

44. Essays, 277.
45. Elizabeth Ermarth, "Maggie Tulliver's Long Suicide," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 14 (1974): 588-89.
46. Josephine Donovan, "Toward a Women's Poetics," *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, ed. Shari Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), 100.
47. (E.S. Dallas), *The Times* 19 May 1860: 10-11; rpt, in "The Critical Heritage", 133.
48. (John Chapman, probably), *Westminster Review*, 74 (July 1860): 24-33; rpt, in *The Critical Heritage* 142.
49. (Unsigned review), *Dublin University Magazine* 57 (February 1861): 192-200; rpt, in "The Critical Heritage", 148.
50. Essays, 275.
51. Philip M. Weinstein, "The Semantics of Desire: Changing Models of Identity from Dickens to Joyce" (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 81.
52. *The Critical Heritage*, 136.
53. Sara Putzell, "An Antagonism of Valid Claims: The Dynamics of The Mill on the Floss." *Studies in the Novel*, 7 (1965): 231.
54. George Levine, "An Annotated Critical Bibliography of George Eliot" (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), 407.
55. May Tomlinson, "Dodsons and Tullivers" *Sewanee Review*, 24 (1918): 319.
56. Essays, 201.
57. Essays, 202.
58. Essays, 204-205.
59. Kathleen Mc Cormack, "The Sybil and the Hyene: George Eliot's Woolstonecraftian Feminism." *Dalhousie Review* 63 (1983-84): 602.
60. Essays, 157.
61. Essays, 157.
62. John Kucich, "George Eliot and Objectes: Meanings as Matter in The Mill On The Floss". *Dickens Studies Annual*, 12 (1983): 325.
63. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination". (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).



26. Martha Vicinus, "Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920" (London: Virago, 1985) 188.
27. See Rover, "The punch-Book 96 and 101" for illustrations.
28. Review of Julia Kavanagh, Rachel Gray: "A Tale Founded on Fact" (London, 1850) in *The Leader* 7 (5 January 1856): 19.
29. *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 244.
30. "Belle Letters", *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856): 565-878; rpt, In *Essays*, 325-34.
31. Leavis 48; Deirde David, "Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy": Harriet Matineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1987), 211.
32. *Essays*, 269
33. Martha Vicinus, ed., "Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age" (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972) XI.
34. Dinah Mulock, *Macmillan's Magazine* 3 (April 1861): 441-48; rpt, in "The Critical Heritage", 155-56.
35. Unsigned review, *Spectator* 33 (7 April 1860): 330-1; rpt. in "The Critical Heritage", 112
36. E.S. Dallas, "The Times 19 May 1860": 10-11; rpt, in "The Critical Heritage", 132.
37. May Tomlinson, "Dodsons and Tullivers", *Sewanee Review* 26 (1918) : 319.
38. David Daiches, George Eliot: "Middlemarch" (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), 7.
39. John Goode, "The Affections Clad with Knowledge: Woman's Duty and the Public Life", *Literature and History* 9 (1983):41.
40. Smith-Rosenberg 1.
41. Bonnie Zimmerman, "The Dark Eye Beaming: Female Friendship in George Eliot's Fiction," *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, eds. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York UP. 1990) 127.
42. Elizabeth Langland, "Nobody Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel", *PMLA* 107 (1992): 303.
43. *Essays*, 286.



11. Elaine Showalter, "Feminsit Criticism in the Wilderness", *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (198;New York: Pantheon, 1985), 248.
12. Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Widerness", 262.
13. "Emily Davis Jane Crow", 21 August (1869), GEL 8:465 (*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordan S Haight, 9 Vols. (New Heaven: Yale UP, 1954, 1978) Herecafter referrd to as GEL).
14. Nestor, 168.
15. See Deborah Gorham, "The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal" (Lodon: Croon Helm, 1982) and carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.1 (1975)
16. Nina Auerabach, "Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP,1978)5.
17. Carolyn A. Heilburn, "Reinventing Motherhood" (London: Victor Golancz, 1979), 97.
18. "Memoirs of the Court of Austria", *Westmininster Review* 63 (April 1855): 303-35/ Unsigned review identified as George Eliot's in *The Wellesey Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, ed. Walter E. Houghton, 5 Vols. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1966-1989)3:623.
19. Essays, 204-05.
20. Vineta Colby, "Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel" (Princeton, NJ: Princeon UP, 1974), 206.
21. "Janet's Repentence", *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. David Lodge (Harmonswoth: Penguin, 1973) 82.
22. Lodge, 2.
23. Peter Fenves "Exiling the Encycolpedia": The Individual in "Janet.s Repentance", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 41 (1987): 427.
24. *Punch* 15 March 1890; rpt. in *Contance Rover, The Punch-Book of Woman's Rights* (London: Hutchison, 1967), 35.
25. P.W. Musgrave, "Society and Education in England since 1800" (London: Methuen, 1968), 16.



## Notes

1. Q.D. Leavis, Introduction, "Marjoribanks", by Mrs. Oliphant, p. 15.
2. Mrs. Parr, Dinah Mulock (Mrs. Craik) in "Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign", Mrs. Oliphant, et al. (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd, 1896), 219.
3. See Deborah Gorham, "The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal" (London: Croon Helm, 1982), 48. Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.1 (1975): 1. Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Women's Press, 1981), 155-177.
4. For a discussion of Female Friendships and Communities, see Tess Cosslett, "Woman to Woman: Female in Victorian Fiction", (Brighton: Harvester, 1988) 1-3 and Nina Auerbach, "Communities of Woman: An Idea in Fiction", (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978), 5.
5. F.R Leavis, "The Great Tradition George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence" (1948; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967)45. U.C Knoepfelmacher, "George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism" (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1968), 4. Alexander Welsh, "George Eliot and Blackmail" (Cambridge, Maynard Gilfil: Harvard UP, 1985), 132-33.
6. Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855) 61: The Census of Great Britain in 1851 (Longman etal, 1854) reported that the total population consisted of 10,223, 558 males and 10,735,919 females on 31 Mar., 1851 (88). It also noted that of all persons above the legal ages of marriage (14 years for males and 12 years for females) 3,110,243 were bachelors and 3,469,571 were spinsters(40).
7. "Friendship", *Victoria Magazine*, Oct. 1871: 545.
8. Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own". (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 82.
9. Pauline Nestor, "Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George, Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell" (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 167.
10. Nestor, 167



*those amongst men, have always been in some measure hostage to the legal and political relations of the society as a whole.*

*Female communities will doubtless persist but they do not offer a practical model for society that still requires co-operation and fellowship across genders in order to survive and reproduce.*



پرویشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی  
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

*communities follows the novels structural tendency to convey characters, particularly, women through their perceptions of men they are involved with and of their role in those men's lives and rarely through their perceptions of women. This is certainly not a "feminine" orienation but rather the author's critical representation of her social reality. The novel's fictional social contexts are determined by attitudes and conditions that force women to think of themselves as subordinate to and dependent upon men.*

*An understanding of social conditions of mid-and late-nineteenth century England, and particulary of conceptions of gender, is thus central to the understanding of Eliot's work. The position of women dramatize the tension between hierarchical practice and more individualistic egalitarian theory. It is only when we break up hierarchical structures and knit up new ones that values of liberty, autonomy and equality are perceptively felt.*

*Her novels provide an excellent account of the situation of women during this period of explosive social and economic change. While the rise of industrialism facilated a much greater social mobility for men-by creating new occupation, it continued to restrict women to their traditional roles as daughters, wives and mothers, maintaining the women's "sphere" of the home as a necessary opposite to the men's "sphere" of the rest of the world.*

*George Eliot was not blind to the imbalance between the social expectations and values attributed to sexes. Her depiction of the interaction between men and women and in particular of their gender-based ideals and impressions of "the other" provides us with a glimpse of the author's view of the actual and optimal distance between the asymmetrical sexual perceptions of her society and their naunced manifestations in fictional life.*

*Feminists seek of a female community in practice. But even these female communities like other persising of forms of community including*



*potential remains unfulfilled.*

*Admittedly the writer exposes the malice and shallowness of women, and ridicules useless accomplishments. Eliot also acknowledges the "oppressive narrowness" of Maggie's community. Maggie's fate is an illustration of how young intelligent girls were defeated in Victorian times, denied in Victorian times, denied a place in the community and forced to struggle against its conventions. Provided with no supportive community, Maggie dies a falsely idealised death.*

*Looking back upon George Eliot's first fictional works, it is possible to discern the origin of many of the issues concerning women in her non-fictional works that preceded her literary career. The women characters are placed in the environments that in no way encourage intellectual and spiritual development. When young, they are given education that favours shallowness and superficial accomplishments that bring forth competition in looks and dress.*

*Once grown up, they are incapable of devoting their time and lives to useful tasks, their principal goal to find husbands. Those who do not succeed, spend endlessly waiting, financially dependent on more or less generous relatives. Eliot's opinion towards her women characters is obvious. She criticises flaws and weaknesses in women generated in and sanctioned by the patriarchal system.*

*To sum up the discussion of female friendships and communities, it can be suggested that in Eliot's novels women's feelings about themselves is to be found in their representation of social relations among women. Although there are not many female communities in Eliot's fiction, George Eliot does not ignore society, treat it carelessly or indifferently as a minimum back-ground. Society is there fully and substantially, as a real fact, and always as context and illumination.*

*Since the characterizations and allusions of George Eliot's text are so numerous and rich, much of the analysis of female friendships and*



worthwhile and be of use to their family, to society and ultimately to mankind.

