

M. A.
T H E S I S

THE THEME OF EDUCATION THROUGH CONFLICT IN
THE EARLY NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

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THE THEME OF EDUCATION THROUGH CONFLICT IN

THE EARLY NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

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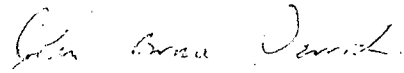
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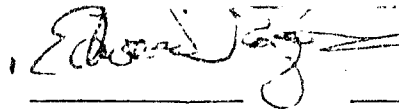
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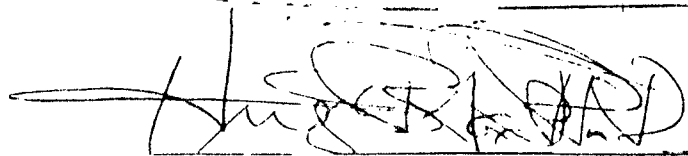
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ABSTRACT

George Eliot passed through several important crises in her lifetime. The first one was when she was strongly influenced by Evangelicalism. Later on she became dissatisfied with the Calvinist dogma of self-renunciation which has as its aim not altruism in itself, but which considers only the prospect of immortality.

Her new scepticism and interest in rationalistic determinism gave rise to another moral crisis, the quarrel with her father, who demanded her attendance at church services. As a compromise, she both pursued her studies of Biblical criticism and also attended church.

The years she worked as an editor at the Westminster Review were ones of marked intellectual unrest and she was in touch with the most controversial theories of the modern age. She assimilated evolutionary theories, mainly the belief in the historical evolution of man. Among the philosophers it was Spinoza who helped to give her a more liberal outlook and freed her from the lasting, gloomy Calvinist trend of her personality. In her early writings we see the growing emphasis upon the human side of the Utilitarian philosophy and Feuerbach's religion of humanity, both of which contributed to the development of the doctrine of altruism present in her early novels, which are the main focus of the present thesis.

In Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, Eliot shows men as they are in real life, and she combines realism with moralism in the optimistic belief in the moral growth of the individual, while in The Mill on the Floss, she deals with conflict and the impossibility of solving it, and shows the tragedy of the individual whose intelligence and sensibility are not enough to conciliate the opposing tendencies of her personality, reason and heart. But the conflict of individual aims and society is not directly the ultimate cause for the protagonist's death, since the novel focuses on psychological and moral conflict at the end.

RESUMO

George Eliot passou por várias crises em sua vida. A primeira crise de sua vida surgiu quando ela sofreu a influência religiosa dos dogmas do Evangelicalismo. Mais tarde ela tornou-se insatisfeita com estes dogmas, principalmente o que diz respeito à renúncia de todos os bens terrenos, e à renúncia de si mesmo, no momento em que ela verificou que a finalidade desta dogma não é altruísmo, mas somente visa à imortalidade.

Seu ceticismo em relação ao dogmatismo religioso e a adoção do determinismo racionalista deu surgimento à uma nova crise moral, a disputa com seu pai, que exigia sua frequência nas cerimônias religiosas.

Durante os anos em que trabalhou como editora do Westminster Review, caracterizados por uma intensa atividade intelectual, ela entrou em contato com as mais controversas teorias de nosso tempo. Assimilou principalmente a teoria do evolucionismo, que acredita na evolução histórica do homem. Dentre os filósofos foi Espinosa que contribuiu para o seu posicionamento liberal e humanístico, livrando-a dos efeitos sombrios do Calvinismo. Nas suas primeiras obras de ficção vemos uma ênfase cada vez maior no lado humano da filosofia do Utilitarianismo e a influência de Feuerbach com sua religião da humanidade. Ambas as filosofias contribuíram para o desenvolvimento da doutrina de amor ao próximo presente em suas primeiras obras, e que é o foco principal desta tese.

Em Scenes of Clerical Life e Adam Bede, Eliot mostra em seu realismo, os personagens como homens comuns que se encontra na vida real e combina realismo com moralismo, em sua crença otimista no desenvolvimento moral do indivíduo e da sociedade. Em The Mill on the Floss, ela mostra o conflito individual e a impossibilidade de resolvê-lo, e mostra a tragédia do indivíduo cuja inteligência e sensibilidade não são suficientes para conciliar as tendências conflitantes de sua personalidade, a emoção e a razão. Mas o conflito das perspectivas individuais com a sociedade não é diretamente a causa última para a tragédia do protagonista,

desde que a autora focaliza no final da obra o conflito moral e psicológico do protagonista.

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1. INTRODUCTORY

1.1 - Statement of Area of Concern

The different stages in George Eliot's early novels can be traced by comparing and contrasting Scenes of Clerical Life, written in 1856, and Adam Bede, written in 1859, with The Mill on the Floss, written in 1860. These three novels will be analysed as stages in her growth as a novelist.

I intend to compare and contrast the theme of education through conflict within these early novels, and show the different ways the novelist approaches the theme. In other words, this work will show the different stages of George Eliot's development from the moralist to the nearly modern novelist she has become in The Mill on the Floss.

George Eliot's optimistic belief in the possibility of moral and intellectual growth of mankind is characteristic of her ameliorism, which corresponds to a Victorian trend. Nevertheless, the religion of the heart that she has learned from her Evangelical home is present in her novels as a spiritual reaction against Anglicanism and Utilitarianism, in short, against the accepted preachers of the Victorian period.

The Evangelical and Dissenting sects which resulted from the Wesleyan revival aimed at the revival of feelings and of the heart, and were against automatic attendance at church service, and also against the temporal and artistic Anglican's pursuits.

By refuting the sceptical tendency of her age, George Eliot tried to replace the utilitarian ethic--which held that although man is essentially selfish, he should promote the general happiness--for the education of the feelings. Unlike the Utilitarians, she believed that human nature is

good, or at least that man is capable of learning from experience and that although deterministically conditioned, the human being is morally responsible for his actions. Suffering a process of maturation, the human being loses his inborn selfishness and learns by self-renunciation to become a social being. In Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, George Eliot follows a social approach to that theme of education through conflict. In these novels, the novelist reflects her early religious training, in her belief that man is essentially selfish, and he must learn by self-renunciation to become a social being.

Parallel to the development of the theme of education in the novels is George Eliot's religious conversion to Feuerbach's "religion of Humanity", and to Lewes' liberalism, that resulted (in The Mill on the Floss) in George Eliot's adoption of a more liberal outlook in her implied criticism of religion and society.

Within the ethic of moral earnestness, the more inarticulate the character is (like Amos Barton in Scenes of Clerical Life) the more conditioned he will be by the laws of consequences, running the risk of facing tragedy, because of this inability to communicate with other men. In Amos Barton, and in Adam Bede, the protagonist's conflicts are mainly conflicts of conscience. In Janet's Repentance, the conflicts are again between the individual and society, but this short story is less deterministic than Amos Barton, and more idealized, answering to the author's anxiety to make an edifying final impression. Amos Barton is basically Amos's trial by ordeal. After his ordeal he is acquitted, but not due to his own efforts: external circumstances combine to prove his innocence. Anyway, the book wraps up with his final redemption through suffering. In Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, Caterina's emotional conflict foreshadows Maggie's. Conflict is carefully dealt with later on in The Mill on the Floss. In this novel, the protagonist (unlike the inarticulate Amos) tries to communicate to society the nobility of her feelings, but because of inner

conflict, and because she is rejected by a dehumanized society, she is led to tragedy.

George Eliot's realism is moral, and the private lives of the different characters is then a process of education. The individual learns that:

One can never make a clear cut break with the society in which one has been brought up, with one's friends and relations, with one's past. Any such break diminishes a man's wholeness and is the result of his failure to recognize his ultimate dependence on others, their claims on him, and the consequent need for human solidarity.¹

George Eliot is not only interested in showing man's everyday life, she uses realism to illustrate the moral and psychological problems that result from the conflict between the character's will and the pressures from the outside, hence her use of determinism. Within this conflict between the individual and the external forces, which may be moral or amoral, there is a corresponding process of education, that shows the novelist's moral view of life as a process of moral growth. Yet the balance achieved when this process is finished, at the end of the process of education, in some cases can coincide with death, as in Maggie's case.

1.2 - Review of Criticism

In his Nineteenth-Century Studies, Basil Willey draws the conclusion that George Eliot's mind was a mixture of conservative and reforming tendencies. In her conservative bent, she was a religious writer who identified the laws of affection with religion. He quotes George Eliot:

We should consider our early religious experience as a "portion of valid knowledge", and cherish its emotional results in relation to objects which are either substitutes or metamorphoses of the earlier.²

In "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels," Thomas Pinney claims that "The basis of George Eliot's conservatism was a piety towards her early experiences that grew out of affection, imagination, and reverence rather than formal argument. But she was a conservative through a reasoned analysis of human society too."³ This conservative tendency

illustrates the ethic of fellow-feeling and altruism, which is the ultimate religious end of her early novels. The education of the race is possible as an outcome of a process of maturation of the individual, who learns to "reverence the life of the past as a guide for the present."⁴

F. R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition, distinguishes between the two different types of society that are present in Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, as opposed to the analysis of the social world of The Mill on the Floss. While the former works take a panoramic view of a leisurely rich pastoral world, the latter is a sarcastic picture of provincial life. Leavis disagrees with Henry James's opinion that charm prevails in Adam Bede. He recognizes that the novel has also "art", to which James refers as "the vaguely idealized art that draws its confidence from convention."⁵ Leavis quotes Henry James's comments on the novel:

In Silas Marner, in Adam Bede, the quality seems gilded by a sort of autumn haze, an afternoon light of meditation, which mitigates the sharpness of the portraiture. I doubt very much whether the author herself had a clear vision, for instance, of the marriage of Dinah Morris to Adam, or of the rescue of Hetty from the scaffold at the eleventh hour. The reason of this may be, indeed, that her perception was a perception of nature much more than of art, and that these particular incidents do not belong to nature (to my sense at least); by which I do not mean that they belong to a very happy art. I cite on the contrary, as an evidence of artistic weakness; they are a very good example of the view in which a story must have marriages and rescues in the nick of time, as a matter of course.⁵

According to Leavis, "charm is overrated when it is preferred to maturity."⁶ As early as Scenes of Clerical Life, the critic foresees the creative writer and the striking originator that George Eliot is going to be as a novelist, in the psychological development of characters and in the closely related sociological interest. The sum of separate interests in which the novel is divided, "applies fitly to the rich creativeness of the art that seems truly to draw its sap from life."⁷ The art to which James refers is also present in the novel--the vaguely idealized art that draws its confidence from convention. Leavis describes such artifice as "an abeyance of the profounder responsibility" (e.g. Hetty's wanderings).

Answering James's comment on the marriage, Leavis says that "the readers don't feel moved to discuss with any warmth whether or not Dinah would really have to become Mrs. Adam Bede since there is no sense of inevitability to outrage."⁷

In Leavis's analysis of Dinah's character he sees her as:

. . . sufficiently successful, but one has in appraising her, in relation to the total significance of the book, to observe on the limiting implications of the word that the success is conditioned by the "charm" that invests her as it does the world she moves in and belongs to. She is idealized as Adam is idealized; they are in keeping.⁸

George R. Creeger, in the article "An Interpretation of Adam Bede," disagrees with James's view that the love that grows between Dinah and Adam and the subsequent marriage is an "artistic weakness." He argues that the novelist is trying to present in the novel "a concept of maturity, a balance of head and heart," and that such love is the fulfillment of their personalities. The charge that Dinah is an incomplete human being seems to him "outrageous," although he recognizes that "she has little genuine vitality":

Dinah is all heart. She scarcely seems to breathe in the midst of her enduring calm and takes little or no nourishment--only scant victuals, as Mrs. Poyser would say. Confronted by a vigorous world, she retreats. The cause of her retreat is the fear of selfishness and hardness resulting from too great abundance of worldly goods.⁹

Creeger admits that "Hetty was incapable of growing up, while Dinah was afraid to."¹⁰

In the fictional world of Adam Bede, life "not only contains sorrow, it needs sorrow in order that there may be love." In this world Adam's and Dinah's moral growth contrasts with Hetty's trial by ordeal. According to Creeger, "The effect of Hetty's ordeal is to externalize the hardness which hitherto has been concealed." He continues:

Hetty becomes the victim of her creator; for after all allowance has been made, one is still left with the impression that towards the kittenish Hetty there is some of the same hardness in George Eliot she deplored in others. That there could be no room for Hetty in Loamshire is, from a symbolic point of view, bad enough; that apparently there could be no room for her anywhere in George Eliot's

scheme of things stands as an indictment against the ethic which the book suggests.¹¹

Creeger also sees a flaw in the novel in that the reader is not "permitted to see the process by which Dinah is enabled to overcome her fear in order to grow."¹² In our opinion Dinah undergoes a passive transformation, which is not made evident in any action. Due to her religious character she prefers to rely on God's will when she makes a decision.

Joan Bennett, in George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art, recognizes that Adam Bede is an idealized character, but that his self-righteousness is drawn on purpose, so that he may overcome it in the process of maturation. Also, she agrees with Creeger's view that the marriage is part of the theme, since "it enables the author to put this last touch to her definition of Adam's character."¹³ She feels that Mrs. Poyser and Adam's mother are intuitive, outspoken characters, to be relied on, who add to the intuitive insight of the novel.

According to Joan Bennett, George Eliot's creative power is limited in this novel. She says that "there is a gap between the artist and the thinker," which makes of Arthur's and Hetty's characterization, "symbolic figures, illustrating important moral truths."¹⁴ She also adds that "sympathy for Hetty is almost choked by Eliot's intellectual appreciation of her limitations."¹⁵

It seems to us that the point the novelist wants to make, by reducing Hetty to a kittenish state is, paradoxically, to diminish the extent of her guilt. Hetty's crime becomes a virtual murder, and results from Hetty's desire to hide her son. The naturalist portrayal of Hetty's character diminishes her moral responsibility, since, led by inner character and external circumstances, she is compelled to commit murder.

F. R. Leavis in The Great Tradition, admits that the most striking qualities in The Mill on the Floss, are the marked sociological interest, which shows the novelist's intellectual qualifications, and its emotional

tone, that goes with the strong autobiographical interest. This emotional quality, resulting from the autobiographical element present in the novel, entails some limitations. According to him, "the emotional quality represents something, a need or hunger in George Eliot, that shows itself to be insidious company for her intelligence."¹⁶ Leavis finds in the novel an element of self-idealization in Maggie's yearning for a "higher" realm, that prevents Maggie from seeing the inadequacy of her getting emotionally involved with Stephen Guest.

According to Leavis, George Eliot's imaginative participation in "exalted enthusiasms" and "self-devotions", prevented her from judging and valuing Maggie's moral dilemma. He states that "it is quite plain that George Eliot shares to the full the sense of Stephen's irresistibility," since "there is no suggestion of any antipathy between this fascination and Maggie's higher faculties, apart from the moral veto that imposes self-renunciation."¹⁷ As for the end of the novel, he concludes that it is a "day-dream" indulgence, revealing an opportunity for "the dreamed-of heroic act" and the novelist's immaturity.

Joan Bennett, in the same work cited above, asserts that George Eliot's conception of a moral dilemma required that the heroine be forced by the issues to choose between "two alternatives either of which would cause suffering." George Eliot believed that in the nature of such choices, "the difference between right and wrong was not clear cut, no preconceived principles should determine what the heroine had to do."¹⁸

The invention of a moral dilemma was made more complex because George Eliot draws freely on her childhood memories. But, as Joan Bennet makes clear, "the novelist would obviously avoid any situation resembling her own life when she elected to live with Lewes."¹⁹

Bennett finds that George Eliot does not treat the climax with complete assurance, which constitutes for her an artistic failure. The

reader is not made aware of the concept the novelist intended to communicate at the climax.

