

Buried Under Interpretation: George Eliot's Early Heroines

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English Department Honors Thesis

Submitted: April 1, 2022

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Professor Maia McAleavey for her guidance and support over the course of this project. I wavered between countless ideas this past year, and she gave me the confidence to write about the idea that I continually returned to, these strangely portrayed heroines. I am so appreciative of all the time she dedicated to helping me through every phase of this project.

My parents, Ken and Kate, and my sisters, Cailin and Jenny, thank you for your endless love, support, and always believing in me. Mom – whether it is talking on the phone, reading drafts, or delivering care packages – you are always there for me and I appreciate all that you do so much.

Thank you to my wonderful friends who I am so grateful for – Anna Chen, Caitlyn Harthun, Jasmine Ng, Kate Canniff, and Raquel Guevarra. I love every minute I spend with you lovely ladies and your constant support means everything to me. And Caitlyn, I am so thankful to you for helping me with my final round of edits.

Lastly, I would not have written a thesis on George Eliot if it were not for my childhood dog, Wally. When I was four years old and he was a puppy I would attempt to teach him how to read when I could get him to sit still. When I was eighteen and he fourteen, Wally's health and mobility were rapidly declining. I chose the longest unread book on my bookshelf and read it outside with him every day that summer, with the stubborn belief he would make it to the end. That book was *Middlemarch* by George Eliot and I would not have written this thesis if it was not for that summer of reading with Wally.

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## Introduction

Fictional characters are called on to be believed as both real people with their own histories and interiorities as well as constructed figures in an imagined world. Female characters have additional contrasting pressures placed upon them by societal expectations of gender roles. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe how Victorian women hover at the border between “two distinct spheres: the phenomenal and the noumenal; culture and nature; two consciousnesses; life and death; public appearance and private reality; conscious and unconscious impulses; past and present, present and future” (469). By conceiving of this border as a veil, itself a popular Victorian image, Gilbert and Gubar argue that women are prevented from fully crossing into either sphere (469). Sarah Maier offers a more literal definition of the pressures on female characters in her argument that “female self-definition via a single identity is impossible ... woman’s ‘place’ is, by definition, multiple – daughter, sister, teacher, lover, wife, surrogate mother figure – in both fact and fiction” (320). Despite this complexity of place and identity, women in Victorian fiction seem to be provided with only one destiny – to be marriageable objects. The issue of how to depict these contradictions and limitations is at the forefront of how George Eliot presents her coming of age heroines in her early fiction.

Reading Eliot’s early works, the reader is struck by the strange way that she repeatedly characterizes her unmarried female characters. The second story of *Scenes of Clerical Life* “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” features the odd and often overlooked heroine Caterina Sarti. Described in a multitude of ways as an “Other,” she is “a gypsy changeling” who attempts to take control of her destiny through her desire to marry aristocratic Anthony Wybrow (96). By the end of the story she is subdued and silenced through her marriage to Mr Gilfil. Eliot’s first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, follows two heroines: Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrel. Like Caterina, Dinah and

Hetty begin the novel unmarried and desire a trajectory different than the one destined for them. Dinah is a female preacher who rejects the notion that she is a desirable object and declares she will not marry. Hetty manipulates her status as a desirable object in her attempt to marry a man above her social position, Arthur Donnithorne. She becomes not only a fallen woman, but also a murderer as she kills her baby. There are gaps in the presentation of her character, contributing to the sense that she is unfairly presented by the narrator. Dinah too is presented in a limited manner to the reader. By the end of the novel Hetty is dead and Dinah is married and silenced. Eliot's following novel *The Mill on the Floss* is her most autobiographical, and in this story she combines aspects from these previous three heroines to create a character largely modeled on herself. Maggie Tulliver – gypsy queen, demonic Medusa, loving Madonna – attempts to challenge destiny in the most radical ways, and yet she too is subdued and silenced after drowning in a flood. Barbara Hardy describes how Eliot repeatedly juxtaposes society's singular set of expectations with her characters unexpected reactions to those expectations:

The pattern remains, the people change. To point to a common image which links character and theme is merely to point to a constant which throws all the variations into relief. George Eliot used the landmarks of her own way of the soul – and this may be one reason why she is sometimes said to use one heroine many times – but it is only the landmarks which are unchanging (*The Novels of George Eliot* 199).

These early heroines are all positioned at the transition between childhood and adulthood, and the various ways this transition is approached and handled by her characters is a worthy study in Eliot approaching this integral turning point in a woman's life from various angles.

In spite of their chronological proximity in Eliot's career, critics have resisted grouping Caterina, Dinah, Hetty, and Maggie together as "Eliot's early heroines." This thesis will be a study in how Eliot presents this apparently eclectic group as struggling against the very narratives she places them within. I argue that Eliot presents her female characters under so

many layers – layers imposed both by other characters and by her narrator – and depicts their struggles against these restrictions as a means to convey the limitations placed upon women. Furthermore, there is the additional element of Eliot herself controlling these characters, preventing them from appearing as fully-formed people. Analyzing the similarities and differences in these characters is a worthwhile examination in the unique pressures placed upon coming of age heroines, as well as how these characters are reflective of Eliot’s early attempts to convey these issues in her fiction. There is no single conclusion that can be drawn from these comparisons, which is characteristic of Eliot’s work as a whole. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer describes, “This refusal of singleness, which makes almost every critical interpretation a story of lesser complexity than the one George Eliot tells, is her primary mode of depicting a world of observers and observed in which ‘true representation’ is impossible” (101). The issue that I am most interested in is that despite these complexities, and Eliot’s presumed commitment to feminist expression, these early heroines are provided with only one ending – being silenced.

With the exception of *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot’s stories are rarely considered to fall into the *bildungsroman* genre. The *bildungsroman* is normally considered exclusive to the “west European middle-class man” who as Franco Moretti describes can fulfill the characteristics of the genre of “wide cultural formation, professional mobility, full social freedom” (ix). The *bildungsroman* “is also situated on the border between two social classes, and at the transition point between them: between bourgeoisie and aristocracy” (viii). Coming of age is a smooth and gradual process *between* borders, which makes the genre inhospitable to female characters whose movement between boundaries is restricted. While to call her complex plots marriage plots may be over-simplistic, the reality is that the majority of her stories revolve around the marriages of her young heroines. Marriage marked the definitive divide between childhood and adulthood for

girls during the Victorian era. This is not a smooth transition in Eliot's fiction. As JD Esty describes, "Eliot represents the passage from childhood to adulthood as more disjunctive than additive" and the "moods, sensations, relationships, and experiences" of childhood cannot survive into adulthood (147). The importance of this rupture cannot be understated, as it moves characters into the aforementioned position of unknowable objects – lacking agency, misinterpreted, suspended in time, and silenced. It also marks the end of any semblance of control by the female character. This connection between coming of age, representation as an object, and control is not often discussed in Eliot criticism.

The stories of Caterina, Dinah, Hetty, and Maggie track the transformation of a girl not into a mature woman, but into an object. This animate-inanimate *bildungsroman* is depicted as a natural process. It is not only society which views it as natural, but the structure of their stories themselves. All of these heroines are deemed foolish for attempting to change their future. Debra Gettelman argues that this denial of choice is Eliot's way of warning her readers against the egotistical wish-fulfillment fantasies of many of her characters. She claims "that George Eliot comes to define realist fiction as relying on the author's discipline over the reader's unruly imagination" (26). Eliot is teaching both the reader and her characters lessons in the realities of life; however, this again returns to the additional level of control her female characters are under. Her characters appear to struggle against their story as much as the oppressive society in which they live. Bodenheimer describes how Maggie's refusal to Stephen "is her right to a woman's power of choice ... To retain the right of choice, to wear it in the face of her society, is to be misread in several ways at once; Maggie is accused both of rational coldheartedness and unwomanly sexual license" (110). Here we see that even when a woman does exercise her "power of choice" it is misinterpreted; however, to say that Maggie truly had choice is

questionable. From the opening pages of the novel she is seen as being controlled by first the narrator and then Philip, who takes the position of the narrator and predicts both her relationship with Stephen and her death in the flood. What is notable is that the one choice that Eliot grants her is the decision not to marry, a decision denied to her previous heroines. The destinies that these characters are not in charge of, but deeply desire, to control is marriage.

One of the primary ways that the representation of these female characters will be explored is by examining Eliot's presentation of her fiction as being both real and imagined. The Victorian realist novel placed an emphasis on depicting the reality of life, and part of this commitment to reality was exposing the novel as a created art object. As explained by Alison Byerly, "Victorian novels are famously self-conscious about their status as artifacts. While earlier novels often masqueraded as 'real' narratives such as letters and journals, the Victorian novel sought credibility by admitting to its own artifice" (2). This awareness can be clearly seen in Eliot's work. For example, the opening paragraph of *Adam Bede* reads as follows:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Johnathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799 (5).

Eliot addresses the fact that a novel is an artistic creation, while simultaneously grounding the story in concrete facts; seamlessly shifting from a "drop of ink" to the "eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799." Bodenhimer suggest that "The scenic mode of presentation which George Eliot develops here seems to situate narrator and reader on the outskirts of a setting that is drawn in pictorial detail by the narrator, then put into living motion by the dialogue of characters; it is a technique that calls attention to the novel as a fiction and yet manages to achieve a kind of intimate realism" (51). Eliot is drawing explicit attention to her stories as

created, and yet as Elaine Freedgood describes in her exploration of the Victorian narrator, the narrator is “reporting on an intact world that it did not make, a world that is really ‘there’ somewhere, and this not-quite-solid collective mind is in it” (17). The narrator is reporting on a world that it did not make, but the reader knows that both the world and the narrator are creations by Eliot. Thus, to borrow a term from *1984*, there is a sort of doublethink at play in how Eliot wants her fictional worlds to be viewed. This tension between prior existence and creation is even more prominent in her characters.

Similar to the way in which Eliot’s novels are presented as being both real and created, her characters also exist in this in-between space. Eliot’s characters are foremost recognized for their “realness,” a characteristic largely due to the imaginations that she grants them. Hardy describes that “one of her greatest contributions to the art of fiction is a dynamic and mobile particularization of the motions of the mind. It would be most accurate to say that her characters *attempt* to imagine, generalize, relate and unify. She catches effort on the wing, showing Imagination as it struggles to achieve, as it does badly, well and better” (*Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* 181). Her characters appear as fully-formed people, and yet they are limited, or rather controlled by, Eliot herself. Hetty for example is a character that is presented with a limited imagination, which is meant to draw attention to the faults of her character. Her character fails to be criticized by the reader in the ways that Eliot perhaps intended because there is the sense that Hetty is unfairly represented by the narrator. By granting her characters this interiority, but never granting the reader full access to their imagination due to the intermediary layer of representation by the narrator, draws attention to the ways in which Eliot is purposefully preventing true representation of these characters.

Eliot complicates her female characters' narratives by continually flagging their relationship to art and their constructedness as art objects. Art plays a significant role in how Eliot intends her characters to be interpreted, as art can be seen as operating on two levels. First, as an indication of the characters "true" self, and secondly how a heroine's attempt to be an artist can be seen as an attempt at agency. Eliot meant for most of these attempts at artistry to be viewed as egotistical, but they can also be seen as attempts of control. Art in Eliot's fiction is foremost used to signify sincerity versus insincerity. Certain forms of art are privileged over others, and when a character is associated with this art form it is meant to draw attention to certain traits of that character. Byerly describes this kind of hierarchy of art as follows:

An examination of her characters' involvement with art reveals a kind of hierarchy of the arts, in which visual art is exposed as a detached and static simplification of complex reality, theatrical art is linked with a dangerous deception of self and others, and musical art alone is capable of representing truth. A woman who imagines herself as a painting or an actress is indulging in egoistic self-dramatization; a man who describes a woman in aesthetic terms is stripping her of her humanity... (106 -107).

How art is employed is therefore a key to the true representation of her characters. While visual art is criticized by Eliot, it is the final destination for her characters who marry and are reduced to aesthetic objects. It is not only female characters for whom art plays a significant role in informing view of character; however, the ramifications of how they are depicted in relation to art have greater implications for her female characters. Gilbert and Gubar explain how in Eliot's fiction we see the "classic role of women who are denied the status of artist because they are supposed somehow to become works of art themselves" (450). Being an artist denotes having control, while being an object is equated to being controlled. Caterina, Dinah and Hetty to varying degrees all attempt to be in this artist position. Caterina sings to "woo" Anthony, and Hetty envisions herself and her future in terms of portraits. Dinah on the other hand assumes the artist position to avoid being viewed as an object. Eliot denies all these characters artistic choice.

This unknowable quality is yet again amplified in her female characters, particularly when they are reduced to being an object. This objectification normally occurs when the character is viewed as desirable by a man, and it is the constant state for her heroines once married. Gilbert and Gubar describe how “For Eliot, then, the fallen state of consciousness, the secret wound of the female, is not only a subject but also a bind related to the paralysis of self-loathing which is initiated by acceptance of patriarchal values that contradict the woman’s inescapable, if unarticulated, sense of her own primacy” (466). Elisha Cohn describes a similar numbing of self in her analysis that “characters react with despair at their social paralysis and unconquerable restraints, so a tendency to drift away, to become unreachable and unknowable, evades analysis when there is no recourse to any strong power of resistance” (69). The retreat of these female characters can be understood as an act of self-protection against the reality of the violation of self and agency that they must endure. This returns to the layering of created and real that Eliot applies to her characters. It is as if her female characters, trapped under so many layers of interpretation, and often misinterpretation, recede further from the judgmental eyes of both other characters and the reader. Bodenheimer writes of Eliot’s final novel *Daniel Deronda* the following: “In a move that connects her final work with the male narrators of her earliest stories, she recovers her masculine persona in full view of her audience, as if to suggest a truth about the whole of her career: that the wearing of the mask is the most revelatory mode of all” (160). This sentiment can be applicable to her female characters as well – presented under so many layers of interpretation, it is ultimately a masked version of themselves that is revealed to the reader.

Throughout this thesis the method for analyzing the representation of these female characters will be to focus on the layers of interpretation placed upon them, the role of art in their depiction, desire for control, and the single destiny of marriage. Special attention will be paid to

how Eliot highlights and manipulates our understanding of these characters as both created and real. The first chapter will focus on the heroines Caterina, Dinah, and Hetty, and how Eliot can be seen working through these issues of representation. The second chapter will focus exclusively on Maggie, as she both exemplifies and counters many of the characteristics that Eliot's previous characters established. Maggie, the character closest to Eliot's own life, is the most complex and contradictory of these characters, and the final flood that kills her marks an end to this phase in Eliot's fiction where she creates these particularly strange and volatile female characters.

George Eliot lived a life that was not typical for her time and strayed greatly from the singular trajectory that she places her heroines on. Exploring the various ways in which her heroines also attempt to stray, but are ultimately reigned in, reveals the ways in which Eliot was attempting to convey these contradictory and opposing pressures acting on female characters. Denied choice and true representation, her heroines end up not where they want to be, but where society, reinforced by narrative, insists they belong.

## Chapter 1: Performer, Painter, Preacher: Eliot's Silenced Artistic Heroines

George Eliot began her fiction at the age of thirty-seven with the release of a collection of three stories titled *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1858, quickly followed by the publication of *Adam Bede* in 1859. In these works the reader can observe the earliest examples of the characteristics that will come to define Eliot's fiction, such as an emphasis on realism and her belief in human sympathy. It is also where she first establishes some of the character types that she will reuse and develop over the course of her literary career, in particular the character of the unmarried heroine.

