happiness will be decisively broken, but it is not to be derided or dismissed. Daniel Cottom views:

In her sensibility, Maggie is art, and like all grisettes she develops her sense of love out of the commonplace stories of her culture, following this theme through its many variations. Therefore, in describing her first meeting with Stephen, Eliot says that Maggie was not really thinking of him or of his evident attraction to her but rather feeling the

half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries. (52)

Whereas the grisette thinks that nothing is too good for her, Maggie thinks nothing too bad. With her utter disdain for political economy, the grisette does not care whether her happiness is deserved, but Eliot does; and so Maggie must be mortified, systematically and comprehensively, until nature itself joins in to overwhelm the last pitiful remnants of her pride. Tom dies at the same time, and he is the male principle incarnate, so perfectly subject to political economy that even the uncle who employs him does not like to hear how miserably devoted he is to his work. Even though he and his sister are undivided in death, however, his demise is far from being equivalent to hers. He chose his burden and found pride and honor in it, whereas Maggie was driven by her desire and encountered nothing but shame.

Forest Pyles writes: "The divergence between imagination and sympathy is for George Eliot a persistent one. Reviewing the successes of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Eliot asserts that only the most successful works of literary art manage to "inform" "melody, fancy and imagination" (35). He further adds "what we may call its poetic body" with a "soul," with the "genuine thought and feeling" Eliot will identify consistently as "sympathy" (36). Sympathy is the imaginative impulse that, transcending the egotism and renouncing the desires of self, promises to bridge the epistemological and ethical gap between self and world. We find a story of this morphology in Philip Wakem's letter to Maggie near the end of *The Mill on the Floss*.

III. OPERATION VERSUS OPPRESSION: A STUDY OF FEMINISM

Women had been continued to be second-class citizens during Victorian period. Even though Mary Wollstonecraft had written the groundbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, stating that “women were unable to gain a prominent position in society because their upbringing did not allow them, nothing much had changed” (Adams 397). Women did not have the right to vote, and married women virtually did not exist in legal terms. Under British Common Law, they could not own property, have custody of their own children, make a will or seek for legal separation from their husbands except through some male relative like a brother or father. Before the law, married women were considered only an extension of their husbands. This comment of Sir William Blackstone in 1760 summarizes their legal condition and the precept known as *coverture*:

By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is the very being or legal existence of the women is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything: and is therefore called in our law-french a feme covert.

(qtd in Ingham, *Brontës* 54)

Women's position in the family and in the home was delineated by the ideas mentioned above, that she had authority over only domestic matters and doing household duties was what was expected of her. The notion of the “womanly woman” prevalent at this time indicated a woman who excelled at all tasks to be performed in the household such as cooking, sewing, baking, cleaning etc. She was expected to be a sort of “angel in the house”, supply all the domestic needs of the men in the family and also not to protest or assert herself but always be self-effacing and mild-

mannered. Any woman not fitting this description and code of behaviour, nor necessarily depending on whether she did anything morally objectionable or not, would at best be considered “unwomanly” or “unladylike”, at worst, depending on how grave her mistake was, “tainted” or “fallen”. What were termed as “conduct books”, expounding at length on how women should conduct themselves in society, and how to be the perfect housewife - cook the best meals, manage the household with the highest efficiency and so on – became widely circulated. *Shirley* provides several illustrations about the way society perceives women, both by the characters' behaviour and reactions and by their openly stated views. The rector, Mr. Helstone, for instance, provides the reader with some idea as to men's perceptions in particular. He sees women as inferior to men, as painted dolls to admire. He does not like them to be sensible, because then they would have to be taken seriously, treated as reasoning beings and equals.

This limiting view of women that was all but universally adopted, not only by men but by the large majority of women as well - as is shown by the authorship of the conduct books listed above - in time led to certain developments. Activism on the part of women was only in its beginning stages during most of the Victorian era -Marian Reid's work *A Plea For Women* written in 1843 and the formation of a Female Political Union were only the beginnings of a trend to take action to have better rights. Men also took initiative about the issue, for example John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women* and supported a women's petition which he submitted to the British parliament. It was only in 1882 that married women truly acquired the right to own their own property during marriage with the Married Women's Property Act. Feminism as an ideology was as yet unnamed but gaining momentum throughout the century. This being the case, realistic representations of women's underprivileged

situation in society and their response to it began to appear in novels, mostly written by women albeit sometimes under pseudonyms. Some of these works also formed a platform for the voicing of ideas about the ideal equality of men and women and the existing inequality in society. After the turn of the century, the suffragette movement –demanding women’s right to vote- made itself felt, and women became much more active in the political arena, organizing themselves, launching protests and trying to make their voice heard in general. Women were finally given the right to vote in 1918 with the Representation of the People Act.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “feminism” was first coined by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, in 1872, however, it originated as a opus, *The Second Sex*, in 1949, and it gained impetus in 1960s. When Beauvoir wrote, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as whole that produces this creature [...] (295), she started a debate that would boost feminist thinking for the next fifty years or more. Even earlier, the problem of inequality between the sexes was highlighted by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and by Olive Schreiner in *Women and Labour* (1911). While Virginia Woolf examined the problems of women writers in her radical essay “A Room of One’s Own” (1929).

Thus, there was a growing awareness of women’s inequality and subjugation. But, it would be wrong to conclude that only women’s writing voiced these protests. As early as 1869, J. S. Mill wrote about the problems of women’s inequality in society, and pointed out: “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions [...] (22). Since

then, “feminism” has been interpreted in numerous shades of meaning, reminding us of the classical onion peel image. This term is not a homogeneous, singular concept, but it is rather a multifaceted, multidimensional and diverse grouping of heterogeneous ideas that are often contradictory to each other. In Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*. She writes:

What more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its and is now obsolete ? The word 'feminist' is the word indicated. That word according to the dictionary, means 'one who champions the rights of women'. Since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning. (117)

Woolf goes on to describe a symbolic burning of the "dead" and "corrupt" word. She declares that once this has been done the air is cleared, and that we can see men and women working together for the same cause. Also, Woolf argues that the word feminist was one which was applied to those fighting "the tyranny of the patriarchal state [. . .] to their resentment" (*Three Guineas* 117). Obviously, the word was imposed on rather than chosen by women fighting for the rights of women. Luce Irigaray's objection to the word in 1982 interview was that feminist "is the word by which the social system designates the struggle of women [. . .] I prefer to say the struggles of women, which reveals a plural and polymorphous character" (Todd 233). But, however diverse the ideas may be, all are concerned with women's inferior position in society and the discrimination faced by them because of the social, economic, political or cultural order. Such arguments have not been successful in burying the word in question. However, to a very large extent, women and men

fighting for women's right have been happy to call themselves, and be called, feminists. But doubts of the term have remained such doubts are probably more testimony to the health of women's movement than the opposite, however. As the movement expands and develops, discussion about such a key descriptive term inevitably takes on a political character. Different interest groupings engage in struggle to impose their own meaning on any term which has become a very important rallying point.