According to Bennett, there is a conflict of wills, but the issues are not clear cut: no fixed principles are involved, and since the consequences are already determined, the argument moves in circles because Maggie's decision is the result of feelings and not thought.

Bennett also finds a moral inadequacy in the novel. She says that Maggie is unconscious of her real error, "when we apply the moral standards the author herself invites us to apply, we feel that Maggie and Stephen should have shown more courage and honesty when they first discovered that they were in love. Their intention to marry Philip and Lucy in spite of that seems the reverse of the noble."²⁰ But she admits that there is no identity of outlook between the author and the heroine.

Dr. Kenn is used in the novel to express the novelist's views of Maggie's conflicts, and his reflections indicate the complexity of George Eliot's conception, which is not communicated fully, since "Maggie in her youth and inexperience, is only fumbling after the conception the author here enunciates in her own person and through the mind of Dr. Kenn. Maggie can only rely on the moral sense, or conscience that her temperament, her upbringing and her environment have combined to develop in her."²¹

Joan Bennett adopts George Eliot's own view about the lack of proportion in the novel, between the fully developed scenes of Maggie's childhood and the concision of the conclusion, where "the drawing of Stephen is a contributory cause of dissatisfaction with the end of the novel."²² Opposing Leavis's argument that George Eliot shares to the full the sense of Stephen's irresistibility, Bennett argues that "there is every reason to suppose that George Eliot intends the impression to be disagreeable."²³ Bennett finds Stephen a vulgarian, a coxcombe and an insensitive egoist, which contributes to make the reader rather indifferent to what happens in the boat scene. She also declares that what

concerns the novelist is her heroine, and her tendency to let instinctive impulses take charge, which runs counter the moral sanctions accepted by Eliot, that "natural impulses should be controlled by reasoned judgement."²⁴ Concerning Maggie's death, Bennett considers it "timely provided, a wish-fulfilling death by drowning."²⁵ She concludes, "George Eliot has placed Maggie in a dilemma in which no preconceived principle could direct her choice--she has let her choose and then she has refused to imagine the results of her choice."²⁶

George Eliot rejected contemporary critics' complaints about her handling of Maggie and Stephen, complaints which raised questions about Maggie's position towards Stephen, Maggie's nobility, and the consequent validity of Maggie's moral dilemma:

The other chief point of criticism--Maggie's position towards Stephen--is too vital a part of my whole conception and purpose for me to be converted to the condemnation of it. If I am wrong there--if I did not really know what my heroine would do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her--I ought not to have written this book at all, but quite a different book, if any. If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble, but liable to great error--error that is anguish to its own nobleness--then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology.²⁷

Barbara Hardy in The Novels of George Eliot, comments that critics from Leslie Stephen onwards have concentrated on Stephen's unworthiness, and so have neglected Philip's character and function. "Philip's voice . . . has a weight and a reliability which represent the author's point of view."²⁸ Hardy declares that Philip's voice--in opposition to Leavis's comments about "Stephen's irresistibility" and "the soulful side" of Maggie, as offered by George Eliot herself--speaks clearly against them.

She agrees with the dissatisfaction that most readers share with Dr. Leavis, concerning the fact that Maggie does not achieve tragic recognition. She admits that: "It is true that this is not the kind of tragedy where the heroine is made to share the author's judgement. But that judgement is passed, even though Maggie dies before she can achieve

the maturity which might accept and understand it."²⁹ This judgement is transmitted through Philip's comments on the "tragic divided action of Maggie's nature," which applies to his own relationship with her as well as to Stephen's. It is also present in Eliot's ironical comment on the inexperience of Maggie's love for Stephen. Barbara Hardy quotes Eliot:

My love of childhood scenes made me linger over them; so that I could not develop as fully as I wished the concluding "Book" in which the tragedy occurs, and which I had looked forward to with much attention and premeditation from the beginning.³⁰

Hardy admits that "George Eliot's obstinate rejection of the criticism of Maggie's relationship with Stephen may have resulted in a rationalization" and that "the haste and cursoriness of the last two books is perhaps appropriate, that is to say, commensurate with the violent sexual attraction that draws the characters together. In the last book, speed is necessary, due to the introduction of a new character, Dr. Kenn, and the impression given by the flood is one of a "well prepared deus ex machina . . . an appearance of an arbitrary concluding rush."³¹ Joan Bennett concludes her analysis of the novel with the following words: "part of what is wrong with the close of the novel is that the problem facing Maggie and Stephen at the crisis is not a satisfactory vehicle for the conception the author intended to symbolize by it."³² Bennett means that Maggie's and Stephen's position at the moment of the crisis does not reflect the novel's ideological framework. She finds a division between the "humour and compassion" with which the novelist conceives Maggie's childhood world and the last part of the book which she considers imperfect.

George Levine, in the article "Intelligence as Deception: The Mill on the Floss," stresses the fact that determinism, according to Eliot's view of it, makes the presence of human will necessary, and is the principal element that informs her novel. Levine also relates the narrative progression to Feuerbach's and Comte's ideas; Maggie's story being "a

dramatization of Feuerbach's religion of suffering."³³ He criticizes the fact that Maggie's redemption is directed only towards her family, and as such, the novel does not accomplish what it proposes, a Comtean or Feuerbachian belief in social and individual growth or the moral redemption of the individual.

It is true that Eliot explores the theme of social growth, made evident in the description of the oppressive narrowness of the inhabitants of St. Oggs. The belief in social growth is bound up with her faith in the progress of mankind. But to say that this is the only approach she gives to the theme of moral growth through conflict is an extremely limiting judgement. We tend to argue that the novel has to be analysed not on the face values of it, but as a dilemma of the individual at odds with her time and place, which in George Eliot's terms means in its moral and psychological conflicts.

At this point we have to agree with Joan Bennett's view: George Eliot does not deal with individual conflict as other later novelists do, that is to say, in the sense that the individual is seen dissociated from society. Although in her adoption of relativism in this novel, which permits the individual's will to assert itself, in Maggie's final death Eliot implies her belief that society is not directly responsible for the individual's tragedy. It is the protagonist's own inability to control her emotions, and her going back to her earlier attitudes of self-renunciation that are the ultimate causes of her death. Maggie is quite aware of the possibility of repeating the same mistakes in a different situation. She grows intellectually, but she does not grow emotionally.

In Leavis's opinion, the novel's end answers to "a day dream indulgence" on the part of the novelist. Leavis concludes that: "The flooded river has no symbolic or metaphorical value. It is only the dreamed-of perfect accident that gives us the opportunity for the

dreamed-of heroic act--the act that shall vindicate us against a harshly misjudging world, bring emotional fulfilment and (in others) changes of heart and provide a glorious tragic curtain."³⁴ Bennett agrees with Leavis's views: "this poetic justice as the culminating point of a long, serious, naturalistic novel is a dishonest contrivance. George Eliot has cut the knot she was unable to unravel. She has placed Maggie in a dilemma in which no preconceived principle could direct her choice-- she has let her choose and then she has refused to imagine the results of her choice."³⁵

A modern critic could rest dissatisfied with that ending and respond to it as Joan Bennett did, by associating the end of the novel with a wish fulfilling principle, that might deviate it from its realistic purpose, which is to show the inability of the individual to fulfill her needs according to the social values of that time. Yet it seems a characteristic trend of the Victorian writer to try to change the pessimistic view of society as it was then, into the possibility of its improvement. It is probable that George Eliot's idealism is present in this last scene. Thus the death by drowning offers the only possibility of ending a conflict that only brings suffering with an emotionally satisfying death.

Levine argues that George Eliot has in this sense flawed her art by not permitting Maggie to live out this conflict, but he also recognizes that "the novel answers to a Victorian strength, in its characteristic search for meaning and justice of life," the escape from a moral dilemma being thematically consistent.

It seems to us that since the protagonist's intellectual growth gives her enough insight to justify her assertion that even if she leaves St. Ogg's, she will not have freed herself from committing other mistakes (which is a confessed recognition of her inner flaw), it is not accurate to say that Maggie does not achieve tragic recognition, or

that the novel's end is just melodrama. If we analyse the book as a process of Maggie's growth, we are going to see that the novelist permits Maggie to have a full insight into her own personality, but that neither its creator nor the creature itself are able to solve the impasse created by Maggie's inability to manage her own hereditary, emotional side of her nature. If we look at the structure of the novel, Maggie's and Tom's tragedy is intimately related to their father's downfall. Tulliver's fight against the lawyer gives us a full insight of his inability to deal with his emotions, and his self-assertiveness contrasts with Maggie's self-renunciation, as the main cause for each tragedy. While Tulliver tries in a quixotic manner to control the uncontrollable (the flow of water that runs in his mill), Maggie, who achieves a more advanced state of education, recognizes her incapacity to control her emotions.

Besides being thematically consistent, the end has much to do with truth of character and "natural truth", in the sense defined by Hardy, who states that:

. . . the didactic novel is so generally devoid of "vraisemblance" as to teach nothing but the impossibility of tampering with natural truth to advance dogmatic opinions. Those, on the other hand, which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel, must have a sound effect if not what is called a good effect upon a healthy mind.³⁶

1.3 - Statement of Purpose

By analysing Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, and The Mill on the Floss, I hope to point out that there is an evolving treatment of the theme of education through these novels.

In her first works as a novelist, George Eliot shows the ultimate identification of the individual with society, and we can trace the author's ethical purpose of social and individual ameliorism which is the explicit end of the process of education. In these pastoral and idyllic books, the individual and the social are closely interrelated.

In The Mill on the Floss, while the education theme remains central, there is a shift of focus. The identification of the individual with society fails not only because of the false values of middle class society itself, and the official education it provides, but also due to some flaw in the individual protagonist. This book combines the criticism of society with a psychological approach to character.

The Mill on the Floss is mainly about the protagonist's inner conflict, and Maggie's tragedy results from her flaw of character. Thus George Eliot's psychological approach, which expands and complements the theme of education, stresses the point that the identification of the individual's aim and society's goals may be tragically impossible.

I will try to make a comparative analysis of the theme of education in each novel, and then I will concentrate on The Mill on the Floss, particularly trying to compare the psychological consequences of the protagonist's failures in her early life, with her later failures, giving special emphasis to her character formation as a member of a divided family.

The unfolding pattern of rejection-acceptance-rejection which she experiences leads her in a circle and ends not with the author's customary development of an altruistic ethic, but with the character's social ostracism and her recognition of her impotence to find an ethical resolution for her conflicts.

George Eliot's early novels, while close to the evangelical ideal, nevertheless allow a certain scope for the treatment of inner conflict. The Mill on the Floss, on the other hand (which is less Calvinistic and more humanistic) witnesses the growth of these conflicts to tragic dimensions. Then it happens that the novel, especially at the end, escapes from the author's altruistic plans and enters a dimension of symbolism and an area of deeper psychology. In contrast with earlier works, it is a more subjective novel, much more concerned with the psychology of

human motives, as well as with instincts and the tendencies that lead to the character's rationalization of her conduct and self-analysis. The ethical value of her experience is revealed not by precept but by the nobility of character displayed by the struggling protagonist.

George Eliot evolved from her early treatment of the theme of education as religious conversion to a tragic depiction of the impossibility of the protagonist's growth, due to conflict and to society's prejudices. The novelist does not go as far as to admit that the individual aim is dissociated entirely from social values however, because she believes in the moral development of humankind.

In Scenes of Clerical Life, and Adam Bede, the collision in the drama is softened by Evangelicalism, while in The Mill on the Floss, conflict grows to tragic dimensions, because of inner conflict, and also because society is not Christian.

In Adam Bede, the reader discovers that behind the naturalistic approach to character that helps to disclose its truth, the fictional world is moral, and the novel's aim is religious. The novel will have achieved its aim if the reader apprehends, as the novelist wants him to apprehend, all the nobility and disintredness of Adam's character, and so he will be able to understand Adam's relationship with the other characters in the novel. While Adam Bede is a historical figure, Hetty Sorrel's and Arthur Donithorne's subplot illustrates an actual growth through conflict, a trial by ordeal, to which Adam Bede is intimately related. But while they are sinning and Hetty is convicted of murder, Adam's conversion is part of the Puritan ethic. His "conversion" or the conviction of his sinfulness, is followed by the proof of his election.

According to George Levine, George Eliot's determinism represents a "complex deterministic universe."³⁷ She believes that man is free because he is capable of reasonable choice in accordance to one's motives, and the motives will be dictated by disinterested reasons, since the individual

is free only after he has learned through conflict to master his natural impulsiveness. Then the individual grows as a full human being, learning to conciliate reason and heart. Only in the pastoral world of the "scenes" and Hayslope, this individual and social growth is possible. While in the commercial, middle-class St. Oggs' society, individual growth is impossible.

Eliot also takes a psychological approach to human motives and actions. The characters in the novel may be conscious or unconscious of their motives:

A character for George Eliot becomes what he makes himself: he can, in some limited degree, move counter to the push of external circumstances, and by allowing himself to become aware of his own motives, can even at times overcome them by changing them.³⁸

Yet the choice they make is conditioned by their natures. The dilemma of determinism versus responsibility is thoroughly dealt with in her novels. George Levine maintains that Arthur's decision is acted out according to the weakness of his character, and not according to necessitarianism, which believes that what man is or what he becomes is necessarily determined. Maggie Tulliver's mistakes are due to her inner flaw, and she is instinctively compelled to repeat them till, forced by external pressures, she becomes aware of her flaw, achieving tragic recognition of it. Eliot's wrong-doer experiences an inward struggle that shows his or her guilty conscience over his break with his early affections as we see in Arthur's attitude towards Mr. Irwine, and Maggie's attitude towards her brother. These struggles of conscience manifest the protagonists' scruples and their consciousness of their error.

George Eliot's earlier novels are all novels with a moral purpose. Shaftesbury sees the moral sense as "the link between intellect and sensation, and hence as the medium of didacticism in art."³⁹ George Eliot's novels are in Shaftesbury's sense essentially didactic. But since her aesthetic conception of art includes Hegel's idealism--art as

the reflex of the spirit of the time, having the human being as the main principle of reality, and laying special emphasis on his historical and intellectual bearings--and since she preserves the Romantic conception of the powers of creative imagination, some of her novels are closer to sociological positivism while others are closer to the Romantic conception of reality, and appear as a criticism of the materialist values of society. Thus Adam Bede should be considered as being more didactic than The Mill on the Floss, which, although being essentially moral, escapes this social didacticism.

George Eliot based her theory of morality in fiction on the whole sensitivity of the reader:

My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher--the rousing of nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of social measure, concerning which the artistic mind is not the best judge.⁴⁰

According to her theory, the novelist must communicate feelings, and he will do it the more successfully if he himself is able to experience love, admiration, sympathy. This theory of empathy, where the artist projects his own emotions on the object contemplated, should re-create a similar atmosphere in the readers' emotions. She tries to communicate that wholeness of vision which gives unity and genuineness to her novels, and Eliot derives her concept from Coleridge's idea of organic form.

In The Mill on the Floss, the Romantic concept of creative imagination is shown in the character's emotional identification with nature, and in the ontological search for the properties of existence. Scenery is in harmony with the character's mental configurations. In this novel, the novelist achieves a perfect balance between her imaginative and reflective qualities, the truth of character being intuitively grasped.