In these works, Eliot presents three heroines all poised at the divide between childhood and adulthood. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the second story, "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" features her first such character, Caterina Sarti. *Adam Bede* largely centers around cousins Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris, who are also at this divide. The factor that further unites these characters is that they all exist in stories that are highly concerned with art, and consequently how female characters are viewed in relation to art. Caterina, Hetty, and Dinah do perform as artists, both intentionally and unintentionally, and they are ultimately punished for their performances. It is primarily through the lens of art and performance that the conflation between coming of age and becoming an object is explored in these texts. The layers of various art forms – visual, music and theater – all place distance between the characters and the reader, resulting in the unknowable quality these characters share. It is also the mode in which questions of control and agency by these characters are explored. There is another layer of art that is applied to the representation of these female characters, and that is the art of the novel itself. This chapter will be a study in the restrictive interpretations that Eliot places upon her female characters, and how this layering is connected to the association between becoming an object and coming of age as an adult.

### “Caterina’s [Buried] Love-Story” – Stifling the Artistic Spirit

“Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” is the second story in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and is often ignored in the Eliot canon for its sensationalism and melodrama; however, it raises important considerations about the representation of Eliot’s heroines and their relation to art. Furthermore, the narrator focuses on a very specific period in his telling of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story.” Caterina and the Cheverels’ nephew Captain Anthony Wybrow, the heir of the Cheverel estate, have been in a secret relationship for an undetermined amount of time. The story begins when Caterina has just learned that he must marry a fellow aristocrat, Miss Assher. Anthony is not only the man that she loves, but through marriage he would also make her an official member of the Cheverel family, as they had never officially “adopt[ed] her as their daughter (101). Caterina’s subsequent emotional anguish underscores the connection between a girl’s coming of age to adulthood, and the issues of art and performance.

Caterina is introduced to the reader through several layers of interpretations before she actually appears within the text. First, she is introduced as the dead and unnamed wife of the recently deceased clergyman Mr Gilfil. The reader is led through a tour of the objects in her perfectly preserved room, being shown a pincushion, a baby-cap, water-color drawings of Naples, and two miniatures of Mr and Mrs Gilfil. These objects are meant to represent “Mrs Gilfil,” but they create a misleading picture of her as a docile wife and mother. The preservation of this room evokes the sense that she is being preserved, or rather trapped, in time. A description of her miniature is provided as a stand-in for a description of Mrs Gilfil’s appearance. The painting is described as “the likeness of a girl, probably not more than eighteen, with small features, thin cheeks, a pale southern-looking complexion, and large dark eyes” (81). Hugh Witemeyer describes in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* that it is through this miniature that

Eliot draws the reader into the main narrative of the story, explaining that “the narrative composes itself into a picture, and then draws the reader through the frame as if through a time barrier” (81). This interpretation emphasizes Caterina’s status as foremost an art object, failing to take into account the additional interpretation of her as a woman that is included before the transition to the past.

Eliot includes an additional description of “Mrs Gilfil” that puts into question the authority of the narrator to tell this story. This account derives from recollections of Mrs Patten, one of the few townspeople who knew Mrs Gilfil. She describes how Mrs Gilfil was a foreigner from Italy and a talented singer, but had a melancholic quality to her. Notably, Mrs Patten relates that when Mr Gilfil and his wife visited her, Mr Gilfil emphasized his wife’s supposed interest in dairy and cheese; Mrs Patten however claims that she showed no such interest. Mrs Patten recounted, “She didn’t seem lively that afternoon, an’ I could see she didn’t care about the dairy, nor the cheeses, on’y she pretended, to please him” (82). Dairy and cheese, symbols of purity and fertility, and her apparent distaste for them, put into question the “unfinished baby-cap” that is noted among Mrs Gilfil’s belongings in her room (80). It is also noteworthy that Mrs Patten is able to recognize the apparent disconnect between Mr Gilfil’s interpretation of his wife and her own interpretation. The male narrator discredits Mrs Patten’s recollections though, asserting: “But I, dear reader, am quite as communicative as Mrs Patten, and much better informed; so that if you care to know more about the Vicar’s courtship and marriage, you need only carry your imagination back to the latter end of the last century, and your attention forward to the next chapter” (83). Witemeyer skips over this important section of competing interpretations of Mrs Gilfil. But by including Mrs Patten’s view and setting it in opposition to the narrator’s claims to

validity, attention is drawn to who is telling the story. The process of “draw[ing] the reader through the frame” of the narrative is more complicated than it seems.

The presentation of the narrator as someone remembering the story is characteristic of Eliot’s earliest works. Barbara Hardy notes, “It is this nostalgic and reminiscent voice which represents the characters of the story – at this stage, also taken from actual recollection – and these characters are presented in the context of familiar knowledge and attachment” (*The Novels of George Eliot* 156). While this voice creates a sense of familiarity, it alerts the reader to the narrator being another layer between the actual story and the reader. How the narrator chooses to represent Caterina must be viewed with the same suspicion as the ways art or other characters do, especially due to this claim of complete authority and diminishment of other views. Another notable aspect of this introduction is the emphasis placed by the narrator that the events and people he is reporting were real. These claims of reality are in stark contrast to the Gothic elements of the story, and thus an early example of Eliot beginning to work through the paradox of presenting her stories as both real and created.

Once the reader is finally drawn into the story, Caterina alive is finally introduced to the story in a manner that is reminiscent of the description of her as a portrait. It must be noted that Mrs Gilfil’s identity as Caterina is not explicitly confirmed until the end of the story; however, the reader can infer the connection between the two. The narrator describes that:

You are at once arrested by her large dark eyes, which, in their inexpressive unconscious beauty, resemble the eyes of a fawn; and it is only by an effort of attention that you notice the absence of bloom in her young cheek, and the southern yellowish tint of her small neck and face, rising above the little black lace kerchief which prevents that too immediate comparison of her skin and her white muslin gown (83).

By addressing the reader in the second person, the narrator is enforcing this idea of bringing the reader back alongside him to the past. The reader being “arrested” by her beauty is a similar

reaction to being struck by a particularly powerful work of art, but this is the living, breathing Caterina, not a portrait. The painted portrait falls flat in comparison to the description of her as a person. Instead of “large dark eyes” they “resemble the eyes of a fawn.” The “pale southern-looking complexion” is expanded to be “the absence of bloom in her young cheek, and the southern yellowish tint of her small neck and face.” Caterina alive is more expressive than her miniature is, and yet it is through the miniature and as “Mrs Gilfil” that Caterina is first introduced.

The difference between Caterina alive and Caterina as a portrait has important implications for how the repression of Caterina can be interpreted. Cheverel Manor is certainly a restrictive force on Caterina; however, it is ultimately her marriage to Mr Gilfil that is the factor that silences Caterina, as seen through these competing portraits of her. While Cheverel Manor is not the final factor, it is still a major contributor to Caterina’s anguish.

The contrast between Cheverel Manor and Caterina is meant to convey the immense control and limitations placed upon Caterina. Cheverel Manor’s architecture is repeatedly emphasized as being at the sacrifice of comfort and function, a definitively unnatural space. This artificiality transcends into the Cheverel family as well, as Alexandra M. Norton describes that in Cheverel Manor “the ability of an aesthetic object to represent and stand in place of human life goes unquestioned” (224). Lady Cheverel looks like she “had suddenly stepped from her frame” while Anthony is “a delicate piece of work” seemingly carved from stone, literally incapable of love (84, 112). The fact that Caterina’s portrait cannot stand-in for her points to her having more emotional substance than an aesthetic object. Instead of being a work of art, Caterina is a “gypsy changeling,” “little southern bird,” and “Blenheim spaniel” (96, 106, 108). This issue is not that the Cheverels reduce her to be an object as Mr Gilfil does, but the disconnect between Caterina

and the environment she is in. Caterina is “one accustomed to conceal her emotions,” pointing to the restraint she is under (91). But her upbringing is also described as, “Unlike the building, however, Caterina’s development was the result of no systematic or careful appliances. She grew up very much like the primroses, which the gardener is not sorry to see within his enclosure, but takes no pains to cultivate” (107). Caterina’s ruptures of emotion and withdrawn silences is due to her being neither fully free nor fully controlled.

Caterina’s various conflicting identities of neither free nor controlled, outsider to nor member of her family is brought under extreme stress when she learns of Anthony’s engagement to Miss Assher. As previously mentioned, Anthony is the answer to her precarious status in the Cheverel family. Additionally, as Eliot will repeatedly describe her heroines in love, Caterina was “slave of this voice and touch. Grief and resentment, retrospect and foreboding, vanished – all life before and after melted away in the bliss of that moment, as Anthony pressed his lips to hers” (95). Being controlled by Anthony offers not anguish but bliss of a constant present. Caterina does not give up on marrying Anthony though. She attempts to both convey her emotions and change her destiny through musical performance.

The means by which Caterina attempts to express herself and rebel against her destiny is through musical performance; however, musical performance again puts her in conflicting identities of both artist and artistic object. The first time that Caterina’s voice is heard in the story is not in dialogue, but in musical performance. The narrator relates that “Caterina must sit down to the harpsichord and sing Sir Christopher’s favorite airs by Gluck and Paesiello” (93). “Must” underscores that Caterina has to perform regardless of whether or not she is willing. Additionally, it is also not music of her own choosing, but rather Sir Cheverel’s favorite. Later in the story in response to a remark from Miss Assher, Caterina responds “quietly, without smiling;

‘I always sing when I am wanted to sing’” (118). This situates music as something she is made to do against her will, and yet she takes a clear sense of pride in it. Her singing is described as “what she could do best; it was her one point of superiority, in which it was probable she would excel the highborn beauty whom Anthony was to woo; and her love, her jealousy, her pride, her rebellion against her destiny, made one stream of passion which welled forth in the deep rich tones of her voice” (93). Particular attention should be drawn to the sentiment “rebellion against her destiny.” Caterina is manipulating her position as “minstrel of the Manor” and “singing-bird” to change her destiny (114). Already her singing had changed the trajectory of her life, as the narrator notes that her singing was an “unexpected gift [that] made a great alteration in Caterina’s position ... Miss Sarti was to be a lady after all” (108-109). Singing grants her a kind of social mobility that further complicates her position within the family.

The competing status of her as an artist versus controlled performer is due to the distinction between music and performance. As Alison Byerly demonstrates, while music was viewed as being the superior mode of artistic expression, there was a distinction between music and musical performance. Byerly describes, “In theory music was extolled as the most sublime and expressive of the arts, but in practice it was treated as a social diversion, a trivial accomplishment best left to ladies and foreigners” (133-134). Caterina is depicted as existing in this in-between space of having true musicality and being a mere performer. The expression of her emotion is supposedly genuine, but this issue of performativity causes her sincerity to be warped.

The questionable sincerity of Caterina’s performances displays how Caterina is the embodiment of Eliot’s own insecurities about the performative aspect of artistic creation. As Bodenheimer explores in *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, Eliot struggled against her own

desire to be an artist, and her belief that “such a life is exhibitionistic and useless, that it is blasphemous and deceptive, that it represents the very image of self-display before an audience which she rejects in herself” (168). Caterina meanwhile is described as being “not at all insensible to the pleasure of being looked at with admiration” (116). Additionally, it is noted that when Caterina is asked to perform for the Asshers, “Caterina was ready enough to obey, for while she was singing she was queen of the room, and Miss Assher was reduced to grimacing admiration” (121). In this paradoxical statement, obeying is what gives Caterina power and changes the power dynamics between herself and Miss Assher. Caterina does not perform for her love of music, but rather for the opportunities that it affords her.

Caterina’s performative nature causes ruptures in her own sense of self, as the story continues her performance extends outside of just music but to all facets of her life. She alternates between “loud whispers and sobs, restlessly pacing up and down, lying on the hard floor, courting cold and weariness” at night to “show[ing] no traces of the conflict for any but sympathetic eyes” (139). Here everyone except for Mr Gilfil does not recognize Caterina’s performance. Earlier in the story after her first performance Caterina throws herself at Sir Christopher’s knees in a bizarre outburst, where he then strokes her cheek in a scene reminiscent of a person stroking a dog. Lady Cheverel admonishes her to “leave off those stage-player antics” and Caterina then “quietly glided out of the room” (93). It can be assumed that Caterina, who has always been described in terms of being similar to an animal, was behaving genuinely, but she is misinterpreted as performing. Even when the narrator grants access to her thoughts it is unclear when it is the “real” Caterina. For example, there is a scene where Caterina hears voices other than her own:

There was a voice speaking in Caterina’s mind, to which she had never yet given vent.

That voice said continually, ‘Why did he make me love him – why did he let me know he loved me, if he knew all the while that he couldn’t brave everything for my sake?’ Then love answered, ‘He was led on by the feeling of the moment, as you have been, Caterina; and now you ought to help him to do what is right.’ Then the voice rejoined, ‘It was a slight matter to him. He doesn’t much mind giving you up. He will soon love that beautiful woman, and forget a poor little pale thing like you’ (95).

The “real” Caterina is even buried within her own mind under these competing voices, that again pull her in opposite directions. She does not appear to be in control of her own mind, as “She was frightened at her own sensations: she was frightened at the imperious vividness with which pictures of the past and future thrust themselves on her imagination” (152). Again, this points to the rigidity of Cheverel Manor inhibiting proper emotional expression. The sensations are her “own” but “pictures” are “thrust[ed]” upon her. This inner turmoil is repressed further by the assertions that “You don’t know your own mind” and “the peace of the whole family depends on your power of governing yourself” (151, 135). However, it is clear that no one knows Caterina’s mind, not even Caterina herself. Through these competing views of Caterina her agency is repeatedly put into question of whether she is capable of acting for herself.

According to the narrator, the one character who is able to truly understand Caterina is Mr Gilfil. Even when the other characters are unable to read the changes in her health under the mask of her performance, “it was only Mr Gilfil who discerned with anxiety the feverish spot that sometimes rose on her cheek, the deepening violet tint under her eyes, and the strange absent glance, the unhealthy glitter of the beautiful eyes themselves” (139). And yet Mr Gilfil too fails to see Caterina as a person. When she firmly confesses that she had meant to kill Anthony, he corrects her, assuring her “you would never have done it” (174). The reader, however, knows that she would have done it. In her one moment of clarity she thought, “Nothing should prevent her from going; nothing should rob her of this one precious moment – perhaps the last – when she could speak out the thoughts that were in her. After that, she would be passive; she would

bear anything” (153). Caterina is terrified that her thoughts and intent of action is what killed Anthony, a concern that Mr Gilfil does not take seriously, alluding to his lack of respect for Caterina as an autonomous person. Additionally, the reader can infer that Caterina would have killed Anthony from her attack on the miniature of him. As Witemyer describes, this attack can be seen as a literal one since Cheverel Manor is presented as a place where aesthetic objects and their real counterparts are presented as interchangeable (70).