To sum up, the society in which Maggie Tulliver grows up is controlled by conservative, patriarchal notions. It is a narrow community where people are measured according to family, kinship, money and reputation, a limited world that provides little breathing space for its dweller. In such a society, an intelligent girl and a woman like Maggie, in need of independence and recognition, is destined to confront frustration and defeat. She is doomed to restricted life because of the narrowly defined gender roles of her world, and she has to suppress thoughts and actions that are regarded as improper in a woman. As her society can not accept her intelligence, she becomes "as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilized world of that day who had come out of her school-life with a soul untrained for inevitable struggles...." (MF 288).

Badly prepared to cope with adversities, she finds little support in her environment with a weak mother ashamed of her and with aunts who disapprove of her. Furthermore, women of her own age, like Lucy and the Miss Guests, have no other ambition than to accept the roles assigned to them by a patriarchal and provincial society. Thus there is no community of women available to support and sustain Maggie and she remains spiritually and intellectually solitary all life.

The isolation and oppression she is exposed to make her feel like a "poor uneasy white bear" who, she thinks, must have got "so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space, that he would keep doing it if they set him free" (MF 373). Stifled by her oppressive environment, she is also afraid of making a new life for herself elsewhere.

Although the author endows Maggie with the potential to do something with her life, she does not grant her the opportunity to develop and follow a path that was denied to most young women in her own time. Her





conscience". Timid women allow the "mutual hatred of women" (MF 506) to control and dominate general opinion. To support Maggie would have demanded "courage, deep pity, self-knowledge, generous trust" (MF 505), rare characteristics in this narrow-minded and self-sufficient society.

Aunt Glegg, however, the strongest and most intelligent of the Dodsons, defies public opinion and stands up for Maggie. Aunt Glegg maintains that Maggie should be punished according to the misdeeds proved against her, not in proportion to allegation "cast upon her by people outside her own family...." (MF 500). In her firm belief in the bonds of kinship, she proves more reliable than the rest of the community.

It is surprising that if George Eliot approved of the Dodson pride and their sense of honour and high work-morale why did she make them so thoroughly disagreeable and oppressive? Why is Aunt Glegg so angry and Aunt Pullet so hypochondriac? Interestingly, these women have been able to remain independent within their marriages, having insured that their desires have remained their own. Feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar suggest that even when nineteenth century women writers do not overtly criticise patriarchal institutions or conventions, they almost obsessively create characters who enact their own covert authorial anger.<sup>63</sup>

It is of course possible to assume that women who wanted to reach a certain degree of independence had to be aggressive and determined. Another reasonable explanation could be that Eliot portrays characters, who feel guilty being childless and realising that they have not fulfilled their womanly mission, react with aggression and hypochondria. They cannot accept that Maggie should have an existence denied to themselves. Obviously, there is an element of frustration in the sisters' behaviour.

Taking into consideration Eliot's reviews on Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller, Eliot advocated an education that would widen perspective and women in the category of Mrs. Pullet and Mrs. Glegg, -women with wealth and leisure- would engage themselves in something



*needlework and themselves, as is suggested in the chapter heading "Charity in Full-Dress" (MF 429).*

*At this vanity fair, both products and women are being observed. Maggie is scrutinised not by her mother and aunts, but by society, with admiration from men and envy from women. Slowly the women's attitude to her change from condescension and indulgence to envy and disapproval. Her elegance accentuates the artificiality of the more conventional and overdressed women. She becomes a target for criticism that will eventually make her a victim of their condemnation. This is further accentuated on Maggie's return from her unintentional journey with Stephen, when she is met with universal disapproval and disdain. Having violated the rules of female behaviour, she has proved to be "dangerous and unmanageable" (MF 428).*

*Had Maggie accepted the code of female conduct, no harm would have come to her, but her behaviour sets the community's base rocking that threatens to demolish the very foundation of society. Not only has she damaged the family reputation and offended the Dodson family code, she has also challenged the societal ideology by her "unwomanly" conduct; Maggie is judged, rejected and ostracised by her community.*

*The mildly injurious gossip of the ladies in "Amos Barton" and Janet's Repentance" turns into something destructive in the narrow society of The Mill on the Floss. The female community becomes the prime supporter of Victorian hypocrisy and double standards. It is not "men of maxims" (MF 521) that judge Maggie the harshest, it is the female community who condemn Maggie's behaviour. This attitude is a consequence of the narrow-mindedness and limited natures of the women, as well as of their situation in society.*

*Women in Eliot world can be most actively persecuting and destructive, leaving common-sense and reason powerless. To be sure, they have their passive followers in women with "some tenderness of heart and*



*possessions she rapidly becomes a confused, pathetic woman. This action emphasises Mrs. Tulliver's idea of materialism.*

*Crushed by the loss of her possessions and her material standard, Mrs Tulliver is totally deprived of her sense of self and she is eventually reduced to being a housekeeper at Mr. Deans's house. The female community in "The Mill on the Floss", becomes the prime supporter of Victorian hypocrisy and double-standards.*

*Maggie is introduced to St. Ogg's high society through Lucy, where she becomes an object of interested observation. Unaccustomed to the artificial customs and manners of high society, and having never "spoken from the lips merely" (MF 377), Maggie at first appears awkward in the eyes of the "more experienced ladies". Objecting to patronising compliments, she cannot understand why women should be complimented on their beauty "with a simper" (MF 378). At first, her inability to adjust easily to ordinary, social conversation adds to her charm, making the ladies overlook her "gaucherie"! The ladies of society do not see Maggie as a threat to their position and status and thus she is readily accepted by their crowd:*

*".... it is fact capable of an amiable interpretation, that ladies are not the worse disposed towards a new acquaintance of their own sex because she has points of inferiority" (MF400).*

*These lines echo Eliot's earliest essay, "Hints on Snubbing", in which for the first time she deals with the conceited women towards potential rivals, using clothes and looks to exert influence over surrounding inferiors.*

*Maggie's connection with St. Ogg's high society enables George Eliot to return to her criticism of many women's shallow and idle lives. As in "Janet's Repentance", charity, sewing and embroidery were organic parts of middle-class women's lives, as were clothing clubs and bazaars. This is also obvious in "The Mill on the Floss" that St. Ogg's female society is given the opportunity to help the poor as well as to display both their*



*and superior purposes of matrimony useless and almost lifeless"*<sup>61</sup> (Essays 157).

*Mrs. Tulliver is Eliot's fictional exemplar of the stupid and unreflective woman, who through her lack of reason wrongs her nearest of kin-her daughter Maggie. She is usually dependent on the opinion of her family and never makes any decision without consulting them. To Mrs. Tulliver, the Dodson credo is law; she feels safe in that world. Like her sister Pullet, she takes great pride in her home, her housework and her possessions, convinced that her domestic virtues will protect her from any harm:*

*"There's not woman strives more for her children; and I'm sure at Scouring-time this Lady day as I've had all the bed-hangings taken down, I did as much as the two gells put together; and there's this last elder-flower wine I've made- beautiful! I laways offer it along with the sherry, though sister Glegg will have it I'm so extravagant; and as for liking to have my clothes tidy, and not go a fright about the house, there's nobody in the parish can say anything against me in respect of backbiting and making mischief, for I don't wish anybody any harm; and nobody loses by sending me a pork-pie; for my pies are fit to show with the best o'my neighbour's and the linen's so in order, as if I was to die to-morrow I shouldn't be ashamed. A woman can do no more nor she can." (MF 96).*

*Although it maybe argued that this description caricatures the Victorian housewife, it nevertheless shows George Eliot's profound Knowledge of the woman's world, Seen against this background and the fact that the Dodson women achieve their place in the world through their control of domestic objects,<sup>62</sup> it is quite logical that the greatest tragedy in Mrs. Tulliver's life is the loss of the possessions, in particular as these things belong to her Dodson period before she was married to Tulliver.*

*Mrs Tulliver puts the faith in linens and china, and the necessity to have the best of both even if one never uses them. For her, possessions define the self, and when her husband's bankruptcy forces her to sell those*



burden to their husbands. As an early twentieth-century critic even writes that Eliot seems to have been "obsessed with the idea of what has often to be endured in the way of misery simply because of the feeble-mindedness of one entirely unmalicious woman".<sup>55</sup>

George Eliot focuses on the idleness and shallowness of women in the Fuller/Wollstonecraft article, and on women's deceptively decorative facade in the Milton review. Like Fuller and Wollstonecraft, Eliot maintains that, whereas men believe themselves superior to women and in command, they are in fact "in a state of subjection to ignorant and feeble-minded women".<sup>56</sup> (Essays 201).

Eliot quotes Fuller on the consequences of keeping women uneducated: "Woman has always power enough, if she chooses to exert it, and is usually disposed to do so, in proportion to her ignorance and childish vanity".<sup>57</sup> (Essays 202).