Organicism is also present in her ethical approach to the novels. She believes that "a scene, a character, or action truly observed will carry with it its true value." The artist who is free from any orthodox restraint "quietly follows the stream of fact and life; and waits patiently

for the moral process of nature as well as we all do for the material processes."⁴¹

In Adam Bede, this sense of unity and genuineness is not yet formed, since the novelist does not succeed in conciliating the creative faculty with the analytic method of depiction of character. The mechanistic approach to character results in the enforcement of a moral bias, which certainly is not part of her concept of moral fiction. She declares in the essay "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister," that the line between the virtuous and the vicious so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself an immoral fiction.⁴²

In each novel the writer seems to be progressively testing her powers as a creative novelist, as she moves away from the analytic instance where characters are more consciously evolved and become "illustrations of theories of life in general" or of "the life of certain classes or temperaments," to the position of the synthetic novelist who "feels the characters intuitively and mysteriously gives birth to them."⁴³ The two early works contain undigested or reductive morality while in The Mill on the Floss, the morality is implicit. In this novel Eliot evolves towards an organic form in which didacticism is submerged in more artistic concerns.

The novel is better described as a Bildungsroman, in its subjective quality, in its discussion of education, in the psychological differences between Tom and Maggie, in its remarks about heredity, intelligence and the nature of childhood. The element of Bildungsroman is also present in the last portion of the novel, where the author's humanistic position, communicating her own sympathy with suffering, is almost choked by the impossibility of Tom and Maggie's growth, both in head and heart. The theme of Maggie's and Tom's growth, followed by their final death, shows that the conflict between individual aims versus social aims is irreconcilable.

2. EARLY INFLUENCES ON ELIOT'S NOVELS

2.1 - Family

Mary Anne Evans was born at South Farm, Arbury, 22 November 1819. Her father Robert Evans was a successful agent for the Newdigate family, who was "bred to his father's trade of carpenter" and could, among other things, estimate within a few feet, the amount of timber a tree would provide, survey and build roads, was a shrewd judge of land values, had responsibility in mining and transportation of coal through the Coventry Canal."¹ According to Gordon S. Haight, "His own farm on the estate, he managed easily. His physical strength was legendary."²

Her mother's family, the Pearsons, belonged to that kind of Protestantism that George Eliot describes with so much humour as the religion of the Dodson family.

The image of Robert Evan's physical strength is present in Adam Bede, but the father figure represented by Tulliver has nothing to do with Mary Anne's father who "never found the world too much for him."³ Also, Mrs. Evans did not resemble Mrs. Tulliver: she was much like Mrs. Poyser with her sharp tongue.

Soon after she was born, Mary Anne's family moved to a farm house facing Coventry Road at Griff. The scenery of this farm house recurs in Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. It is described by Haight as:

set well back on a lawn with two tall norway firs flanking the gate and the broad sweeping branches of a sombre old yew almost touching some of the upper windows. Beyond the farm lay the farm-yard with low rambling stables and out-buildings. In the garden flowers and fruit trees jostled each other in profusion. A gate opened into green fields, where not far from the road lay the Round Pool.⁴

George Eliot's memories of the country are ever present in the early novels together with the memories of her childhood and adolescence.

After some critics tried to impute to the author a dislike for the Dodson's attitude, she restated her attachment to these people she met in her childhood. According to the novelist:

I have certainly fulfilled my intention very badly if I have made the Dodson's honesty appear mean or uninteresting or made the payment of one's debts appear a contemptible virtue in comparison with any sort of Bohemian qualities. So far as my own feelings and intentions are concerned, no one class of persons or form of character is held up to reprobation or to exclusive admiration. Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie, and I am so far from hating the Dodsons myself, that I am rather aghast to find them ticketed with such very ugly adjectives.⁵

Mary Anne's yearning to be admired and loved are present from these initial years of her childhood. Her love for her brother Isaac resembles very much Tom and Maggie's love during their early childhood: "how she followed him everywhere, 'puppy-like' on the little expeditions to the Round Pool or the rookery oaks beyond the garden or along the brown canal . . . once she was entrusted with the fishpole while he went off to hunt bait and was praised for getting a fish she did not know she had caught."⁶

2.2 - Education and Religious Influences

In 1824, her brother Isaac was sent to school and Mary Anne joined her sister Chrissey at Miss Lathom's boarding school, when she was five years old.

Mary Anne, like Maggie Tulliver, was closely attached to her father, while her mother preferred to deal with Chrissey, whose behaviour delighted the Pearsons' aunts (the Dodsons in the novel). Mary Anne was described as "a queer, three-cornered, awkward girl, who sat in corners and shyly watched her elders."⁷ Mr. Evans was held in great affection by his daughter. During her drives with him, she got acquainted with the inherited beliefs, the complex of prejudices, the experience and common sense that make up the character of rural people. Religious tradition and social conventions are many times introduced in her novels under the

form of dialogue "which bears the stamp both of the individual speaker and of the race and class."⁸

Maggie's affectionate ties for her brother were loosened by distance and were gradually replaced by the love of books. The earlier reading included The Pilgrim's Progress and Aesop's Fables, among others. Sir Walter Scott's Waverley introduced her to the writing of fiction.

In 1828, she was sent to another boarding school, at Nuneaton. There she had Miss Maria Lewis as a governess and a friend for the period of fourteen years. Miss Lewis had a kind heart and a good sense of humour, but she was deeply imbued with evangelical earnestness. She was the first important influence on Mary Anne.

Robert Evans did not worry about his daughter being influenced by Evangelicalism; he himself was a regular church-goer, but never troubled his mind about religious doctrines. Mary Anne found by the side of Miss Lewis the affection she missed at home.

At the age of thirteen, she was sent to Miss Franklins' School in Coventry, whose headmistresses were daughters of a Baptist minister. One of the first things Mary Anne learned at that school was a new pronunciation of the English language; she subsequently left off speaking the broad Midland dialect which appears very often in her novels under the form of dialogue and gives so much local colour and vividness to her novels. The new spelling of her name "Marianne Evans" probably reflects her studies of French. Under the influence of Miss Rebecca Franklin, she made her first acquaintance with Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Cowper, Byron, among others.

The Evangelicalism that Miss Lewis inculcated in Mary Anne was not harsh, she only taught by examples, more like the teaching of the early Wesleyans. Also the doctrines of the Baptist minister in Coventry had more liberal tenets than the general Baptists whose views were similar

to the stricter Evangelicals in the Established Church, who talked nothing but sin and the need of an unobtainable mercy.

Nevertheless, Mary Anne was of an impressible temperament and was struck by "the conventional beginning of the religious life" or "Conversion, the conviction that one was utterly sinful and could be saved from hell only by accepting the atonement of Christ."⁹ Those early religious influences did not make her come closer to the specifically Baptist doctrines. She always considered herself as belonging to the Church of England, whose Evangelical party much resembles the feelings of the Dissenter's group.

When her mother died in 1836, Mary Anne went to keep house for her father. During the years she lived at her Griff farmhouse, her religious zeal was far from wavering. She read much religious literature, but her interest in reading fiction did not diminish.

In the period between 1839 and 1841, her belief in evangelical dogmas began to crumble. Her Evangelicalism began to cool under the influence of Isaac's conversion to Catholic doctrine. In 1839, during the visit of her Methodist aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans, Mary Anne used to debate with her about predestination, holding her Calvinist position against her aunt's Arminianism. Nevertheless, her inquiring mind led her to some important changes in her religious outlook. Her most prominent feature was intellectual honesty and she soon found out by reading Isaac's Taylor's book, "The Origin of Christianity and the Tracts," against the Puseyites, "the relevance of the study of the origins of Christianity, and most important of all, the moral dangers of any extreme asceticism."¹⁰ It is in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians that she finds the "warning against the beggarly elements of the spirit of self-righteousness."¹¹

The same kind of moral earnestness with which she pursued her religious inquiries, and which led her to her change in religious outlook,

is present in her development as a novelist. As Joan Bennett shows, "Mary Anne Evans was soon to accept the view that self repression was not a good in itself, but only as it served some discernible end; that is, for her, only as it promoted the welfare of others."¹²

As a consequence of the change in the religious point of view, the doctrine of self-renunciation was impressed in Mary Anne's mind by the doctrine of altruism or fellow-feeling. This ethical approach is an effort of the moralist to learn not to base her decisions on egoism.

Mary Anne's interest in the Oxford Movement effected no changes in her former adherence to Protestantism, but the consequent impulse towards reviewing Christianity in its origins led to the final break with the Calvinist dogma of predestination.

2.3 - Religious Change

The religious change that Mary Anne underwent is mainly due to her inquiring mind that made her pursue questions about the origin of Christianity to the point that she outgrew her early religious influences. Her change of point of view was the result of much reading, and among her readings Charles Hennell's book An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity, which claimed that "the true account of the life of Jesus Christ, and the spread of his religion, would be found to contain no deviation from the known laws of nature,"¹³ contributed to give her the necessary freedom of thought necessary to the religious change.

Also her acute observation of facts of life led her to an unsettlement of orthodox views. As Gordon Haight points out, "in her calls on the miners near Foleshill, who were mostly Methodists, she was shocked at the apparent union of religious feeling with a low sense of morality."¹⁴

This change in outlook occurred after she went to live with her father at Foleshill Road in Coventry. It is quite well stated in a letter to Miss Lewis, that ends with: "Goodbye, and may Heaven bless

you as it does by the sure laws of consequences bless every one who does his work faithfully and lives in loving activity."¹⁵

The break with her father came soon after she disclosed her scepticism in January, 1742. While members of the family were engaged in trying to bring Mary Anne to outward compliance, her friends found that it was impossible to argue with her. Finally, her father became convinced of his hardness towards her, of the fact that "by making Mary Anne's worldly interest dependent on a change in her opinion he was setting up the most effective barrier to her reversion to orthodoxy."¹⁶ The disagreement ended with Mary Anne's consent to attend church services, and her father's permission for her to think what she liked during service.

Mary Anne's crisis of religious belief is a recurrent situation in nineteenth century biography, when religious beliefs gave place to rationalism:

The disappearance of the notion of miraculous revelation, and the reduction through Hennell and other rationalists of our hope of Heaven to a mere speculation will leave a distressing blank in the hearts of many. But they will find a substitute in the privilege and duties of this earthly life, in the advance of science, in the strengthening of characters by adversity, and by discovering in the Universe itself a Son which tells of a Father, and in all the natural beauty and moral excellence which meets us in the world an ever present Logos, which reveals the grace and truth of its invisible source.¹⁷

2.4 - Moralism and Intellectual Unrest

Basil Willey thinks that Mary Anne's moral certainties were unaffected by her change of doctrine. The reconciliation with her father, worked out by her brother, the Brays and Miss Rebecca Franklin, and the years she spent by his side in his old age and sickness, were a positive experience in the development of her spirit of self-sacrifice and fellow-feeling that resulted in the late attitudes in life that demonstrated her moral excellences.

According to Basil Willey, "It was George Eliot's constant objection to evangelicalism, that in its emphasis upon the will and acts of an implacable Deity it extinguished human love and service."¹⁸ Willey gives as a very good example of her love for old, imperfect things, Eliot's analysis of the contrasted types of churchmanship in Scenes of Clerical Life. She reveals in this first work as a novelist a religious and moral sympathy, an "instinct for the understanding all forms of thought and feeling, this quest for that which is essentially human in all varieties of belief."¹⁹ In the novel, as in the author's life, a personal moral crisis has a primary role in the protagonist's process of education.

In a letter to Sarah Hennell, written in October, 1843, she shows that she has already accepted the idea of church attendance, and she recognizes that "agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feelings as the only universal bond of union."²⁰ As Joan Bennett points out, "this letter indicates her rapid advance towards that imaginative understanding of human nature and that combination of reason and sympathy which informs her novels."²¹

Also her "dull" life (as Sarah Hennell terms it at that time) was intellectually satisfying to Mary Anne. The first work of translation was done then: Strauss's "Life of Jesus." It took her three years to complete, but it was an excellent experience of sustained writing. The next thing she did, was to translate Spinoza's "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" (1846), which she abandoned, as was her translations of his "Ethics" (1854), based on the assumption that "the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them up and give an analysis."²² Her interest in Spinoza's work was shared by G. H. Lewes, who published an essay on Spinoza in 1836, the same year in which Mary Anne was introduced to his works.

She and Lewes recognized in Spinoza a forerunner of all that is most humane in Utilitarian philosophy and they welcomed his insistence

in the "Ethics" on the unreality (or relativity) of evil:

. . . By good, therefore, I understand everything which we are certain is a means by which we approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we see before us. By evil, on the contrary, I understand everything which we are certain hinders us from reaching that model.²³

The foundations of Spinoza's thought, she saw, rest upon imagination and wisdom rather than intellect and knowledge.

After her father's death in 1849, Mary Anne went to Switzerland and Geneva, where she met the D'Alberts, who were going to become her life-long friends. In 1851, she went to London. During the period from 1850 to 1854, very little was known about her private life. Marian, as she signed her translation of Strauss's book, was criticized because of the breach of conventions (her love affair with Chapman, the owner and editor of The Westminster Review).

According to Bennett, probably Marian, who "was quickly responsive to expressed affection; she needed to love and be loved," was emotionally attracted by Chapman. Bennett suggests that John Chapman "may have supplied some aspects of Stephen Guest in The Mill on the Floss: he had in common with him at any rate, coxcombry and good looks."²⁴

It was Herbert Spencer who first perceived Marian's creative gifts. But it was "her lack of self-confidence, which led her in those days to resist any suggestion that she should write novels."²⁵ Due to Marian's romantic nature, she usually fell in love with those she admired intellectually, and this probably happened with Spencer also. But Spencer did not intend to marry, as he wrote to his father:

On the whole I am quite decided not to be a drudge; and as I see no probability of being able to marry without being a drudge, why I have pretty well given up the idea.²⁶

Marian accepted that because in her nature the extreme elements, the moral and the rebellious, the ascetic and the romantic coexisted.

Instead of writing fiction, she devoted her intellectual capacity to the editing of The Westminster Review and the writing of articles

and reviews. In the period between the translation of Strauss's book and Feuerbach's, she contributed a review to The Westminster, concerning R. S. Mackay's "The Progress of Intellect" (1850). She begins this review by stating that, though Comte's positivism "offers the only hope of extending man's knowledge and happiness," expulsion of error will be quickened,

if by a survey of the past it can be shown how each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its own stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with its forms of the past is a futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul.²⁷

Mackay was the only English theologian who accepted Strauss's view about the mythical character of the Bible. The opportunity offered by Chapman for Marian to review Mackay's book, gave her the possibility to state her own views about biblical criticism in an impressive article, which revealed the grasp of her massive intellect.

Marian was first introduced to George Henry Lewes in September, 1851. In July, 1854, she and Lewes left England for Germany, creating a situation that even her liberal friends were not likely to accept, because Lewes was a married man. Bennett finds that "despite the social difficulties that ensued and the financial anxieties of the early years, the union with Lewes marked the achievement for Marian Evans of emotional equilibrium.

The second moral crisis in Marian's life turned out to be a good opportunity for her personal and artistic realization. In 1856, she began Amos Barton, which resulted in an artistic success.

Before she left England, she translated Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity." Her conversion to Feuerbach's Religions of Humanity and her realization as an accomplished novelist, correspond to her intellectual and emotional fulfillment. Even her secluded life after she came back from Germany with Lewes, contributed to create a strain

in George Eliot's mind, when she adopted a liberal outlook that was checked by her moralism.

3. SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

3.1 - Presentation

In these short stories George Eliot combines narrative with descriptive technique, in order to show her power of writing dialogue and to achieve a dramatic depiction of character. The novelist's aesthetic conception of art aims at intensification of feelings, and this aesthetic conception justifies the recurrence of pathos in her works of fiction. Yet the modern reader is somewhat dissatisfied with the abrupt changes from realistic presentation to contrasting appeals which engage the reader's emotions.

By analysing each story, we can see that this criticism applies to all three "scenes". Nevertheless, the fine realistic depiction of society, the accurate character-description, and the satirical vein of the novelist as a critic of rural mid-Victorian England make these three stories very lively.

It is true that George Eliot sometimes hints at social questions, as in her depiction of the misery of the collier's life in Janet's Repentance, but these suggestions have only religious connotations and have to do with Mr. Tryan's struggles of conscience. George Eliot is just the novelist with a wide range of knowledge (we can remember here how deeply she imbibed the ideas about biblical criticism), who transmutes the concrete, the experienced into fiction. She relies on art as a source of moral truth by increasing the protagonist's and the reader's awareness of the moral reality of life.

Sometimes she is not convinced that her art suffices to express what she intends, and then she assumes the role of the moralist. The

novelist's voice as a moralist, sometimes appears as a didactic voice backing the moral pattern of the story. In "Janet's Repentance," a good example occurs when the novelist is talking about the elements which are necessary for a moral vision of life. She advises the reader:

Do not philosophic doctors tell us that we are unable to discern so much as a tree, except by an unconscious cunning which combines many past and separate sensations; that no one sense is independent of another, so that in the dark we can hardly taste a fricassée, or tell whether our pipe is alighted or not, and the most intelligent boy, if accommodated with claws or hoofs instead of fingers, would be likely to remain on the lowest form? If so, it is easy to understand that our discernment of men's motives must depend on the completeness of the elements we bring from our susceptibility and our experience. See to it, friend, before you pronounce a too hasty judgment, that your own moral sensibilities are not of a hoofed or clawed character. The keenest eye will not serve, unless you have the delicate fingers, with their subtle nerve filaments, which elude scientific lenses, and lose themselves in the invisible world of human sensations.¹

Through her statement, we can see that George Eliot has also imbibed scientific knowledge about human behaviour, but that she is primarily interested in applying these ideas to the moral side of human nature.

George Eliot started writing about her own past and the religious change she witnessed, within the scope of her moral vision of life.

Joan Bennet in "Vision and Design," describes very well what this conception means:

George Eliot was aware of the ethical, religious and social conventions of the world she paints as a product of history, evolved in time and changing with time. She was consciously interested in the pressure all these exert on individual lives and in the existence of a problem concerned with resisting or succumbing to that pressure. She shares the modern consciousness of man in a changing and developing society. Consequently, the organic form of her novels--an inner circle (a small group of individuals involved in a moral dilemma) surrounded by an outer circle (the social world within which the dilemma has to be resolved)--is more significant than in any preceding fiction.²

Therefore, the theme she develops within this world view, is that of the tragedy of the individual who must leave this social world due to some external circumstances or social pressure.

In Scenes of Clerical Life, the main religious issues of her adolescence and their connection with the introduction of Evangelicalism

are depicted by the novelist. She shows how it affected the private lives of three clerical men, whose stories she witnessed or just heard about.

3.2 - Amos Barton

Amos's religious behaviour is examined through the critical eyes of his parishioners who do not seem too much concerned with metaphysics. They are really preoccupied with earthly and matter-of-fact subjects, such as Amos's worldly flaws.

Eliot's admirable insight into character is immediately felt from the opening pages of the book. This is the description of Mrs. Patten's character:

Quiescence in an easy-chair, under the sense of compound interest perpetually accumulating, has long seemed an ample function to her, and she does her malevolence gently. . . . She used to adore her husband, and now she adores her money, cherishing a quiet blood-relation's hatred for her niece, Janet Gibbs, who, she knows, expects a large legacy, and whom she is determined to disappoint. Her money shall go in a lump to a distant relation of her husband's, and Janet shall be saved the trouble of pretending to cry, by finding that she is left with a miserable pittance.³

Her hostile attitude towards Mr. Barton is explained, since he touched the weakest point in her character, by accusing her of being a "steward of her riches." According to her,

When Mr. Barton comes to see me, he talks about nothing but my sins and my need o' marcy. Now, Mr. Hackit, I've never been a sinner. From the fust beginning, when I went into service, I al'ys did my duty by my emplyers. I was a good wife as any in the country. . . . If I'm not to be saved, I know a many as are in a bad way. But it's well for me as I can't go to church any longer for if th' old singers are to be done away with, ther'll be nothing left as it was in Mr. Patten's time; and what's more, I hear you've settled to pull the church down and build it up new?⁴

Churchwarden Hackit's opinion's are practical and matter-of-fact and contrast sharply with Mr. Barton's, whose ideas do not coincide with reality. Barton wants to build a new church, although there are fewer people attending church services; he wants also to give up the old songs, and, worst of all, he does not know how to deal with the

psychological side of his parishioners; he only menaces them with the rage of God. Mr. Hackit is a "shrewd, substantial man, whose advice about crops is always worth listening to, and who is too well off to want to borrow money."⁵ According to Mr. Hackit,

The congregation's fell off o' late; though Mr. Barton says that's because there's been no room for people when they've come. You see, the congregation got so large in Parry's time, the people stood in the aisles; but there's never any crowd now, as I can see.⁵

Mr. Barton's deficiencies are introduced to us through his dealings with his parishioners, as we can see in his address to the boy in the poor house as well as in his harsh treatment of his wife and children. Also, since he is always in need of money, the rebuilding of Shepperton's church is an extravagance committed against the public and against his own private life.

The presence of the Church of England, with its defence of Episcopalianism and its rejection of preaching outside the church, is also a theme in the story. Cottage preaching is criticized by Mr. Pilgrim, who comes from Milby, and hates the Reverend Barton for two reasons: he called in a new doctor, recently settled in Shepperton, and because, "being himself a dabbler in drugs," Barton had recently cured on of Mr. Pilgrim's patients. He accuses Amos Barton of being a Dissenter:

They say his father was a Dissenter shoemaker; and he's half a Dissenter himself. Why, doesn't he preach extempore in that cottage up here, of a Sunday evening?⁶

Amos Barton's Evangelical teaching concerned sin and unobtainable mercy. His harshness is the main reason for his not communicating with people. His inarticulateness is present even when he is preaching, as Mr. Hackit says:

. . . that preaching without book's no good, only when a man has a gift, and has the Bible at his fingers' ends. It was all very well for Parry--he'd a gift. . . . But our parson's no gift at all that way; he can preach as good a sermon as need be heard when he writes it down. But when he tries to preach wi'out book, he rambles about, and doesn't stick to his text; and every now and

then he flounders about like a sheep as has cast itself, and can't get on his legs again.⁷

Society grasps the truth about his character, but it is to a great extent preconceived, since the conclusions it arrives at answer to its idiosyncracies. In George Eliot's novels, society plays an important role in pointing out the individual's deficiencies, but since the society she depicts in the three scenes is of a pastoral, homogeneous kind, its opinions are to a certain extent one-sided and prejudiced. Eliot gives a sociological rather than psychological approach to character, and shows how he acts and reacts in the different places he preaches and his attitudes in his own house-

Amos is a character deterministically fated because of his inarticulateness and his consequent lack of fellow-feeling. The novelist's ironic voice points out Barton's many shortcomings, his greatest fault being psychological. According to the narrator, he has the opinion, but he lacks the will.

There are some elements of idealization, particularly referring to Mrs. Barton, although the novella is extremely realistic in its approach to Amos's deficiencies. The pessimistic view of his character almost chokes the novelist's ameliorism. This is why in the next novel Adam Bede, she chooses Adam not as an average man. Amos Barton as a clergyman needs society's approval, but he is unconscious of the criticism he raises. As the narrator tells us:

By the help of dear friendly illusion, we are able to dream that we are charming--and our faces wear a becoming air of self-possession; we are able to dream that other men admire our talents and our benignity is undisturbed; we are able to dream that we are doing much good--and do a little.⁸

Ingenuously he believes in his capacity and in the work he is doing. The indefiniteness of his character is fully present in his physical description:

. . . a narrow face of no particular complexion--even the smallpox that has attacked it seems to have been of a mongrel kine--with

features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression, is surmounted by a slope of baldness gently rising from brow to crown.⁹

Mrs. Barton is described as having an attractive and substantial presence, being worth a man of higher sensibility than Amos Barton. Nevertheless, the novelist expresses her sympathy for Amos's ordinariness, and according to her world view, Mrs. Barton's qualities are destined for Mr. Barton by "pre-established harmony":

. . . if it happens to see a fellow of fine proportions and aristocratic mien, who makes no faux pas, and wins golden opinions from all sorts of men, it straightway picks out for him the loveliest of unmarried women, and says, "There would be no proper match! Not at all, say I: let that successful, well-shapen, discreet and able gentleman put up with something less than the best in the matrimonial department; and let the sweet woman go to make sunshine and a soft pillow for the poor devil whose legs are not models, and whose efforts are often blunders, and who in general gets more kicks than halfpence. She the sweet woman--will like it as well; for her sublime capacity of loving will have all the more scope; and I venture to say, Mrs. Barton's nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you would perhaps have had in your eye for her--a man with sufficient income and abundant personal éclat."¹⁰

This idealism results from the novelist's belief in the moral growth of mankind. The contrast between Amos Barton and his wife exhibits this belief, as in The Mill on the Floss does the contrast between Maggie's generation with the Tullivers' and Dodson's generation.

Relevant to the theme of moral growth through conflict, we can see that this address to the reader explains the nature of the author's moral determinism, her didacticism. Her optimistic belief in the possibility of the moral growth of the individual is paralleled by the possibility of a linear and uniform social growth. Amos (as every ordinary man) is given the opportunity of refining his sensibility in dealing with his fellow men, by passing through a process of growth that is accomplished with a later recognition of one's previous harshness.

Among Amos's deficiencies must be cited his inaccuracy in orthography and syntax, some recurrent errors in speaking and his blunders in dealing with Radicalism and Dissenting circles. He gives too much

emphasis to controlling their influences, but his efforts result in his being inefficient and indefinite. He carries his inefficiency to the point of failing to give his hearers the spiritual interpretation he aims at:

. . . he often missed the right note both in public and private exhortation, and got a little angry in consequence. For though Amos thought himself strong, he did not feel himself strong. Nature had given him the opinion but not the sensation. Without that opinion he would probably never had worn cambric bands, but would have been an excellent cabinet maker and deacon of an independent church, as his father was before him.

. . . it was wonderfully easy to convince him which was the best road. And so a very unwonted reading and unwonted discussion made him see that an Episcopalian Establishment was much more than unobjectionable, and on many other points he began to feel he held opinions a little too far-sighted and profound to be crudely and suddenly communicated to ordinary minds.¹¹

His pride is made more evident in his relationship with the Countess. The Countess Czerlaski and her brother, Mr. Bridmain are described as two foreigners, although they are British. They are really foreigners to the small community of Shepperton, and as such they are not accepted by it. The only persons with whom the Countess has any social intercourse are the Bartons. The Countess intends to leave this place, since it does not offer the opportunity for a good marriage, the thing the Countess has been looking forward to. Ironically, there is some plot intertwining, that results in her brother's marriage with the Countess's maid, which makes the Countess leave the house and go to live in the Barton's house, becoming a burden to their lives. The Countess's egoism and unconcern becomes evident in the period she stays there. But the decision to turn her out does not come from the Bartons. Gossip and the Countess's small egoisms prompt the maid to tell her that she is contributing to Milly's (Mrs. Barton's) sickness and giving opportunity for gossip.

After she leaves the house, Milly becomes once more the subject of love and sympathy from her neighbors. And the suffering which Barton

undergoes with Milly's death acts like a catharsis which results in his final redemption through suffering.

Within the pastoral world of Shepperton, there are some good qualities of fellow-feeling that compensate for the materialism and hardness of the majority of the people. To these people, Milly's death and Amos's suffering are a way of showing their short-sightedness.

The Reverend Amos Barton is the prototype of the ordinary man. Nevertheless, the novelist addresses the reader and tells us that Amos's insignificance does not prevent him from being the hero of the story:

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul, that looks out through dull eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.¹²

During Milly's sickness she was carefully attended to by the good parishioners, but the Reverend could not help thinking about "representing his case to a certain charity for the relief of needy curates."¹³ According to the narrator's comments (and not according to Amos's awareness of his position):

. . . his parishioners were more likely to have a strong sense that the clergyman needed their material aid, than that they needed his spiritual aid.¹⁴

Amos becomes a victim of the circumstances exactly because he is unconscious of his flaws. All the time he is conscious of his superiority. While Milly thought that her relationship with the Countess was a good in itself, the Reverend Amos thought that he had risen above his parishioners in an aristocratic manner. Nevertheless, Amos's faults are described as middling:

It was not in his nature to be superlative in anything, unless indeed, he was superlatively middling, the quintessential extract of mediocrity. If there was any point on which he showed an inclination to be excessive, it was confidence in his own shrewdness and ability in practical matters, so that he was very full of plans which were something like his moves in chess--admirably well calculated, supposing the state of the case were otherwise.¹⁵

The first blow inflicted on Amos was Milly's death, which was followed by the feeling that it was too late to make amends, and the keen memory that his love for her "needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness."¹⁶ This blow was softened by the fact that "outward solace came, when cold faces looked kind again."¹⁷

In this pastoral world, there is a balance between good and evil. At the same time Mr. Barton recognizes his flaws, the conflict between himself and his parishioners ends, and the heartfelt demonstrations of fellow-feeling shows that, if Amos Barton did not convince his parishioners by his preaching, then his own suffering opened their hearts to the most important Evangelical creed: the doctrine of the heart. Amos's final tragedy consists in his removal from Shepperton:

It roused some bitter feeling too, to think that Mr. Carpes' wish to reside at Shepperton was merely a pretext for removing Mr. Barton, in order that he might ultimately give the curacy of Shepperton to his own brother-in-law, who was known to be wanting a new position.¹⁸

This last blow comes from the outside but the conflict between individual and society is resolved.

Amos is fated to fail because he is incapable of escaping the smallness of his own world (satirically represented by his shortcomings). It is by Milly's nobility of character and because of her death that Amos's tragedy awakens his parishioners' sympathies. Eliot's deterministic approach toward the truth of character results from her religious belief that man learns through suffering, and that the blow inflicted on him awakens his full consciousness.

In the pastoral world of the "scenes" and of Adam Bede, conflict has not become internal yet, such as in The Mill on the Floss, which is basically about Maggie's psychological conflict. In the earlier books, conflict still resides in a religious sense of sin and consequent repentance. In spite of Eliot's pessimistic description of reality, the end of such stories is optimistic and didactic since the conflict between the individual and society is resolved.