In an attempt to categorize the evolution of feminist movements through different phases, critics have talked about the emergence of feminist movements at different periods, as a series of “waves.” first-wave feminism is used to refer to the movement which emerged in the late 19th century and the early 20th century, more concerned with gaining equal rights for women, particularly the right of suffrage. Jane Addam, Sojourner Truth, Frances Wright, and Virginia Woolf were some of the well-known feminists who belonged to this first wave. Second-wave feminism refers to the revival of feminist activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, when protests centered again on the same issue of women’s inequality. It lasted till the 1980s, has continued to exist since that time, and is both a continuation of the second-wave feminism and a reaction against the failures of the former movement. While Simone de Beauvoir, Oprah Winfrey, Angela Davis, Susan Faludi, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Kate Millet added new dimensions to the second-wave feminist movement, Judith Butler, Margaret Atwood and Bell Hooks were the more prominent figures belonging to the third school.

This classification, though useful, may lead to the false impression that outside these three waves, there has been no feminist activity. The endeavour to bring a whole

series of different theories and actions under a general description of first wave, second wave or third wave, may act to camouflage the diversity of feminist thought that has existed both intra and inter waves. Though initially most feminist movements and theories had leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America, there was a change in the perspective and attitude in the later phase. Since Sojourner Truth's speech to American feminists in 1851, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms, which have given birth to, among others, "Post-colonial" and "Third World" feminisms.

The emergence of several diversified forms of feminism- Marxist and Socialist feminisms, Radical feminism, Liberal feminism, French feminism, Black feminism and Womanism, Multiracial feminism, Individualist feminism, Post-structural and Post-modern feminism, Ecofeminism, etc. – encompasses so many aspects, that even the use of the term in a plural sense fails to do justice. Its use as a plural is rather a conceptual approach – still ambivalent and rather slippery. Despite the many differences of opinion and disagreements within these feminisms, they all have important targets which are highly relevant to contemporary society, even in this era of post-feminism. To quote Radha Chakravorty, "Within this widely divergent field, certain discourses of the body [...] provide spaces where many strands of feminism intersect" (33).

Feminism holds different meanings and connotations to different persons. Like Woolf, Rebecca West, British author and critic, says: "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is – I only know that other people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or prostitute (219).

Primarily, feminism asks why women have played second fiddle to men in human societies. It also studies the male-dominated cannon in order to understand how men used culture to further their domination over women. Thus, a feminist perspective would enable both the critics and the readers to provide an understanding of the sexist ideology in the text under study. We may best summarize the basic tenets of this movement by quoting Maggie Humm:

Feminism incorporates diverse ideas which share three major perceptions: that gender is a social construction which oppresses women more than men; that patriarchy shapes this construction; and that women's experiential knowledge is a basis for a future non-sexist society. These assumptions inform feminism's double agenda: the task of critique (attacking gender stereotypes) and the task of construction. Without this second task (sometimes called feminist praxis) feminism has no goal. (194)

The western cultural tradition too, has assured the perpetration of male rule. From time immemorial, woman has been chained with the concepts of softness, sympathy, beauty, and sacrifice. This entrapment has limited her pitifully. In all patriarchal societies, man is the creator, she the created; man the maker, she the made. If man's creative urge fails, her existence ceases to be. In all traditions, irrespective of religion, country, race and the period in which they live, women have always been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking. Whereas, to Aquinas, the Roman Catholic, woman is an imperfect man and a "mis-begotten male", Nietzsche, the German philosopher, proclaimed that woman is the source of all folly and unreason. Even as learned a psychologist as Freud proposes the concept of woman's envy of the

private parts of man. Otto Jespersen, the well-known Danish Grammarian, goes even a step further and argues that there is a danger of the language becoming sluggish, uninteresting and dull, if we were to content ourselves with woman's expressions.

1960s saw the emergence of feminist group which advocated women's liberation and socio-political union. They fought for women's right to vote and to receive education. This movement coincides with the goals of other reform movements of the time, which included improved medical care, socialized property ownership, and class equality.

Hence, feminist theories try to explore women's personal as well as common experiences of suffering, exploitation, oppression and their struggle for independence and liberation. Feminism tries to discover all forms of violence, abuses and oppression against women of all different socio-political context. Furthermore, the theory tries to find out the causes and consequences of the crises and provides favorable strategies for women's liberation. Despite, the served dimension and diversities, the autonomous movement of 1960s emphasized on the common goals of women's emancipation.

In the late 1980s the most developed form of the feminism, called "The Gender Theory", emerged and was applied to the study of sexual differences. It views that writings by men also can be feminist and our perception of gender does not go far from feminist theory. Feminist criticism is an analysis of gender and opens the textual field in discourse. Gender theory promises to introduce the subject of masculinity into feminist criticism. The distinction from traditional feminism is that it tries to bring some theorists, critics and scholars into feminist criticism. Another aspect of gender study is that it brings feminist criticism from margin to the center in literary analysis.

The overall view is that female literature is to free from women particularly from patriarchal society. Feminists are of the opinion that only a feminist struggle will change relations between men and women on issues such as sexuality violence and different cultural policies of dress. Hence, feminism explores female identity and role under the circumstances of hegemonic discourses of patriarchy. To raise voice of equality and freedom, a feminist thinker should unite in a broad network of feminist movement.

The term "patriarchy" has been used to point both to the actual exercise of power and also the ideological system—the ideas and attitudes. It is used to bolster, justify and protect this power. Patriarchy thus has political, economic, social and ideological dimensions. Much recent feminist literary criticism has aimed to uncover patriarchal ideas in works of literature as well as in the systems surrounding these works. For instance, education, publishing, journalism, reviewing, and the general systems of literary production are specific to different cultures and societies.

Some argue that patriarchy is based primarily upon male violence and of women's sexuality. So, we can say that domestic violence and the sexual abuse of both women and children within the home is seen as the cutting edge of the patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and the most aggressive form. In her book *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir States:

As a matter of fact, the privileged position of men comes from the integration at his biologically aggressive role with his social function as leader or master; it is an account of this social function that the psychological differences take on all their significance. Because man is ruler in the world, he holds that the violence of his desires in a sign of

his sovereignty; a man of great erotic capacity is said to be strong, potent-epithets-that employee activity and transcendence. But, as warm and frigid, which is to say that she will never manifest other than passive qualities. (397)

Patriarchal society gives all power to the male and weaknesses to the female. In a patriarchal social structure, men are taken as rational, active and superior beings where as women are regarded as inferior, passive and kind. Such type of discrimination compelled women to accept sexual abuses ad harassment as natural without any objection. The society depicted in *The Mill on the Floss* also has norms of its own, which it expects all of its members to comply with. The central character Maggie grows up often frustrated by these standards. She feels that they are unjust, but there is usually very little she can do to change things. One social norm that Maggie becomes acquainted with very early on is about education. Boys, as they are expected to be involved in business and public matters when they grow up, are given a comprehensive education. Girls, on the other hand, are not provided with such an opportunity. They receive only a perfunctory education, which Eliot calls “shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history” (293), for a much shorter period of time. It is also worth noting that the narrator's words here show Eliot's own awareness of the issue. Boys are even taught Latin, which does not have much immediate practical use for them other than giving them a literary background, because it is the tradition.

But today, the situation has changed. Women have become conscious of their secondary position and have began to question against it. Thus, feminism is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of women to be taken as second class citizens.