Caterina’s confession and Mr Gilfil’s subsequent correction of her feelings is viewed by many as the moral highlight of the story. Derek and Sybil Oldifield view this scene in terms of Feuerbach’s philosophy, writing that “it is interesting to note that although Maynard says that God alone can see Tina whole, he has already shown her that through love he himself knows and responds to her as a whole person, and in doing so he salvages her sanity, and, for a little while, her life. Tina’s very ‘I’ is dependent on her being Maynard’s ‘Thou’” (7). Norton takes a similar approach in describing the seemingly shared consciousness of Caterina and Mr Gilfil, arguing that Caterina is representative of childlike consciousness, while Mr Gilfil is representative of this consciousness becoming mature. Caterina is reliant on Mr Gilfil for intellect, and Mr Gilfil is reliant on Caterina for emotion and primal feeling (222). While this is a nice sentiment, it fails to account for the complete erasure of Caterina’s emotion and primal feeling due to Mr Gilfil.

The ending of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” raises additional considerations about the relationship between object, agency and performance. After Caterina is removed from Cheverel Manor and sent to live at Foxhold Personage, “a nest of comfort” that should be better suited for this bird-like girl, she is described as often “relapsed into motionless reverie” (178, 179). This is supposedly shattered when she hears a harpsichord being struck, and “The vibration rushed through Caterina like an electric shock: it seemed as if at that instant a new soul were entering

her, and filling her with a deeper, more significant life” (179). Caterina, instead of being a performer, becomes a musical instrument herself. She performs *Che faro* – again noted as Sir Christopher’s favorite – and as she sings she forgets about her recent troubles, remembering only the happy days of her childhood. This scene is confusing as on one hand Caterina appears to have accessed a richer interior life and sincere musicality, while on the other she is still performing the role that she is expected to play. She doesn’t sing her favorite song, or retain her mixed emotions about her childhood. This lack of self is further emphasized when it is described that “The delicate-tendrilled plant must have something to cling to. The soul that was born anew to music was born anew to love” (180). Caterina “clings” to Mr Gilfil, and the reader has no further access to Caterina’s thoughts or perspectives. The closing chapter details their marriage and Caterina’s death, when “Maynard Gilfil’s love went with her into deep silence for evermore” (182). It is not Mr Gilfil who was silenced, but Caterina as she is reduced to a passive object, no longer a bird, but a plant that must cling to someone else.

“Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” in all of its melodrama, is Eliot’s first attempt to depict a heroine at this pivotal moment of being at the brink of marriage. We see all of these conflicting forces acting upon Caterina – being natural in an unnatural world, in an undefined position in her family, and both artist and artistic object. These contradictions cause Caterina to even doubt her own mind, causing her to cling with desperation to someone else who will assume the position of thinking for her. Caterina is repeatedly misunderstood and diminished by those around her, and this includes the narrator of the story as well. The narrator, choosing to position the story within the frame of Caterina’s death, is an additional restricting force on her expression. This is a story about Caterina’s failed love story with Anthony, presented as “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story,” the final blow to the belittlement of Caterina and her emotions.

### **Artists or Art Objects? *Adam Bede*'s Performing Women**

In many aspects *Adam Bede* can be seen as a continuation of the themes and character types first explored in “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story.” Caterina’s musicality in opposition to the Cheverel’s emphasis on visual art is seen in Dinah’s musicality in contrast to Hetty’s painting. Hetty shares many traits with Caterina’s character: she is frequently being compared to animals, delights in her own performances, and is infatuated with a man in a station above her own; however, Caterina’s musicality is withheld from Hetty and is transferred to Dinah, who also struggles with her status as a performer. In turning to Hetty and Dinah from their predecessor Caterina, Eliot brings the problem of artist versus artistic object and real person versus created character to the forefront of her presentation of these characters.

Following a similar method to “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” *Adam Bede* opens with the narrator drawing the reader through a frame:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799 (5).

In the introduction of this thesis, I discussed how this is an example of the paradox that Eliot presents to her readers to believe her stories as both created and true. In *Adam Bede* more so than “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” this plays a crucial role in how these characters are meant to be understood. Hetty and Dinah are presented as antithetical to each other as a positive and negative example of a coming of age woman. The layers of contradictions that pressure Caterina are reduced, as instead these contrasts are split between the two women – Dinah is “good” while Hetty is “bad.” Rae Greiner describes “For some, Hetty’s rescue, as morally problematic, is akin to the narrator’s problematic moralizing, most noticeably in chapter 15’s juxtaposition of (bad)

Hetty and her (good) cousin Dinah: each is antithetical to realism, betraying the novelist's too-heavy hand in controlling outcomes and directing judgement” (106). Eliot’s “too-heavy hand” and focus on Hetty and Dinah representing opposite moral sensibilities causes them to lack substance and come across as created characters rather than real people. However, there are subtle complexities to these characters that show that even Eliot’s most controlled heroines react against their destiny in surprising ways.

### **Dinah – The Artist as An Object**

Dinah Morris is one of Eliot’s most deceptively nonconforming heroines. She is not only a female Methodist preacher, but also works in a factory. Dinah appears to be Eliot’s answer to the question of whether an alternative to marriage is possible for her young heroines in this independent woman. Unlike Caterina and Hetty who are scrutinized for their faults, Dinah is presented as an angelic saint. It is the emphasis on her “goodness” that causes her to lack real substance as a character. Hardy describes:

Then there are the dramatic failures – charmless characters like Dinah or Felix Holt or Daniel Deronda, who are fairly obviously not read with the affection or admiration which their author hoped for... They do not provide us with much more than moral example. There is very little in Dinah or Felix or Daniel which gives us the impression of vitality and personality: almost all the features of these characters – though not quite all – are devoted to the business of providing the moral example (*The Novels of George Eliot* 80).

The admirable selflessness of Dinah causes her to lack self-awareness, particularly in terms of how she is both an artistic performer and an object of desire. Dinah falls flat in coming across as a real character because of Eliot’s heavy assertion that Dinah does not think of, nor for, herself. Through an examination of her character we see how Dinah first appears to be in the artist position and in control of her life; however, despite her assertions to the contrary, she is actually in the position of a desirable object throughout the novel. Dinah is an example of even if a

woman presents herself as selfless, she is still reduced to an object in the coming of age process. The overall failure of Dinah, both in terms of remaining single and the character itself, shows how even in Eliot's most selfless and moral woman she could not imagine an alternative path for her unmarried heroine.

Dinah initially presents herself unknowingly in the artist position through her preaching, where she possesses a mastery over her audience that is reminiscent of a powerful theatrical performance. Her physical entrance into the novel is in the very public and theatrically rendered chapter "The Preaching." As noted by Bodenheimer, Dinah enters before three audiences, "the Methodist faithful who have come to hear her message, the skeptical villagers drawn by the phenomenon of a woman preacher, and the upper-class horseback-riding stranger through which the entire episode is focalized" (171). This positions her not only as a spectacle, but also firmly within a public space. The chapter is relayed not through the perspective of Dinah or the narrator. Instead, it is the experience of the "horseback-riding stranger" that is relayed to the reader:

chained to the spot against his will by the charm of Dinah's mellow treble tones, which had a variety of modulation like that of a fine instrument touched with the unconscious skill of musical instinct. The simple things she said seemed like novelties, as a melody thrills us with a new feeling when we hear it sung by the pure voice of a boyish chorister; the quiet depth of conviction with which she spoke seemed in itself an evidence for the truth of her message (25).

Dinah herself is a musical instrument that she is playing "unconscious[ly]." It is not the substance of her words, but rather her voice and emotional appeal that is entralling to her audience. And it is this bewitching quality, the description "chain[ing] to the spot against his will by the charm of Dinah's mellow treble tones" that highlights Dinah's immense influential power. While her preaching is meant to come across as a genuine appeal, it reads more like a seduction rather than a moral sermon. How the reader is meant to interpret Dinah's performance is thus convoluted.

Dinah's preaching comes across as a performance because she appears to embody two contradictory forms of art – theater and music. Byerly describes how “theatrical art is linked with a dangerous deception of self and others, and musical art alone is capable of representing truth” (106). In Dinah there is a sincerity to her inherent musicality, but also an aspect of threatening deception. This is seen again in her conversation with Mr Irwine, where it is described that “Dinah had let her work fall during this narrative, which she uttered in her usual simple way, but with that sincere, articulate, thrilling treble, by which she always mastered her audience” (83). Dinah is both “sincere” and “master[ing] her audience” leading to the question of whether her mastery is accidental or intentional. Unlike Caterina who enjoyed performing for the admiration and power that it granted her, Dinah has no self-serving motives for her preaching. This absence of self in her performance is the “deception of self” that Byerly describes. Dinah deceives herself into believing that her body is absent in her performance.

There is a disconnect between how Dinah views her body in relation to her performance, and how other characters view this relationship. Before she is physically within the text she is talked about among male characters solely in terms of her beauty – first in the workshop, and then in the Donnithorne Arms. They describe her as “a uncommon pretty young woman” and “quiet enough to look at” (8,15). Dinah's status as an attractive single woman is at the forefront of how others view her, a fact that she is completely oblivious to. Helena Michie argues that Dinah's attempts at erasure of her body signals the very reinscription of her body (87). For example, when Mr Irwine asks Dinah how she feels about being the subject of intense male gaze as a young woman, Dinah responds:

‘No, I've no room for such feelings, and I don't believe that people ever take notice about that. I think sir, when God makes his presence felt through us, we are like the burning bush: Moses never took any heed what sort of bush it was – he only saw the brightness of the Lord’ (83).

Michie describes how Dinah's statement has the "paradoxical effect of reminding us of the sexual fires within Dinah, thereby inscribing her body all the more firmly in the reader's consciousness. The pun on 'burning bush,' hidden as it is by the shift to Biblical trope, becomes a coded and potentially subversive means of access to Dinah's body through its apparent negation" (62). Bodenheimer meanwhile describes Dinah as Eliot's attempts to prove that there can be "a direct channel linking emotion and audience through the musical powers of voice, while the consciously performing body fades away" (172). For Dinah her body may fade away in her performance, but not to her audience.

Dinah's refusal to acknowledge her body as a desirable object is part of her rejection of the female coming of age trajectory. She tells Seth Bede after his proposal, "I desire to live and die without husband or children. I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own, it has pleased God to fill my heart so full with the wants and sufferings of his poor people" (33). This denial of self appears unnatural to characters such as Mrs Poyser, who relates a conversation she had with Dinah where she said "'Love your neighbor as yourself; but,' I said, 'if you loved your neighbor no better nor you do yourself, Dinah, it's little enough you'd for him'" (172). However, this denial of self appears to be both Dinah and Eliot's defense of Dinah's independence and nontraditional lifestyle – it is a choice that Dinah did not make.

The depiction of Dinah's thoughts as not her own further places her in the position of controlled object versus artist in control. Debra Gettelman describes "Dinah's absorption in spiritual imaginings makes her appear particularly unconscious to the surrounding world" and these reveries "are characterized not only by their unconscious nature, but by their unnarratable

one” (37). Dinah certainly has a hidden private life that is in contrast to Hetty’s consciousness which is laid bare and scrutinized throughout the novel; however, Dinah’s thoughts are oddly presented as not being her own. For example, Dinah attributes her knowing how to care for the poor to guidance from a kind of divine power: “As Dinah expressed it, ‘she was never left to herself; but it was always given to her when to keep silence and when to speak.’ And do we not all agree to call rapid thought and noble impulse by the name of inspiration? After our subtlest analysis of the mental process, we must still say, as Dinah did, that our highest thoughts and our best deeds are all given to us” (104). While the narrator attempts to situate this as a universal phenomenon, this diminishes the fact that Dinah does not give herself credit for her own actions. While the voices inside Caterina’s mind further divided her, Dinah appears to rely on these voices for validation. In another scene it is described that “Dinah was not satisfied without a more unmistakable guidance than those inward voices. There was light enough for her, if she opened her Bible, for her to discern the text sufficiently to know what it would say to her” (144). In accordance with this view, Dinah would say that her public sermons and independent lifestyle were not her choice, but rather a choice dictated for her. There is a sense that Dinah is selfless in a very literal sense – there is no “real” Dinah.

This lack of self causes Dinah to seamlessly appear as other people. Earlier it was described how Dinah’s body is in focus against her will; however, it is also seen as who people *want* her to appear as, instead of who she truly is. Mrs Poyser who wishes Dinah would adopt a more domestic lifestyle tells her “You look th’ image o’ your aunt Judith, Dinah, when you sit a-sewing” (70). Lisbeth Bede, mourning the death of her husband, when she sees Dinah “She saw nothing at first but a face – a pure, pale face, with loving grey eyes, and it was quite unknown to her. Her wonder increased; perhaps it *was* an angel” (99). When Adam hears noises in the

kitchen, “A foolish thought came, and moved him strangely. As if it could be Hetty!” (105).

While Dinah is always looking outward, her literal lack of self causes her to be a reflection of whoever others want her to be. If Hetty is a warning against extreme egoism, Dinah is a warning against extreme self-denial.

This lack of control and sense of self allows Dinah the malleability to transform as a character, smoothly transitioning into being a desiring object. When she and Adam meet in the kitchen, the scene is described as:

For the first moment or two he made no answer, but looked at her with the concentrated, examining glance which a man gives to an object in which he has suddenly begun to be interested. Dinah, for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness; there was something in the dark penetrating glance of this strong man so different from the mildness and timidity of his brother Seth. A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it (106).

Sarah Gates describes being the subject of Adam’s intense male gaze as the beginning of Dinah’s “feminizing” process (31). It is notable that it is Adam who grants Dinah a sense of self, his male power transforms her from a mere object to having consciousness. Dinah is thus set on her right and natural path towards marriage and motherhood.

The reader, however, would likely not agree that through Adam’s love Dinah is elevated from being an object to possessing consciousness. Instead, Dinah becomes more of an object than she was before. For example, in the letter to Seth Bede she writes the word “body” a total of five times, including descriptions such as “my body is greatly strengthened” and “we shall see each other again in the body” (297). A letter is an opportunity for a character to present themselves directly to the reader without the intermediary of the narrator, and the fact that Dinah repeats “body” so often in the short letter shows how subconsciously she is now aware of it. Furthermore, Dinah’s body goes from a musical instrument that unconsciously plays itself, to one that is played upon. In a scene where Dinah hears Adam’s voice, “It was as if Dinah

had put her hands unawares on a vibrating chord; she was shaken with an intense thrill, and for the instant felt nothing else..." (439). Margaret Homans argues that Dinah is not transformed into a sexual object during this self-awakening. She poses the questions "How does the novel manage to represent her as having a self and being selfless; how can it show her as sexual and angelic at the same time?" (167-168). Homans answers these questions by citing the "ethereal way" her attraction is described so as to retain her inherent purity. Additionally, Dinah never actively pursues Adam the way that Hetty does with Arthur and Caterina with Anthony. Dinah goes from "chain[ing]" men against their will, to passively waiting for Adam to love her back (25). Thus, we see Dinah ultimately represent the Victorian trope of the angel of the house – she is in her proper position as married, while retaining her sense of purity.

*Adam Bede* famously ends with Dinah having given up her preaching married to Adam. Her body is plump and she is silent. Ruth Bernard Yeazell describes the scene where Seth mistakes Dinah for his mother Lisbeth:

By the time the sun once again lights up her pale red hair, it is clear that the woman is Dinah; but the momentary confusion with Lisbeth is deliberate as is the explicit return to the opening chapter of the novel. That generic repetition enables one figure to take the place of another is evident even before Seth remarks the resemblance and tacitly alludes to the death of her predecessor ... The one thing that threatened the calm of that earlier scene was the possibility that Dinah might reject domestic life for the solitary vocation of the preacher. Now she, too, has been assimilated to the picture (106).