Similarly Wollstonecraft believed that unless woman was educated to become the companion to man, the general progress of mankind would be halted. Therefore, she must not be confined to domestic concerns but be given equal opportunities with men. Eliot reinforces this by arguing that men "pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women" and that they would be forced to toil for a woman "who can understand none of (their) secret yearnings"<sup>58</sup> (Essays 204-205). Kathleen McCormack argues the Eliot's novels illustrate Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments and that her work is a major key to an understanding of the problem's of Eliot's feminism.<sup>59</sup>

Despising women who hid their silliness behind a facade of false modesty, Eliot shares Milton's view that the "bashful muteness of a virgin" often hides "all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation"<sup>60</sup> (Essays 157). No doubt, she supported Milton's view that a man should have the right to divorce his wife on discovering that behind the appearance of modesty is hidden a nature to all the more estimable



*sacredness of family, in standing by one's kin, though her support usually entails a necessary and self-important scolding of imprudent relatives. As a custodian to the Dodson traditions she scolds her sisters for departing from the norms, even in small matters, for example the use of fine clothes and consumption of good food which certainly reflects the middle-class virtues of stinginess.*

*Aunt Glegg considers Mrs. Tulliver particularly vulnerable and urges her to follow the pattern of her elder sisters. As the most intelligent and temperamental of the sisters, Aunt Glegg resembles Maggie in character. They are both regarded "mad" by their surroundings when they are angry. Mr. Glegg compares his wife to a "mad dog" (MF 215) and Maggie's attempt at revolt is seen a "mad outbreak" (MF 215).*

*This affinity may explain why Aunt Glegg supports Maggie and offers to take her in. The woman who has reproached Maggie the most, offers her shelter when it is denied by her own brother. Aunt Glegg's family pride and moral rectitude combine in her behaviour towards Maggie and her opening her home to her.*

*George Levine argues that Aunt Glegg breaks away from her narrow egotism and in this is the first step of family unity towards community.<sup>54</sup> This is to read too much into the text; there are no signs of growing harmony or of the family coming closer together. Aunt Glegg takes Maggie in, out of family pride rather than out of pity. That pride may involve a feeling of affinity with the rebellious child who has perhaps inherited her aunt's defying temperament. But as certain conditions are attached to the offer, Maggie's rejection is a logical reaction to the oppressive treatment she has been subjected to, and her urge towards independence is even more firmly reinforced.*

*In Mrs. Tulliver, George Eliot has created a character very different from the strong, wilful Aunt Glegg. Mrs. Tulliver epitomises Eliot's recurrent ideas that in their narrowness, silly and ignorant women are a*





*assumes that "you", the reader, may have felt the same kind of "oppressive feelings" weighing upon you in watching the sordid life of the Tullivers and Dodsons.*

*Although the narrator acknowledges that the reader "could not live among such people; you are stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great or noble" (MF 272), the narrator nonetheless begs the reader to understand how this acted upon "young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them...." (MF 272-73). The reader is thereby invited to identify with Maggie's desperate attempt to fight "the oppressive narrowness" by these "emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers" (MF 272), and clearly the narrator sympathises with Maggie.*

*Nineteenth century critic E.S. Dallas noted that George Eliot relieves the repulsiveness of the insect life which she has exhibited in the Dodson family by making her bigger insects all revolve around those two little creatures, Maggie and Tom Tulliver.<sup>52</sup> The Rhone villages preserve "old-fashioned family life" and "conventional wordly notions and habits", they constitute the conservative forces in human history and they represent the kind of Dodson emphasis on family and allegiance to accepted customs and rules that oppress Maggie.<sup>53</sup>*

*The household code of the Dodsons consists of everything that is customary and respectable. They behave in a way that is expected of them, never defying duty and propriety and taking pride in their own particular ways of doing things, exclusively illustrated with examples from the female world; how to bleach the linen, how to make cowslip wine, how to cure hams, how to scour household utensils, how to keep bottled gooseberries, and above all how to behave at funerals.*

*The dreaded epicentre of the clan is the eldest Dodson sister, Aunt Glegg is the eldest of the Dodson sisters and the spokesperson for the Dodson family "religion" -the Dodson code. She claims to believe in the*



*workings of uncultured minds and the narrowness of imagination and intellect that she had examined in her review article "The Natural History of German Life," in which she had pointed to the conventionally traditional influence of women.<sup>50</sup>*

*Eliot's suggestion that women are the bearers of traditional values also applies to the argument of the Dodson sisters such that are also the bearers of traditional "male" values repressing every endeavour in their own gender to transgress set boundaries.*

*The detailed characterisation of the Dodson sisters sheds rather a lurid light on the generalisations about the nature of the women which George Eliot provides throughout the novel. The novel's action continually draws attention to the ways in which limited social expectations create limited personalities.*

*The first appearance of the Dodson women in "Book I" is farcical and full of witty details, and the sisters appear ridiculous and funny, even harmless. But there is no doubt that consciously or not, the tone harshly caricatures the self-interest of the Dodsons not only as comic but as "petty, smug, and blind".<sup>51</sup>*

*Their second appearance, in the Rhine-Rhone digression in "Book 4", is different, with a sadder and more subdued tone with the effects of their oppressive behaviour laid bare. The long digression may at first seem some what out of place, not being directly related to the progress of the novel.*

*But one soon realises that in describing human life in the Rhone Villages as "narrow, ugly, grovelling existence, which even calamity does not elevate "and people as" part of a gross sum of obscure vitality" that is "swept into the same oblivion with the generations by ants beavers" (MF 271-72), the narrator portrays the kind of society that is very much epitomised in the Dodsons.*

*In describing those "dead-tinted, hollow-eyed, angular skeletons of villages on the Rhone" (MF 271), that oppresses him, the narrator*





*classical magnitude:*

*"So it has since the days of Hecuba, and Hector Tamer of horses: inside the gates, the women with streaming hair and uplifted hands offering prayers, watching the world's combat from a far, filling their long, empty days with memories and fears: outside the men, in fierce struggle with things divine and human, quenching memory in the stronger light of purpose, losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the hurrying ardour of action (MF 309).*

*St. ogg's encoded message is that women have accepted and internalised patriarchal ideology and are more forceful bearers of its tenets than men. The women, in fact, comply with the system that oppresses them and are instrumental in oppressing individuals of their own gender. Not only have they themselves accepted their inferiority, they also wield power and oppression through denial and control or as one critic observed, "women whether in community or in isolation, share a condition of oppression or otherness, " resulting in a "psychic alienation".<sup>46</sup>*

*Those who impose the severest restrictions on Maggie and those who judge her the harshest are the female members of her society, family and community. For with her intelligence and "unwomanly behaviour, Maggeie offends the codes of this society characterised by its "oppressive narrowness" (MF 272).*

*The foremost conservative women in the novel are the Dodson sisters, and upon the publication of the novel, their narrowmindedness immediately attracted the attention of contemporary critics. They were seen as "stingy, selfish wretches",<sup>47</sup> as "Christian pagans, narrow, contracted, ignorant full of prejudice, and ready to anger" and "governed by a code of traditionall morality",<sup>48</sup> and their "pervading selfishness, ill-nature, stupidity, narrow culture"<sup>49</sup> were noted.*

*Interestingly, a modern reader's impression of the Dodsons is limited and oppressive. By means of the Dodsons, George Eliot reveals the*



*It is a conservative and traditional town adhering to traditions and "everywhere custom is (their) supreme law".<sup>43</sup> In addition to being old and permeated with traditional ideals, St. Ogg's is a bustling, burgeoning nineteenth century commercial state whose quintessential values are success, prosperity and progress, a society largely engrossed in accumulating wealth produced in "unfragrant deafening factories, cramping itself in mines, sweating at furnaces, grinding, hammering, weaving under more or less oppression of carbonic acid...." (MF 272).*

*This is the industrial society of the growing middle class. The female community is largely controlled by a narrow-minded female ideology of restrictions and adherence to decorum and the patriarchal social norms are most firmly implemented by women.*

*The ideology of the novel is intimately connected with the code of St. Ogg's patriarchal society. Like Milby and Hayslope, St. Ogg's is also an ignorant society, where people boast of having little or no education and where even "good society" is ignorant. In a society where people have "the smallest possible faith in theoretic knowledge"<sup>44</sup> an individual, and in particular a woman with an extraordinary intellectual and emotional potential, is distrusted and doomed to defeat.*

*Heterogeneous though they are in general outlook, the two worlds-the old traditionally conservative one and the new commercial one-have similar views concerning women and family. Since men have the power, they assume they are superior, or as Elizabeth Ermarth aptly expresses it in her article, "Maggie Tulliver's Long Suicide", in St. Oggis "one is either male or not-male, and while there may be a way to be a proper female, in a deeper way to be not-male, means merely to be wrong or inferior in some essential way".<sup>45</sup>*

*Thus, in the old town of St. Ogg's men and women live in separate spheres, the outside active world of struggle and power, the inside one of waiting and watching. Comparing these worlds, George Eliot gives them a*



hopeless youth...."<sup>34</sup> That the novel's central conflict is that of a woman superior to and different from her family and community was noted very early by nineteenth century critics. Singling out Maggie's family for criticism, one of them wrote:

*The character of Mrs. Tulliver and her three sisters-with all their family fretfulness and peculiarities, their idolatry of the 'proprieties' - supply not only a background dull and mean enough for the bright, bold, dark-eyed girl, but furnish an excuse for much that is erring in her 'ways'. You feel that, in such a home, a child like Maggie would inevitably grow up into a woman such as Maggie Tulliver is.*<sup>35</sup>

The majority of St. Ogg's inhabitants were seen as "unpleasant companions-prosaic, selfish, nasty"<sup>36</sup> and the novel was read as "a consumable exposition of small mindedness".<sup>37</sup> Since then critics have dealt with the role of society and its impact on individuals, with "a community, with inter-relationships, with individual response to social pressures and the effect of society on individual ambitions"<sup>38</sup>. What is most interesting is the female part of that community, in particular as "The Mill on the Floss, seems to be the most exposing text about the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society."<sup>39</sup> And the experience is to a great extent, one of subjugation and oppression. Recent feminist critics argue that nineteenth century women to a large extent built their lives on a "female world of love and ritual"<sup>40</sup> and that George Eliot's novels recreate "nurturing, empowering influences exchanged between women".<sup>41</sup>

The main purpose is to explore the patriarchal attitudes to women in St. Ogg's and to identify the coded message of its female section. It is of interest to examine to what extent, women themselves comply with and are accomplices in the power system that oppresses them<sup>42</sup> and in what respects the dullness and meanness of the community affect the female protagonist. St Ogg's is "one of those old towns.... a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history like a millennial tree..." (MF 115).