Adrienne Rich as a critic has poured her views on feminism abundantly, especially on patriarchy. In her prose work, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Rich writes of her ambivalent feelings towards a women's role and power in a patriarchal culture. The emotional burden of full-time motherhood and wifely duties cause tremendous strain to her. She began to realize that being a traditional female human being is the curse upon her imaginative expansion. In her early career she was confused about her position in the world or "marriage and motherhood, experiences which were supposed to be truly womanly, often left [her] feeling unfit, disempowered, adrift" (*Blood* 175). Later she realized that she would have to reject the so-called patriarchal idea that a poem's text and a poet's everyday life were mutually exclusive. She also wanted readers to look beyond innovation and artistry in her poetry and recognize her struggles to connect with problems associated with her sex. Regarding the limited role of mother and their effect on their daughters, Rich writes: "It is the mother through whom patriarchy teaches the small female, her proper expectation [. . .]. A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman [. . .]" (*Of Women Born* 243-44). Rich believes that a daughter can feel rage at her mother's powerlessness. It is not simply that such mother's feeling both responsible and powerless. It is they that carry their own guilt and self hatred over into their daughters' experiences. Few women growing up in patriarchal society can feel mothered enough, the power of our mothers, whatever their love for us and their struggles on our behalf, is too restricted. The life of a daughter, wife mother and poet was immensely suppressed by patriarchy. Rich chooses male identification to signify her determination to take risks in an attempt to resolve the conflict between her two

selves. It was difficult for a woman to escape the fact that poet was a masculine noun in the fifties and sixties. Rich intends to discard the external "feminine" self and free from her well-constructed world. Rich's involvement in the independent women's movement of the late sixties through her poetry, prose, and lectures helped her shape a feminist theory based on "female experience, and remain connected to a radical imagining of social transformation" (*Blood IX*).

The word "power" is highly charged for women. It has been long associated for them with force, rape, stockpiling of weapons, ruthless accrual of wealth, and the hoarding of resources. The power acts only in its own interest despising and exploiting the powerless including women and children. The effect of this kind of power is all around them. Literally, the effects are in the water they drink and the air they breathe, in the form of carcinogens and radioactive waters. But, for a long time, feminists have been talking about redefining power. An early objection to feminism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was that it would make women behave like men ruthlessly, exploitatively, and oppressively.

Feminists object that this philosophical consolidation of the preeminence of the masculine over the feminine rests on untenable assumptions about the transparency of the self, the immunity of the self to noxious social influences, and the reliability of reason as a corrective to distorted moral judgment. Today, people grow up in social environments in which "culturally normative prejudice persists, even in communities where overt forms of bigotry are strictly proscribed" (Meyers 224). Although official cultural norms uphold the values of equality and tolerance, cultures continue to transmit camouflaged messages of the inferiority of historically subordinated social groups through stereotypes and other imagery. These deeply

“ingrained schemas commonly structure attitudes, [...] perception, and judgment despite the individual’s conscious good will” (Valian 132). As a result, people often” consider themselves “objective and fair, and yet they systematically discriminate against “different” others while favoring members of their own social group” (Young 190). “[F]ortified by culture and ensconced in the unconscious, such prejudice cannot be dispelled through rational reflection alone” (Meyers 34).

These oversights necessitate reconceptualizing the self in two respects. To account for the residual potency of this form of prejudice, feminists urge, the self must be understood as socially situated and murkily heterogeneous. To account for the self’s ability to discern and resist culturally normative prejudice, the moral subject must not be reduced to the capacity for reason.

A tension within feminism complicates the project of reclaiming women’s selfhood, however. The claim that women are systematically subordinated and that this subordination has a grievous impact on women’s lives is central to feminism. Yet, this key insight seems to belie the claim that women’s selfhood and agency have been overlooked. To be unjustly subordinated, it would seem, is to be diminished in one’s selfhood and to have one’s agency curtailed.

Some rays of feminism can be found even in 18th century. The exemplary figures of non-conformist characters are Shirley in *Shirley* and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*. Both of them tried to challenge the prevalent social norms, perceptions about women and morals from their unconventional attitudes. The first important characteristic that should be mentioned from *Shirley* is that Shirley has a man’s name, because her parents had wanted a son but only had one daughter. At the time, Shirley was a common masculine name, after the publication and circulation of the book, it became a popular name for women. Her masculine characters can be traced in her activities. For

example, the fact that she whistles, owns pistols and knows how to use them are some aspects of her lifestyle that can be termed masculine. Because she owns a mill, she also has an interest in commercial matters, which are generally deemed to be a man's realm, and conducts business.

Likewise, in *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie's overall character may give an idea as to why she goes against social norms and disagrees with perceptions about women, what guides her actions and why she fails. From childhood, Maggie is not what is expected of a girl her age: she is tomboyish, always getting her pinafore dirty by romping about outdoors, she cannot tolerate the procedure of having her hair curled and her mother cannot keep her in bonnets. In short, she does not fit into the confines that define what a 'proper' little girl should be. Her physical aspects – having unruly hair, her skin being darker in color than the Dodsons – meet with her aunts' disapproval, as well as her wayward behavior.

IV. UNCONVENTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SHIRLEY AND MAGGIE: A CHALLENGE TO PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

IV.I Social Norms

Shirley:

The characters' interactions or their conversations are the main reference points for understanding what is considered the social norm in the world of *Shirley*. In addition, the narrator's comments sometimes amount to social critique. The narrator in *Shirley* at one point makes some general observations about English country ladies, stating that beyond merely conforming to social norms, they themselves are the norm, the representation of all that should be considered proper: "In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. Whether young or old, pretty or plain, dull or sprightly, they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features" (111). These features can be seen in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice - therein they are wrong.' Shirley Keeldar is in a number of respects the complete opposite of what these ladies are, and rejects society's norms on many issues, as will be shown here, therefore making her automatically wrong from their points of view.

The generally accepted view in society that clergymen (figures of authority in the community) should always be treated with respect is flaunted by Shirley on one occasion in the chapter entitled "Mr. Donne's Exodus." When the curate Mr. Donne, who is not described in her novel as having a very amiable character, comes to Fieldhead for a visit and begins to openly denigrate Yorkshire and its people in her company, Shirley becomes incensed. As she has been born and bred in Yorkshire, like generations of her ancestors, she feels very strongly on the subject and turns the curate Mr. Donne out of her house. This, besides going against established behaviour to be shown to clergyman, would be deemed unladylike by normal standards.

The social norms according to which a young woman is expected to make her preferences about who to marry are to be mentioned while analyzing *Shirley*. Shirley obviously goes against social standards when she refers to herself as a man. Mrs. Pryor rebukes her for doing so, intimating that affecting masculine manners is considered wrong and is something to be avoided:

If she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. (211)

This declaration she made to Mrs. Pryor, who received it very quietly, as she did most of her pupil's off-hand speeches, responding – “My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed: it is a strange one. Those who do not know you, hearing you speak thus, would think you affected masculine manners” (211). The remarks of Joe Scott, one of Robert Moore's workers, to Caroline and Shirley, prove that the working class adopts the same social norms as others regarding women. According to him, they have not the right to form their own opinions, but even in thought should be led by men, as if they have no capacity to think for themselves: “Women may exercise [private judgment] as well as men? 'Nay: women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them” (338). After, he makes his views known, both Shirley and Caroline react indignantly, saying he should be ashamed. Clearly, they are against such norms as he is advocating.