Dinah, in many regards an object from the beginning, has been "assimilated" into her proper place within the home. She is presented as going from no self, to gaining value through her marriage. However, her voice is taken from her. Adam speaks for her when he explains why she no longer preaches, telling Seth "she thought it right to set th' example o' submitting, for she's not held from other sort o' teaching. And I agree with her, and approve o' what she did" (481). The language of "submitting" and "approves" points to Adam's domineering tendencies within

their relationship. Dinah thereby ends up in her proper sphere, her voice and artistry silenced. If Dinah was Eliot's fantasy for a performing woman, then this ending suggests that all women, no matter how selfless they claim to be in their performance, ultimately belong in the domestic space.

### **Hetty – The Object as Artist**

If Dinah's subtle rebellion against her destiny is reined in by the end of the novel, then Hetty's bold attempt to create her own future is brutally extinguished. Hetty Sorrel is Eliot's first iteration of the fallen woman, and she is not treated kindly within the narrative. The reader is meant to hate Hetty, not only for her character traits, but also for her actions. Hetty not only had an affair with Captain Arthur Donnithorne, but has a baby who she kills. And yet – even considering the infanticide – the reader sympathizes with Hetty. Similar to Caterina, Eliot appears to have accidentally created a female character who exposes the pressures a single woman endures facing a future she has no control over. Dorothea Barrett has a similar interpretation of Hetty, writing “Hetty, it seems to me, became a kind of Frankenstein's monster for George Eliot. Created for a specific and limited purpose, Hetty breaks her confines and threatens to take over the novel. The narrator's lack of sympathy for Hetty defeats its apparent purpose – it wins readers to Hetty perhaps more than a gentler treatment would have done” (43). I argue that Hetty “breaks her confines” primarily by subverting her status as a created object, manipulating her position to grow in power and simultaneously be both artist and artistic object. Her failure is monumental, showing what is at stake for a woman who strays from the established path. Hetty is deceptively complicated in the fine-line that she exists within between

created and real, artist and object, alive and dead, control and controlled. While these contrasts divide Caterina, they empower Hetty until everything falls apart.

Similar to the heroines before her, Hetty is discussed by other characters before she is physically present within the story. Hetty, however, is only discussed in passing, pointing to the initial insignificance of her character. Dinah refers to her as a “poor wandering lamb” while Seth complains in reference to Adam’s love for Hetty, “it ’ud go to my heart if he was to marry her, for I canna think as she’d make him happy” (31). Dinah is setting up Hetty to be a character the reader should be sympathetic for and Seth quickly negates this appeal. Already contradictions are at play in how Hetty is meant to be viewed. Is she a lost lamb? Or is she a calculating woman who makes a man she does not love “work seven year for *her*, like Jacob did for Rachel, sooner than have any other woman for th’asking” (31)? Seth is ready to blame Hetty for Adam’s unhappiness if they do marry, and also blame her for stringing him along and not marrying him. It appears that Hetty is straying from the path that she is meant to be on, the question is whether she is an innocent lamb led astray, or a conniving Rachel.

When Hetty finally enters the text, she is figured as an object that does not yet have meaning. The narrator describes:

Hetty Sorrel often took the opportunity, when her aunt’s back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces, for the oak table was usually turned up like a screen, and was more for ornament than for use; and she could see herself sometimes in the great round pewter dishes that were ranged on the shelves above the long deal dinner-table, or in the hobs of the grate, which always shone like jasper (67).

Before the chapter titled “Hetty’s World,” we see that Hetty’s worldview consists primarily of herself. Her narcissism causes her to see herself among the ornamental objects around her.

Notably, a physical description of her is withheld. This initial introduction is usually skipped over in favor of analysis of the more famous butter-making scene; however, it foreshadows key

aspects of her character. Hetty is shown acting in secret and defining herself in terms of other objects. Her body is concealed from the reader, despite seemingly being on display. This alludes to the fact that Hetty will literally “build” her character in terms of luxurious accessories, and also manage to conceal her entire pregnancy from her family.

The moment that transforms Hetty though is the butter-making scene, where Hetty’s trajectory as both artist and artistic object is set in motion due to Arthur’s gaze. The scene notes that “Hetty blushed a deep rose-colour when Captain Donnithorne entered the dairy and spoke to her; but it was not at all a distressed blush, for it was inwreathed with smiles and dimples, and with sparkles from under long curled dark eye-lashes ... Hetty tossed and patted her pound of butter with quite a self-possessed, coquettish air, slyly conscious that no turn of her head was lost” (76). Hetty is consciously aware of her performance and her effect, in contrast to Dinah who performed “unconscious[ly]”; Hetty’s blush “was not at all a distressed blush” while when Dinah blushes under Adam’s gaze she “felt a painful self-consciousness” (106). The inverse of Dinah, Hetty manipulates her performance to serve her own self-interests. According to Nina Auerbach, the irony in her performance is that “her dimpled fleshiness makes her the equivalent of her environment of butter and cream; she embodies her world rather than transcending it” (176). Hetty, who desires a world of luxury, fails to recognize how she *is* the environment that she is in. She does not know her place within the social order.

Once gazed upon by Arthur, Hetty is finally granted her physical description. While the description is long, its significance is worthy of including:

It is of little use for me to tell you that Hetty’s cheek was like a rose-petal, that dimples played about her pouting lips, that her large dark eyes hid a soft roguishness under their long lashes, and that her curly hair, though all pushed back under round cap while she was at work, stole back in dark delicate rings on her forehead, and about her white shell-like ears; it is of little use for me to say how lovely was the contour of her pink-and-white neckerchief, tucked into her low plum-coloured stuff bodice, or how the linen butter-

making apron, with its bib, seemed a thing to be imitated in silk by duchesses, since it fell in such charming lines, or how her brown stockings and thick-soled buckled shoes lost all that clumsiness which they must certainly have had when empty of her foot and ankle; – of little use, unless you have seen a woman who affected you as Hetty affected her beholders, for otherwise, though you might conjure up the image of a lovely woman, she would not in the least resemble that distracting kitten-like maiden. I might mention all the divine charms of a bright spring day, but if you had never in your life utterly forgotten yourself in straining your eyes after the mounting lark, or in wandering through the still lanes when the fresh-opened blossoms fill them with a sacred, silent beauty like that of fretted aisles, where would be the use of my descriptive dialogue? I could never make you know what I meant by a bright spring day (76-77).

Hugh Witemeyer explains that her description mimics that of a traditional Renaissance portrait, and “Behind its alluring description of surface appearances, this Petrarchan idealization conceals the truth about Hetty’s character. George Eliot implies that the convention itself involves a projection of male desire which has little to do with the real nature of women” (53-54). Sarah Gates frames Hetty more in terms of her being the landscape rather than a portrait; however, her description of Hetty being a malleable landscape, or perhaps blank canvas, in which meaning is applied to is important. She states that “Hetty thus becomes the beautiful object of a romance whose shaping subject is Arthur Donnithorne. He endows her face and body with meaning and identity...” (24). Debra Gettelman offers a third analysis of the description that focuses on Eliot’s invitation to the reader to imagine Hetty for themselves: “Though an image might be conjured for the reader, and a sensation even stirred in him, neither carries the affect of real-life experience, which is seen to be beyond the novelist’s representation ability, and yet is absolutely required to imbue the passage with deeper meaning in the reader’s mind” (34). All of these interpretations are accurate. Hetty is a painting, the landscape, and the object of someone’s imagination – unlike Caterina where the layers of interpretation of her character caused her to be buried under them – these descriptions give Hetty life. The important quality of these interpretations is they all render Hetty as both created and given meaning by an outside force.

Once Hetty is “created” it would be tempting to say that she immediately transitions into the role of artist imagining her future; however, there is an intermediary stage. There are many contradictory images associated with Hetty – she is both surrounded by symbols of youth and fertility as well as symbols of death; her arms are like soft butter while her heart is a hard pebble. Rae Greiner describes how “A kind of infantile deadness defines her, an elemental heartlessness that, next to sociopaths – and kittens – only babies possess. Likening her to newborn animals and stone fruit, the novelist captures her hardness and softness at once” (107). This applies to both her narrow heart and supposedly narrow mind. While her mind is certainly limited, Hetty does consider her options and reality before she begins to weave her fantasies with Arthur. For example, she has a much keener awareness of how other people view her than she is perhaps expected to. She knows that Luke Britton came to look at her, that Mr Craig is in love with her, and Adam Bede is completely enamored with her. Hetty “knows” a lot more than Mrs Poyser, who calls her featherminded, gives her credit for (88). When considering Adam Bede, “She saw him as he was – a poor man with old parents to keep, who would not be able, for a long while to come, to give her even such luxuries as she shared in her uncle’s house” (90). The self-awareness of only thinking of others in terms of how they relate to her comes across as egotistical; however, it positions her as more in tune with reality than Dinah is, who appears even more foolish in her oblivion.

The diminishment of Hetty’s surprisingly rational approach to weighing her potential options for a suitor is due to the distinctly male narrator of *Adam Bede*, who as aforementioned, does not judge her kindly. Her analysis of different potential suitors is presented as cold-hearted and shallow, instead of as a woman evaluating her prospects to try and better her position through marriage. Hetty’s status is precarious, since she would “have been but a servant

elsewhere” if it were not for the Poysers taking her in (90). Her narrow imagination is not pure fantasy, but rather an attempt to imagine and realize a better life for herself, and this better future is mercilessly ridiculed by the narrator. Monika Fludernik describes in “Eliot and Narrative” that “Hetty is rendered almost consistently in external focalization, though often through the internal focalization of other characters’ thoughts about her” (29). Fludernik claims that this contributes to the impression created that Hetty is easily readable, while in truth she is hiding herself under her beautiful exterior. This partially takes the view that it is Hetty’s performativity that is to blame for her apparent deceit from other characters and the reader. It also points to the important consideration that the narrator manipulates her character to be this way, under the guise of blaming her egoism and performance. It is because the narrator limits the access to Hetty’s thoughts to such a degree that she is not allowed to have any semblance of intelligence, and her moments that do push through are quickly negated.

Hetty’s progression as an artist also occurs in a gradual manner. Her first fantasy is incomplete, described as being “vague, atmospheric, shaping itself into no self-confessed hopes or prospects...” (91). The narrator addresses the reader that these are “Foolish thoughts! but all this happened, you must remember, nearly sixty years ago, and Hetty was quite uneducated – a simple farmer’s girl to whom a gentleman with a white hand was dazzling as an Olympian god” (91-92). This is a contrast to the previous descriptions of Hetty, where she confidently read how other men perceived her, and also the statement that the “child no more conceived at present the idea that a young squire could ever be her lover, than a baker’s pretty daughter in the crowd, whom a young emperor distinguishes by an imperial but admiring smile, conceives that she shall be made empress” (91). In fact, the next time that they meet, Hetty shares with Arthur that she is training to be a lady’s maid, seeking to be as self-sufficient Dinah is. Her next dream has slightly

more clarity, but is still hazy, “She only saw something that was possible: Mr Arthur Donnithorne coming to meet her again along the Fir-tree Grove. That was the foreground of Hetty’s picture; behind it lay a bright hazy something – days that were not to be as the other days of her life had been” (123). And then the following vision, while still vague, is more concrete when compared to the previous, “They are but dim ill-defined pictures that her narrow bit of imagination can make of the future; but of every pictures she is the central figure, in fine clothes; Captain Donnithorne is very close to her, putting his arm round her, perhaps kissing her, and everybody else is admiring and eveying her...” (139-140). Her inability to imagine a complete picture points to her narrow imagination, and the transfer of herself to the center of these pictures points to her egoism; however, it also points to her growing in strength and control in actively shaping her future.

The level in which Hetty is criticized for her artistic creations and the level of importance that they play in the novel varies between different literary critics. Hardy focuses on the limitations and egoism in her creations, emphasizing her reliance on practical experience and inability to generalize (*The Novels of George Eliot* 36). Auerbach views Hetty’s artistic endeavors as her becoming “the artist’s chief ally” and integral to the “novel’s central shaping principle, the instrument of the sibylline artist herself” (178). She argues that her frequent looking in the mirror “mirrors” the opening line of the novel, “With a single drop of ink for a mirror...” (5). Hetty’s failed attempts to be an artist are what sets in motion the main action of the novel; her failures aid the artist of the novel – Eliot – in completing her vision of the story. Michie offers an opposing interpretation, arguing that “Hetty is object, not creator; while it is proper to be looked at ‘in an artistic light’ she must not herself aspire to artistic power and ‘make pictures’ herself” (110). Michie situates Arthur as the primary artist who “frames” Hetty, which

prompts Hetty to attempt to paint her own hazy pictures and sit before her dirty mirror, leading to her downfall. Hetty outgrows this frame, and “the failure of the frame to accommodate Hetty’s growing body and desires signals to Arthur and to the world of the novel the terror of a painting come to life” (111). This certainly relates to my argument of Arthur being the factor that brings Hetty to life, causing her to grow outside the frame that she was placed in; however, this gives too much credit to Arthur, as well as too much blame to Hetty.

As Hetty grows in power, her status as artist and artistic object grows in interesting ways as well, as she attempts to assert control over her story. As previously stated, Hetty puts an overlooked amount of thought into her relationship with Arthur. When Adam discovers Arthur and Hetty, he repeatedly places the blame on Arthur, a blame that Hetty repeatedly rejects. Adam is implying that Hetty was the victim of Arthur, and while there are certainly aspects that make it clear that Arthur took advantage of Hetty, Hetty takes offense to the allusion that this was not her choice. Hetty, as an artist, believes that *she* is in control. It is Hetty who sits before the mirror and ornaments herself and imagines her future. In a sense, being an object is what gives Hetty meaning. After Adam criticizes Hetty for putting a rose in her hair “like the ladies in the pictures at the Chase; they’ve mostly got flowers or feathers or gold things i’ their hair” and beseeches her to dress plainly like Dinah, Hetty puts on Dinah’s plain clothes and is laughed at for looking like a ghost (202, 207). Without objects to prop her up, Hetty is like a ghost. Similarly, when Hetty realizes that Arthur has left her, “when she looked up from it there was the reflection of a blanched face in the old dim glass – a white marble face with rounded childish forms, but with something sadder than a child’s pain in it. Hetty did not see the face – she saw nothing – she only felt that she was cold and sick and trembling” (300). Is it that Arthur caused her to lose meaning? Or that Hetty no longer views herself as an artist and artistic object?

The presentation of Hetty's character for the rest of the novel can only be thought of as strange. No longer artist or object, and yet she takes almost complete control of the narrative. Throughout the story, Hetty is kept at a clear distance from the reader, that is until her journey of despair. Barbara Hardy describes the abrupt shift into virtually Hetty's perspective as follows:

We are face to face with her 'narrow imagination' which cannot anticipate. She plans unemotionally, and only recoils from death when she is about to jump into the pond. Instead of imagination we have the flat references to her actual experience – to the woman and baby who came to Hayslope, nearly dead with cold and hunger, to the pond in the Scantlands: this is the unimaginative mind which thought of Arthur's love in terms of finery. George Eliot speaks of 'the narrow circle of her imagination' and this is exactly demonstrated in the account of her flight. It is done in terms of sensation not of sensibility, of practical memory not of generalization, of careful matter-of-fact planning not of terrified anticipation (*The Novels of George Eliot* 179 -180).