*active involvement in her dairy which consumes a lot of labour and time as a result, there is not much time left for socializing with the other women; moreover, the close proximity of her dairy and the house engaged her not only in the work of the dairy but also in minding the children and tending fires. She has also to supervise Nancy and Hetty at the dairy and kitchen.*

*Nancy Grey Osterud in Bonds of Community observes that in rural communities, the elements of conjunction between women and men outweighed those of disjunction. This situation presented the rural women with both a problem and an opportunity. The difficulty was that the possibilities of autonomy were highly circumscribed, and the resources to which women had independent access were strictly limited.*

*Rural women had few means of support outside by the households in which they lived, and their interactions with men in their families and kin groups were both immediate and powerful. Women could, however, attempt to redefine the terms of those interactions. They could meet men on common ground rather than in situations that were shaped by gender difference. They could focus their energies on those aspects of life in which sharing provided some basis for equality rather than marked by hierarchical divisions. Thus, rural women emphasised the familial rather than feminine dimensions of the crucial transitions in their lives.*

*In contradiction to Osterud's thesis, Mrs. Poyser personifies pre-industrial women with an autonomous role in the market of dairy products. It is probably because of the strong portrayal of Mrs. Poyser that the author is unable to place her among the common village women. There are visible bonds between her and other women in the society.*

*Shortly after the publication of "The Mill on the Floss", (MF 1860), Dinah Mulock wrote that it is a "very simple story. A girl of remarkable gifts mentally, physically, and morally: born, like thousands more, of parents far inferior to herself-struggles through a repressed childhood, a*



*an outlet for their interests in useful occupations and may have become doctors or nurses. But if we see these two sisters as frustrated women, women whose ambitions have yet not been fulfilled, they are not grotesque. They live their lives in a private sphere that is invisible to society, but behind the facade, there is silent pain and suffering.*

*The Irwine sisters illustrate the dismal situations of financially dependent nineteenth century women. Many of these fell into nervous-illnesses, as Elaine Showalter, for instance, how ideas about proper feminine behaviour frequently caused madness in women who did not fit into traditional female roles. Although it would not be appropriate to consider Miss Anne mentally ill, she is mentally ailing, suffering from psychosomatic symptoms caused by her frustrated life. She is frequently indisposed to severe headaches that seem to indicate migraine. George Eliot draws attention to the vulnerability of unmarried and dependent women, deploring the misery and the sorrows of superfluous women, indirectly criticising the enforced, useless and idle lives of upper and middle-class women.*

*In contrast to Mrs. Irwine or the Irwine sisters, Mrs. Poyser is an example of a woman who is far from superfluous or useless. She is the typical rural farm woman epitomising many values of her community. In Mrs. Poyser, George Eliot has portrayed a woman confident of her intelligence and capability. She lives an isolated life in the parish; it is questionable whether she chooses to live at a distance from other women or if the village women stay aloof from her.*

*Either way it is reasonable to assume that there can be little intimacy between them, as Mrs Poyser sets herself apart from the others—they are "only neighbours, as are no kin to me ...." (AB 592). As a contemporary critic, Anne Mozley wrote, Mrs. Poyser is arrogant, "confident first in the superiority of the female sex, and next in her supremacy over all other females". Yet another reason that can be claimed for her aloofness is her*



*Irwinés are old maids who belong to the category of "superfluous" women-women who were considered failures by early Victorian society. Since they are not the conventional Victorian Women, they challenge the very core of the society and the patriarchal ideology. Mrs. Irwine's two "hopelessly maiden" daughters. (AB 111), unlike the "splendid" mother do not fit the set patterns. They do not take active part in the shallow society life-women who have the potential of cultural ladies are not given the opportunities to flourish. They try to fill their time by charity work and philanthropy, in Martha Vicinus words, the "most popular alternative to vacuity for the middle classes".<sup>33</sup>*

*Even if women of their class were expected to devote themselves to charity, the Miss Irwinés seem to be genuinely interested in this kind of work. They are involved "deep in science of medicine" (AB 71). In earlier societies, women who prepared healing medicinal herbs were often considered to have supernatural skills and were suspected of being in league with the devil.*

*More recent historians' research has shown that they were often exceptional in their attempts to find answers to questions they were not supposed to ask, and may be seen as forerunners of women who wanted to break out of their narrow confines. It is tempting to speculate on George Eliot's reason for giving Miss Anne these somewhat uncanny qualities.*

*It is possible that the two sisters illustrate Eliot's aversion to absolute definitions of women's nature and demarcations of woman's mission.*

*In the article of Wollstonecraft and Fuller, Eliot singles out and pleads for expansion of the range of employment for women. Further down, she quotes Wollstonecraft's suggestion that women "might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses....".*

*Very likely, the Miss Irwinés also anticipate Eliot's plea for better education for women, because if these two sisters had the same fund of knowledge placed within their reach as men have, they might have found*





*The Poyser are virtually obsessed with the running of their farm and their status in the eyes of the community. They have little time or use for either religion or charitable works; while we see them on the road to church, we never actually see them inside it, or responding in anyway to a crisis that does not directly affect their material interests.*

*Mrs. Poyser's attack on the old squire is motivated more by her financial self-interest than by any abstract notion of speaking for her class against the oppression enforced by "their betters" (AB 338) more strikingly Martin Poyser's response to the stigma Hetty's crime brings upon him indicates the general failure of sympathy in the family, even for one of their own." I am willing to pay any money as is wanted towards trying to bring her off.... but I'll not go nigh her.... we shall ne'er hold up our head's I this parish nor I any other" (AB 469). Little wonder, then that Hetty's own interests are so preponderantly material, that she makes the morally wrong but practically expedient choice when faced with a moral dilemma for which nothing in her experience has prepared her.*

*Surely, the Poyser embody the fundamental indifference and estrangement from whatever lies beyond their own narrow province, they are technically baseless for what happens to Hetty. They are culpable in terms of the larger point of view Eliot urges to take, the point of view which judges not on the basis of "egoistic or purely personal", but rather according to an understanding of human needs and human feelings.*

*As was the case in Scenes of Clerical Life, distrust of women and their talents pervades the atmosphere of Adam Bede. It is obvious in the story of Adam Bede that women's opinion of and behaviour towards the members of their own sex is neither appreciative nor supportive. It is substantially noticed in the relationship between Mrs. Poyser and Hetty. Mrs. Poyser finds faults with Hetty and criticises her female neighbours; and Mrs. Irwine despises her own daughters.*

*Like Janet Gibbs, Miss Pratt and the Linnet sisters, the two Miss*



*In the female community in Adam Bede as in Scenes of Clerical Life, greater importance is attached to looks than to inner qualities. Mrs. Irwine, herself once a beauty, urges Arthur to choose a handsome wife, "I can't put off with amiability, which is always the excuse people are making for the existence of plain people", (AB 307) However, she is also intent on his marrying someone who is not silly, knowing Arthur wants "managing and a silly woman can't manage you" (AB 307).*

*Mrs. Irwine definitely voices Eliot's distrust of beautiful but weak and silly women. Most women in the novel share George Eliot's scepticism of beauty in women. Mrs. Promfet, lady's maid at the Chase, deploras Hetty's looks, foreseeing that nothing good will come of them. Hetty's beauty also proves to be a part of her fall, as the landlady in Windsor says: "It'ud have been a good deal better for her if sh'd been uglier and had more conduct....". (AB 427).*

*Even allowing for these women's envy of a pretty young girl, it is a fact that her good looks hide a less admirable character. Mrs. Poyser also sees the imperfection behind the pretty facade.*

*Within the context of Adam Bede, Hetty is very much a product of that community's materialistic ethic and its value on appearance. Hetty embodies the dichotomy that the narrator reveals in nature: she is both physically beautiful and morally empty. Hetty precisely represents the community; her consistent association with the "speckled mirror" suggests vanity, but it also conveys the extent to which Hetty is merely a reflection of natural and social world around her. We may see Eliot's judgement on her as a harsh one, but we must recognize that the judgement equally extends to include Hayslope and rural ways. In punishing only Hetty for community, a crime in which the whole community participates, either directly or indirectly, Eliot levels her social critique at an individual, thus determining the connection between the social and familial order and those individuals who compose it.*





towards the villagers is disdainful and condescending very similar to Eliot's description of the slow, stupid, coarse and hard-drinking English peasants in her Riehl-article: "The Natural History of German Life":

"..... the slow utterance, and the heavy slouching walk, remind one rather of that melancholy animal the camel, than of the sturdy countryman, with striped stockings, red waistcoat, and hat aside, who represents the traditional English peasant....."<sup>(32)</sup> (Essays 269)

They are sceptical of Dinah and her Methodism, and in particular, of her aptitude for preaching. It is here that George Eliot indirectly brings in the topic of women and their vocation has a main point, but indirectly, thereby drawing attention to women and women's mission. The distrust of women and their talents pervades the whole novel expressed by various characters, male and female.

In *Adam Bede* the female community as a collective voice is relatively insignificant, and the social control does not function in the same way as in the other stories. With few exceptions, the individual women characters in *Adam Bede* are depicted as scrutinising one another's appearance. The female villagers gather at Dinah Morris' preaching out of curiosity and with the intention of examining her looks and clothes.

Although women comprised the majority of all church members throughout the nineteenth century experiencing conversion and affiliating with the churches in greater numbers than men, they did not serve as ministers or church officers in the major denominations.