Also, Shirley is expected to refer to her uncle and have his approval when choosing a husband, although legally she is under no constraints to do so, as she has come of age. Shirley's uncle, Mr. Sympson, comes to Fieldhead with his family,

determined to marry her off to advantage – that is to someone of high financial status and good social standing. When she talks of marrying for love, and belittles her suitor Mr. Wynne, whom she has refused, he calls her language “unladylike” and herself “unwomanly” (481), thereby indicating what he -and society in general – considers ladylike and womanly – to accept someone he sees fit, without further consideration about her happiness.

The majority of the chapter called 'Uncle and Niece' consists of their conversation on the subject of marriage. He keeps insisting on learning whom she intends to marry, if she intends to marry at all, because he suspects that she has rejected a fifth proposal, from Sir Philip Nunnely, a baronet. Shirley, however, is determined to choose for herself in terms of marriage and to claim her right to decide what to do with her own life:

'What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?'

'In what respect?'

'In respect of matrimony.'

'To be quiet - and to do just as I please.'

'Just as you please! The words are to the last degree

indecorous.' (563)

When he asks about the sort of man she would choose for a husband, she makes her preference clear, she cannot live with a man who would dictate to her: “A tyrant would not hold me for a day - not for an hour. I would rebel - break from him - defy him” (565).

She jests with him for quite a while, telling him she was once in love with Socrates and other ancient philosophers, and that she is currently in love with Lord Wellington. She also tells him plain and simple “I disdain your dictatorship” (569).

During this conversation, she uses phrases men use to belittle women, in a kind of retaliation, and her manner of speech finally makes him ask if she's a lady: "What do you mean? There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil - improper influence! What old woman's cackle is that?' 'Are you a young lady?' 'I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated'" (569).

Her words here show her demand for respect, as an independent and honest woman, and a person who can form her own opinions and act on them. The fact that her uncle says she acknowledges "no rules – no limitations" (569) affirms that she is going against social norms, which can be defined as the rules and limitations imposed on her by society. At the end of their conversation, Mr. Sympson says to Shirley's face, referring to her in third person "She's not proper." (572). In the scene where she and Louis confess their love for each other, she also breaks with convention by being the first one to put into words a marriage proposal, as one critic argues:

Shirley herself, in a display of female power, expresses the traditional, directly declared marriage proposal, which Louis had skirted by simply calling her his wife, and she sets the rules for Louis's and her marriage. While she does not ask that he take all of the 'cares and duties of property' from her, which she had escaped briefly once before, she does ask him to 'share the burden' and be her 'companion through life', 'guide' where ignorant, 'master' where faulty, and 'friend always' (580).

Louis must, therefore, answer her and agrees to Shirley's proposal of marriage.

Shirley's ability to declare the marriage proposal and define the rules of their marriage displays female power. But at the same time, Shirley does not demand that Louis act submissively to her.

Maggie

As in the previous novel, the society depicted in *The Mill on the Floss* also has norms of its own, which it expects all of its members to comply with. Maggie's frustration gets heightened often by these standards. She is aware about this unjust, however, she has no capacity to correct it. Inequality in educational system is that social norm which affects Maggie's psyche very badly. Grown up boys are expected to be involved in business and public affairs so they are given a comprehensive education, but girls are deprived of it. However, Maggie shows she is better at understanding Latin than Tom, when she helps him with his homework. She is also intensely aware of the unequal opportunities presented to herself and to her brother, as can be understood from her musings: If she had been taught "real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew" she thought she "should have held the secret of life; if [she] had only books, that [she] might learn for [herself] what wise men knew!" (291). She knows that her potential is cast aside by lack of education, that she could have become whatever it was in her to become if she had acquired more learning. Her personal perspective and society's notions of proper behavior do not agree with one another. She continues to act independently and to educate herself. She is unable to reconcile approved behaviour with her intellectual and emotional insights.

However, any further education for girls is considered superfluous by accepted norms, as they will not have any need for it in what they are ultimately meant by society to become: wives and mothers. What they are supposed to learn, instead, is how to be a good housewife, how to do household tasks like cooking, cleaning and so on. Sewing is one of these tasks which Maggie does not like. She calls patchwork "foolish work" when she is only nine, in the second chapter of the novel.

Later, when her family is placed in a difficult financial position by her father's bankruptcy, she only does it for economic support to her family and sees it as self-mortification. She is clearly not comfortable with the tasks she is expected to fulfill, which are meant as preparation to equip her for her future role. The outward appearance, as well as the behaviour of girls is judged according to certain norms. Girls are supposed to look pretty, be clean, wear bonnets and be obedient – like Maggie's cousin Lucy - neither of which Maggie has much intention of doing. She cuts her own hair.

People always comment on how it will not stay smooth. Her mother's sister, Aunt Glegg, reproaches her severely for what she has done: "Die, for shame!" said aunt Glegg, in her loudest, severest tone of reproof. "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread and water,--not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles." (65) Mrs. Glegg's comments make it clear that doing such a thing against norms should bring with it not only the consequence of reprimand, but also that of severe punishment – too severe for a child. This makes norms more like a kind of unwritten law, where the punishments for various kinds of crimes are predetermined by general consensus. Girls are also not expected to speak their minds on important matters, but to keep silent and follow men's judgement. When Maggie goes against this convention and upbraids her aunts and uncles for being unwilling to help her father, Tom says she should be guided by him:

"But it's always the same, Maggie," said Tom, with the little frown he put on when he was about to be justifiably severe. "You're always setting yourself up above me and every one else, and I've wanted to tell you about it several times. You ought not to have spoken as you did to my uncles and aunts; you should leave it to me to take care of my

mother and you, and not put yourself forward. You think you know better than any one, but you're almost always wrong. I can judge much better than you can." (237)

Maggie tells her mother and Tom that they should not find fault with her father when he loses the mill, and again she tells her father not to have his enmity recorded in the family Bible. She is clearly for speaking her own mind on matters, and telling people what to do if she considers them to be doing wrong. Maggie is also cognizant of the restrictions that social norms place upon her as a woman and her powerlessness due to those restrictions, however there is not much that she can do to remedy this in practice, except maybe to defy Tom. Being unable to find gainful employment is one of the limitations imposed by norms. When Tom implies that he shows his affection for his father by working to pay his debts, instead of going against his wishes by meeting with Philip Wakem, she states that she will not submit to him because she cannot work, or because he is her brother. She does not recognize either of those qualifications as warranting her obedience:

'I have a different way of showing my affection.'" "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world."

"Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can." "So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right. I will submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit to it from you. You boast of your virtues as if they purchased you a right to be cruel and unmanly, as you've been to-day. Don't suppose I would give up Philip Wakem in obedience to you. The deformity you insult would make me cling to him and care for him the more.'" (355)

Later, when Maggie asks Tom to release her from her promise not to see Philip again, Tom makes a similar claim that his doing business in the world outside and being more 'worldly-wise' than his sister gives him the authority to judge what is good or bad for her in her stead:

‘Yet you might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you.’ (401-2)

Having first been incapacitated by society - and men as part of that society - through limitations, women are rendered ineffective and of secondary importance.