3.3 - Mr. Gilfil's Love Story

Caterina, an orphan, is adopted by Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel, not as a daughter but as a "protegée". The utilitarian character of this adoption gives us an idea of their egoistic personalities. The gardener, Mr. Bates, one of the servants to Cheverel Manor, wins Caterina's affection, and foresees that Caterina's adoption " . . . 'll coom to soom harm."¹⁹ The fact that Caterina is an Italian and a Catholic caused a good deal of discussion among the servants. But all of them heard Mrs. Sharp's more liberal views:

. . . I can't say but what I think as my Lady an' Sir Cristifer's done a right thing by a hinnicent child as doesn't know its right hand from its left, i' bringing it where it'll learn to speak summat better nor gibberish and be brought up i' the true religion. For as for them firrin churches as Sir Cristifer is so unaccountable mad after, si' pictures o' men an' women a-showing themselves just for all the world as God made 'em. I think for my part, as it's almost a sin to go into 'em.²⁰

Caterina soon became the pet of the house. She is affectionately called "his black-eyed monkey" by Sir Christopher. There is a recurrent imagery of pet names referring to Caterina: she sits "like a frog," or she is like "a little southern bird who had its northern nest lined with tenderness and caresses, and pretty things."²¹ These images are relevant to understanding Caterina's character. She is a sensitive, tender girl, who reacts with fierce resistance to any harsh and unloving effort to correct her wildness. Once in a while her anger overcomes her awe.

Cheverel Manor's restoration is compared to the growth of Caterina from ugliness into beauty, but Caterina (whose voice of low toned tenderness, recalled the notes of a stock-dove), had not so much beauty as charm. However, Caterina's education is not given as much attention as the remodeling of the building; "Caterina's development was the result of no systematic or careful appliances."²² She is accepted in this aristocratic medium as a pet, but "she grew up much like the

primroses, which the garden is not sorry to see within his enclosure but takes no pains to cultivate."²³ Caterina's talents lay in loving and music. After the discovery of Caterina's musical talent, she is accepted as a member of the family, since her singing makes her dearer to Lady Cheverel.

Maynard Gilfil is another "protegé" of Sir Christopher's. He is described as an "affectionate lad," whose love for Caterina is also associated with animal imagery. When Maynard accepts Sir Christopher's proposal to become chaplain of Cheverel Manor and curate of the neighboring parish, he admits the possibility that Caterina may come to love him, ". . . judging falsely, from his own case, that habit and affection were the likeliest avenues to love."²⁴

Foreseeing the possibility of a future marriage between Mr. Gilfil and Caterina, Sir Christopher is blind to Caterina's love for nephew, Anthony Wybrow. As the narrator tells us, Sir Christopher is shortsighted, "for though the good Baronet was not at all quick to suspect what was unpleasant and opposed to his views of fitness, he was quick to see what would dovetail with his own plans." He also had another defect: "a power of forgiveness was not among Sir Christopher's virtues."²⁵ That is why he rejects the son of his older sister, and disinherits him in favour of his younger sister's son, Captain Wybrow. He spends a considerable amount of money restoring Cheverel Manor, to remove the entail from his estate.

Captain Wybrow's love for Caterina is of an egoistic kind, "to find oneself adored by a little . . . singing woman . . . was an agreeable sensation, comparable to smoking the finest Latakia, and also imposes some return of tenderness as a duty."²⁶ As a matter of fact, Wybrow's double with Caterina and Miss Asher, his fiancée, proves that he is unable to love anyone except himself. In chapter ten, the reader has a good insight into Wybrow's character. He sits himself, for

example, in front of the mirror, as it reflects his exquisite image.

His monologue in front of the mirror gives the dimension of his egoism:

Here am I, doing nothing to please myself, trying to do the best thing for everybody else, and all the comfort I get is to have fire shot at me from women's eyes and venom spurted at me from women's tongues.²⁷

Caterina does not know that he does not love her till the last moment when Mr. Gilfil tells her that Captain Wybrow has convinced Sir Christopher of the necessity of her marriage to Gilfil.

Sir Christopher, in his turn, is quite happy with Wybrow's prospective bride, Miss Asher, "whose quickness of eye and taste in externals," formed a real ground of sympathy between her and Sir Christopher."²⁸

Meanwhile, Caterina's conflict does not become evident to anyone except Mr. Gilfil and her "agitated nights were producing a more fatal effect than was represented by these slight outward changes."²⁹ Caterina's refusal to marry Mr. Gilfil, her desire for vengeance, and her awe of Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel give rise to conflicting emotions. When Miss Asher presses her in order to know if Wybrow had told her the truth about the affair between him and Caterina, she is unable to answer, and, driven by emotions, she intends to kill him. But when she goes to the Rookery to meet him, she finds him dead. From now on Caterina develops a feeling of guilt, that is shown by her external actions. Mr. Gilfil succeeds in improving her mental and physical health. She marries him, but soon after she dies.

This story contains many hints about Caterina's character. The consistent comparison with birds and little animals suggests her timid and loving nature, which contrasts sharply with the civilized refinements and selfishness of Captain Wybrow and his fiancée.

Mr. Bates, who lives away from this civilized world in his charming cottage, foresees that Caterina is not going to thrive in this foreign atmosphere. Lady Cheverel is too cold, detached and submissive to her

husband's will while Sir Christopher is a patriarchal figure, always giving orders and expecting to be obeyed, although his orders are always dictated by his wish to do good. In chapter two, the scene that takes place between him and Mrs. Hartopp, when he orders and expects to be obeyed, reflects his strong will. And we see it again later on, in chapter thirteen, in the scene that takes place between him and Caterina. He admits that, "there is nothing, after Anthony's marriage, that I have set my heart on so much as seeing you and Maynard settled for life. I must have no whims and follies--no nonsense."³⁰ Nevertheless, this blindness towards other people's feelings has to be corrected. Life teaches him because his plans about Wybrow and Caterina fail.

The change that is effected in him is a consequence of suffering and of his knowledge of the truth about the reckless consequences of Wybrow's trying to win Caterina's affection. As a consequence of his change, he forgives his older sister and gives her son the share he has a right to in his properties.

Caterina, like Maggie Tulliver, is a victim of circumstances and of her emotional nature. Driven by emotions, we have seen, she determines to kill Captain Wybrow, but she already finds him dead. If she had had the opportunity to talk to him, she surely would not have killed him. Her affectionate nature would have prevailed over her emotions, but she is not given this opportunity of recognition. Although Mr. Gilfil succeeds in making her overcome the sense of guilt, she never recovers from the emotional shock of the circumstances in which she faced Wybrow's death.

Also like Maggie, Caterina is an emotionally weak character and her heart (the sound core of her personality) has been irrevocably bruised, although she becomes affectionately tied to Mr. Gilfil. Like Maggie, she dies without having overcome completely the sense of sin and sorrow. Apparently her conflict is resolved, but the marks of

suffering are present to her last days. While the melodramatic scenes give a view of Caterina's romantic character, the ending gives a didactic view of Mr. Gilfil's old age, when his nobility and his flaws are attributed to his early life with Caterina.

In this short story, the novelist gives a lyrical, romantic approach to character. Even the pathetic fallacy is evident in the melodramatic coincidence of human passion and suffering with nature.

There is also the imagery of progress opposed to the smallness of Caterina's world. George Eliot's optimistic belief in the progress of science contrasts with the smallness of Caterina's world and she questions whether there is any place in this world for Caterina's affectionate nature. Her optimistic belief in the historical progress of mankind contrasts with the subjective and lyrical approach to man isolated from this world of materialism and science which forms the center of the drama itself.

. . . The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope, the great ships were labouring over the waves; the toiling eagerness of commerce, the fierce spirit of revolution, were only ebbing in brief rest; and sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest centre of quivering life in the water-drop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty.

This question is reawakened and implied in The Mill on the Floss, by the opposition of Maggie's world of feeling versus Tom's world of materialism and business.

3.4 - Janet's Repentance

In this short story Eliot reexamines the theme of the growth of Evangelicalism. The town of Milby is divided into two groups. Lawyer Dempster leads the group against the Tryanites. This division is an important feature of the town life. Its doctors, Mr. Pilgrim and

Mr. Pratt, have specific ways of attending to their clients, and they only join together when they have to face a new concurrent. Mr. Pilgrim, who has already been introduced to the reader in Amos Barton, reappears in this story in a neutral position, which he assumes because "he has got a dozen Tryanite livers under his care," as Dempster declares. It is in that condition of an observer that Mr. Pilgrim admits to Dempster that "I shouldn't wonder if Tryan turns out too many for you, after all."³²

Mr. Dempster (Like formerly his partner Mr. Pittman), is a very popular lawyer, in spite of his lack of honesty and his unprofessional conduct. Mr. Crewe, Milby's old curate, is also accepted by his parishioners in spite of his niggardliness and ineffectual preaching, for he had been part of Milby's life for half a century. Although he was much criticized by his parishioners, they did not want "to venerate the parson or anyone else: they were much more comfortable to look down a little on their fellow creatures."³³

Religion is not really the subject for the dispute between the indifferent parishioners of Milby, since it is common to see Church people "who were of the opinion that Dissent might be a weakness but after all, had no great harm in it."³⁴

Mr. Tryan is an Evangelical man, preaching at the "chapel of ease" on Paddingford Common. He calls Milby's attention to some innovations he wants to introduce, such as preaching extempore in cottages and the Sunday school. Yet these are innovations which the genteel people consider to be a "disease" that unexpectedly arrived at Milby and "infected" important people there, such as Mr. Landor, the banker, and several other good houses.

Eliot's satirical vein is felt in the description of the representatives of the community, the head of the opposition being the lawyer ironically recognized as the personification of the "intellect". Her

sense of humour is also present in the description of the ladies who gather at Mrs. Linnet's drawing-room. Once more the dialogue is the way of introducing the real situation of characters in the story. They talk about Janet's life and the gossip introduces the readers to Janet's flaws; there are allusions to her being used to drinking and about her "pride" in concealing the sufferings she undergoes in her life with Dempster.

The introduction of Evangelicalism raises the possibility of change as is shown in the altered behaviour and ways of thinking of these ladies that are gathering at Mrs. Linnet's house.

Mr. Tryan is described as a "paradoxical character, at once mild and irritable, gentle and overbearing, indolent and resolute, self-conscious and dreamy."³⁵ In the same way that Milby's society is not completely evil, Mr. Tryan is not completely good. His life in Milby is a kind of redemption from his early sin and sorrow. He creates by his own example, a religious awakening, which has the effect of improving the morality of the community, by smothering its feelings of resentment.

The popular demonstration against Tryan is organized by Dempster and his speech shows that he is not afraid of Tryan himself and Evangelicalism, but of the doctrine of asceticism, which is part of the Methodist sect. Dempster's fondness of drinking revealed in his address to the mob, as the imageries of drinking recur in his speech: "No man had better try to thrust his cant and hypocrisy down your throats." Or, "We are not to be poisoned with doctrines which damp every innocent enjoyment, and pick a poor man's pocket of the sixpence with which he might buy himself a cheerful glass after a hard day's work, under the pretence of paying for bibles to send to Chicktaws."³⁶ The realism of Dempster's alcoholism is replaced by the pathos of Janet's sufferings with its direct appeal to the reader's feelings. The abrupt change to pathos makes a sharp contrast with the realism of Dempster's speech:

There was a portrait of Janet's mother, a grey-haired, dark-eyed old woman, in a neatly fluted cap, hanging over the mantel-piece. Surely the angel eyes take on a look of anguish as they see Janet--not trembling, no! it would be better if she trembles--standing stupidly unmoved in her great beauty, while the heavy arm is lifted to strike her. The blow falls--another--and another. Surely the mother hears that cry--"O Robert! pity! pity!"³⁷

This change answers to the novelist's intention to show Janet as a passive character and to emphasize how she changes from this first scene to the last fight, when she answers back to Dempster's aggressiveness and is turned out from her house. By then she shows that she has free will, although she and her mother are economically dependent on the lawyer.

Janet Dempster is symbolically placed in Orchard Street, which is an enclosed place. The long, dark walls of her house are illuminated by her when she appears, "a distant light began to flicker on the walls of the passage." Janet's luminous passivity is also cause for Dempster's curses: "Curse you! you creeping idiot!" These images suggested by the long passages of the house, and Janet's "creeping" along them, show that her passivity is the result of long suffering, which is reaffirmed by her features:

. . . grandly cut features, pale with the natural paleness of a brunette, and premature lines about them, telling that the years had been lengthened by sorrow, and the delicately curved nostril, which seemed made to quiver with the proud consciousness of power and beauty, must have quivered to heart-piercing griefs which had given that worn look to the corners of the mouth. Her wide-open black eyes had a strangely fixed, sightless gaze."³⁹

In the next scene, she is shown leaving this prison-like "orchard" for her mother's house. Janet's mother, Mrs. Raynor, does not know anything about the doctrines of Evangelicalism, but she believes in an "eternal love" that will not permit Janet to be drawn further into vice and suffering. It is her hope and trust in the love and goodness that exist in the world which makes her think:

. . . it was not hard to believe that the future would be anything else than the harvest of the seed that was being sown before her

eyes. But always there is the seed sown silently and unseen, and everywhere there come sweet flowers without our foresight or labor. We reap what we sow, but nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours.³⁹

The author believes in a natural harmonious order existing in nature. This belief is also found in such a religious character as Dinah Morris, in her pantheistic identification with nature, and in the nobility of such a "natural" character as Maggie Tulliver, as part of the ethic of moral determinism.

Janet becomes an Evangelical because she identifies with Mr. Tryan's sin and sorrow. Evangelicalism is then a redemption from sin and sorrow, and answers to a necessity of identification with suffering humanity, that appears in the form of pity and sorrow.

Although a victim of the circumstances, Janet finally reacts against them. She is not led by the laws of consequence as Amos Barton is. But like Amos Barton, she is subjected to the same process of growth through suffering, which is a process of moral determinism.

Janet's public life is oriented towards helping others. She is the opposite of her husband. While he tries to do harm, she does good effortlessly. Nevertheless, in private she tries to cooperate with him; she is a good, submissive wife, to the point of being an anti-Tryanite.

Dempster begins to lose ground after the bishop agrees with Tryan's lectures. The climax of the conflict is when Dempster admits that he is losing ground as a professional man, when one of his old clients, Mr. Jerome, becomes a Tryanite and wishes "falsehood to be contradicted."⁴⁰ After the triumph of the public demonstration against Tryan, Dempster loses his campaign. Dempster's failure to carry out his intentions is a proof that evil is not omnipotent, and shows the novelist's relativism. Eliot's own moral earnestness is expressed when she comments on the main effect of Evangelicalism, its introduction to the idea of duty:

. . . Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation in Milby society that idea of duty . . . a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, impulses . . . there was a divine work to be done in life, a rule of goodness higher than the opinion of their neighbours; and if the notion of a heaven in reserve for themselves was a little too prominent, yet the theory of fitness for that heaven consisted in purity of heart, in Christ-like compassion, in subduing selfish desires.⁴¹

George Eliot endorses Mr. Tryan's doctrine of sympathy and fellow feeling and makes of the narrator a close observer of Mr. Tryan's sacrifice, aiming at:

a true knowledge of our fellow man . . . which enables us to feel with him. . . Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth, unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings.⁴²

The opinions in Milby diverged as to the motive why Mr. Tryan exerted himself so much. His enemies were of the opinion that under his unrest he hid some cunning intention. His friends draw there conclusions out of their moral vision, from the depth of their veneration and pity.

Mr. Tryan, like Janet, had deep-felt troubles, and his fellowship with the sufferer draws Janet towards him at the moment of her crisis. Janet wishes to change her life, but she fears a reversal of her past, which occurs soon after she meets Mr. Tryan. After Janet is turned out from her house by Dempster, she looks for Mr. Tryan and confesses her sin and sorrows. Mr. Tryan also confesses his own sin, and the work he is doing in Milby appears as a redemption from his sin and guilt.