This can be understood on the basis of the fact that the village women are illiterate. Therefore, it is natural that they are sceptical of Dinah and other methodist women's behaviour and clothes. Moreover, women are seen to "compete" with one another- a competition that is "superficial" rather than "moral". This is an indirect depiction of a materialistic society where the acquiring of wealth or the display of material objects becomes an advantage and an asset. It presumably grants status and satisfaction.



*nonetheless became hegemonic in urban middle-class culture. Ideologies do not necessarily reflect social experience; rather they shape the ways people interpret their situations and interact with one another. The ideology of the separate spheres concealed gender inequality at the same time it reinforced male dominance, making it quite effective in reducing gender conflict within those groups who adopted it. Rural women, whose lives so directly contradicted to the prescriptions of separate spheres, rejected the terms of dominant ideology. They did not retain traditional modes of thought based on hierarchical relations between women and men. Rather, they constructed an alternative vision of gender relations based on their experiences of kinship and labour.*

*It might be also argued that in Adam Bede and that Adam's suffering and his mental growth is of greater significance. This may be true to a point, but Adam's misery is closely tied to the fate and suffering of a woman, Hetty Sorrel, who transgresses social boundaries and who is very much at the centre of the novel.*

*Hetty is particularly interesting for our purposes as George Eliot combines in her character two aspects of her own picture of women in society. The pretty but the inarticulate and potentially harmful woman, and woman as victim of society's prejudices and intolerance, isolated without friends or a female network.*

*Even if the reader is introduced to the male world of farming and workshops, the female sphere of kitchen and dairy, as illustrated by Mrs. Poyser's and Mrs. Bede's, is also central. The Hayslope society is ugly, stupid, inconsistent, but true to life.*

*The educational standard like that in Milby is low, many of the villagers being illiterate. As Dinah says in her preaching: We haven't been to school much and we don't know much about anything but what happens just around us (AB 24). These people form a limited and narrow-minded community averse to new ideas. The narrator's attitude*



*harmonious a world as it may seem. It is a patriarchal society with set rules and social control of its inhabitants, where men and women have their self-defined roles and where anyone who questions and challenges them is severely punished. Under the calm surface, there is an undercurrent of oppression and intolerance, affecting women in particular.*

*The absence of a conspicuous female community in "Adam Bede" can be understood by stating that rural women did not occupy a "separate sphere" during the nineteenth century and they were not confined to a distinct domain of social life. In contrast to urban women, whose position was increasingly defined by their difference from men, rural women were defined through their relationships with men. Although the kinship system identified them as wives and mothers, daughters and sisters, these women neither elaborated their shared experiences into a female defined subculture nor turned to female networks as an alternative to their relationships with men.*

*Rural women upheld the principle of kinship as the basis for social organisation and opposed the formation of exclusive and impersonal interest groups. Unlike urban middle-class women, farm women contributed to commodity production in concrete and visible ways and thus they were central to the mode of production on which rural society was founded. They participated in the most highly valued and least gender-marked forms of productive labour.*

*To some degree, this vision remained implicit in women's practice, but in crucial contexts, women explicitly advanced this vision as an alternative to both male dominance and separate spheres. In attempting to secure community-wide acceptance of their model of gender relations, women were consciously and collectively countering the hegemony of ideologies of gender division and inequality.*

*Although the ideology of separate spheres failed to correspond to the actual situation of many groups of women in the nineteenth century it*



woman, elegant, kind-hearted, intelligent, well educated with the makings of a truly cultured woman and above all, (after her husband's death) financially independent. At the age of thirty-five, she is resigned to a life of memories and endurance. The woman who could not "be made meek by cruelty " ends her life in compliance and resignation, in "a solemn service of gratitude and patient effort " (JR 301) and like Patty Barton, lives for and through others. Thus, the muted story in "Scenes of Clerical Life" is undoubtedly there to be read and decoded.

In conclusion it can be claimed that in "Janet's Repentance", one of George Eliot's earliest and shorter fiction articulated her essential ideas in the form of a myth. This myth, which is both organic and dialectical, she found she could dramatise by adapting to the conventional form of romantic love to express the process of growth in the individual and in the society.

In her first full-length novel, "Adam Bede" (AB 1859), George Eliot leaves urban Milby and takes the reader to rural Hayslope in Loamshire. The story of "Adam Bede" is placed in the seventeenth nineties society, a decade characterized by great upheavals in rural conditions and life, but of these, there are few signs in the novel. Hayslope is an isolated community where inhabitants observe old and traditional values, very little affected by the new political, social and religious ideas. What George Eliot sees is very different not; because the country has changed, but because she has available to her a different social tradition. She was responding not so much to the growth of industry and cities as to the accompanying break-up of established patterns of behaviour and relationships.

Hayslope is, to a great extent, depicted as a charming and idealised world with simple natural scenes, merry harvest suppers, birthday feasts and everyday farm life, noted by critics who refer to the novel as " mellow presentation of rustic life".<sup>31</sup> Although critics have persistently commented on the charm and comfort of this rural society, it is not as peaceful and



and therefore solaced them "with writing sentimental doggerel".<sup>30</sup> As a result, whatever knowledge the girls acquired in no way prepared them for the adversities of life nor helped them to become satisfactory companions to their husbands.

As the prevalent educational ideals encouraged girls to be silent or rather prevented them from practising and developing sensible ideas, many men discovered too late how false those ideals were, a subject that Eliot returns to in her fiction in the characters of Mrs. Tulliver whom Mr. Tulliver had chosen "cause she was a bit weak like" (MF 19).

It is the badly educated woman who proves the more unmanageable being inclined to follow her whims and childish desires; a thorough education alone would make her a rational being, able to distinguish between trifles and important issues. It was the limited and debasing education offered to girls which was at the centre of the problem, which is clear from Eliot's review of "Hertha" (1856), a novel by the Swedish writer, Frederika Bremer.

In the characters of Miss Pratt, the Miss Linnets and Eliza Pratt, Miss Pratt's motherless niece, George Eliot condemns the futile lives of women with little education, with few meaningful tasks in life and with no real mission. Critical of the educational system and aware of the double standard, she was attentive to the conspicuous unequal political, social and economic conditions in Victorian society. Still she maintained that unless women cultivated their minds, no extensive improvements/alterations could be carried out.

The writer criticises the shallowness of an educational system as represented in Milby high society and Miss Townley's school. The Linnet group is presented as futile and ridiculous, but at the same time the muted story reveals that futility to be sad and somewhat tragic.

To a modern reader, Janet Dempster's fate is perhaps a very disheartening one; she is endowed with the makings of a truly cultured



*Eliot saw around her a society where most women were weak, silly and restricted to their narrow spheres, women who were badly educated and lazy. Some were learned perhaps but in a pointless and undigested way and their knowledge was often used merely for superficial display and ostentation and for imposing on other.*

*Eliot believes that instead of sanctioning idleness, society should allow women to be exposed to the same topics as men and to share ideals with them. Georg Eliot in the negative representation of an elderly unmarried lady, Miss Pratt and the younger Miss Linnets, explicitly criticises and despises their kind and condemns a society that brings forth such beings.*

*Eliot clearly believed that as long as women were not granted the same opportunities as men to educate themselves and to cultivate their minds, they were not ready to shoulder new responsibilities. She advocated".... An equivalence of advantages for two sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development,"<sup>28</sup>.*

*For Eliot, the purpose of education was the individual's fulfilment to a social function. She disapproved of education merely as a matter of prestige. If this was the case, Miss Pratt would not have been so despicable and could have been a model for her society. And the Miss Linnets would not epitomise idleness and would not lead useless lives. It was the society that encouraged and endorsed superficial skills and accomplishments in girls. Eliot is critical of the Miss Linnets who are engaged in reading fantasy novels by women writers. She understood that many of these novels fortified and preserved existing standards for women and imbued girls with false ideals.*

*Eliot attacks writers for pouring out silly novels whose main purpose was to make woman's time pass. She dismissed many stories for women as those of a fine lady's sorrows wept into "embroidered pocket handkerchiefs."<sup>29</sup> She saw many of these books as "butterflies", mostly written by idle women who had to do something with their lonely hours*





*and their lives is clear. The Linnet Circle is instrumental in rejecting Janet from her community, rejected by her friends who had once admired her outstanding qualities with the exception of Mrs. Pettifer. Although the Linnet Circle notices that Janet is mentally and physically tortured by her husband, they are not much of a help and instead, place much of the blame on her:*

*Mrs. Dempster had never been like other women; She has always a flighty way with her... . Going to drink tea with Mrs. Brinley, the carpenter's wife, and then never taking care of her clothes, always wearing the same things-week-day or Sunday (JR 241)*

*The Milby female community punished Janet for her violation of the accepted code. Provoked by her less ostentatious way of dressing and her association with people of an inferior class, the ladies let loose an indignation that causes the amiable laconic Mr. Phipps to wonder "how it was women were so fond of running each other down" (JR 241).*

*After her husband's death, Janet is accepted by society again, since all his property is left to Janet unconditionally, she is financially independent. It is remarkable to note that Janet becomes of interest to the insincere and snobbish "aristocracy" in Milby. Eliot is referring to the hypocritical conduct of the community. By showing how it promptly accepts a formerly shunned individual, George Eliot reveals the true nature of the ingratiating behavior of this female community and exposes its hypocrisy, its lack of solidarity and of genuine friendship.*

*The ladies' futile and useless lives in The Linnet Circle is to a modern reader sad rather than ridiculous. Miss Pratt is the archetype of the fighter for women's rights as ridiculed in, for instance, "Punch" at that time.<sup>27</sup> Miss Pratt is also a writer of books in the "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" category "..... Occasionally dabbling a little in authorship, though it was understood that she had never put forth the full power of her mind in print... ." (JR 1836).*