The narrator of the novel also comments on how in certain instances, like Maggie and Stephen's assumed elopement, public opinion, which is the force that determines social standards, is always female:

Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender,--not the world, but the world's wife; and she would have seen that two handsome young people--the gentleman of quite the first family in St. Ogg's--having found themselves in a false position, had been led into a course which, to say the least of it, was highly injudicious, and productive of sad pain and disappointment, especially to that sweet young thing, Miss Deane. (502)

This “world’s wife” is in a way the conceptualized form of the English country ladies that Charlotte Brontë's narrator in *Shirley* described. She sees anything differing at all from herself and her values, her standards as wrong, even fallen as in Maggie's case. Maggie tries to resist the false public opinion in St. Ogg's against her, to hold on to a

place in the community by finding a means to live, but she fails. This public opinion is also heavily judgmental, as indicated by the chapter title 'St. Ogg's Passes Judgement'. It reaches verdicts on what she *should* have done: "Why did not Miss Tulliver accept the shelter offered her by her aunt Glegg? It did not become a girl like her to refuse it." (518-19), and again on what sort of character she *must* have: "She must be very bold and hardened to wish to stay in a parish where she was so much stared at and whispered about." (519).

IV.II Perceptions about Women

Shirley:

Shirley provides several illustrations about the way society perceives women, both by the characters' behaviour and reactions and by their openly stated views. The rector, Mr. Helstone, for instance, provides the reader with some idea as to men's perceptions in particular. He sees women as inferior to men, as painted dolls to admire. He does not like them to be sensible, because then they would have to be taken seriously, treated as reasoning beings and equals. The narrator of the novel describes his ideas:

At heart [Helstone] could not abide sense in women. He liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible, because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be - inferior, toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour, and to be thrown away. (118)

His low opinion of women is proved by the way he treats his wife, Mary Cave: He marries her, then completely ignores her – 'throws her away' - disregarding her needs and feelings, and watches as she pines away in despair then dies. He does not even understand why she dies. Shirley's actions and words are of course opposed to such a

perception, as she does talk sensibly and logically, and does not stand in a corner like a doll but does as she pleases.

The image of the mermaid, a mythical, mysterious and dangerous female figure of fable, is the subject of a conversation between Caroline and Shirley, where Shirley displays her knowledge of false perceptions in society about women. She states that some men see all women, without exception, as temptresses, terrors and monsters, like the mermaid: “But, Shirley, she is not like us: ‘we are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters.’ ‘Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to ‘woman,’ in general, such attributes” (250).

The words she chooses, such as “it is said”, show that Shirley herself is opposed to this idea and thinks it false. The perception is linked to the notion of the fallen woman mentioned in the very introduction of the novel. Because of those notions the society forces on men, they see woman as either an angelic figure or a demon, with no middle ground between the two.

Shirley, as an intelligent woman, observes men's treatment of women and recognizes the perceptions that underlie it. When Robert Moore does not inform her of the attack on the mill, even though she owns it, she remarks that men tell women nothing and keeping them completely in the dark about subjects which involve danger. She comes to the conclusion that they perceive women to have as much capacity for thought as children, and clearly states that she thinks this wrong:

And this is the way men deal with women; still concealing danger from them: thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were to-night: we know they little conjectured where we were. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake [...]. (360)

Her sarcastic language suggests that she also resents this situation. By being kept in the dark, she is kept from knowledge of danger like any other woman. In the same speech, she goes on to point out the angel – demon distinction in men's minds mentioned earlier, and criticizes the “ideal” heroines created by male authors, the false results of their false perceptions:

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. (360)

As she claims that she would be stoned to death if she criticized those, heroines, she knows that in this case men's perceptions are in fact the perceptions of society in general, as they could move a whole crowd and not just men to punish her for having such opinions.

Shirley is a large difference between her and traditional perceptions about what a woman is supposed to be. By her authenticity, inner independence and originality Shirley is distinctly removed from the traditional idea of woman.

Maggie:

There is plenty of evidence in *The Mill on the Floss* about how society in general and men in particular perceive women, in the characters' stated views on the subject. Maggie's character and behaviour, as with the previous women characters in this study is often at variance with these perceptions. Mr. Tulliver and Mr. Wakem, the lawyer, provide good illustrations as to how men see women. Being a farmer as well as a miller, Mr. Tulliver draws his parallel from among farm animals when talking about Maggie: "The little un takes after my side, now: she's twice as 'cute as

Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid," (8) continued Mr. Tulliver, turning his head dubiously first on one side and then on the other. "It's no mischief much while she's a little un; but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep, -- she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." (8) He apparently sees women as comparable to sheep to be sold, as a sort of possession. The fact that he makes this comparison about his daughter gives an indication to her worth in his eyes. He also thinks that women should not be too intelligent: "A woman's no business [...] being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt" (13).

The lawyer, Mr. Wakem, is more educated than Mr. Tulliver. However, this does not stop him from entertaining a low opinion of women. He also sees women as a kind of property or commodity, and their closest male relatives as being their owners. This can be understood plainly from his words to his son Philip, when Philip states that he wants to marry Maggie: "We don't ask what a woman does; we ask whom she belongs to. It's altogether a degrading thing to you, to think of marrying old Tulliver's daughter." (436) Mr. Glegg's – Aunt Glegg's husband's- views on the subject, as reported by the narrator, are somewhat better than those of the previous two. He relies more on religion and on the account given in Genesis of woman's creation. He thinks women are creatures made out of a man's rib, have "contrary" natures and that their chief duties consist of doing household work – making pastry, rolling napkins and so on. Similarly, his second subject of meditation was the "contrairiness" of the female mind, as typically exhibited in Mrs. Glegg. It struck him as a pitiable irregularity in other women if they did not roll up their table-napkins with the same tightness and emphasis as Mrs. Glegg did, if their pastry had a less leathery consistence, and their damson cheese a less venerable hardness than hers.

Nay, even the peculiar combination of grocery and druglike odors in Mrs. Glegg's private cupboard impressed him as the only "right thing in the way of cupboard smells" (122). In answer to a question of Tom's, the verdict of his tutor, Mr. Stelling, about women's intelligence is that their understanding is superficial, although prompt. He claims that they could never study or work at anything in depth:

"Mr. Stelling," [Maggie] said, that same evening when they were in the drawing-room, "couldn't I do Euclid, and all Tom's lessons, if you were to teach me instead of him?" "No, you couldn't," said Tom, indignantly. "Girls can't do Euclid; can they, sir?" "They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say," said Mr. Stelling. "They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow." (150)

When Tom makes fun of her on this subject later, she feels dejected, as if Mr. Stelling's pronunciation has doomed her in some way. Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie, behind Mr. Stelling's chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called "quick" all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom. "Ha, ha! Miss Maggie!" said Tom, when they were alone; "you see it's not such a fine thing to be quick. You'll never go far into anything, you know" (151).