The lyrical end is somewhat detached from the tone of suffering and realism of the first part. The optimistic tone of Janet's conversion, when she gives up drinking, and her final redemption, is in accordance with the novelist's moral determinism. The moment of conversion "remained forever in Janet's memory as one of those baptismal

epochs, when the soul, dipped in the sacred waters of joy and peace, rises from them with new energies, with more unalterable longings."⁴³

In this short story, George Eliot is sympathetic about Dissenting religion, since the dissenters adopt an ethic of duty and fellow-feeling. This transformation is possible because the world depicted in the scenes is a pastoral world. The ending of the stories is melodramatic and lyric. This ending is in accordance with the novelist's subjective view of reality, in which natural religion is opposed to dogmatism, and answers to the novelist's romantic conception of art.

4. THE NOVEL AS A PORTRAIT OF LIFE

George Eliot's first experience in writing a novel reflects the inclusiveness of her mind, her attempt to make her ideas "thoroughly incarnate," to the point that we may wish to argue that the creative process is hindered by the novelist's intellectual approach. Realism as an aim of the novel results from her religious inquiries, and first became Eliot's aim when she gave up religious dogmas and embraced Feuerbach's religion of humanity. Realism is also part of the narrative technique and serves as a dramatic means of arriving at the psychological truth of character.

In Adam Bede the novelist tries to combine realism, in its approach to the psychological truth of character, with religious determinism, which corresponds to the division within the novel between good, idealized characters, such as Adam and Dinah (when their virtues come out to be flaws in their psychological growth, but whose moral earnestness serves as an example for the weak characters), and the weak characters, such as Arthur and Hetty (whose sin can be redeemed through a religious conversion).

George Eliot tries to infuse this naturalistic world of Hayslope with the doctrine of love and fellow feeling, but only Adam, Arthur and Dinah remain as important parts of this world.

So the critic has to be aware of the novelist's aesthetic principle of sympathy and love to understand how she conciliates her deeply felt sense of moral righteousness with her sympathy with Hetty as a wandering outcast. It is in accordance to this moral earnestness that Hetty Sorrel remains an outcast.

We know that the novelist's purpose is intensification of feelings and, by means of her artistic power of "negative capability," she identifies with the wandering outcast, giving the reader the true dimension of Hetty's character. Hetty's reduction to an instinctive kind of life permits the novelist to commute Hetty's death sentence in the fictional world.

The consistent naturalistic depiction of Hetty's character, drawn from animalistic metaphors, shows her gradual disintegration. She is led to act instinctively, and her egoism and external circumstances combine to bring on the whole truth of her character. When the novelist shows Hetty's instinctive wandering, she gives the extent of Hetty's egoism by means of contrasting imageries, such as the imagery of her vanity suggested by the jewel she hangs around her neck, and her final revelation to Dinah that the baby she killed felt "like a heavy weight hanging around my neck."¹

At the same time that Hetty's wandering shows her hardness, it is in itself the kind of suffering that leads to Hetty's confession and that effects the catharsis, which evokes the whole drama of her egoism, and the possibility of achieving some humanity by the contact with another human being. But recognition of her sin does not make her grow morally; she remains an outcast. The climax of the novel coincides with Hetty's confession.

In this novel there is not a balance between the humanistic ethic which is expressed through Feuerbach's religion of the heart, and Utilitarianism, which is expressed through Adam's moral earnestness and didacticism. Hetty's tragedy becomes the medium by which Adam and Arthur grow through suffering.

But the reader is not completely convinced of Adam's change. Adam's heady doctrine and his lack of insight into others' feelings remain basically the same, and contrast sharply with Dinah's religion of the

heart and intuitive grasp of a moral truth. Nevertheless, Adam learns enough to recognize his deficiencies, and tries to hold back his egoistic urges by living for others.

Arthur is so much subjected to the inflexible laws of consequences that it is hard to assert, as Levine does in his analysis of Arthur's motives, that Arthur is responsible for his actions, and that he was free to avoid the circumstances that drew him into sexual relations with Hetty Sorrel."²

In the process of growth through suffering there is a sharp contrast between Adam's free will and self-assertiveness and Arthur's weakness and incapacity to control his impulses. In the subjective and didactic approach to Adam's growth through conflict is implied the growth of a patriarchal figure who in his old age remembers his past, and whose comments on the religious issues of the past show such a detachment that we question whether this Adam corresponds to the same Adam of the story. As we know, the novel results from the idealization of a father figure, combined with the story George Eliot heard from her Methodist aunt, about a crime committed in circumstances similar to those narrated in the novel.

It is true that Adam grows through conflict, and that the recognition of his flaw, or his lack of fellow-feeling, is thoroughly compensated by his moral earnestness, which makes evident the amoral side of Hetty's nature and Arthur's weakness of character, and which finally brings on Hetty's and Arthur's sin. Yet we question the verisimilitude of this contrast. As Knoepfelmacher recognizes, "Hetty is employed as an agent to convert both Arthur and Adam into sadder and wiser men."³

4.1. - Adam Bede

Adam is an accomplished carpenter, and his brother Seth is learning with him. Adam is an outspoken workman and a distinguished student of Bartle Massey's night school. Everything he intends to do is planned

"by the square." This heady doctrine makes him plan his future marriage not with Mary Burge, the daughter of Adam's employer, but with Hetty Sorrel, the nephew of his friends, the Poysers.

He knows that this marriage will create problems with his mother, but he still intends to marry Hetty. His father's death by drowning makes Adam recognize that he has been out of patience with his father quite a lot, but the conflict of conscience raised by his father's death is not enough to make him change.

Hetty is viewed by Arthur, the heir of the Donnithorne estate, as kitten-like, and Arthur does not intend to court her seriously, but he becomes sexually involved with her. Arthur is Adam's rival and his romance with Hetty forms a plot parallel to Adam's courtship.

Naively, Adam carries on his intentions of marrying Hetty even after he meets her with Arthur in the Fir Grove. Nevertheless, Hetty's pregnancy leads her to concealment, and she runs away from Hall Farm looking for Arthur, but she does not find him.

During Hetty's wanderings, the baby is born, and she hides it. When a farmer finds it, it is already dead, and Hetty is found nearby with a piece of loaf in her lap. After she is condemned to death, she confesses to Dinah, but she is rescued by Arthur. Adam and Arthur are reconciled with each other, and Adam agrees to work as Arthur's employee, so that the Poysers can go on living at Hall Farm, because it is part of Arthur's estate.

Dinah Morris, the Methodist preacher, refuses to marry Seth, but she cannot help falling in love with Adam and marrying him. Their union (the symbolic union of the natural man and the spiritual woman) constitutes the culminating event, the happy ending of this pastoral novel.

Adam's physical strength functions as a simile for his moral hardness. This hardness is "closely allied to his realism, to his clear

perception of the order of things and his inflexibility in abiding by his own vision of consequences."⁴ This hardness is made more evident by the contrast with his brother Seth, who is just the opposite of him, and who introduces Adam to the Methodist preacher Dinah Morris, who is going to exert a strong influence over Adam's change. Adam struggles with his hardness when he recognizes that,

It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against them, so as I can't bring myself to forgive 'em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul for I could sooner make a thousand strokes with th' hammer for my father than bring myself to say a kind word to him. Mayhap the best thing I ever did in my life was only doing what was easiest for myself.⁵

His father's death introduces the idea that it is part of the common lot of our lives to be erring, sinning, and suffering. Life cannot be lived in accordance with reason and the Calvinistic ethic of work and duty, but in accordance with love and heart. Adam has to learn through experience, and his love for Hetty is his trial by ordeal. The working of an invisible force which we may choose to call destiny, or the inflexible law of consequences informs this novel. Adam's strength, first associated with his father's weakness, is later associated with Hetty's error.

Hetty's life (previously associated with the neutral colours of the dairy, and with the orderly life of Mrs. Poyser's household) is later on associated with the vivid colours that reflect her yearning related to the "growing pains" of passion. The red colour is also associated with temptation and sin. Hetty is shown picking currents and her hands "were dyed and damp with current jelly."⁶ The garden where Adam meets her resembles the garden of Griff's farmhouse, "with hardy perennial flowers, unpruned fruit-trees, and kitchen vegetables growing together in careless, half-neglected abundance."⁷ It is in this scenery that Adam feels Hetty's seductive powers:

Hetty bending over the red bunches, the level rays piercing the screen of apple-tree boughs, the length of bushy garden beyond,

his own emotion as he looked at her and believed that she was thinking of him, and that there was no need for them to talk. Adam remembered it to the last moment of his life.⁸

But Adam is mistaken because the emotion that Hetty demonstrates is not a sign of love towards him, but of her growing passion for Arthur.

The sexual imagery of the love affair between Hetty and Arthur is understated. Hetty sits with him in the grass without a hat and her desire to have a pair of earrings is quickly satisfied by the good-natured Arthur. He has the box wrapped "in a great many covers, that he might see Hetty unwrapping it with growing curiosity till at last her eyes flashed back their new delight into his."⁹ Also her neckerchief left in the Hermitage connotes Arthur's and Hetty's sin, which Arthur tries to hide from Adam symbolically in a basket. This neckerchief is present in the last meeting between Arthur and Adam at the Hermitage, as a sign of the irrevocableness of wrongdoing.

Hetty's misleading beauty predisposes Adam's and Arthur's tender feelings towards her. Hetty's beauty, like the beauty of nature, is amoral, therefore she senses but does not feel. Hetty's unloving nature is ironically present in the simile: "those who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it."¹⁰

Hetty's egoism is compared by Mrs. Poyser with "a cherry wi' a hard stone inside it."¹¹ It is out of her egoism that she makes the decision to marry Adam.

Why should she not marry Adam? She did not care what she did, so that it made some change in her life. She felt confident that he would still want to marry her, and any further thought about Adam's happiness in the matter had never yet visited her.¹²

Hetty's egotistical nature is shown by the recurrent imagery and also by her indifference to her family. She related egoistically to the world and as such she is not included in the process of moral growth.

They are but ill-defined pictures that her narrow bit of imagination can make of the future; but of every picture she is the

central figure in fine clothes. . . . Does any sweet or sad memory mingle with this dream of the future--any loving thought of her second parents--of the children she helped to tend--of any youthful companion, any pet or animal, any relic of her childhood even? Not one. There are some plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook or rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flower-pot, and they blossom none the worse. Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her, and never cared to be reminded of it again.¹²

Mrs. Poyser is the only person who recognizes Hetty's hardness and speaks about it with "great openness" to her husband,

She's no better than a peacock, as 'd strut on the wall, and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folkes i' the parish was dying: ther's nothing seems to give her a turn i' th' inside, not even when we thought Totty had tumbled into the pit.¹³

The smallness of Hetty's dream world gives a measure of her own egoism and unloveliness. It is not in accordance with Hetty's nature to taken any "passionate" step. She is only driven into the thought of suicide, led by the desperation of terror. This terror is a consequence of her shame over her actual pregnancy:

For Hetty looked out from her secret misery towards the possibility of their ever knowing what had happened, as the weary prisoner might think of the possible pillory. They would think her conduct shameful; and shame was torture. That was poor little Hetty's conscience.¹⁶

The frustrated attempt to drown herself symbolizes the impossibility of unifying her inward with her outward ego. After she does not dare to end by death,

The very consciousness of her own limbs was a delight to her: she turned up her sleeves, and kissed her arms with a passionate love of life.¹⁷

Foreshadowings assault Dinah and make her afraid about Hetty's future, and it is Hetty's purity that brings out the imagery of a "lily-white bud." Despite Dinah's earnest pleadings, she does not succeed in making Hetty respond. In the same way, Mr. Irwine is unable to help Arthur when he goes to him for help. This incapacity to communicate deep feelings to those who are close to us is the force that moves these characters toward their fate. When Hetty confesses it is too

late. A trial by ordeal is a necessary stage in the drama of man's entering the world of fellow-feeling, when he outgrows his inborn selfishness. But Hetty's confession acts as a catharsis, which as an outlet for strong emotions, makes the characters identify with each other's suffering and achieve a fuller humanity. This religious conversion is at the surface of the novel, and translates the possibility of redemption from sin by the ethics of fellow-feeling.

Arthur is left to decide his dilemma by himself. As he has already realized, he cannot trust in his own instincts:

We may determine not to gather any cherries, and keep our hands sturdily in our pockets, but we can't prevent our mouths from watering.¹⁸

Arthur is unable to control his instinctive nature, as he cannot control his salivary glands. His driving away from the Chase and his return in a break-neck manner, show the conflict between his resolution to stay away from Hetty and the impulsive desire to acquiesce in his instincts. It is also true that external circumstances combine to drive him into his present dilemma. His broken arm, the lameness of his mare, Hetty's plotting to marry him, and his weakness, combine to entangle him in this love affair.

Fir-tree Grove is described as a "delicious labyrinthine wood," midway between the Chase and Hall Farm. This place is deceptive. It is called "Firtree Grove," not because the fir trees were many, but because they were few. It is haunted by nymphs, that metamorphose themselves into squirrels and running brooklets. Arthur passes along these paths of limes and beeches, in an atmosphere of personification:

. . . the golden light was lingering languidly among the upper boughs, only glancing down here and there on the purple pathway and its edge of faintly-sprinkled moss: an afternoon in which destiny disguises her cold awful face behind a hazy radiant veil, encloses us in warm downy wings, and poisons us with violet-scented breath.¹⁹

It was not a grove with measured grass or rolled gravel for you to tread upon, but with narrow, hollow-shaped, earthly paths,

edged with faint dashes of delicate moss paths which look as if they were made by the free will of the trees and underwood, moving reverently aside to look at the queen of the white-footed nymphs.²⁰

This deceptive appearance is related to the sexual imagery suggested by water and the warmth of the midsummer sunbeams:

. . . she was no more conscious of her limbs than if her childish soul had passed into a water-lily, resting on a liquid bed, and warmed by the midsummer sunbeams.²¹

Such young unfurrowed souls roll to meet each other like two velvet peaches that touch and are at rest; they mingle as easily as two brooklets that ask for nothing but to entwine themselves and ripple with ever-interlacing curves in the leafiest hiding-places.²²

The first scene in which Arthur and Adam meet shows the social differences between them, as well as their reciprocal feelings of friendship. It also introduces Arthur's conflict which is going to divide them. The conflict takes shape in the fight between them, although Adam asserts that he will not fight again, unless he has to face a scoundrel. Adam has the blood of a peasant and as such he is "assisted by his boyish memories and personal regards." His peasant descent explains his attitudes of deference towards Arthur.

Arthur is already struggling with his conscience: he feels already a seducer. Adam and Mr. Irwine tell Adam basically the same thing.

I've seen pretty clear, ever since I could cast up a sum, as you can never do what's wrong without breeding sin and trouble more than you can ever see. It's a bid o' bad workmanship--you never see th' end o' mischief it'll do. And it's a poor lookout to come into the world to make your fellow creatures worse off instead o' better.²³

Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before--consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves.²⁴

Since Arthur does not confess his sin to Mr. Irwine, he must trust now to his own "swinging". These struggles of conscience, which are in accordance to Mr. Irwine, "the worst form of Nemesis," show that Arthur is morally responsible for his attitudes. His moral growth is shown by his concern for the Poyzers, as a redemption for his wrongdoing.

The next time Adam meets Arthur, he is really facing a scoundrel. Adam gets the best of the fight with Arthur, but because of Adam's naive nature, he is too straightforward to make a distinction between a direct falsehood and an indirect one. Yet Adam's moral earnestness weighs heavily on Arthur's weakness and sin, and becomes the embodiment of "the irrevocableness of his wrong doing."²⁵

At the moment of Hetty's seduction, both Hetty and Arthur are doomed to suffer the consequences of their deed. Arthur's dilemma is transformed into "compulsion" and "anxiety".