*create sensible and pleasant companions to future husbands. It was regarded as sufficient but it was even desirable that middle-class girls merely learn the rudiments of French "a smattering of French phrases...".<sup>24</sup> The accomplishments most appreciated were a little dancing, a little drawing, playing music and embroidery.*

*Education for girls was a family matter; most girls were taught by their mothers or in certain cases by governesses. Most of the few schools that existed were of low standard, offering bad food, inhuman discipline and poor teaching.<sup>25</sup> The emphasis lays on accomplishments, behaviour and dress. The curriculum was limited and methods of teaching were monotonous and mechanical. These were the schools that Thacheray ridicules in Miss Pinkerton's Academy for Young Ladies in "Vanity Fair" and Charlotte Bronte criticises in her representation of Lowood Institution for indigent daughters in "Jane Eyre". In the eighteen fifties, there was a growing reaction against schools of this kind.*

*Martha Vicinus has shown these milieus (school for girls) often generated intense friendships among pupils as well as among pupils and teachers, friendships that were important steps in growing up and "taught girls intimacy and socialised them into the world of women".<sup>26</sup> Such thinking and behaviour does not find place in Eliot's women characters. In Eliot's novels, women do not bond together in a sincere way; neither do they show intimacy free from rivalry, jealousy and envy. There is more of competitiveness than of complementary relationships amongst the female characters, resulting in a lack of female bonding. In the second half of the story of "Janet's Repentance" we move from the sectarian dispute to the life and death struggles of separate human beings in the community and in particular to the fate of Janet Dempster. In the private conflict, the more obvious public contrasts are subtilized.*

*In the portayal of the female group of unmarried women and widows guthering in Mrs. Linnet's parlour, George Eliot's delineation of women*





women. The cause of their superiority and personal vanity is of their better economic position in the society and also because of their stylish dress code that sets a demarcation between them and the other women of the less privileged section. It is also implied that George Eliot is convinced that women's attention to looks and dress prevents them from exerting themselves in anything but trivialities.

This is the inevitable logic which comes into play when the social organism decays. Education gives status but Milby's educational standard is mediocre set by men like Miss Tomlinson's father who prides himself on having been given "no education, and he didn't care who knew it; he could buy up most of the educated men he'd ever come across" (JR 170).

It is true that George Eliot does not present the school curriculum but the effects of such schooling can be seen in the young ladies who are the "furnished" products of "distant and expensive schools" (JR 176)- a schooling that is mainly used as a medium to impress and over-reach others.

Instead of broadening their minds, the girls' fashionable schooling has made them intolerant, narrow-minded and scornful. Intolerance, slandering and back biting are conspicuous features of the girls in Miss Townley's school-a place where assests are gauged in the from of eyes and hair-do.

Considering Eliot's early attack on the effects of contemporary education, it can be concluded that Eliot expresses her condemnation of a system that emphasises accomplishments and appearances to be used for prestige and status rather than for culture and enlightenment.

In the nineteenth century, girls' education was not considered particularly important. They were denied the pursuit of serious studies, a denial founded on the conception that women had no aptitude for scholarly work and that it might endanger their femininity. Girls' education was never meant as preparation for a profession but only to



money. A man's principles is validated by his property, his education by the cash.

George Eliot has clearly shown that the community has lost its true role and even the professions have become self-perpetuating systems with their own esoteric codes and rituals for the purpose of creating money and power. Even the church in Milby has failed to challenge this materialism, for it, too, has generated into vested interests and empty forms. The church service has become a paga celebration of wealth, booty, and status by means of which, a "distinguished aristocratic minority"<sup>21</sup> defends its position by ridiculing publicly the dress and demeanour of the rest of its congregation. It employs for this purpose satire, the essential ingredient of the Milby ethos, by means of which any real communal values are subverted. George Eliot has shown how a perverse ethic comes into operation. Experience has shown that people are most comfortable when they "look down a little on their fellow-creatures."<sup>22</sup>

In such a society it is inevitable that Milby's female community is reperedented by female characters who often reveal their personality and social status through looks and dress and the young female elite of Milby dress in a vulgar and obstentious manner. In their hats with "long, drooping ostrich feathers of parrot green" and bonnets with a "plume of feathers" (JR 175) they resemble peacocks prancing and showing off, an image that Eliot also makes Mrs. Poyser use in connection with Hetty Sorrel's selfishness and frivolity in *Adam Bede*. In his discussions of Milby's social hierarchy and organisation, Peter Fenves points to the young ladies' adornment as a means of differentiating them from working class and factory girls.<sup>23</sup>

Eliot repeatedly refers to the aggravating fact that women set clothes, looks and charming behaviour above intellectual pursuits and that they were attentive to and were impressed by men's flattery. Beautiful young ladies of society in "Janet Repentance" fancy themselves superior to other



*Eliot's conception of women's relationship can be interpreted in accordance with Eliza Lynn Linton's contemporary view that no woman's friendship ever existed free from jealousy and that much female behaviour was determined by rivalry. Sexual rivalry almost inevitably plays a prominent part in women's relationships for Bronte and Eliot. Eliot, likewise, has no expectations of female solidarity. She writes in Middlemarch that "Dissatisfaction in women's minds is continually turning into trivial jealousy, referring to no real claims, springing from no deeper passion than the vague exactingness of egoism, and yet capable of impelling action as well as speech" (MM 317).*

*Not all Eliot's female characters are given to sexual rivalry and jealousy, but the absence of such a feeling toward other women is seen as a particular virtue, the rarest quality in a character such as Lucy in *The Mill on the Floss*, a woman who is loving and thoughtful for other women. In "Janet's Repentance" the female communities comprise of the snobbish wives and daughters of the local lawyers and millers, the girls in Miss Townley's school, and the ladies in Miss Linnet's Parlour-to a certain extent-fictional representations of ladies that Eliot had so forcefully ridiculed at in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists".*

*The first community of women consists of the wealthy young ladies in Milby, the upper stratum of social hierarchy who form an exclusive world of their own. To a large extent, they incarnate the shallow and frivolous, critical and intolerant women Eliot had already delineated in the review articles, notably the one on Fuller and Wollstonecraft, and who will reappear though in different form in *The Mill on the Floss*.*

*As Vineta Colby puts it, "The canting hypocrites and village gossips, the timid spinsters and comfortable matrons who populate Milby will flourish again in *St. Ogg's* and in *Middlemarch*".<sup>20</sup> when the story opens, it is soon apparent that the leading citizens of the town of Milby have externalised everything that is inward, emotional, and spiritual into objects, rituals and*



*show no affection to one another; instead, jealousy and rivalry prevails among them.*

*George Eliot believed that if women had access to formal education, it would bring out well-read and cultured women-women who would not have false ambitions but would be refined, graceful and witty.*

*A really cultured woman..... is all the simpler and less obstrusive for her knowledge: it has made her see herself and her opinions in something like just proportions; she doesn't make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right estimate of herself.... .*

*In conversation, she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you without wanting to make you aware that you don't understand her. She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture-she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence (Essay 317).*

*It is noteworthy that none of these aristocratic ladies in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" are truly cultured according to George Eliot's standard. Through the depiction of these female characters Eliot is certainly suggesting societal change for a better future where women, as well as men, will have access to the same fund of knowledge-the truth.*

*The narrator comments: "It is amazing how long a young frame will go on battling with this sort of secret wretchedness, and yet show no traces of the conflict for any but sympathetic eyes" (GLS 127). And there are no sympathetic eyes around her except those of Maynard Gilfil. In "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story", Eliot depicted a small community of women where Caterina Sarti's life is thwarted by the conventionally snobbish and haughty values of patriarchal high society. The social world has made her emotionally handicapped and her original liveliness is frustrated by conventional attitudes, and the coldness and narrow conventionalism of Lady Cheverel has deprived her love and support.*



*individual's class background, her economic situation, her race, her physical abilities and disabilities.*

*These women are often blind and ignorant mainly to experiences dissimilar to their own and the circumstances of others. Women's support and friendship for one another are undermined and fractured by feelings of envy, anger, competition and betrayal-feelings which serve to distance women, not bring them together. These feelings also threaten to destroy the openness and trust that can exist between them-a theme that can be observed in almost all of Eliot's novels.*

*Women's desire for love, acceptance and support from one another is related in a complex way to the heritage and the potential they have experienced in their first relationship with a woman-the mother. Then how is it than women's positive feelings towards one another have a counterpoint in equally powerful negative feelings? To understand how this has happened, we need to understand how the change in women's social role affects women's relationships. We need to provide ourselves with a social and psychological perspective that can account for these changes.*

*In "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story", the female community is of less consequence than in the other two stories. The women characters have very little contact with society outside their homes and they live their lives separated from a female community.*

*The small female group in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" can be traced in the interactions of Lady Cheveral, Lady Assher and her daughter Beatrice-ladies of higher social hierarchy. These aristocratic women, similar to the women of lower stratum in Eliot's novels, are potential rivals than potential friends. Like the Countess in "Amos Barton", these ladies of society have had no formal education that would prepare them for an independent living and give them a broader view of life so that they would be able to understand their fellow human-beings. Their world is narrow. They are the conventional portraits of nineteenth century women who*



*Barton's angelic wife, herself something of an outsider in the community, always presented in relation to her husband, children and home.*

*Eliot's involvement in women's social condition and education took shape at a very early age. In her earliest known manuscript, a school notebook (watermarked 1830), she wrote an essay entitled "Affections and Conceit" in which she dealt with the emptiness and shallowness of many of many of her own sex. Singling out for criticism women who by their personal charm try to arouse envy of their rivals, she writes:*

*Thus women... . by their personal charms secure the admiration and worship of the whole world and safe in this belief they flutter.... on the flattered of the one sex, the envy of the other; and they are happy while thus admired and envied, their whole minds being in one confusion and whirl of excitement and vanity;... their whole thoughts are how they shall best maintain their empire over the surrounding inferiors, and the right fit of dress or bonnet will occupy their minds for hours together;... So conscious are they of the power of their personal attractions". (Essays 553, 54)*

*Admittedly, this early essay demonstrates Eliot's main concerns: the mental and intellectual emptiness of many of her own gender. Moreover, taking into consideration her female characters, George Eliot attempts to provide an understanding of the emotional and psychological processes that are set in train when women perceive differences in each other. They face difficulties in coming to terms with those differences. Differences in background and in the status between/ among women are, of course, substantial and contribute to the hurt, the misunderstanding and the anger that fester in women's relationships.*

*The assumptions that women characters make about one another often do not take account of their own particular circumstances. The expectations, desires and ambitions that they have for themselves are based on a perception of the world seen from the vantage point of an*





possibility of influencing her destiny. In addition, the character of the Countess permits George Eliot to show the effect of gossip and slander in a small community.