The reader has simultaneously full and limited access to Hetty's mind – aware of a terrible, guilt-inducing secret, but not privy to what that secret is. She is in control of the narrative, and yet she desires control, as “she yearned to be again with somebody who would care for her!” (333). The independent artist is gone, and whether it is meant to show that all along she was the object is unclear. This narrow imagination of Hetty's is still interrupted by the narrator though, with interjections such as “Poor wandering Hetty, with the rounded childish face, and the hard unloving despairing soul looking out of it – with the narrow heart and narrow thoughts, no room in them for any sorrows but her own, and tasting that sorrow with the more intense bitterness!” (349). The narrator is simultaneously sympathetic and condescending towards Hetty in his analysis of her narrow thoughts, and yet the narrator too is oblivious to Hetty's great secret – she is pregnant. Not only pregnant, but the birth of her baby and her subsequent carrying it with her is entirely concealed from the narrative. It isn't until her arrest that the reader learns of these details. Hetty, rather than Dinah, is thus successful in erasing her body.

Hetty fades from the pages as her execution is tidily halted due to Arthur's interjection. She is exiled, but still ends up dying, a detail that is revealed in passing within the text, reminiscent of the first mention of her character. Hetty is therefore effectively silenced for her bold claims to control over her future in a swift exit that seems abrupt and undeserving for such a pivotal character. The intriguing aspect of her character is the unclear relationship between artist and artistic object. Being an object seemingly gives her a greater sense of self and agency. Whereas Caterina was stifled by her objectified existence and Dinah attempted to numb herself to it, Hetty's transformation into an object enables her to grow, both physically - literally - and in terms of textual significance. It is the fact that Hetty flourishes in her position as an object that makes her seemingly so threatening and hateful to Eliot. Hetty, the object of Eliot's own imagination, acquires an agency that even Eliot herself did not know how to control.

## Chapter 2: Maggie Tulliver: Playing the Part of a Woman?

*The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot's third major publication, is a continuation of many of the major themes she first began exploring in her early works. The novel explores ideas of art and performance, emotional control and expression, and in a more direct way than her previous works, the place of women in society. In the previous chapter, I explored how Eliot subtly exposed many of the pressures that women face in society, especially when they are on the brink of marriage. Through the thick layers of interpretation placed upon Caterina, Dinah, and Hetty, Eliot employed art to both add to these pressures as well as offer a means for women to attempt to gain control. In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot places these pressures and attempts to work against them at the forefront of the novel, as well as expanding the narrative scope of the story to explore her heroine's entire coming of age process.

Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of the novel, possesses many of the traits that Eliot's previous heroines have. Impulsive and prone to erratic behavior, deeply moved by music and love, she is a more fully formed Caterina Sarti. Like Dinah, Maggie seeks to not be viewed as an object and live a life of independence. But she has even more in common with Hetty, most notably sharing Hetty's penchant for wish-fulfilling fantasies. However, unlike Hetty who is able to conceal her status as a fallen woman until her baby is found dead, Maggie is deemed a fallen woman by nature. Maggie extends beyond being a mere combination of these previous characters, as she is an overall more complicated and nuanced character, partially because many view her as modeled after George Eliot's, or rather Mary Anne Evans', own life. Despite these autobiographical roots, Maggie's status as a created character is the most emphasized throughout her story. Through Maggie, Eliot explores the possibilities of a female character who seeks to come of age not by becoming a marriageable object, but by seeking to enter the world of

masculine knowledge. Her failure to free herself from submitting to becoming an object is perhaps surprising, especially since this failure is not presented in an entirely negative light. Additionally, Maggie's quest is thwarted from the beginning, as her emphasis on being a created character causes her to be seen as a controlled object, Eliot's most explicit example of this technique to show the inevitability of women's lives as controlled. Ultimately Maggie does succeed in crafting her own story in her refusal to leave childhood at the end of the book, dying before she has to endure the living death of adulthood.

### **Setting the Stage**

*The Mill on the Floss*, as the stories before it, begins by drawing the reader through a frame and into the world of the story, introducing many of the central tensions of the novel surrounding fictionality and authority. While "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" emphasized being entrenched in concrete reality and *Adam Bede* was the result of ink on the page, *The Mill on the Floss* is a more disguised work of fiction, as Eliot presents the story as it were the real experienced memories of a person, the narrator. In the beginning of the chapter however, it is not yet established that these are recollections of St. Ogg's, rather, they appear to be the narrator's current experiences:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace... How lovely the little river is with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dripping willows... I remember the stone bridge (9).

The reader is invited to similarly immerse themselves into the world and story. For example, two consecutive sentences begin with the words "See" and "Look" (10). These verbs establish the "realness" of the scene and the authority of the narrator, as Janet Freeman describes, the narrator

is inviting the reader to “look and see...for ourselves” (375). It is also an invitation to the reader to take an active role in the imagining of the scene. Eliot is asking the reader to both believe that the story is a real account, while simultaneously asking the reader to imagine and create the world alongside the narrator.

The blending of the scene as both real and imagined is seen in other parts of the chapter as well. The narrator describes “The rush of the water and the booming of the mill bring a dreamy deafness which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond” (10). St. Ogg’s is being figured as a sort of stage that is isolated from reality, with sound both aiding in the creation of the scene, while also having a numbing, deafening effect. The dreamy isolation of this setting sets it up as a place where experimental alternatives can be explored.

Another instance of blending the real and imagined that also raises questions of control is in the introduction of the little girl. The nameless girl could be interpreted as being given an identity and life by the narrator, similar to how Hetty is given new meaning under Arthur’s gaze. Janice Carlisle explains the “analogic relation” of the narrator and Maggie in her argument that Maggie and the narrator are the same person (183). The little girl is presented as the mirror image of the narrator; “Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again and watch the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too: she has been standing on just the same spot at the edge of the water ever since I paused on the bridge” (10-11). The narrator then gives the direction “It is time the little playfellow went in, I think...” (11). Their thoughts dictate Maggie’s movements, causing the reader to consider how much Maggie can be understood as being controlled by the narrator, versus having autonomy over herself and her story. This is in contrast to the previous heroines, who while the narrator perhaps unfairly

represented them, he did not control them. Through Maggie, Eliot is exploring the idea of a woman's lack of control over their future in a more profound way, by emphasizing the idea that Maggie's actions and future are dictated for her, like a player on a stage. On two levels – societally and within the novel itself – Maggie's level of control is being limited.

The end of the chapter reveals that the preceding sequence was in fact the narrator's dream. The dream is presented as a memory, as the phrases "one February afternoon many years ago" and "on that very afternoon" indicate that these events took place at a specific point in time; however, a concrete date is not given (11). While this is a memory, there is a haziness and dreamlike quality to it, indicating that events can be manipulated. The last sentence of this chapter is telling of this mixing of reality and dream; "Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking about as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of" (11). The narrator is not only "dozing-off" and "dreaming," but is also telling this story aloud. An oral story is by nature less permanent than a written one, as it is more reliable on memory and liable to inconsistency. This narrator is thus claiming less authority and credibility than the previous narrators did, and yet is also more actively involved in controlling the events of the story. The narrator almost blurs into the role of author.

In the opening chapter, Eliot weaves together reality and illusion, oral and written language, memory and dreams to set the precedent for a story concerned with these boundaries.

As Beth Tressler describes:

Therefore, if we consider this opening chapter as exemplifying Eliot's notion of realism, the narrator provides authenticity by constructing a realist narrative through her dream narrative. The honest waggoner and his meek-eyed horses are not real objects – they only exist within the content of her reverie. But according to Eliot, what derives from these imaginative acts is no less a sincere realistic representation, since the inward vision in all

its contradictory and fanciful states is precisely what constitutes the novel's creation in the first place (490).

Elisha Cohn has a similar interpretation of the dreamy opening chapter, discussing it in conversation with the second chapter, which she argues is a second beginning that “offer[s] an omniscient perspective that contextualizes the particular lives of individual characters in the long scope of geological, biological, and cultural history.” Cohn describes how “the two beginnings raise the questions of how the first – sensation – might produce the other – knowledge” (83). The prioritization of sensation before knowledge suggests not only the merit of literature as an intellectual pursuit, but also informs the reader how Maggie's frequent breaks from reality should be viewed. The lessons that Maggie learns primarily result from experiences in the realm of sensation, despite her efforts to limit herself to only being influenced by concrete “masculine” knowledge. Further, the fact that the beginning is split mirrors Maggie's own tendencies to ricochet between periods of only knowledge and only sensation, periods that are defined as being particularly “masculine” and “feminine.”

### **Maggie as Faulted Object**

Following the pattern set by the previous stories, Maggie is discussed by other characters before she is physically present within the story. The first characters who describe her are her parents, Mr and Mrs Tulliver. According to the Tulliver's she is “a wild thing,” “half a idiot,” “Bedlam creatur” and a “straight black-eyed wench” (15). Maggie, much to the chagrin of her parents, is everything except for a little girl. When she does finally appear in the scene, she throws off her bonnet and “was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes – an action which gave her very much the air of a small Shetland pony” (16). What is notable about this description is that while Maggie is behaving in an

“unpredictable” manner, her behavior actually matches the previous description of her.

Additionally, Maggie’s “wildness” indicates her apathy towards gender roles. She not only throws off her bonnet and casts away her sewing, but when Mr Riley seems to dismiss her intelligence, she is upset that “he thought her silly and of no consequence” (27). Maggie is not oblivious to the way that the world works, as seen through her interpretation of the story of the witch:

‘O, I’ll tell you what that means. It’s a dreadful picture, isn’t it? But I can’t help looking at it. That old woman in the water’s a witch – they’ve put her in, to find out whether she’s a witch or no, and if she swims she’s a witch, and if she’s drowned – and killed, you know, – she’s innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she’d go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. And this dreadful blacksmith with his arms akimbo, laughing – oh, isn’t he ugly? – I’ll tell you what he is. He’s the devil *really*...’ (20).

Maggie is not only foreshadowing her own demise, but also confidently interprets the injustice of the story. She, who is described as a “Bedlam creatur’,” recognizes that the witch is really just a woman. Maggie is not ignorant to how society treats women, and it is because of this perception that she seeks an alternative. As described by Joseph Adamson, “With her intelligence and ardent imagination, Maggie feels there is no place for her in a society preoccupied with property rights and pecking orders, especially in light of its rigid view of the roles of men and women. She thus finds herself identifying with the gypsies and witches of the books she reads, fiery dark women like herself, who are mistrusted and feared by the social establishment” (318). In Maggie’s early scenes her affinity with witches and devils is underscored, pointing to her belief that both within her family and St. Ogg’s she does not belong.

*The Mill on the Floss* is therefore a story where gender is at the forefront. As many have noted, such as Joseph Adamson, Renata Wasserman, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and M. Melissa Elston, Eliot stresses the divide between the roles and place of men and women within

society. This divide is the most prominent in the different expectations for Tom and Maggie. While Tom is expected to live a life associated with the world of commerce and culture, Maggie's future is far more limited. Closely allied with nature, she is a landscape to be domesticated and transformed into an object suitable for marriage. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar explore the stark divide between Maggie and Tom by contrasting them with the androgynous unity of Cathy and Heathcliff: "While Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff had romped in joyous union on the heath, 'half savage, and hardy, and free,' Eliot's siblings are born into a gendered world where girls are driven by an intense need for male approval and boys are locked into a harsh, self-justifying code of honor" (492). The source of this tension is that Maggie does not see herself as part of the girl category, nor does she actively desire to be part of the boy category. In this stage of her life, Maggie aligns herself more in the "Other," or "Outsider" category, where she can be viewed in an alternative light and where she believes she can acquire power and agency.

As Maggie grows we see her try to grapple with the knowledge that as a woman she will be viewed as an object, and she attempts to find alternatives to this reality. For example, when her cousin Lucy is introduced to the story, "Maggie always looked at Lucy with delight. She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy with a little crown on her head and a little sceptre in her hand... only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy's form" (66). Maggie is first imagining a world where people remain children forever, indicative of her ultimate decision to never leave childhood behind. Secondly, it is an image of a woman in complete power. The power seems to stem from appearance, as Maggie places herself *as* Lucy into the position of queen. This is in

contrast to Hetty, who grows in power due to the validation from Arthur of her status as a desirable object.

Maggie's attempts to change her destiny are further thwarted, or rather seem like weak attempts to change the inevitable, due to the unique relationship between the narrator and Maggie. For example, after Tom is introduced the narrator states:

But that same Nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies. Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross, she conceals some of her most rigid inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters, and the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink and white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features (36-37).

Within the same train of thought the narrator says that the future cannot be predicted, while simultaneously revealing Maggie's destiny. Janet Freeman describes this as an example of the narrator's "knowledge of what's to come," foreshadowing the fact that Maggie will undergo a subduing of both personality and appearance (378). It also raises the question of whether Maggie ever had the capacity within her to change her destiny, as it is clearly already predetermined for her. Even at her most rebellious and independent, it is implied that Maggie is not in control of her future.

One of the first cracks in Maggie's belief in an alternative is when she impulsively cuts her hair after it is ridiculed in comparison to Lucy's. Joseph Adamson describes the act as "a way of escaping shame, a denial of the dark-haired, dark-skinned girl she is; it is an angry, punishing attack on the self that others are always persecuting; and finally – this may be the most powerful unconscious motivation – it is a resentful attack on others, an angry defiance of social authority that can only draw more attention to herself and more ridiculing attack by others" (321).

Adamson's interpretation of her cutting her hair as an attack on others that backfires lends to the

argument that this is one of Maggie's first realizations that she cannot create an alternative for herself. It is Tom who tells her to look at herself in the mirror, the first time that we have Maggie closely considering her appearance. She laments that:

Maggie felt an unexpected pang. She had thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty – that was out of the question – she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl and not to find fault with her. But now when Tom began to laugh at her and say she was like the idiot, the affair had quite a new aspect. She looked in the glass, and still Tom laughed and clapped his hands, and Maggie's flushed cheeks began to pale, and her lips to tremble a little (69-70).

For the first time, Maggie feels real shame at her appearance, and this shame is triggered by Tom's insistence that she looks in the mirror. Jenijoy La Belle describes the significance of Tom, the male, solidifying to Maggie her worth being tied to her physical appearance, that "the very act that Maggie takes to free herself results in a reimposition of the social (preeminently masculine) tyranny" (55). Maggie feels oppressive shame at her reflection, the opposite of Hetty who takes delight in hers. Maggie realizes that within her world, she will both be defined by her appearance and that her appearance will never be that of Lucy's, prompting her to run away to the "Other" she is always compared to.

Maggie appears to both reject and embrace her status as a faulted object. An example of this is when she makes the impulsive decision to run away to the gypsies. By running away, she is rejecting the pressure to meet the expectations she will never match – to be like her cousin Lucy. And yet, by going to the gypsies she is conforming to the definition of herself that others repeatedly tell her. She leaves because "she had been so often told she was like a gypsy and 'half wild' that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium and being entirely in harmony with circumstances, would be to live in a little brown tent on the commons" (112). While she relents to others opinions of her, she subverts these criticisms to

place herself in a position of superiority. Once she meets the gypsies, “Maggie’s eyes had begun to sparkle and her cheeks to flush – she was really beginning to instruct the gypsies, and gaining great influence over them” (117). Susan Fraiman argues that this is an example of her trying to mimic Tom, as she attempts to “civilize” the gypsies in a masculine, rather than feminine manner. Fraiman writes, “this second phase of Maggie’s venture is a kind of cross-dressing as Columbus ... the Columbian dream of crossing oceans to rule a ‘barbarian’ nation is a larger-scale version and logical extension of Tom’s more modest capitalist career. Here then is Maggie’s bid to generate a *bildungsroman* for herself and even to beat Tom at his own genre” (142). Fraiman’s assertion that this is Maggie’s attempt at a *bildungsroman* that is superior to Tom’s points to this notion that Maggie believes in the value of herself, as the powerful, female “Other.” While she does adopt a more masculine method of “colonizing,” she sees no fault in her intelligence, as she confidently assumes the role of teacher. However, like cutting her hair, Maggie shifts from confidence to fear and regret among the gypsies, as she realizes that they are people she also does not belong with. Within this scene, the reader sees Maggie’s most bold attempt to seek an alternative for herself, but also her realization that she is not “different” enough to fully leave her family and St. Ogg’s society. It reinforces the idea of Maggie as a faulted object, as she is caught between two worlds and does not fully belong in either.