Also, Maggie was so oppressed by the dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort. Maggie is faced with a "destiny" that is essentially created by preconceived ideas like Mr. Stelling's, the basis for which is questionable. Although she does not like to accept this view, there is really no avenue open to her in which she can prove otherwise. Tom claims it will likely make her a conceitful person and

an object of hate: "Well, *you'll* be a woman some day," said Tom, "so you needn't talk." "But I shall be a *clever* woman," said Maggie with a toss. "Oh, I dare say, and a nasty, conceited thing. Everybody'll hate you" (147). As demonstrated by Mr. Glegg's thoughts on women and on his wife, which were touched on earlier, Mrs. Glegg sets her standards of being a woman by how well her housekeeping is. The same is true of her sister, Mrs. Tulliver: Mrs. Tulliver's view of the whole duty of women befits a Dodson sister. It is to make beautiful elderflower wine. This demonstrates how women's perceptions of themselves are determined by what they have been taught from an early age about women's duties and place in society.

IV.III Morals

Shirley:

On the subject of morals, Shirley has her own brand of morality which, it can be argued, has distinctly feminine elements. This is also detectable in her unorthodox religious views, which are a mixture of Christianity and the paganism of Greek mythology. These views concerning creation and woman form a basis for her moral values. She has a unique conception of the first woman, different from the one that is often used to disparage women, which shows Eve as the cause of Adam's damnation, as the first one to be deceived and as the one who leads him to sin as well. Likewise, she has a feeling of sisterhood with other women, which keeps her from doing anything that she would consider an injustice or insult to them.

Shirley reveals her own version of Eve or nature in a conversation with Caroline. She begins by criticizing Milton's characterization of Eve – she claims he made him too ordinary and simple a woman, based on the women around him. According to her, the first woman to be created is a more potent and extraordinary being than Milton would have one believe, a Titan:

'Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not.'

You are bold to say so, Shirley.'

'Not more bold than faithful. It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, [...] 'I would beg to remind him that the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother: from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus' ---- 'Pagan that you are! what does that signify?' 'I say, there were giants on the earth in those days: giants that strove to scale heaven. (328-29)

What Shirley is doing in this conversation with Caroline is essentially rewriting the book of Genesis according to her own vision. The Eve she describes here, considering her statements that she gave birth to Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus and Prometheus, corresponds to the Titan Gaia in Greek mythology. Gaia is one of the very first Titans, and is a sort of earth-mother figure, who gives birth to the various elements of nature, like the oceans and the sun. Shirley's Eve appears to be Gaia in everything but name. She is a life-giving, immortal force, not a mortal woman prone to deception, whose existence is secondary to that of the man's, being made out of his rib. Her existence precedes all other life and nourishes it. At the end of her speech Shirley identifies this Eve with Mother Nature.

Shirley's feeling of sisterhood with women and the moral obligations places her under become apparent when she refuses Robert Moore. She knows that if one woman were to purposefully try to ensnare a husband by using her charms and devious maneuvers, she and all her sex would be denigrated by men as artful and conniving. Thus, out of that feeling of sisterhood, she refrains from any action that would wrong other women in this way by degrading them. "You conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman's feelings," was her answer: "you have announced it in a

fashion revolting to a woman's soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manoeuvre to ensnare a husband: you imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand, because I have courted you” (548). That is to say, that she is a traitor to all her sisters. She further opines “I have acted as no woman can act, without degrading herself and her sex: that I have sought where the incorrupt of my kind naturally scorn and abhor to seek” (549).

During their quarrel about marriage, Shirley also compares her religious views and morals with her uncle's. It is obvious that they clash. Using scathing language, she emphasizes her uncle's worldliness and mercenary attitude— she states that he has made the world his God. As evidenced by his opinions about her suitors and her matrimony, he views marriage as a sort of financial contract, or business venture. There is no consideration for love in the way he conceives marriage, only for personal interests and worldly values like wealth. She, however, rejects his morals - she is true to her conscience, herself not to interests, appearances or financial power:

'Mr. Simpson . . . I am sick at heart with all this weak trash: I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. [...] (571)

After this conversation, her uncle decides she must not associate with his daughters lest she infect them with what from his point of view are her “loose” morals. She has become a fallen or “tainted” woman in his eyes. As the scene with her uncle shows, Shirley is guided by her own convictions about morality, and refers to no one else as the expert who can inform her about what is moral and what is not.

Maggie:

Morals are another matter in which Maggie's and society's perspective often disagree. Maggie has her own innate sense of morality, which is later influenced by her reading of Thomas a Kempis. She is for having pity and compassion for one's fellow mortals when they do wrong, and being aware of one's own faults, not just congratulating oneself on one's virtues. She makes her opinions known when she is talking about Tom's hardness and desire to punish her, after he discovers her and Philip's meetings :

"I don't want to defend myself" said Maggie, still with vehemence; "I know I've been wrong,--often, continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them. If you were in fault ever, if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you; I should not want punishment to be heaped on you. (354)

Her boat ride with Stephen and its consequences is another point on which Maggie stands by her own judgement of right and wrong. According to the morals of the town of St. Ogg's, a young woman cannot go on a trip with a gentleman that lasts till the morning, and not be considered as having eloped. Such a situation necessitates immediate marriage, failing which the young lady's reputation becomes compromised. She is deemed to be morally in grave error. Maggie had returned without a trousseau, without a husband. In that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that "Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated" (503) kind.

Maggie, however, does not consent to do as the community's morals dictate. When Stephen suggests they should get married, she refuses. She follows her own conscience, which is against causing Philip and Lucy pain by wronging them in such a way. She also does not want to be in the position of the woman who stole Lucy's prospective fiancée from her, which shows that she has a feeling of sisterhood with the members of her sex. This is a feeling that prevents her from acting in way that would be particularly hurtful for another woman. In such a situation like Maggie and Stephen's, society automatically blames the woman, not the man, for being at fault. As the man is believed to be of a higher moral standing normally, he is considered the unfortunate, misled party who was led astray by the audacious, scheming woman: "it would have been more correct to say that she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion" (503).

As for poor Mr. Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise; a young man of five and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases,--he is really very much at the mercy of a designing, bold girl. And it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself: "he had shaken her off as soon as he could; indeed, their having parted so soon looked very black indeed--for her" (503).

Finally, the narrator of the novel demonstrates how the world's wife, or public opinion, who sits in judgment on Maggie in this affair, sets itself even above God due to its presumed responsibilities toward society: "No good could happen to her; it was only to be hoped she would repent, and that God would have mercy on her: He had not the care of society on His hands, as the world's wife had." (504). After rumours about her trip with Stephen start circulating, Maggie is treated as a fallen woman by the townspeople. Dr. Kenn takes her part and tries to convince people that Maggie was not at fault, Stephen also sends a letter absolving her of all guilt, but it is to no

avail. Dr. Kenn finds the struggle on his hands an impossible one: "he suddenly found himself as powerless as he was aware he would have been if he had attempted to influence the shape of bonnets" (517). He tries to find a job for Maggie at St. Ogg's, but fails.

The conduct of the women of the town also shows clearly how cruel women can be towards one of their own, when they perceive her as being at fault. The ladies of St. Ogg's were not beguiled by any wide speculative conceptions. But, they had their favorite abstraction, called Society, which served to make their consciences perfectly easy in doing what satisfied their own egoism, thinking and speaking the worst of Maggie Tulliver, and "turning their backs upon her" (518). This is an example of women siding with society and its harsh rules instead of with a lone, helpless woman in need of support, merely to satisfy their own opinions of themselves. From a feminist point of view it can be said that this amounts to a betrayal of the whole sex.