It must be remembered that the Countess is a stranger in the village, and moreover, a beautiful woman, a fact that arouses distrust amongst the female villagers, in particular. Settling in the neighbourhood to find a husband, she has miscalculated her chances of being accepted in a community where amongst people who know one another well and "where the women were mostly ill-dressed and ugly" (AmB 35), her every movement is subjected to close inspection. Rejected by the community, she has to humiliate herself by begging her brother to take her in. Very perceptively, we are made to see the pressures working in such a society.

Although the Countess is both selfish and calculating, she serves her purpose as an illustration of the dreary prospects open to dependent women in the nineteenth century. A main issue that can be re-organised from Eliot's earliest writing in the "Westminster" and in the "Leader" is women's shallowness and unsatisfactory education. Eliot realises that idleness and ignorance existed in all classes of society from country girls to women at court.<sup>18</sup> To Eliot, it was important that women could prove that they were capable of "accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command"; otherwise, woman is fit for nothing but... "to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine"<sup>19</sup> (Essays 204, 205)

Apparently, the Countess has been given a sketchy and unsatisfactory education that does not prepare her for an independent living. In the portrayal of the Countess, George Eliot demonstrates and exposes both the effects of idleness, ignorance and financial dependence in an individual and also the effects of female envy and rivalry.

Furthermore, Eliot is perhaps trying to channel women's energy into something more useful than loitering with easy grace and being idle and ignorant. The only woman who has pity on the Countess is Milly Barton,



*Janet Gibbs belongs to the category of nineteenth century women generally referred to as "superfluous women", who had to rely on the benevolence of their relatives. In contrast to her aunt, who being a beauty could marry well, Janet Gibbs, provided with neither beauty nor money, "has refused the most ineligible offers out of devotion to her aged aunt..." (AmB 8). It is noteworthy here that beauty and money added to the status of the women. A beautiful young woman drew eligible suitors and her married counterpart secured her position in society. The ironical remark can be interpreted in two ways; Either Janet refuses the offers of marriage because they were indeed unsatisfactory or it could be that she was really keeping an eye on her aunt's property, expecting a possible inheritance.*

*It is of course possible that Miss Gibbs is as mercenary as her aunt suspects her of being, but it is more likley that Eliot is portraying a woman, who, victim of current attitudes in society towards women, is dependent on her aunty's money in order to survive. In Mrs. Patten, George Eliot has outlined a woman character who shows no loyalty or compassion to less fortunate female relative but uses her as an unpaid lady's maid and housekeeper.*

*Although Janet Gibbs is snubbed by her aunt and to an extent oppressed by her, yet, she is socially accepted in the female community of the village. She is a poor, unmarried relative of Mrs. Patten who has not trespassed the moral code of the society. However, Countess Czerlaski is exposed to villagers' slander and gossip. Though a minor character, the Countess illustrates the Victorian ideals that encouraged women to be idle and shallow, making them financially dependent and vulnerable, unfit of earning their own living.*

*Unlike Janet Gibbs, the Countess had once a profession as a governess but has got used to being provided for first by her husband and her brother. It is clear that the Countess' idleness has made her incapable of earning her own money and without money of her own she has little*





*into material wealth, and considers her marriage, to have been a happy one, not because she has participated actively to make it happy, but because she has "never aggravated her husband" (AmB 11). Money not only provides her with security but commands respect and esteem among her neighbours also.*

*Mrs. Patten is George Eliot's first fictional representation of a woman who feels that her superiority (a complex achieved through the possession of material wealth) grants her the right to look down upon her social inferiors. The other side of Mrs. Patten's sense of superiority is reflected in her superior dairy products which makes her despise other women and their inferior products—a trait that reappears in both Mrs. Poyser in "Adam Bede" and Mrs. Tulliver in "The Mill on the Floss". The essay most relevant of this discussion is "Hints on Snubbing" and is a forceful critique of various kinds of social, political, religious and domestic snubs. The writer attacks the hypocrisy and snobbery that flourish in society and disapproves of the contemptuous and hypocritical attitudes by the "ladies" of society to their "inferiors". This way Eliot exposes and ridicules societal evils.*

*Mrs. Patten is one fine example of such a woman. Mrs. Patten's egocentricity and acquisitiveness are best revealed, however, in her behaviour towards her niece, Janet Gibbs whom she detests, suspecting that Jane counts on inheriting her aunts's property and therefore, only pretends to take care of her. Consequently, Mrs. Patten is determined to disappoint her niece and leave her "with a miserable pittance" (AmB 9). On the other hand, "Janet seemed always to identify herself with her aunts's personality, holding her own under protest" (AmB 13). This shows Janet's dilemma; being at the mercy of her aunts she is compelled to endure her aunt every time she wants to suggest something. This show that her opinions are not valued and her aunt is the sole authority where decision-making is concerned.*



*rank and position. In this case, the oppressed are the representatives of a "cast" rather than "class".*

*Since the main aim of this study has been to focus on and examine the female communities, initially, it takes into consideration the two stories of "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance" that contain well developed female communities. They will be examined as to the potential examine of female sub-culture within the community at large. Another objective will be to examine the extent to which patriarchal values directly affect the relationships among women, which is particularly interesting in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story", where patriarchal control and oppression are directly exerted in the micro-world of the family.*

*Critics have argued that the female communities in "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance" are not central to development of the plot and that they function largely as a chorus. This chorus introduces and gives its opinions on the main characters and the main events. It is true like the Dodson sisters in "The Mill on the Floss" the female communities in "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance" may appear comical, but upon close scrutiny these communities are revealed as neither harmless nor amusing. They are more than a background and they illustrate the oppression to which women were often subjected. Consequently, these female communities also help to throw light on the lives of the female protagonists and their predicaments. Clearly, George Eliot saw these communities as embodiments of narrowminded attitudes and beliefs that she had attacked earlier in her fiction. Seen in this perspective they give a clear picture of Eliot's ideas on women and women's situation in a constricted society.*

*The female community in "Amos Barton" is represented by the elderly ladies in Mrs. Patten's circle. The centre of the circle is Mrs. Patten, a childless, aged widow, who has got rich "chiefly by the negative process of spending nothing (AmB 8). Having once been a beauty, she has married*



men".<sup>16</sup> By extending her observation to George Eliot, one perceives that Eliot did not conform to this norm and female friendship is rarely convincing amongst her female characters.

Many critics have focussed on the importance of society in Eliot's but few have dealt with the female community peruse. One exception are the Dodson sisters in "The Mill on the Floss" who have attracted critical notice mainly as examples of George Eliot's ability to create humorous characters. But Mrs. Linnet's in "Janet's Repentance" and the Irwine Sisters in "Adam Bede" are hardly mentioned by critics. A conspicuous quality of the female community in George Eliot's fiction is its narrow-mindedness which exists not only in the society at large, the macro-world, but also in the micro-world of family and home. Mothers impose it on their daughters, aunts on their nieces, older women on younger ones, upper-class women on their social inferiors and villagers on strangers. Narrow-mindedness, intolerance and prejudice are features that Eliot ascribes to her female society, often expressed through what she calls the voice of the "world's wife"-the public opinion:

*The world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for  
The preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's  
Conduct had been of the most aggravated kind (MF 491).*

The values and attitudes of these communities or groups of women are seen to influence the interactions among the women characters, the main emphasis being on the intolerance and oppression to which women subject one another. As Carolyn Heilburn perceptively notes that women have behaved "not as an oppressed class struggling to overcome their oppression, but as a cast, identifying with their oppressors, internalising the oppressor's views on them".<sup>17</sup> This statement applies to many of George Eliot's women characters. Hierarchical divide in the society not only reflects oppression of women by men-the calss oppression, but at the same time, women of low social status are oppressed by women of high social



*shares with many of George Eliot's female characters, minor as well as major, to be a woman in Eliot's fiction is to live in "oppressive emptiness" (MF 286) to be "too much oppressed" by suffering (SCL 249) and to feel "oppressive dullness" (AB 404). This perspicacious observation will sum up the essence of George Eliot's depiction of her female societies exposing her female characters to the oppressive narrowness of their own community.*

*In the analysis of George Eliot's attitude to and depiction of her female characters and the communities they live in, this article not only studies the female protagonists but also focuses on the cultural background and the role and interaction of the minor female characters as members of the female community. Although the minor female characters may not be of prime interest to a reader of George Eliot's novels, they nevertheless, are represente "not merely as part of a backdrop to the community, but as the initiators and creators of communality".<sup>14</sup> They contribute to creating a whole and help as map out Eliot's female fictional landscape.*

*These minor characters are of interest, first, since they are connected with Eliot's "radical" writing in the Westminster Review, and secondly, because they portrary interesting women characters and contain embryos of female communities. The characters have a future dimension in that collectively they serve as an illustration of the fates of a variety of women in the nineteenth century English society.*

*In such a milieu, women might be assumed to form loyal, supportive networks, and recent studies in history of women show that in the Victorian period, women frequently lived in close relationship.<sup>15</sup> For instance, Nina Auerbach examines the image of a self-sufficient or a self-contained female community in a number of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels by women writers.*

*Auerbach claims further that the female community as a recurrent literary image in many novels by women writers of the period is a "rebuke to the conventional ideals of a solitary women living for and through*



Nevertheless, George Eliot was touched by the general controversy. She not only reflected, but deepened the more general debate, and this study endeavours to examine those insights against the background of a broader controversy, which refused to see the issues in terms of female incapacities, locating culpability rather in the system itself which was blameworthy.