Despite the repeated reinforcement of Maggie as an object on the female coming of age trajectory, Maggie continually does not see herself as such, especially in terms of her intelligence. The dismantling of this faith in herself occurs when she visits Tom at school. She repeatedly offers to help Tom in his studies, but discovers that she is not intelligent as she originally thought. When she attempts to read Euclid, “She began to read with full confidence in her own powers, but presently becoming quite bewildered, her face flushed with irritation. It was

unavoidable – she must confess her incompetence and she was not fond of humiliation” (155). This does not deter her for long though, as she turns to Latin grammar, which she enjoys because she “quickly found that there was an English Key at the end, which would make her very wise about Latin at slight expense” (155). She has great pride in her self-perceived cleverness, and believes that Mr Stelling, Tom’s teacher, recognizes this in her too; however, Mr Stelling tells them that he believes girls have “a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn’t go far into anything. They are quick and shallow” (158). In response, “Maggie was so oppressed by this dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort” (159). This is a similar, if not more profound, blow to Maggie’s confidence than when Tom directed her to look into the mirror. Maggie had never truly cared about her appearance until she was trained to do so, but her intelligence is something that she values from when she first enters the story. Thus, the reader sees Maggie’s discovery that the destiny she finds so limiting is the path that she is on.

### **Seeking A Guiding Voice**

The second volume of *The Mill on the Floss* centers on the disillusionment of Maggie after the downfall of the Tulliver family ends the Edenic days of her childhood. Maggie, the girl who cut her hair, ran away to the gypsies, and thought she could teach her brother Latin, is firmly woken up to her position in life. Hardy describes that during this period “Maggie is forced into loneliness and apathy. Tom can go out to redeem the family pride and fortune, she can only look at her lost enchantments. The author’s voice moves away from Maggie, with the wisdom of maturity pitying youth ...” (*The Novels of George Eliot* 160). Maggie attempts to help her family and her attempts are brutally shot down by Tom, who tells her “You’re always setting yourself up above me and everyone else... You think you know better than any one, but you’re almost

always wrong. I can judge much better than you can” (246). This scene is reminiscent of Mr Gilfil telling Caterina she did not intend to kill Anthony, Adam Bede insisting to Hetty that Arthur led her on, and Adam answering the question of why Dinah no longer preaches – female characters are consistently told that they do not know their own mind. Maggie then cries in her room: “They were very bitter tears: everybody in the world seemed so hard and unkind to Maggie: there was no indulgence, no fondness, such as she imagined when she fashioned the world afresh in her own thoughts...The world outside the books was not a happy one” (247). The irony of this scene is of course that Maggie does exist inside of a book; however, the more important aspect of this scene is the shattering of Maggie’s worldview. The world is not only crueler than she ever imagined, but her role, or rather the potential of her role, is limited. The narrator notes, “No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it. A girl of no startling appearance, and who will never be a Sappho or a Madame Roland or anything else that the world takes wide note of, may still hold forces within her as the living plant-seed does, which will make a way for themselves, often in a shattering, violent manner” (248). Maggie has forces and potential within her which will never find a means of expression or recognition. To a lesser extent Eliot has also explored these colliding forces of her previous heroines. Caterina struggled under them, Hetty thrived, while Dinah sought to fill her mind with other voices and renounce her selfhood.

During this period Maggie seeks to find answers to her anguish and desires a kind of inner voice to guide her. She is ignored by “the two idols of her life” Tom and her father, Tom because he was never at home, while “her father was bitterly preoccupied with the thought that the girl was growing up – was shooting up into a woman; and how was she to do well in life? She had a poor chance of marrying, down in the world as they are. And he hated the thought of

her marrying poorly...” (291). Her future is at stake, and the limited options that she had before have been further reduced. The person worrying about the decision of what her future will be is telling her father. Maggie searches for something to alleviate her from her misery, first believing that “Scott’s novels and all Byron’s poems” could be the solution, but then thinks that “She could make dream-worlds of her own – but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life: the unhappy-looking father seated at the dull breakfast-table...” (298). What she desires is for someone to make sense of her life, something that is real, not in a book or fantasy. She begins “to nibble at this thick-rinded fruit of the tree of knowledge... and feeling a gleam of triumph now and then that her understanding was quite equal to these peculiarly masculine studies” (299). These moments of triumph do not last long, as Maggie falls into fits of sobbing where “she rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness...” and:

Then her brain would be busy with wild romances of a flight from home in search of something less sordid and dreary: – she would go to some great man – Walter Scott, perhaps, and tell him how wretched and how clever she was, and he would surely do something for her. But in the middle of her vision her father would perhaps enter the room for the evening, and, surprising that she sat still, without noticing him, would say complainingly, ‘Come, am I to fetch my slippers myself?’ The voice pierced through Maggie like a sword: there was another sadness besides her own, and she had been thinking of turning her back on it and forsaking it (299-300).

Like Hetty, Maggie has these flights of fancy to distract herself from the reality of her position; however, unlike Hetty, Maggie is brought back to Earth and reality out of a sense of duty to her father and family. Here we see the colliding forces of Maggie’s soul, as she is split between not following her ambitions, but rather validation of her intelligence by “some great man” and her father who needs her. Notably, there is a contrast between her father who only worries about her future, and Maggie who renounces possibilities for her future because of the duty she feels to her father.

What ultimately brings Maggie comfort is the realness and austerity of Thomas à Kempis, as like Dinah she attempts to fill her mind with a voice other than her own. When Maggie discovers the book, “A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor... hardly conscious that she was reading – seeming rather to listen while a low voice...” (302). Maggie is both awakened and in a stupor, and she vows to enter a life of renunciation from her fanciful musings, while “with all the hurry of an imagination that could never rest in the present, she sat in the deepening twilight forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness ...” (303). Barbara Guth argues that “the flaw in this doctrine for Maggie is that it stresses so completely the insignificance of individual happiness” (358). Maggie, like Dinah, believes that in order to survive in the world, she must deny herself. She is viewing herself increasingly in terms of being an object, as “her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity” (305). Again, the fictionality of Maggie is brought to the forefront, except now Maggie herself believes that there is a part set for her that has already been determined. As a result, she throws away all of her books of masculine knowledge and dedicates herself to sewing. Maggie, it appears, has firmly given up her childhood quest for a different life for herself and will “play the part” of a proper woman.

Maggie’s submission extends beyond her mind to her physical appearance as well. During her period of self-denial, there is not a physical description of her, as if she too physically ceases to exist as an autonomous person. Once she is stripped of her thoughts and her intelligence, she slowly begins to be rebuilt in the vision of who she *should* be. It is described that she “was obliged to give way to her mother about her hair and submit to have the abundant

black locks plaited into a coronet...” (306). She allows others to mold her into the object that she should be, beginning with allowing her mother to have her way with her hair. She “showed a queenly head above her old frocks – steadily refusing, however, to look at herself in the glass” (306). She achieves being a dark-haired queen, at the same time that she submits. This begins the next phase of Maggie’s life, where it is oddly through submission that she gains power, reminiscent of Caterina’s submission to musical performance to garner a sense of control. Maggie’s refusal to look at herself in the mirror can be read as a sense of shame to her submission to being an object, or as a reinforcement of this loss of sense of self.

This stage of submission corresponds with the return of Philip Wakem. When Philip, her childhood friend, returns, she is tempted to look at herself, “With that thought Maggie glanced towards the square looking-glass which was condemned to hang with its face towards the wall, and she half-started from her seat to reach it down; but she checked herself and snatched up her work, trying to repress the rising wishes...” (309). Similar to how it was Tom who prompted Maggie to first look in the mirror, it is now Philip who is tempting Maggie to look at herself and feed the ego she had been repressing. While Tom did so out of malice, Maggie could be thought of literally remembering herself because in many ways Philip is an extension of herself. Janice Carlisle notes “the duplicative relation between Maggie and Philip” as “Philip enters the novel to become the voice of rebellion and desire once Maggie herself embraces submission and denial. Philip personifies Maggie's longing for the world of books, music, and art. When they meet in the Red Deeps, he simply represents the activity and survival of that part of herself that she has attempted, unsuccessfully, to annihilate” (184). In a surprising repeat of Hetty, the first truly detailed description of Maggie is when she is gazed upon by a man. When she goes out to meet

Philip in the Red Deeps, the narrator provides a full, physical description of her, inviting the reader to literally see her:

You may see her now, as she walks down the favourite turning and enters the Deeps by a narrow path through a group of Scotch firs – her tall figure and old lavender gown visible through an hereditary black silk shawl of some wide-meshed net-like material; and now she is sure of being unseen, she takes off her bonnet and ties it over her arm. One would certainly suppose her to be farther on in life than her seventeenth year... the nights in which she has lain on the hard floor for a penance have left no obvious trace: the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and rounded, the full lips are red. With her dark colouring and jet crown surmounting her tall figure, she seems to have a sort of kinship with the grand Scotch firs, at which she is looking up as if she loved them well (310).

The directive “You may see her now” is giving the reader permission to look at her, despite this being a moment where “she is sure of being unseen.” Maggie’s body is now on display and in a sense no longer hers, as the reader, the narrator, and Philip are all looking upon it.

Philip, as Maggie’s “second self,” assumes the role of artist. In this chapter there has not been the same emphasis on the artist versus artistic object discussion. This is due, because as eloquently put by John Levey: “Maggie is indeed the representative of the poetical temperament, but in a rather peculiar, almost negative way. At first blush one would certainly say that Maggie has been presented as a girl with an artistic nature with capital letters, but if one goes back to check the impression .... She is, thus, obviously not artistic in deed but artistic in essence” (74). While Maggie is deeply moved by art, she is not artistic. Philip, on the other hand, is a literal artist. First, he captured Maggie as a child, “with her black locks hanging down behind her ears, looking into space with strange, dreamy eyes. It was a water-colour sketch, of real merit as a portrait” (312). He paints her again, no longer a mere water-color sketch, but an oil painting. He tells her, ““You will look like a tall Hamadryad, dark and strong and noble, just issued from one of the fir-trees, where the stems are casting their afternoon shadows on the grass”” (339). Philip moves from capturing her in a moment, to designing how the scene will appear, pointing to his

increasing control over Maggie. If they are the same, they are unequal halves. As Janice Carlisle describes, “By the time that Maggie is seventeen, all the traits of the would-be artist, all the rebellion and imaginative storytelling, have been drained out of her and have become embodied in Philip” (185). This is the opposite of the common argument that Philip returns Maggie to her former self. While he technically does not “take” Maggie’s potential artistry from her by making her his “tenth Muse,” he fails to give her the opportunity to become an artist herself (345).

Maggie’s submission as an art object to Philip points to the element of control that being an object provides, because it allows Maggie to maintain her childhood sense of self. Philip represents stunted development, which is literally presented through his physical deformity. He tells Maggie that “‘Then, there are many other things I long for’ – here Philip hesitated a little, and then said – ‘things that other men have, and that will always be denied me. My life will have nothing great or beautiful in it – I would rather not have lived’” (314). Philip will never be able to be a man; thus, he is stuck in this state of perpetual childhood. Maggie’s attraction to him stems from the fact that when she is with him, she can remain in a state of childhood.

Additionally, Philip, like Maggie, also possesses traits of the opposite gender. He has the appearance of being well-educated, but his education resembles more that of a woman’s, “I care for painting and music – I care for classic literature, and mediaeval literature and modern literature – I flutter all ways, and fly in none” (339). This resembles the “unfocused” female education described by Mr Stelling. His associations with being a woman extend beyond his education, he also is sometimes physically described as one. For example, when Maggie kisses Philip, she “stooped her tall head to kiss the low pale face that was full of pleading, timid love – like a woman’s” (350). M. Melissa Elston argues that within the Red Deeps, “it can be argued that the text is, in fact, demarcating a third sphere, an alternative to the dyadic Victorian worlds

of men and women” (34). Within the Red Deeps, Maggie’s masculine tendencies and Philip’s feminine traits are able to flow freely. Therefore, Maggie’s status as Philip’s artistic object is not entirely negative for Maggie, as seen when they first reunite and the narrator notes “It was impossible not to perceive that Maggie felt herself a child again” (311). Maggie is allowed to exist in this genderless space where she is allowed to be a child again, at the sacrifice of her independence.

It is in Maggie’s imagination where she seeks to have control, mainly in remaining in a state of childhood. This supports the argument that instead of being a *bildungsroman*, the story is an anti-*bildungsroman*, as Maggie does not want to leave childhood. JD Esty situates *The Mill on the Floss* within Eliot’s questioning of whether people improve, or even have a continuous identity over time, locating the transition between childhood and adulthood as a sort of rupture in identity (144-147). Throughout the novel, the reader sees Maggie continually cling to her childhood and balk against the opportunities presented to her to transcend it. Elisha Cohn takes her analysis of *The Mill on the Floss* one step further by situating the text as an anti-*bildungsroman* in both the novel’s and Maggie’s refusal to develop. Cohn describes that “This particular *Bildungsroman*, as anti-*Bildungsroman*, concerns the very forms and rhythms of unproductiveness that critics have been slow to accept in Eliot’s work. Maggie Tulliver’s boat does not reach the shore, but it is the state of floating before the crash that interests Eliot” (67). Not only Maggie, but the work itself follows a cyclical pattern that it never breaks free of, until the final rupture at the end of the novel. While Maggie on the surface appears to be full of action, in reality she fails to follow through on her plans, whether that be running away to the gypsies or with Stephen, her academic endeavors, or her self-renunciation.

Similar to his position as artist, Philip also seems to take the position of narrator as well. He not only paints her and alerts her to her own physicality, but tells her to “*Listen to me – let me supply you with books*” (342). Even Maggie’s elopement with Stephen is the result of Philip’s imagination. When Maggie says that she wants to avenge all the dark heroines, Philip tells her: ““Well, perhaps you will avenge the dark women in your own person: – carry away all the love from your cousin Lucy. She is sure to have some handsome young man of St Ogg’s at her feet now – and you have only to shine upon him – your fair little cousin will be quite quenched in your beams”” (345). Not only is her affair with Stephen predetermined, but also the fact that Maggie seduces Stephen quite unintentionally. This returns to the earlier notion that even when Maggie is choosing freely, these are actions that have been set for her. Which returns to one of the oddest aspects of her character – Maggie, who appears the most “wild” is actually the most controlled.