IV.IV Evaluation of the Character as a Whole

Shirley:

For the purposes of evaluating Shirley's character as a whole, the novel provides indications as to many other characteristics that Shirley possesses, which possibly influence the unconventional attitudes. The first important characteristic that should be mentioned is that she has a man's name, because her parents had wanted a son but only had one daughter. At the time, Shirley was a common masculine name, after the publication and circulation of the book, it became a popular name for women. This is the explanation in the novel when she first makes her appearance:

Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of

marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed) - Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress: she was agreeable to the eye. (204-205)

Partly influenced by this fact and partly by being the owner of her own estate, she affects masculine manners. For example, the fact that she whistles, owns pistols and knows how to use them are some aspects of her lifestyle that can be termed masculine. Because she owns a mill, she also has an interest in commercial matters, which are generally deemed to be a man's realm, and conducts business. She herself states, while talking to Mr. Helstone, that this makes her feel "gentleman-like":

Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire! Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position: it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood, and when I see such people as that stately Anglo-Belgian - that Gérard Moore before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentleman-like. (207)

Overall, the effect of her actions and words is to confound the roles society has defined between genders, and to raise questions about whether it is possible for a woman to do the things men are expected to do with equal success. This confusion is of course against the ideologies of the period, which placed the woman completely outside the public sphere and the world of business. While Caroline only questions her conventional role in her uncle's household, Shirley Keeldar, Brontë's second heroine, represents a clear challenge to a Victorian ideology that deems the female brain, not equal to the demands of commerce or the professions, having no business

mingling with men in a man's world. Shirley, as an independent, wealthy land and mill owner, does more than simply mingle with men in her business dealings; she is their superior. This study read *Shirley* as a proto-feminist novel find Shirley representative of the possibility that a woman can find a satisfactory role for herself and that women have the potential not only to survive in society but also to rule over it.

Shirley has a self-confident, independent character which causes her to see herself as men's equal. Her statement that she sees herself as their social peer demonstrates this fact: "I consider myself not unworthy to be the associate of the best of them - of gentlemen, I mean: though that is saying a great deal." (217). Likewise, she believes that a woman and not just any man but what she calls "a great, good man" (217) are equally indispensable, and for that reason not to be submitted to comparison: "I would scorn to contend for empire with him, - I would scorn it. Shall my left hand dispute for precedence with my right? - shall my heart quarrel with my pulse? - shall my veins be jealous of the blood which fills them?" (221).

Shirley has her own ideas about marriage as well. Her telling Caroline that she would not marry if she thought she was going to be disappointed in her husband in particular and in men in general is proof that she approaches the idea of marriage with a certain discernment and even apprehension. She also shows in the same conversation that she is aware of the limitations marriage would bring – that she cannot walk away from it if it makes her unhappy. Apparently, the thought of being trapped in a miserable, boring union is frightful for her to contemplate. Overall, it is obvious that she does not think of marriage as the idyllic ending to a true romance and that she would not go into it blindly. Besides, she decidedly is not a young woman who waits for a husband and 'dreams' of getting married, as evidenced by her refusing

the proposals of five respectable gentlemen. Instead, she has her own terms and conditions which would have to be met before she chose to marry a man:

'But, to tell you a secret, if I were convinced that [men] are necessarily and universally different from us - fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathising - I would never marry. I should not like to find out that what I loved did not love me, that it was weary of me, and that whatever effort I might make to please would hereafter be worse than useless, since it was inevitably in its nature to change and become indifferent (218-19)

However, it cannot be said that Shirley's courtship and marriage with Louis Moore exactly depicts women in the light asserted by feministic idea and that all their reasons for objecting to marriage are valid in this case. For example, she can hardly be called docile in the scene where they declare their love for one another.

Shirley is a fearless woman as well, an attribute which is generally assigned to men. According to Caroline, this is even confirmed by Mr. Helstone, who does not think highly of women, and Shirley admits it herself:

'My uncle, who is not given to speak well of women, says there are not ten thousand men in England as genuinely fearless as you.' 'I am fearless, physically: I am never nervous about danger. I was not startled from self-possession when Mr. Wynne's great red bull rose with a bellow before my face, as I was crossing the cowslip lea alone, stooped his begrimed, sullen head, and made a run at me'(270)

Her actions during the attack on Hollow's Mill are a testimony to her fearlessness. She is perfectly prepared to defend herself and Caroline when the rioters pass by the Rectory gates and she stands ready with a pistol in her hand. She then goes to

Hollow's Mill with Caroline, shortly after the rioters, to watch what happens. Another aspect of Shirley's character is that she is determined once she makes a decision and not easily intimidated. This is shown by her uncompromising attitude toward any rioters who may harm her property or the people on it: "At present I am no patrician, nor do I regard the poor around me as plebeians; but if once they violently wrong me or mine, and then presume to dictate to us, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness and respect for their poverty, in scorn of their ignorance and wrath at their insolence" (272). Shirley is also intelligent and perceptive. She sees the negative outcomes of the set gender roles society has determined for women. She is aware, for example, of the futility that women's lives are degraded into while they live according to those roles and of the waste of their potential. In the French composition she writes, entitled *Le Premiere Femme Savante*, the young woman who is the main character thinks thus:

She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, ,never seen, never needed, - a star in an else starless firmament, - which nor shepherd, nor wanderer, ,nor sage, nor priest, tracked as a guide, or read as a prophecy? Could this be, she demanded, when the flame of her intelligence burned so vivid; when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred disquieted, and restlessly asserted a God given strength, for which it insisted she should find exercise? (496-497)

All these attributes make Shirley an exceptional and intriguing woman. Society, and in particular men, are unable to understand or make sense of her behaviour and words.

Maggie:

A look at Maggie's overall character at this point may give an idea as to why she goes against social norms and disagrees with perceptions about women, what guides her actions and why she fails. From childhood, Maggie is not what is expected of a girl her age: she is tomboyish, always getting her pinafore dirty by romping about outdoors, she cannot tolerate the procedure of having her hair curled and her mother cannot keep her in bonnets. In short, she does not fit into the confines that define what a proper little girl should be. Her physical aspects – having unruly hair, her skin being darker in color than the Dodsons – meet with her aunts' disapproval, as well as her wayward behavior. Maggie has an affectionate character, but her feelings of affection for her family are not rewarded or reciprocated, especially by Tom. On one occasion, for example, when she hugs Tom and accidentally spills his wine this is the reaction she receives:

[Tom] must have been an extreme milksop not to say angrily, "Look there, now!" especially when his resentment was sanctioned, as it was, by general disapprobation of Maggie's behavior. "Why don't you sit, mstill, Maggie?" her mother said peevishly. "Little gells mustn't come to see me if they behave in that way," said aunt Pullet. "Why, you're too rough, little miss," said uncle Pullet. Poor Maggie sat down again, with the music all chased out of her soul, and the seven small demons all in again. (92)

Her display of fondness for Tom earns rebukes from four people at once, therefore discouraging her from behaving in a similar way again. Her family does not understand her craving for love, which always makes her eager to win their approval, not their reprisal. She is most eager to win Tom's affection particularly, and cannot

bear it when he is displeased with her. Though, Tom is often cruel towards Maggie and withdraws his affection from her when he is disappointed with her behavior, knowing that that is what would injure her the most. Both the people around her and the environment in which she lives disallow her receiving what her spirit needs.