In examining George Eliot's attitudes to and depiction of female friendships and communities, this study represents, in some respects, an extension of the concerns raised by Elaine Showalter that women's fiction can be read as a "double-voiced discourse" containing a "dominant" and a "muted" story, that women constitute a "muted group" as opposed to the dominant male group.<sup>11</sup>

Showalter argues that both groups "generate beliefs or ordering ideas of social reality at the unconscious level, but dominant groups control the forms and structures in which consciousness can be articulated. Thus muted groups must mediate their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures".<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, members of the muted groups, the women characters, accept and internalise the beliefs and doctrines of the dominant group and expose those who do not want to adjust to prevailing opinions to a stiflingly oppressive narrowness. Furthermore, it is of particular interest to explore the extent to which the silent female author commits herself to her women characters by placing them in a culturally oppressive context.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot depicts what it is like for "young natures in many generations before them" and "the oppressive narrowness" that they exposed to (MF-272-63). And in a conversation some years later Eliot said that sole purpose in writing "The Mill on the Floss" was "to show the conflict which is going on everywhere when the younger generation with its higher culture comes into collision with the older...".<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Maggie Tulliver is alone on a collision course with the ideology of the older generation, voiced by her female community. This is the fate Maggie



*men; it emphasizes those experiences which women share with one another rather than those which tie them to men. This approach makes it possible to attain a comprehensive view and to analyze the interactions among the familial, economic and social dimensions of women's lives and to investigate the dynamics that shaped the meaning of gender system as a whole. This problem is situated in the socio-historical condition within which the gender system took shape and was re-shaped. The diversity of female experience shows that the ideas about the female characters are socially constructed and thus constantly evolving in response to complex socio-economic and cultural changes.*

*In "A Room of One's Own", Virginia Woolf observed that until Jane Austen's day, women almost without exception were" shown in their relation to men"<sup>8</sup> a statement that is applicable to George Eliot's fiction as well. Accordingly, a recent critic argues that Eliot tends to "define female characters in relation to men rather than to each other"<sup>9</sup> This is logical as Eliot's young heroines live in a world dominated by male principles of commerce and materialism, but one might also assume that in such a milieu a female subculture of support and sympathy, comfort and compassion would be palpably felt. Of this, there is little evidence, and bonds between women are rare.*

*Admittedly, a certain amount of benevolence and kindness does exist among women in Eliot's works; but more often, her Women's world is cruel and heartless and her works bear witness to a divisive and destructive element" in women's various interactions as community members, as participants in the same rites of womanhood, as sexual rivals, as unmarried women and wives, as mothers and daughters".<sup>10</sup> Clearly, though, the severity of many women commentators on the subject of female friendships cannot be entirely attributed to a chauvinistic defensiveness and suggests more simply an acceptance of prevailing, often derogatory assumptions about women.*





*She understands and represents the separation of public and private spheres, and how these representations inform their accounts of gender subjectivity. This notion of women's culture tends to encapsulate women within their separate spheres. Eliot expresses her continuing anxiety over the role women are given to play in a society structured by gender, class and capital. It can be further argued that George Eliot takes a stance within her culture, which is neither entirely resisting nor entirely complicitous, a culture which is delineated by the social and political analysis of her era.*

*The mid-nineteenth century saw the literary phenomena of an emergent community of women writers synchronize with the social phenomena of an excess of females in the population. This stimulated a widespread reassessment of women's role and drew many women writers such as Gaskell, Brontes and Eliot into the discussions of women's relationships.<sup>6</sup> It was the common conviction that the feminine frame of mind and natural disposition was particularly vulnerable and that women's tenuous grasp on rationality and control was dependent on proper occupation and supervision. Then, how far could women be trusted without male supervision? How healthy were relationships between? Indeed, were women even capable of friendship with their own sex? Negative answers were predictably forthcoming with periodicals like "The Saturday Review" leading the hue and cry against women's collective action<sup>7</sup>.*

*Furthermore, women constitute a cultural group that exists within a wider culture, so that bonds between women are seen as co-existing with women's connection with men. Within the private boundaries of their so called separate spheres, women developed a distinctive counter-culture with values and priorities that both organised from the diversity of female experience and validated their prescribed roles.*

*The creation of a distinctive "women's culture" takes gender divisions as its basis and builds on the elements of separation between women and*



*necessary because feminist literary critics in nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties had developed the hypothesis of a female subculture in accordance with the women's liberation movement that was fighting for the 'Cause' on the basis of the universality of all women. Since the mainstream 'male' literary criticism had marginalized the feminine, it became imperative for these feminist critics to search for and to discover a sense of solidarity and bonding among women characters in women's fiction.<sup>5</sup>*

*It can be argued that this view tends to idealise female relationships. In George Eliot's fiction, the ties that bind women to one another are also seen as chains that imprison. Hence in contrast to the commonly held view, this article seeks to explore the ambivalence that actually exist in Eliot's fiction, in her depiction of female relationships.*

*This article explores Victorian women's relationships with one another by examining how they are transformed into literature. The aim here is to investigate the complexities of female bonding as delineated in George Eliot's "Scenes of Clerical life" (1858), "Adam Bede" (1859) and "The Mill on the Floss" (1860). In pursuing this goal, the other novels have not been the focus of the study because of the lack of the depiction of conspicuous female communities which are more prominent in Eliot's early novels than in her later fiction.*

*In order to understand how this author has chosen to portray women's inter-relationships, an examination of George Eliot and her works will include an examination of some of the Victorian beliefs about women's relationships, as well as contemporary non-fictional accounts of the representation of friendship. It is of interest to examine whether George Eliot in her portrayal of female friendship was questioning the conventional assumptions of the history of women's friendship.*

*Through her novels, George Eliot discusses nineteenth century social conditions in England and the specific limitations imposed on females.*



*Eliot as a woman writer-Q.D. Leavis seeing her work as "a serious criticism of false Victorian values where women are concerned" has not explored the full possibilities of George Eliot's 'feminism'.<sup>1</sup> Feminist Literary Criticism has explored this area fully and revealed the marginalization of women as seen in George Eliot's fiction. However, a defense of her novels does not view her writing as simply seeking the truth. Rather, one sees her as a woman writer, who in terms of categories available to her, attempted to understand and make sense of the social history of her time and the possibilities for the female self-development made available by that history.*

*Most feminist discussions of women's novels have concentrated on women characters and it is not surprising that in doing so, they have needed to focus on a good deal of silence and subterfuge in their search for the materials of female experience.*

*It is against the background of widespread reconsideration of women's social roles and expanding possibilities for women's association with women that George Eliot had the opportunity of 'telling her own story'. Then, what image of women's relationships did the female writer project? This study seeks to answer this question in relation to George Eliot who wrote within this context. It is not simply a study of the woman novelist's female characters or her heroines. It is rather an examination of relationships among women in her fiction, during a period which lent particular interest to the subject of female friendships and communities.<sup>2</sup>*

*Recent studies in the history of women show that in the Victorian period, women frequently lived in close relationships.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, female friendships as portrayed in nineteenth century women's fiction have of late attracted critics well. In the context of Victorian fiction, emphasis has been laid on female bonding. Recent feminist literary critics, such as Nina Auerbach and Tess Cosslett have discovered networks of sisterhood and support in novels by George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte.<sup>4</sup> Possibly, this was*



## **Female Friendships and Communities in George Eliot's Fictional Works**

Anita Lashkarian,  
Ph.D member of the staff of Yazd University

*There have been shifts and alternatives in the perception of George Eliot's writing with changing paradigms and changing ideologies in cultures and societies.*

*A critical study of the Society in George Eliot's fictional works has been widely popular. Recent studies have widened the scope of study by focusing on the women characters and their relationships. The study of women's position in Victorian society as depicted in George Eliot's fiction becomes very relevant today, especially for those marginalised by gender. George Eliot not only demands revision of social values and conventions but also envisions alternative worlds in which women would be autonomous and self-defining.*

*In order to place ourselves fully in relation to George Eliot's novels, we need to understand them in historical/social terms; only by understanding their location in their own time can we assess their possible importance to us across the time, as well as the space that now divides us from the author. Thus, the task at hand is not to assemble documents for an account of the surfaces of women's lives but to track the deep creative strategies of the literary mind at work upon the fact of being female; furthermore, to examine George Eliot's fictional works, not necessarily in a chronological order, and without resort to biography-in adaptation of Lawrence's dictum about trusting the tale rather than the artist.*

*New Criticism, while it has made a nodding acquaintance with George*