### **Maggie’s ‘Brighter Aerial World’ – A Heaven or Hell?**

The final phase of Maggie’s life is fully submitting to the female coming of age trajectory that she had tried to avoid up to this point in her life. While the reader may have viewed Maggie as a controlled object over the course of the narrative, it is not until this phase that Maggie fully becomes what she had been fighting against. Just as Caterina, Hetty and Dinah are reduced to objects – particularly objects of male desire – the threat of objectification has a stifling and numbing effect on Maggie. However, Maggie’s transformation into an object takes a distinct form. While Eliot is certainly critical of the hazy dreamworld that Maggie enjoys, it is not without its pleasures. This is a surprising shift from the previous heroines where being an object

was presented as a kind of living death. Maggie too experiences a kind of death as an object, but she finds herself in a heaven where she is tempted to remain.

In the third volume *The Mill on the Floss* begins again, shifting from a focus on the natural to the domestic world. While the novel begins with the description of “A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea...” and the sound of the “low placid voice” of the river itself, the third volume opens with the overview of “The well-furnished drawing-room, with the open grand piano and the pleasant outlook down a sloping garden to a boat-house by the side of the Floss, is Mr Deane’s” (377). The Floss, which in the first chapter dominated the landscape, is consigned to the side, as the focus is centered on the confined domestic room, the artificial source of sound, and the constructed landscape. The emphasis on the artificiality of the setting is reminiscent of Cheverel Manor in “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story.” However, while Cheverel Manor was presented as a more masculine space, the domesticity of the Deane’s is meant to convey it as a feminine realm. Lawrence Buell describes “the double paradox of ‘nature’ having been androcentrically constructed as a domain for males, in contradistinction to female-coded domestic space, yet at the same time symbolically coded as female – an arena of potential domination analogous to the female body” (109). Maggie, who has always been identified with nature, is entering a space where she will be expected to be tamed.

The similarities with “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” continue in the introduction of Stephen Guest. The narrator describes him as “he might have been sitting for his portrait, which would have represented a rather striking young man of five and twenty...” (378). Stephen is presented as a kind of living portrait, underscoring the stylized nature of this space. He assumes Maggie to be a similar living painting, “a fat blonde girl, with round blue eyes, who will stare at us silently” (380). Lucy, oddly, does not correct Stephen’s false prediction because as a passive object is how

she wants Maggie to be viewed. Lucy not correcting Stephen is an indication of the active role that Lucy will attempt to make in shaping Maggie's trajectory.

Despite the emphasis placed on the artificiality of the setting, it is a space that allows for the complete dominance of sensation. While Cheverel Manor stifled emotional expression, the Deane's home seems to encourage it. For example, when Stephen and Lucy first sing together, the narrator notes "In the provinces, too, where music was so scarce in that remote time, how could the musical people avoid falling in love with each other? Even political principle must have been in danger of relaxation under such circumstances; and a violin faithful to rotten boroughs must have been tempted to fraternise in a demoralizing way with a reforming violoncello" (382). Foreshadowing the inevitability of Stephen and Maggie's attraction, this also introduces how the contained domestic setting appears to amplify the effect of music. While there are plenty of musical performances during Maggie's stay with Lucy, they can be thought of less as performances, and more as expressions of true feeling. The characters embody the music to such a degree that they are often referred to foremost in terms of music, as the previously quoted section suggests. The overpowering sensation allows for natural, unrestrained behavior that is perhaps unexpected in a space so divorced from nature. Eliot is inverting the vision of a domestic upper-class space that she created with Cheverel Manor, where people were interchangeable with paintings rather than music.

Once the setting is established as definitively female, Maggie is brought into the space. Again, in contrast with her original introduction where she enters the room as a "small mistake of nature" and refuses to do as her mother tells her to, she is instead passively arranged by Lucy. First, Lucy "plac[ed] that dark lady in the large crimson velvet chair," then she "rose from her knees and went to a little distance, holding her pretty head on one side, as if she had been

arranging Maggie for a portrait and wished to judge of the general effect” (386, 387). No longer an active force that moves on her own accord, Maggie is now moved and positioned like an object; however, even as a compliant object, Maggie still has traces of being a “small mistake of nature.” Lucy complains there must be “witchery” to Maggie, as she looks “best in shabby clothes” (387). Lucy wants her to be an object, the problem is that Maggie is a faulty object, due to both the “Otherness” and masculine qualities within her.

Lucy is meant to represent the typical Victorian girl coming of age in society, and in this capacity, she serves as a foil to Maggie’s development. Completely oblivious to the intense attraction between Maggie and Stephen, she can be easily overlooked; and yet, she plays a crucial role in establishing Maggie as an object in St. Ogg society. John Levay describes how “it seems to me that the underpinning web of literary allusiveness is so pervasive in this novel that we can hardly fail to get a kind of allegorical sense of Maggie... Maggie may not want to be Corinna, the ‘tenth Muse’ (290), encumbered with her harp and scroll, ‘an uncomfortable goddess’ (290); but that is exactly what she is, clearly for Philip, and obscurely for Stephen, Jakin, her father, and even Lucy” (69). Lucy though, while she certainly recognizes the odd qualities of Maggie, does not let them interfere with her vision of Maggie. When Maggie’s arms and complexion are criticized by Mrs Tulliver and Mrs Pullet, she says “I don’t mean Maggie to have long sleeves, and I have abundance of black lace for trimming. Her arms will look beautiful...A painter would think Maggie’s complexion beautiful” (399). Maggie, notably, finds this attention directed on herself uncomfortable, but says nothing.

Lucy’s influence is therefore surprising for a female character as she seems to take more active narrative control over the story than even Philip did. Her influence over Maggie extends beyond her appearance to Maggie’s actions, or rather her inactivity, as well. She positions and

dresses her, insists that she and Stephen will get along, and when Stephen offers to lend Lucy a book, she interjects, saying “I must forbid your plunging Maggie in books. I shall never get her away from them. And I want her to have delicious do-nothing days, filled with boating and chatting and riding and driving: that is the holiday she needs” (396). Here Lucy is firmly preventing Maggie from going back into the world of masculine knowledge. Maggie even admits to the amount of control that Lucy has over her, saying “Lucy is like a fairy godmother: she has turned me from a drudge into a princess in no time. I do nothing but indulge myself all day long, and she always finds out what I want before I know it myself” (429). Underscoring the dreamlike quality of her stay with Lucy, this statement also points to her role as “fairy godmother” in attempting to shape her future. After Maggie tells Lucy about her past with Philip, Lucy says “O I shall puzzle my small brain to contrive some plot that will bring everybody into the right mind – so that you may marry Philip, when I marry – somebody else. Wouldn’t that be a pretty ending to all my poor, poor Maggie’s troubles?” (403). Maggie feels a chill when Lucy says this, but does nothing to prevent her from taking action. And Lucy does set in motion a potential tidy ending for Maggie in orchestrating the return of the mill to Tom from the Wakem’s. It is Lucy, not Philip, Stephen, or even Tom, who plays the most pivotal role in reducing Maggie to an object during this period. The only woman who exerts influence over Maggie leads her into a numbed existence that is also the most natural path that Maggie struggles the least against.

While Lucy views Maggie as a faulted object that can still conform to standards, Stephen’s attraction to Maggie is due to the ways in which she is not the typical “sort of woman he had always admired” (385) as Lucy is. When Stephen first sees Maggie, it is described that:

For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall

dark-eyed nymph, with her jet-black coronet of hair, the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. This new experience was very agreeable to her – so agreeable that it almost effaced her previous emotion about Philip. There was a new brightness in her eyes, and a very becoming flush on her cheek as she seated herself (391).

Stephen's attraction to Maggie is repeatedly emphasized as being due to the ways that she differs from the norm, and in the manner that she is clearly attracted to him. This is explicitly shown in his initial thoughts after meeting her: "An alarming amount of devil there... I wish she would look at me again" (392). He becomes increasingly obsessed with her looking at and listening to him. Maggie meanwhile can be understood as having a sexual awakening in her physical response to his gaze. She realizes that she enjoys being looked upon as desirable by a person who she in turn desires. It is a different, more adult, spark than what she has with Philip, as the aforementioned quote exemplifies.

The pleasure that Maggie feels in being looked upon leads to the surprising element of this section of her story – when Maggie is in this domestic space, where she is viewed and treated as an object, she enjoys it and the ease which it provides. Tammy Amiel Houser argues that Maggie's physical transformation opposes the traditional *bildungsroman*, as in the male the body is not an important factor, while in the female the body is often degraded. Maggie meanwhile has a positive physical transformation. Houser explains that "In *The Mill on the Floss*, by contrast, Maggie's metamorphosis from ugly duckling into beautiful swan involves becoming a desiring subject rather than simply a desired object, and includes an awareness of her beautiful body as a potential source of her own pleasure" (561). Sensation – looks, sound, touch – define the relationship between Stephen and Maggie. Stephen obsessively desires Maggie's eyes on him, while Maggie blushes when his gaze is on her. There is a mutual giving and receiving of pleasure.

Maggie's status as an object is largely conveyed through her being presented as a musical instrument which is "played." Stephen and Philip inspire very different musical responses from her. Philip breaks Maggie out of her spell, such as when Stephen mentions Philip's name "Maggie gave a little start – it seemed hardly more than a vibration that passed from head to foot in an instant. But the new images summoned by Philip's name, dispersed half the oppressive spell she had been under" (423). Philip's effect is noticeably weak though. When Stephen mentions his name again, "Maggie did not notice Philip's name this time" (424). Stephen, on the other hand, consistently has the power to have a physical effect on Maggie through song, a power which she attempts to resist. Maggie routinely attempts to control herself through sewing. Helena Michie explains that:

When Stephen sings, releasing in her a flood of inappropriate passion for music and for Stephen herself, she bends assiduously over her sewing. The music repeatedly causes her to drop her work, but she returns to it grimly, 'making false stitches and pricking her fingers with much perseverance' (*Mill*, p. 367). The seeming insignificance of Maggie's pain, these little finger pricks, is in itself a form of repression: acute and real as Maggie's suffering is, it is domesticated and tamed, trivialized in its metaphorization into pinpricks (42).

Michie argues that if the final flood can be interpreted as an expression of Maggie's desires, then the droplets of blood can be seen as how trivialized female desire is in a domestic space. Sensation is amplified, but there is no outlet for Maggie to appropriately release this desire. Maggie, however, can never refrain from responding to Stephen's music. For example, "When the strain passed into the minor she half started from her seat with the sudden thrill of that change. Poor Maggie! She looked very beautiful when her soul was being played on in this way by the inexorable power of sound" (434). Like a musical instrument, Maggie needs an outside source in order to be beautiful. We first saw this in her physical transformation after she submits to her mother and becomes Philip's muse. Like Hetty, and even Dinah, Maggie physically takes

form in response to outside stimulus. In the same scene Philip attempts to do the same and reach Maggie through music, but she entirely misreads him, “She was touched not thrilled by the song: it suggested distinct memories and thoughts, and brought quiet regret in the place of excitement” (435). Delia da Sousa Correa explores the connection between music and memory, and the impact it has on identity. She writes, “unconscious memory is awakened by music in ways which both affirm and disturb the individual’s sense of self. Philip’s singing intensifies Maggie’s sense of integration with her past. Musical communion with Stephen disrupts the musical associations which help bind her conscious sense of identity” (551). Philip’s music alerts Maggie to her past, while Stephen’s music has the effect of placing Maggie in a kind of numbed present.

Equating being an object with being trapped in a present is not a new idea for George Eliot. After Caterina gets married, time appears to stand still for her, and the majority of her heroines appear to enter this phase of suspended time once they get married. What is unique about *The Mill on the Floss* is that being an object and existing only in the present is connected with sensation. Instead of being an object causing a dulling of sensation, it leads to feeling sensation and emotion more intensely. Elisha Cohn describes this phenomenon in the following quote: “This novel presents instrumentality and intention as flawed, and cognitive or ethical lapses as both inevitable and, surprisingly, pleasurable. Suspension withholds its assent from the ethical, social, and aesthetic practices that ineluctably damage Maggie’s life: it not only widens the psychology of her art, but also alters her humanist aesthetic” (67). This is explicitly seen in the following quote:

It was not that she thought distinctly of Mr Stephen Guest or dwelt on the indications that he looked at her with admiration; it was rather that she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries (400).

Maggie views Stephen as an object that grants her access to the “brighter aerial world” that she always imagined for herself (401). The detailed descriptions of the sensation that Maggie feels with Stephen can inform what Caterina meant by being “slave of this voice and touch” of Anthony, and Dinah and Hetty’s deep blushes in response Adam and Arthur’s gazes (*Scenes of Clerical Life* 95). Eliot never explored the pleasurable sensation of being admired with her previous heroines, instead viewing it as a character fault, or rather weakness. Through Maggie, Eliot explores female pleasure in a positive way, explaining why a woman would want to be reduced to a kind of object. For example, after only a week at the Deane’s, “Maggie began to be less haunted by her sad memories and anticipations. Life was certainly very pleasant just now: it was becoming very pleasant to dress in the evening and to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of this spring time” (417). In this quote we see the pleasure that Maggie finds in being an object herself, not only for the admiration that she receives, but also for the numbing effect it has on her mind. Freeman argues that during this phase the narrator both loses authority over Maggie, and is less sympathetic towards her troubles (381-382). The narrator may be critical of Maggie’s submission to sensation, but there is also the sense that this is where Maggie most naturally belongs, since it was after all a similar dreamscape where the narrator first set Maggie into motion.

Additionally, it is notable that as objects Stephen feels controlled by a “natural force” while Maggie becomes controlled by another person. They often interact with each other through a third medium, whether that be song, Lucy, or the dog Minny. For example, in the scene where Stephen strokes Minny while she is sitting in Maggie’s lap, it is described that “It seemed to Stephen like some action in a dream that he was obliged to do ...” while “for Maggie she had no distinct thought” (422). While Stephen acts according to some other natural power that is

influencing him, when Maggie loses “consciousness” she is controlled by another person. Maggie’s conflicted feelings towards this loss of control is seen throughout her entire story, as she desires both to be independent, while also intensely wants someone else to guide her. Her enjoyment is seen in a scene where she slips and Stephen helps her, when she reflects that “It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind graceful manner by some one taller and stronger than oneself. Maggie had never felt just in the same way before” (398). The factor that both intensifies and breaks the spell between them is when they are alone and touching. The first time that they stroll arm and arm with each other, “Maggie had darting thoughts across the dimness: – how came she to be there? – why had she come out? Not a word was spoken. If it had been, each would have been less intensely conscious of each other” (425). Maggie’s awareness and growing panic at being not in control of herself causes her to pull away, and once she does she wishes she was back in the Red Deeps with Philip. Maggie is aware that Stephen could pull her away into the future; however, she also does not necessarily want to go back to her past either with Philip. The bliss of being an object is most felt when it allows her to be entirely in the present.