Maggie is often inclined to do what she feels to be right, without much thought for how her actions may be viewed by others. She is a young woman who speaks her mind when she deems it necessary, as seen in some of the examples given earlier. Also, when she first refuses Stephen, she does not care for what other people will think of her decision: "But among her thoughts, what others would say and think of her conduct was hardly present." (492). She stands by what she has decided, by her own sense of right and wrong, for as long as possible, and tries to resist being directed by false public opinion about her. The words *resistance*, *determination*, *unswerving* are used to describe her attitude during this period. She refuses to give up easily and leave: "I will not go away because people say false things of me. They shall learn to retract them. If I must go away at last, because--because others wish it, I will not go now. (509) Instead, she chooses to continue to live in the surroundings that are familiar to her, even if it has to be in isolation.

Maggie is also independent in spirit, if she cannot always be so in fact. After Tom rejects her because she has not married Stephen, she wants to earn her own living and not be dependent on anyone: But she was not without practical intentions. The love of independence was too strong an inheritance and a habit for her not to remember that she must get her bread. When other projects looked vague, she fell back on that of returning to her plain sewing, and so getting enough to pay for her lodging at Bob's. She meant to persuade her mother to return to the Mill by and by, and live with Tom again; and somehow or other she would maintain herself at St.

Ogg's (505). Placed in a situation at home where she is neither emotionally nor intellectually satisfied, where her spirit is stifled by her family, her environment and the financial difficulties of her family, she silently protests against her underprivileged circumstances:

She rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness; and fits even of anger and hatred towards her father and mother, who were so unlike what she would have them to be; toward Tom, who checked her, and met her thought or feeling always by some thwarting difference,-- 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)

However her protest is mostly a silent one, she does not have the power to rebel actively, other than in small ways. Her running away to the gypsies, or meeting secretly with Philip can be seen as such small rebellions. They may also be seen as signs of an unwillingness to grow up.

Maggie is really only one prototype in the novel and that is the type of woman belonging to the category of those who conform with society's standards. All of Maggie's aunts and Lucy fit into this description. Lucy, in outward appearance and behaviour, is correct in every way, the image of the proper young lady - never getting her clothes dirty or indulging in naughty behaviour, her hair always in place. Mrs. Tulliver even regrets that she is not her daughter, instead of Maggie. The Dodson sisters - Aunts Pullett, Glegg and Deane – can be considered the standard of what is proper for married ladies. Household duties and womanly concerns such as following the latest fashion in bonnets, having the best lace etc. are all that interest them. Mrs. Glegg, for example, reproaches Mrs. Tulliver for having “unmatronly curl” (51) and

tells her when she should serve dinner and what food would be more becoming for her to serve, for the purpose of economizing. When their sister's husband faces bankruptcy, the three find it most regrettable that the linen with their family name embroidered on it will have to be sold, as well as Mrs. Tulliver's china.

Maggie's father's only sister, Mrs. Moss, on the other hand, is also an epitome of womankind in another way. She is the image of fertility, a kind of earth mother figure, with her eight children. Although not happy with the financial and physical difficulty of looking after so many children, she sees it as her lot in life and is resigned.

Thus, there are only two comparable types of women in *The Mill on the Floss*. One is Maggie, who is aware of the restrictions placed upon her by society but cannot act on this awareness, except for her passive resistance to marriage, and the second is all the rest, who conform. It tells of women that one would be more likely to encounter in real life in the England of the early 19th century, the large majority who would not or could not rebel.

V: CONCLUSION

The two novels chosen for this study, *Shirley* and *The Mill on the Floss* portray women characters that struggle against unfair norms, illogical perceptions and rigid morals of the society in which they live. Both find a different source of strength for this struggle: Maggie faces being left without means to live and Shirley has to confront an uncle who tries to tyrannize her. Chronologically speaking, these portrayals of women are not in a progressive order according to the degree of their defiance. However, both of them behave non-conformal way to decry the contemporary dictatorship of patriarchal society.

Shirley and Maggie are involved in modes of behaviour and speech that can in many aspects be termed “feminist”. In using this term, the period in which each novel was written needs to be kept in mind, as what was later called the feminist movement did not exist when these novels were written. Nor were social or legal conditions ripe for the envisioning of such women characters as modern feminists would like to see portrayed in literature.

Instead, judging by the subject matters of *Shirley* and *The Mill on the Floss*, what Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot wrote can be seen as the beginnings, in literature, of what would transform into feminism, as small steps in that direction. In the nineteenth century, for example, Brontë, and George Eliot forcefully dealt with women's rebellion against a male-dominated culture. These writers wrote of the constraints of feminine life and the “marriage plot”. If what they wrote was not ideology, it was what would come to be known as “feminist.” It can be said that these contributions towards literature that dealt with injustices and inequalities suffered by women provide precedents or cautionary examples for women of later generations, whether they be real women or fictional characters in a novel. Charlotte Brontë tells

of a young woman who confounds men with her bravery, her unique religious convictions and the masculine manners she adopts. George Eliot tells of the defeat of Maggie, who is more intelligent than the ordinary people around her, and who wishes to fulfill her potential by leading a better existence.

The aspects of femininity George Eliot draws attention to by doing so and making such a character as Maggie her heroine, are more positive - compared to what Charlotte Brontë is able to say through her heroines - pointing to not what women lack but what they possess and what sets them apart from men dogmas. While Brontë curses the fact that women are denied intellectual development, Eliot admits the terrible effects of this malnourishment but also implies that emotional life is thereby enriched for women. While Brontë shows how difficult it is for women to be assertive, Eliot dramatizes the virtues of a uniquely female culture based on supportive camaraderie instead of masculine competition. While Brontë dramatizes the suffocating sense of imprisonment born of female confinement, Eliot celebrates the ingenuity of women whose love can make one little room, an everywhere. Additionally, while Brontë envies men the freedom of their authority, Eliot argues that such authority actually keeps men from experiencing their own physical and psychic authenticity.

Of course, both of them are able to portray an even more emancipated woman. They record the phenomenon of feminism in the character of Shirley and Maggie, who live independently, defend women's rights in public settings and conduct their love-life as they choose. In a way, they portray in their central lady characters the culmination of what the earlier women authors were wishing their heroines to achieve and chronologically is able to reap the benefits of both the earlier women writers' works and the efforts of early or proto-feminists.

To conclude, the two women characters analyzed in this thesis –Shirley Keeldar and Maggie – both defy existing social norms, perceptions about women and ideas about morality to some extent. Shirley Keeldar is the one who most strongly rejects preconceived perceptions about women as she assumes the manners and authority of a man as an heiress. Similarly, Maggie Tulliver rejects society's morals. She is involved in such a rejection as she refuses to be forced into a marriage that society's morals impose upon her.

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