Adam thinks Hetty innocent, in spite of what he has seen, and relying on his physical strength he intends to protect her. Ironically, Adam engages himself in protecting Hetty to conceal the truth. Adam's love for Hetty grows out of his own strength; "How could he imagine narrowness, selfishness, hardness in her? He created the mind he believed in out of his own, which was large, unselfish, tender."²⁶

Hetty's crime is a kind of trial for Adam too. When he sees to the full extent Hetty's guilt and hardness of heart, he has his understanding widened by suffering. In his conversion to Dinah's religion of the heart, he is already thinking of how Hetty's hardness can be extricated. Eliot describes his awakening to the full consciousness of Hetty's true character:

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonized sympathy, the struggling appeals . . . made Adam look back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence and he had only now awakened to full consciousness.²⁷

The novelist shows by Hetty's trial and conversion how this trial affects the lives of a small group of persons emotionally involved in it. The story reaches its climax at the moment of Hetty's confession of her guilt to Dinah and her conversion. Hetty's final rescue is part of George Eliot's ethic and aesthetic belief that the novelist should not

draw a sharp line between what is moral and immoral, and adds to the religious tone of the novel, answering to Dinah's methodistic belief in love and sympathy.

When Arthur and Adam meet for the second time, after Hetty's trial, Arthur makes Adam aware of his own hardness and self-consciousness:

I've known what it is in my life to repent and feel it's too late: I felt I'd been too harsh to my father when he was gone from me--I feel it now, when I think of him. I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent.²⁸

After Arthur's entreaty for the Poyser's and Adam to stay on his estate, everything runs on smoothly at Hall Farm. Adam's change is shown by his more indulgent attitudes towards his friends and his family. Yet, the reader is not quite convinced of Adam's conversion to Dinah's hearty doctrine. Adam is quite slow in interpreting other people's feelings, as he is slow in seeing the reality of Dinah's love for him. Critics from Carlyle onward have reiterated that Adam's characterization is idealized: that he is too good a character. Although Adam grows morally, by a full awareness of the importance of fellow-feeling, his growth is limited to a gradual change in point of view, from a materialist, matter-of-fact interpretation of life to a certain awareness of the intuitive life of feelings. That is to say, Adam remains basically a naive, straightforward person, a peasant. Adam's materialism is just the opposite of Dinah's spiritualism. Her marriage to Adam is a means of achieving a balance between her self-renouncing nature and Adam's self-conceit.

Seen through Mrs. Poyser's eyes, Dinah's spiritualism does not correspond to the prosaic reality of life. So Dinah has to give up this spiritualism when she marries Adam, who is a much more substantial figure. Dinah grows from the ascetic and dogmatic Methodist preacher into a more complete human being. In the same way as Dinah influences Adam's change, her marriage to Adam transforms her into a wife and a mother. Nevertheless, Adam does not fulfill his promise to let Dinah

preach after their marriage. Also we see him in his old age, and it seems very unlikely that this old Adam is the same suffering and converted Adam of earlier years.

If the book is well structured formally, with its contrasting imageries, it does not thoroughly convey, to the modern critic, the novelist's world view. The division between the good and the bad characters does not agree with George Eliot's ethic and aesthetic concept of morality and art.

There is the division of the book into two themes, the historical change from feudalism into peasantry, and the theme of the introduction of the dissenting spirit in the materialist world of Hayslope. Also the division between Hetty's materialism and Dinah's spiritualism, is responsible for the separation of the novel into two parts, two different worlds.

This division raises the criticism about the ending of the novel as a wish-fulfilling end, since in accordance with the moral determinism of the novel, Hetty is not permitted to be a part of the fictional world of Hayslope. As such, she remains an outcast. The novel answers to a moral bias, directly stated by the novelist's addresses to the reader, which is part of the novelist's moral earnestness. The novel seems to present a positivist sociological approach rather than a moral dilemma.

The difference between this novel and the following, The Mill on the Floss, corresponds to the novelist's adoption of her liberal and humanistic outlook. In Adam Bede the moral concept of education of feelings is not so much related to the psychological growth of character as it is related to religious determinism. The central concept of the novel, we have to recognize, is that of religious conversion in which the good characters are rewarded and the bad ones are punished. This triumph of the good is part of the Calvinistic doctrine. The character's growth is a religious one, and they learn through experience and self-renunciation.

The following novel, The Mill on the Floss, retains as its main theme a moral dilemma, and the novelist succeeds in combining her moral earnestness with her liberal outlooks, by painting the nobility and the tragedy of the individual who achieves tragic recognition of an inner flaw.

5. THE MILL ON THE FLOSS:

THE UNIFYING THEME OF THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY

This novel employs the psychological and sociological analysis of the development of an inner conflict, and it does not function (as Leavis puts it) as an "idealization of the novelist's own life." In the psychological analysis of the protagonist's character, her masochistic tendency to control her emotions (as her father previously tried to control the water used for irrigation), results in collision with society.

The Mill on the Floss is termed by Henry Auster "the landscape of memory."¹ The education of the main protagonists and their early experiences are certainly drawn from the novelist's early childhood as we have already seen in the second chapter. But the novel read as a biography goes later into the author's life. We identify Maggie Tulliver's religious change in Mary Anne's conversion to Evangelicalism. We can trace the novelist's own memory of past experiences in Maggie's conflict itself, in her intense, lively nature that contrasts with her self-renunciation, and in Maggie's aspiration for "a higher realm of experience," a yearning that Mary Anne probably felt during her youth. Of course Maggie's emotional involvement does not permit her to understand Thomas à Kempis's philosophy, based on the Christian spirit of self-renunciation, because she adheres to his teachings as a way of escaping her domestic problems.

At this point, the novelist seems to be criticizing her own religious experience. But later on in the book, we can only trace the novelist's world view as it is given through the mouth of humanistic characters such as Philip Wakem and Dr. Kenn. Their humanistic advice to not help

Maggie in her inner conflict, which results from her psychological problem; she does not learn how to reconcile the emotional side of her nature with asceticism. We even hear the novelist's voice rebuking Maggie:

From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation; her own life was still a drama for her in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And it often came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud . . . and took Tom's rebukes as one of her outward crosses. Tom was very hard to her, she used to think in her long night-watchings, to her who had always loved him so--and then she strove to be contented with that hardness and to require nothing. That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism--the path of martyrdom and endurance rather than the steep way of tolerance, just allowance, and self blame (where there are no leafy honours to be gathered and worn).²

Although the novelist recognizes her own emotional involvement with the Dodsons, later on when Maggie enters the artificial world of St. Oggs, we find no longer a "landscape of memory": it is a concrete social world that connects the inner psychological problem of the character with society's artificial values. The main theme of the novel, which is Maggie's and Tom's education through conflict, achieves a tragic end because of Maggie's inner conflict, which remains unresolved to the end. It is the novelist's belief that "we should have strength, wisdom and luck to aim at our liberty." Maggie's tragedy lies in the fact that she recognizes at the end that she is not free because of inner conflict.

During Maggie's childhood, she has her world apart. The books, the attic, and the mill are the childhood retreats where she develops her imaginary world.

Physically, Tom is as different as possible from Maggie: he has, . . . a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character of boyhood . . . the dark-eyed girl, demonstrative and rebellious, may after turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink and white bit of masculinity with indeterminate features.³

The conflict between Tom and Maggie reflects on hereditary conflict between the Tullivers and the Dodsons, that symbolically represents the values of heart (Tulliver) and reason (Dodson). The motive for Tulliver to send Tom to a private school is related to his constant "going to law," he wants Tom to become a lawyer. Mrs. Glegg (who represents the Dodson's way of thinking) is against Tulliver's decision to send Tom to a private school, and this generates the discord which culminates with Tulliver's downfall. Mrs. Glegg demands that Tulliver give back to her the money he owes her. Because he had lent some money to his brother-in-law, he goes to get this money at his sister's house, but in his kind heart he does not consent to bring ruin to his own sister in order to save himself from it.

Due to his constant law-suits (due to his desire to control his irrigation system) he loses the mill. Tulliver loses it after a "long-threatened" law-suit against Pivart, who owns some land up the river and wants to irrigate them. Tulliver thinks he can control the flow of water on the grounds that his family has been the owner of the lands of Dorlcote Mill for more than a century. He thinks he can beat Pivart in the same way he had previously beaten Dix, and he considers lawyer Wakem as an agent and the personification of the Devil. In his mania, he transfers the hate he feels for the lawyer to Wakem's son. He warns Tom to have as little to do with Philip (Wakem's son) as possible at school.

As a consequence of the loss of the mill, Tom and Maggie have to leave school and start working. Tulliver does not leave the mill after he loses it. Since he is ruined, he starts working for Wakem, who has bought the mill, as a consequence of Mrs. Tulliver's blunder.

Tulliver's wrath against the lawyer increases to a point that he attacks Wakem physically and soon after Tulliver dies. Tom also shares his father's wrath toward Wakem and also attacks Philip and forbids Maggie to ever see him again.

After Tulliver's death, Tom and Maggie have to leave the mill. Maggie goes as a teacher to a boarding school, and Tom works under his uncle to pay his father's debt, and to recover the mill. When Maggie comes back to Lucy's house, she cannot help falling in love with Stephen who is engaged to Lucy. Thus Philip's forebodings come true. As he had told Maggie, her self-renunciation (trying to control her emotions as Tulliver previously tried to control the uncontrollable) would lead to harm.

Lucy planned a boat trip so that Maggie could be alone with Philip and maybe give up her idea of going away for a job and make plans for a probable future marriage with him. But Philip, who seems to be aware of the attraction between Stephen and Maggie, is too sick to come. Ironically, Maggie is left alone with Stephen in the boat trip and is driven along the river by Stephen instead of Philip till they have passed the nearby town. When Maggie notices that, it is too late. There is no seduction, but in Maggie's masochism, she feels guilt. The boat trip makes public a feeling that Maggie tried to hide, because she never consciously agreed to accept Stephen and harm Lucy's and Philip's feelings. She goes back to St. Oggs and in spite of being forgiven by Lucy and Philip, she is not forgiven by Tom and is also rejected by St. Oggs' society. Also Stephen's insistence and nearness make her conflict intensify; and then comes the flood, which is symbolical of Maggie's uncontrollable emotions that merge with her self-renunciation. The flood answers to her wish to go back to the past, and it brings the novel to its apocalyptic end.

This novel deals basically with the theme of education of two "unmodifiable" characters, Tom and Maggie. It is an analysis of their relationship and of their early experience in a conflicting world and the influence of this atmosphere of conflict on their character formation. Tom's denial of love contrasts with Maggie's need of love. In

his masculinity, he makes her feel inferior to him and in awe of his superiority. Because he is punitive, and like a father to her, she takes refuge in her dream world.

Tom's rabbits, the jam tart, Lucy's arrival, are causes for division between brother and sister. Tom had asked Maggie to raise some rabbits while he was away at school, but Maggie forgot to take care of them and they died. Tom's reprimands are necessary at that time, but later on when he rebukes her because she eats the jam tart, that she had previously offered him, he is being partial and unjust. Maggie keeps the sense of unmerited reproach, since she can recognize that she is naughty towards her mother but never toward Tom.

When Lucy comes to visit them, Tom forgets about Maggie and only pays attention to Lucy. Tom's attitude toward her makes Maggie throw Lucy into the mud. As a consequence she runs away from home to the gypsies, afraid to face punishment. When she repents and comes back, instead of being punished, it is Tom who is reprimanded by their father. These incidents contribute to Maggie's increasing sense of guilt. Maggie does not learn from her experience because when she should be punished (Lucy's incident), she is not, and when she does not deserve to be punished (the jam tart), she is. These situations contribute to the psychological flaw in her character, the development of the self-renouncing side of her nature, because she is afraid to rely on her emotional side. This conflict is going to intensify itself later on and results in a succession of ups and downs in her outward struggles.

Maggie's character is determined by these early experiences. The sense of irrevocableness of her deeds contrasts with Tom's instinct of discernment and his perception of Maggie's mistakes, which predominates over thought or feelings and make him frequently disapprove of her.

In accordance with George Eliot's moral determinism, the truth of Maggie's nature has to appear. The emotional side of her nature is, as

such, symbolically related to the river imagery. The river is also present as the symbol of an angry father, a God or Destiny. And Love and Death in the water is also symbolic of a religious revival. The river is also the symbol of a mysterious cyclical process.

Due to Maggie's religious conversion to Thomas à Kempis, she becomes more and more reduced to passivity. This passivity and self-renunciation lead her to an unresolvable conflict, because Maggie's nature is an emotional and lively one. The sharp contrast with Maggie's childhood when she reacts like a rebel is made more salient by Maggie's passivity in the last scene, when she thinks she is acting (going to rescue Tom) but in fact she is being led by the river.

5.1 - The Mill on the Floss: Tragic Inner Conflict

The starting point for locating the conflicts between Tom and Maggie, Tom, Maggie and Philip, and Maggie, Lucy, Philip and Stephen is to determine the conflict that exists in Maggie herself. First of all, this is the story of Maggie's rejection because she does not play according to the rules of society; she is led by emotion, she makes mistakes, repents, becomes penitent, and finally looks forward to being accepted back by society (or by her brother).

The childhood conflicts between Maggie and her mother, and between Maggie and the Dodsons, illustrate the beginning of her troubles. She rebels against their values and takes refuge in the world of dreams. When Maggie quarrels with her mother, she goes to the attic and avenges herself on the wooden doll. Later on this conflict is broadened. Since her father is always on her side, he takes her side against her aunts. Tom stands between approval and disapproval, takes a neutral position, which is in accordance with his philosophy that everyone should suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing. When he does something wrongly, he

is conscious of his error, but he keeps doing it and is ready to suffer punishment. Once he has made up his mind, he does not change it and he favours punishment. Maggie, on the contrary, only becomes conscious of the extent of her wrongdoings when she suffers the repressive measures imposed by society. When she does something wicked, she is always driven by passion and she simultaneously repents. She acts by impulse without thinking about punishment. She does not act according to reason as Tom does, but according to intuition, emotion and heart.

When Maggie follows her father's advice and cuts her hair short, she wants to feel approved by Tom. Since she is not secure of his position, she is not able to "brave the mockery and derision of aunts and uncles."⁴ Tulliver's position favouring Maggie brings about the conflict between himself and Mrs. Glegg, which culminates with his bankruptcy and death.

The conflict between brother and sister is progressively intensified when Maggie's feelings of guilt and her diffidence come as a consequence of her impulsive actions. When they go to Garum Firs, Maggie is made sure of Tom's position. He forsakes her for their cousin Lucy, and as a consequence Maggie throws Lucy in the mud. These childhood events illustrate quite well that conflict that grows in Maggie, and are foreshadowings of later events. As a little girl, Maggie is able to assault Lucy, but when she gets older, in a similar situation, she prefers, figuratively speaking, to throw herself in the mud.

The gypsy incident illustrates a loss of innocence; it is the beginning of the end of her childhood day-dreaming. She runs away to the gypsies and they appear to her as they actually are. She repents, goes back to her father, and becomes conscious of her error, not because she is punished as she should have been, but because Tom and her mother are reprimanded by her father while she is not. Her father's

leniency, contrasted with Tom's strictness, results in Maggie's unbalanced emotional growth.