Maggie is not only a desirable object, but ultimately a marriageable object. This issue is at the forefront during the Bazaar, where this fairytale of Lucy’s design is starkly interrupted by this capitalist marketplace. The Bazaar has a mixing of masculine and feminine qualities that is perhaps best summarized by Stephen when he complains ““taking young ladies from the duties of the domestic hearth into scenes of dissipation among urn-rugs and embroidered reticules! I should like to know what is the proper function of women if it is not to make reasons for husbands to stay at home and still stronger reasons for bachelors to go out. If this goes on much longer the bonds of society will be dissolved”” (421). The Bazaar sees women leaving the

domestic space and entering the realm of commerce as they run the event. Maggie further complicates this switching of gender roles when she finds herself selling gentlemen's dressing-gowns, and attracting a large number of male customers. This quickly causes her to lose popularity among the other "charitable ladies" as they think "There was something rather bold in Miss Tulliver's direct gaze, and something undefinably coarse in the style of her beauty, which placed her, in the opinion of all feminine judges, far below her cousin Miss Deane..." (449). Nina Auerbach describes how " – for in her *mélange* of demonic and transforming power, Maggie seems a fallen woman by nature, in whom any activity is secondary to the intense ambiguous impact of what she *is*" (183). This encapsulates the view of Maggie – she is deemed fallen by association, and here we see the transition between her selling objects to being an object for sale herself. Philip's father Wakem visits Maggie at the Bazaar, after Philip tells him that he loves Maggie. Him visiting Maggie in her stall is reminiscent of the previous scene where they discuss her while considering the two portraits of her by Philip. When Stephen sees Wakem, in combination with Philip looking upon Maggie as if he was "studying for a portrait," he becomes alerted to the fact that "there had been some former relation between Philip and Maggie beyond that childish one of which he had heard" (451). Maggie is an object to be possessed and captured in painting. Wakem's statement that "We don't ask what a woman does – we ask whom she belongs to" comes to fruition, as we see Philip and Stephen competing for ownership over Maggie (443- 444). The women are concerned with what Maggie does, or poses the threat of doing, while the men view her increasingly in terms of an object to possess.

It is after stepping out of the dreamy feminine space and into the masculine world of commerce that Maggie concludes that she wants more in life than being an object; however, she is not as free as she believes she is to make this choice. The narrator notes that:

It may be surprising that Maggie, among whose many imperfections an excessive delight in admiration and acknowledged supremacy were not absent now, any more than when she was instructing the gypsies with a view towards achieving a royal position among them ...[and] with the satisfactory consciousness which had necessarily come from being taken before Lucy's cheval glass and made to look at the full length of her tall beauty, crowned by the night of her messy hair.... If that state of mind could have lasted, her choice would have been to have Stephen Guest at her feet, offering her a life filled with luxuries, with daily incense of adoration near and distant, with all possibilities of culture at her command. But there were things in her stronger than vanity – passion, and affection, and long deep memories of early discipline and effort, of early claims on her love and pity...(454-455).

Maggie standing before the mirror can be interpreted in two ways. Throughout the novel Maggie has either been forced to look in the mirror by Tom, or avoided mirrors during her period of renunciation. Her standing in front of it and admiring her appearance can be viewed as taking ownership of the mirror and sense of self-worth. Or, it could be seen as her giving-in to male standards of beauty and wealth. Jenijoy La Belle describes how “the male enlists the power of his ally, the mirror, to define the female as a visual image” (55). Maggie now defines herself by her appearance, and not her intellect. Even the comparison between being queen of the gypsies and ruling over Stephen points to the transformation in how she views her power, from wanting to rule through her intellect to recognizing she can rule through her beauty. This awareness that she wants more than just vanity comes after the peak of her being viewed as an object, and her leaving the domestic space for the Bazaar. Thus, the female coming of age story is not possible for Maggie, but as already shown, the male version is not possible either. Wasserman describes how “Maggie suffers not so much from excessive femaleness as from the fact that some of her attributes have been culturally assigned to men, and some to women, so that to obey the cultural norms defining her as female she must suppress part of herself, and to obey the cultural norms that describe the development of a complete, mature individual, she must defy her definition as a female, a risk she does not take” (278). Maggie decides that she will move on to her new position as a governess, but Lucy instead tells her “Give it up – let me write” in her ongoing plan to have

Maggie marry Philip (456). Maggie moves from believing that she has the option of choice, to Lucy, her “fairy godmother” writing for Maggie to set in motion her marriage to Philip.

Maggie follows the pattern of falling into a dream, waking and desiring agency, but then falling into a deeper dream and loss of consciousness. This repeats on a small-scale throughout the third volume; however, the entire section could also be understood as being divided into these categories. Immediately after Maggie makes the decision to return to her past and give up her dream-world with Stephen, she goes to the dance at Park House and dances with Stephen. It is described that:

When Maggie became conscious that she was the person he sought, she felt, in spite of all the thoughts that had gone before, a glowing gladness at heart. Her eyes and cheeks were still brightened with her child-like enthusiasm in the dance; her whole frame was set to joy and tenderness: – even the coming pain could not seem bitter – she was ready to welcome it as a part of life, for life at this moment seemed a keen vibrating consciousness poised above the pleasure or pain. This one, this last night, she might expand unrestrainedly in the warmth of the present, without those chill eating thoughts of the past and future (459).

In her full submission to the present, she delves deeper into a fantasy world, remarking that the trees “look as if they belonged to an enchanted land, and would never fade away: – I could fancy they were all made of jewels” (459). Trees are not only made into objects, but they also join Maggie in this eternal present. As she loses more control over her consciousness, she also becomes more like an object. As she and Stephen walk arm in arm, it is described that “A woman’s arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the time-worn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie’s was such an arm as that – and it had the warm tints of life” (460). Rather than resembling a statue, she is figured as a statue with hints of life to it. Helena Michie describes how “In the case of Maggie Tulliver, the disembodied hand and arm are equally sinister synecdoches for the fully sexualized female body...her arms, visible to the world and the

reader, become representative for Stephen both of his desire for Maggie and of her desirability” (98-99). It is thereby fitting that what breaks the spell between them is when Stephen kisses Maggie’s arm – shattering the distance that was between them and causing Maggie to recoil from this transgression.

After this episode the spell and dream is shattered for Maggie, but not for Stephen. She leaves to stay with her aunt where he finds her and demands her forgiveness. Forcefully he demands her to take his arm, which she does while feeling “all the while as if she were sliding downwards in a nightmare” (466). Stephen implores her to forget all previous ties and marry him, to which Maggie responds “‘I would rather die than fall into that temptation,’ said Maggie, with deep, slow distinctness, – all the gathered spiritual force of painful years coming to her aid in this extremity. She drew her arm from his as he spoke” (467). Drawing back her arm in an attempt to draw back her sexuality, she fails to resist for long, following the pattern of dream, resistance, deeper dream.

As Maggie increasingly loses control of her autonomy, the perception of her as a marriageable object also strengthens. Before her elopement with Stephen, the issue of Maggie’s place and purpose within her family is the topic of conversation among her relatives. Maggie is about to return to “service” to work as a governess – an occupation that the reader never sees Maggie perform. After her return from Lucy’s, there are now other options for her though: “Maggie in her crude form, with her hair down her back and altogether in a state of dubious promise, was a most undesirable niece; but now, she was capable of being at once ornamental and useful.” Mr Glegg tells Maggie, “Don’t let us hear of you taking a place again, Maggie. Why, you must ha’ picked up half-a-dozen sweethearts at the bazaar – isn’t there one of ’em the right sort of article?” (472). Maggie is an object that is most “useful” when “ornamental,” but Mr

Glegg does not place her into the category of an object for sale at the bazaar, instead her “sweethearts” are the “article[s].” Maggie being a beautiful and passive object is giving her the power of a kind of choice in who she will marry, at least in the eyes of her family. This element of choice is negated when Stephen takes her away down the river.

Maggie and Stephen’s journey down the river is notable for how natural it is presented, and thus it is also notable for how unnatural Maggie’s refusal is depicted. Leading up to the elopement, coincidences align so that Stephen and Maggie are alone together, and as they travel down the river, “thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped – it belonged to the past and the future that lay outside the haze” (484). Again, being with Stephen is presented as a way for Maggie to empty her mind, the opposite of her previous period where she sought to fill her mind with masculine knowledge and the voice of Thomas à Kempis. The appeal that she found in those voices are repeated in the absence of thought, as it is described that when Stephen does speak to her, “Maggie obeyed: there was an unspeakable charm in being told what to do, and having everything decided for her” (487). Ironically, it is a dream that “awakens” Maggie to what has occurred, as she dreams of Philip and Lucy, the two people who will be most hurt by this elopement. Maggie chooses the happiness of others over her own, and in perhaps the one choice that she truly makes for herself in the novel, she goes back against the current to her past, and away from her destiny as a woman to be a wife. Talia Schaffer, in her exploration of the transition from familiar to romantic marriages during the Victorian era, defends Maggie’s decision to turn her back from the future and romantic marriage, and make the arduous journey home where she is destined to be outcast. She writes that the end, “requires us to respect Maggie’s success in choosing her own path and asks us to pity her as a helpless victim of larger currents. For Maggie’s movement attests both to the difficulty of moving against the

romantic tide and the need so many Victorian women felt to find a safe harbor” (237-238).

Maggie, though, does not return to a safe harbor.

When Maggie refuses her destiny of marriage, she then fails to have any possible future. In the final chapters Maggie gets lost within the pages, as instead the gossip and judgment of the “world’s wife” takes over (509). She cannot live with her brother, she cannot marry Philip, and she cannot work. Thus the flood that drowns Maggie can be viewed as a kind of rescue, that puts Maggie out of her misery of a life where all choices lead to misfortune. Maggie dies in a final embrace with Tom, where “in one supreme moment” they return to the blissful days of their childhood (542). The reader knows that Maggie’s childhood was not as heavenly as she remembers, but it is as if Eliot rewards, as Hardy describes, “Maggie’s prayer” with the reward of the flood that allowed Maggie to enter the heaven of the childhood she always dreamed of (*The Novels of George Eliot* 118). For as JD Esty notes, through her refusal of marriage, “Maggie is barred from permanently entering into either traditional or modern gender arrangements. The absence of a marriage plot for Maggie is the most important index of the novel’s break from *Bildungsroman* conventions: without a husband, she cannot be recognized as a fully ‘formed’ woman” (151). And it is exactly this destiny of a “fully ‘formed woman’” that Maggie had always rebelled against.

The degree to which Maggie took control over her destiny is also important to consider in terms of her status as an object within her life and story. As she became less of an autonomous person over the course of her stay with Lucy, she oddly gained more control from the narrator.

The narrator’s loss of control seems to happen in the span of a page, as she tells the reader:

you have known Maggie a long while, and need to be told, not her characteristics, but her history, which is hardly to be predicted even from the completist knowledge of character... Maggie’s destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal

itself like the course of an unmapped river: we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home (418).

The narrator appears to be relinquishing her control over Maggie's story, situating herself in the position as the reader. Janet Freeman describes this as "And so we wait, reader and narrator alike witnessing Maggie's passionate attraction to and abandonment of Stephen Guest, until at last the unmapped river floods St. Ogg's and Maggie, alone, takes control of her future" (379). Maggie breaking away from Stephen appears to prove this point, as well as her assertion to Philip that she will not have a future that causes her to break from her past. This fails to take into account though the two prophecies that Philip has for Maggie – that she will steal Stephen away from Lucy, and that she will drown. This harkens back to Maggie's belief that her life is controlled by an outside force. Thus, even when Maggie thinks that she has broken free from the bonds of being controlled, there are still forces that are acting upon her.

Through Maggie, George Eliot at first appears to attempt to solve the problem of the one destiny that women are provided – to be marriageable objects. However, upon closer reading it is clear that she is actually exploring the inevitability of a woman to be a controlled object throughout her entire life. Maggie, so closely modeled after Eliot herself, is still silenced by the end of the novel, but this silencing is far kinder than the ones that her previous heroines received.

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have explored the competing layers of interpretation that Eliot placed upon her early heroines. In these doubly restrictive scenarios her heroines are limited by both the society that they live in and by Eliot herself. Eliot, as the author and as a woman, could have granted her heroines kinder treatment within her novels, and yet she chose to present her heroines in this limited manner, almost chiefly in terms of being controlled objects. This is not the first examination of this seemingly unfair treatment. In her essay “Why Feminist Critics Are Angry With George Eliot” Zelda Austen writes “Feminist critics are angry with George Eliot because she did not permit Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster, and finally live openly with a man whom she could not marry” (549). Austen argues that Eliot recognized her own exceptionalism in not allowing her heroines to live similarly extraordinary lives – the vast majority of Victorian women had no options other than marriage.

When one thinks of Eliot’s thwarted heroines, one first thinks of Dorothea, as Austen’s aforementioned quote suggests; however, examining this group of earlier heroines of Caterina, Dinah, Hetty, and Maggie as this thesis has, yields surprising revelations about how Eliot constructs these oppressed female characters. Caterina, often dismissed as a melodramatic character in an early short story, is perhaps Eliot’s most direct depiction of a young woman buried under interpretation, restriction and art. Her ruptures into activity and retreats into silence show a mind in anguish that is belittled by the unfeeling narrator. Hetty and Dinah at first glance come across as almost anti-feminist – Hetty in her egotistical shallowness and Dinah in her unbelievable selflessness and sacrifice of vocation for marriage to an unfit husband. Hetty

though gains an underappreciated power in the manipulation of her position as artistic object to become a kind of artist herself, while Dinah, as seen through the odd focus on her body, is more of an object rather than the independent artist she first appears to be. Eliot employs art and unsympathetic narrators to represent the suppression of these characters, but these characters also use in attempts to subvert their positions. They struggle more than the mainstream criticism of Eliot suggests that they do.

My second chapter draws Maggie Tulliver— who is typically discussed in conjunction with Dorothea or Gwendolen – in conversation with these earlier heroines. Eliot is much more explicit in putting gender and the woman question at the forefront of *The Mill on the Floss*. Maggie at first appears to be the most “free” of her heroines, and capable of breaking the cycle of being silenced. But in comparison to these previous characters, Maggie surprisingly comes across as the most controlled and least active. From the opening scene of *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie is presented as playing a part, versus having agency over her life. The one choice that she makes in not marrying Stephen negates all possibilities of a future for her. The fact that she literally never moves forward out of childhood is proof that Eliot could not imagine an alternative for this heroine so closely based on herself. Zelda Austen cites Eliot’s many amazing achievements; however, reading Eliot’s letters one can see that these achievements and alternative lifestyle came at a cost as she was essentially disowned by her family and ostracized by society. Killing Maggie thus comes across as an act of mercy rather than a cruel end for the character.

In her early heroines the reader can see Eliot working through the problem of how to represent the lives of women as they truly *are*, instead of how they could be. She achieves this partly by burying them under so many layers of interpretations that their “true” character is

hidden from the reader. In the characters of Caterina, Hetty, and Dinah the reader has to look closely to see how they are struggling and acting against these unfair representations, and how these reveal the overall pressures women face in this period before marriage. With Maggie the limitations placed on her are much more apparent to the reader, but it is more hidden the large extent to which she is a controlled object. By the time Eliot writes *The Mill on the Floss* she is more confident writing female characters as a woman and her more frank discussion of and sympathy for the struggles that Maggie faces is clear. Creating Maggie as a highly controlled object points to Eliot's belief that the life of a woman is ultimately defined as having one's destiny set for you.

After the flood that drowns Maggie, Eliot does not focus so intensely on this period before marriage with her female characters, shifting to the stifling consequences of ill-fated marriages. Caterina, Hetty, Dinah, and Maggie all to varying degrees attempt to create a future for themselves different from the ones allotted to them by destiny. Maggie and her failure to craft an alternative for herself seems to close this period in Eliot's writing where she focused on heroines facing the life-altering question of who they will marry. Eliot, unable to imagine an ending besides death or marriage for these young women, moves on, centering her subsequent novels on what happens after marriage for her heroines. But it is in these early novels that we can see Eliot's clearest experimentation with the impossible possibilities of non-marital futures.

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