Since Maggie is a tragic heroine, she has a tragic flaw. She does not learn how to deal with her emotions. She grows intellectually, but she does not grow emotionally. Maggie's emotional growth is hindered by the world of conflicts in which she has developed. These conflicts take shape in Tom's disapproval of Maggie while he withholds love from her. Since Maggie's need of being approved by Tom (society) is never satisfied, her conflict is never solved. Her full growth would correspond to the complete harmony between her inner self and the external world. Maggie never reaches this harmony, except when her conflict ends by death.

Tulliver loses his law-suit, and Tom and Maggie begin "their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by unremembered cares."⁵

Tulliver's loss of the mill is a direct cause of Maggie's self-renunciation and lack of emotional growth. Her readings (or misreadings) of Thomas à Kempis, develop her feelings of submission and dependence to such an extreme that Maggie becomes inwardly directed. She becomes submissive to the point of being compared with "a bit of furniture, on which Mrs. Tulliver could bestow her anxiety and pride."⁶ There is a reversal of situation when Tom and Maggie assume their parents' roles. They are pushed into it by Tulliver's place, and he "shows himself dominant"⁷ over Maggie's impulsive nature.

The loss of the mill illustrates quite well the opposition between Maggie's former world of dreams and her later world of suffering. Maggie tries to make up her father's loss by self-renunciation and love. She takes her father's side against her mother's complainings (and aunts) and she wants to make sure that Tom is on her side. But she gradually loses her father who grows isolated in sullen uncommunicativeness. Maggie

takes refuge in religion, while her father and Tom become identified in their desire to repay their debt and in their desire for vengeance.

Tulliver even forces Tom to swear vengeance in the family Bible,

Write as your father, Edward Tulliver, took service under John Wakem, the man as had helped to ruin him, because I'd promised my wife to make her what amends I could for her trouble, and because I wanted to die in th' old place where I was born and my father was born. But that i' the right words--you know how--and then write, as I don't forgive Wakem, for all that; and for all'll serve him honest, I wish evil may befall him. Write that.

Now write, write as you'll remember what Wakem's done to your father, and you'll make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes. And sign your name, Thomas Tulliver.⁸

Maggie's noble nature is shown in her lifelong friendship with Philip Wakem, the lawyer's crippled son: when she resists and reproaches the Tullivers' diabolical hatred of Wakem. They became friends when Philip was Tom's school fellow. Seen through Tom's eyes, Philip was simply a hump-back, although "the deformity of Philip's spine was not a congenital hump . . . but the result of an accident in infancy."⁹ Tom and Maggie suffer the consequences of this hatred. According to the narrator, Tom and Maggie are "tied by the strong fibres of their hearts, to the oppressive narrowness of these emmetlike Dodsons and Tullivers, but it is necessary that we feel it, and how this narrowness acted on their lives."¹⁰

While Tom is worried only about the material side of the problem, following his steady purpose of recovering the mill, and struggling for self-assertion in the business world, Maggie looks for spiritual guidance. Maggie's refuge in religion results from her loneliness, dread, and suffering. Maggie sees that "no dream world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation for this hard real life: the unhappy father . . . the cruel sense that Tom didn't mind what she thought or felt."¹¹

While Maggie's life struggle is within her soul, Tom has a more substantial struggle. He is more likely to be a winner than Maggie, although he has to give up his personal inclinations and "his strong

appetites for pleasure . . . his practical shrewdness told him that the means of such achievements could only lie for him in present self-denial." But Tom has definite purposes in life, "Tom's strong will bound together his integrity, his pride, his family regrets and his personal ambition."¹² Tom's character is in unity with itself, but he is also influenced by opposite feelings, such as his criticism of the rashness and imprudence of his father. Maggie's character, on the contrary, is not at unity with itself. Because of her intense nature and passionate character, submission and dependence are self-torture to her.

Also Maggie is not bound to Tom's promise of vengeance. While Tom's character becomes stronger by self-denial, Maggie's character becomes weaker, because of her conflicting feelings of resentment and affection, mingled with awe and admiration of Tom's firmer and more effective character. Maggie has to find a way in which she can live well in the world of suffering which follows Tulliver's ruin. She finds a way out in self-renunciation. But according to her character, she carries her self-renunciation to a kind of fanaticism, "I may not keep anything I used to love when a child. The books went; and Tom is different--and my father. It is like death."¹³ Maggie is even wrong about the sense of the word "renunciation":

She had not perceived--how could she until she lived longer--the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings: that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and in ecstasy, because she had found the key to it.¹⁴

Resignation for her means inward peace and happiness. Philip opens her eyes to the fact that resignation really means "pain that is not allayed."¹⁵ It is true that Maggie suffers very much from her father's change as well as Tom's, mainly in their disinclination to confidence, and it is also true that, intuitively, she becomes submissive in order to avoid conflict. That is why self-renunciation connotes for Maggie inward peace as well as repressed emotions. By self-renunciation,

Maggie becomes passive and weak: she becomes in awe of Tom and "the dread that her father, should add to his present misfortunes the wretchedness of doing something irretrievably disgraceful."¹⁶

When Maggie meets Philip in the Red Deeps, she is anxious to find a compensation for her dull life, since her emotional side opposes the ascetic way of life. She does not yield easily to the temptation to meet Philip. Also, she does not want to assume the responsibility to meet him openly, going against Tulliver's feelings towards Wakem and his son. Philip wins her resistance by means of sublimation; he offers her books, music and art as a way of compensation. Later on, Philip makes more explicit his love for Maggie, who is led by her impulsive nature to promise that she will keep faithful to him.

When Tom discovers that Maggie has been meeting Philip, he makes her swear over the family Bible that she will never meet Philip again, and attacks Philip physically. Maggie shows her weakness in this scene because she is incapable of reacting against Tom's iniquitous act. She even feels relieved because her affair is interrupted and the conflict between herself and the outside is temporarily resolved.

The sight of Philip when he appears at the mill with his father, who is now its owner, brings back to Maggie the memory of the old school days and makes her submerged conflict surface. The meetings with Philip in the Red Deeps make evident the two opposite sides of Maggie, the emotional side opposing the ascetic.

She meets him in the Red Deeps, "while she looked up at the old fir-trees and thought that those broken ends of branches were the records of past storms which had only made the red stems soar higher."¹⁷ The Red Deeps is then described as an allegorical landscape and shows Maggie as a religious ascetic, one who allegorically meditates about the effect of past storms on the branches of old trees. This stoicism gives place to a quite different Maggie, who is shown as a passionate

girl, and this trait of her character is echoed in the images of the landscape as well as in Maggie's pleasure at being there.

. . . it had the charm for her which any broken ground, any mimic rock and ravine have for the eyes that rest habitually on the level especially in the summer when she could sit on a grassy hollow under the shadow of a branching ash. . . .¹⁸

Even in Eliot's physical escription of Maggie, the religious stoical elements of her character are put forward in contrast to her sexual self. She has a "slow, resigned sadness of the glance, from which all search and unrest seem to have departed," but "the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and rounded, the full lips are red."¹⁹

Maggie's self-renunciation (and the consequent passivity that results from the stoical acceptance of her lot) as well as her deterministic belief that her lot has been traced beforehand, does not coincide with Philip's belief that we are free to will, "there are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them."²⁰ George Eliot's humanism is made evident in Philip's idealism. Philip is really the spokesman for an ethic of learning through conflict, and seems to be the moral touchstone of the book. According to this ethic, Maggie's inward impulses, which correspond to her need for love and beauty, does not chime with her asceticism.

Maggie's asceticism is a way of conforming to her dreary, monotonous, empty, present life and contrasts with her yearnings for an excitement that would be present in a different kind of life; outward directed and lived in accordance with reality and not merely with books and waking dreams.

Philip's humanism would be a way of reconciling Maggie's past (with its petty family obstacles to her freedom) with the future. But because of Maggie's monomania, she remains tied to her past and has no future. Philip warns her that:

It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world

some day and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now will assault you like a savage appetite.

Philip's efforts to help Maggie imply, however, some double motives on his part, since he is trying to prevail over Tulliver's claims on Maggie by behaving like a lover and expecting Maggie to correspond to his feelings. Maggie's responsiveness to Philip's love is also ambiguous. When she means to follow reason, by recognizing that "we can be no more than friends," she gives way to feelings:

It was one of those dangerous moments when speech is at once sincere and deceptive, when feeling, rising high above its average depth, leaves flood-marks which are never reached again.²²

From the moment Maggie starts meeting Philip, she is afraid to face the responsibility of her action, because to be sincere with Philip is to be deceptive with her father. So Maggie's tragedy is a consequence not merely of "her culture of monomania" as Philip terms it, but also a consequence of inner conflict that results from the clash between her inward needs and external circumstances. Eliot intensifies Maggie's conflict by making Philip (whom she responds to spiritually) physically almost an impossibility as a future husband.

Maggie is afraid to hurt Philip's feelings, so, led by emotions, she pledges with him that they would "belong to each other--for always--whether we are apart or together."²³ Joan Bennett gives a quite appropriate explanation about Maggie's conflict: Maggie moves in circles because she does not act according to reason: "in Maggie's imagination she suffers with anticipation, always rushing extravagantly beyond immediate impression."²⁴

Like Maggie, Philip is also discontented with life, but he is not self-renouncing. He wishes he were like other men, "if he were he might get some distinction by mediocrity."²⁵ Philip sees the instability of Maggie's character and tells her that she must live with conflicts and mediate between extreme kinds of behaviour. But because of circumstances (family ties and its emotional conflicts), and because of

her inner conflict, she seems to find it impossible to achieve a balance between reason and heart. In this affair with Philip, Maggie shows her inability to control her emotions which is followed by her opposite attitude of passive resistance to Tom.

Maggie's moral conflict intensifies as she is launched into the social world of St. Oggs through Lucy's influence. The view of life within St. Oggs society is presented in an ironic tone that depicts Lucy and Stephen's relationship. Eliot's images reveal how artificial is their relationship, the opposite of Maggie's way of being. Lucy's complicated embroidery contrasts with Maggie's plain sewing, and Lucy's fondness for small animals and her charitable social engagements reveal her shallowness. Stephen is viewed as a social dandy, his superciliousness, indifference, and his patronizing attitudes contrast with Philip's simplicity and humbleness. Lucy's charity betrays the limited dimensions of her egoisms and far-sighted views, while Stephen's relationship with her reveals the extent of his self-centredness. Lucy's engagement to Stephen means to her climbing socially and involves no responsibility: She becomes submissive to Stephen's patronizing, as she had been in her childhood days to the Dodson's pattern of life.

Maggie enters this artificial world of Stephen and Lucy's, and music is the element that gives unity to the group formed by Maggie, Lucy, Stephen and Philip. Music is the element that awakens Maggie's emotional world, "it seems to infuse strength into my limbs, ideas into my brain, life seems to go on without effort when I am filled with music. At other times one is conscious of carrying a weight."²⁵ Music and the rush of conflicting feelings suggested by water imagery, reflect Maggie's passionate sensibility.

But Maggie does not rid herself of the past; the remembrance of past sorrows is a constant in her life and makes of it a mystery that attracts Stephen. As for Maggie, she feels Stephen as "an alluring

conscience. Also Lucy's "cunning" plans, which include besides her marriage with Stephen, Maggie and Philip's marriage, helps to create the incidents that culminate in Philip's hope of being loved by Maggie being transformed into his awareness of the love affair between Maggie and Stephen. This is what really prevents him from going on the boat trip. This trip is another of Lucy's blundering attempts to create an opportunity for Maggie and Philip to be alone.

At the same time Maggie intends to go away to find a job, she leads an intensive social life and is sorry to think of leaving this world. But these outward impulses of vanity and egoistic excitability are counteracted by her inward impulses of pity and devotedness to her early affections, represented in the persons of Tom, Philip and Lucy.

Tom disapproves strongly of Maggie's wishes to go away. he reflects the Dodson's views which hold that her desire to teach is demeaning:

Going into service was the expression by which the Dodson mind represented to itself the position of teacher or governess, and Maggie's return to that menial condition, now circumstances offered her more eligible prospects, was likely to be a sore point with all her relatives, besides Lucy.²⁹

In his harshness, Tom does not want Maggie to meet Philip at Lucy's house until Maggie tells him she has already given up thinking of Philip as a lover. Tom's harshness raises Maggie's spirit of resistance, but she soon relents, and her negative peace (her self-renunciation) appears once more as a result of her dread of alienation from her brother. Maggie acts childishly and her brother's goodness appears in the fashion of a pedagogue. Tom discerns the truth about Maggie's character, but his unsympathetic voice does not help Maggie at all. Both Tom and Philip speak with prophetic voices.

According to Tom, her flaw consists in her "perverse self-denial" and in her incapacity "to resist a thing she knows to be wrong."³⁰ Maggie allows herself to be scolded because she keeps her feelings of

inferiority from her early childhood, also, she cannot tell Tom of her feelings for Stephen and that her decision to find a situation is a way of running away from him and from her own feelings of guilt and self-denial. Maggie believes in her possibility of self-assertion, so she rebels against Tom's harsh words, that nevertheless express the crude and unsparing truth about Maggie's character:

You're always in extremes--you have no judgement and self-command; and yet you think you know best and will not be guided. I never feel certain about anything with you. At one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another you have no resolution to resist a thing you know to be wrong.³⁰

Following the passionate side of her nature, Maggie is led on the boat trip by Stephen instead of Philip, as Lucy had planned. She goes like a somnambulist:

Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance; it is the partial sleep of thought; it is the submergence of our own personality to another.³¹

This boat trip is symbolic of the strong sexual attraction that draws them together. As soon as Stephen declares his intention of marrying her, and she has to face the evidence of the facts (that they have passed Lucreth, where they should have stopped), Maggie gets alarmed.

The flood of guilt that assaults her is made worse by Maggie's old jealousy of Lucy and by the fact that Lucy is generally accepted as Stephen's fiancée. But what contributes greatly to increase Maggie's guilt is her consciousness of that weakness in her nature (the passionate, sexual self) that prevents her from following what she had previously determined; that Stephen and she should give up each other and remain faithful to Lucy and Philip.

George Eliot seems to endorse the renunciation and the flood of guilt, as it is expressed in Maggie's monologue:

The irrevocable wrong that must blot her life had been committed; she had brought sorrow into the lives of others, into the lives that were knit up with hers by trust and love.³²

In Maggie's moral earnestness, it is Duty that gives her a clear guidance

in her present confused moral state. This boat scene serves as a catharsis or Maggie's recognition of "a fatal weakness" that exists in herself. The novelist seems to identify emotionally with Maggie, and at this point we could endorse Leavis's opinion that the emotional tone goes with the strong autobiographical element in the novel. In this yielding to guilt, Maggie shares with the novelist the same ethic of moral earnestness.

If Leavis is right in the recognition of "exalted enthusiasms" in the novel, his conclusion that Maggie does not achieve tragic recognition, and Bennett's view that Maggie is unconscious of her real error is not necessarily true. Maggie becomes fully aware of the extent of her guilt, and she is led to penitence and repentance. Symbolically, by facing Stephen, Maggie sees her own tragic fallacy, and Stephen's words clearly express the moral adequacy of the novel: "What is outward faithfulness? Would they have thanked us for anything so hollow as constancy without love?"³³

But Maggie does not answer him because she is following the opposite trend of her temperament: "Maggie has decided to suffer."³⁴ It is true that circumstances and accidents intensify Maggie's moral dilemma, but her psychological flaw also helps to create the appropriate climate for conflict. When Maggie and Stephen arrive at Mudport, Maggie tells Stephen that she is going back to St. Oggs to face alone the responsibility of their action. This fact illustrates quite well her masochist tendency. But in accordance to Eliot's humanism, by going back to St. Oggs, Maggie shows that she has free will and an intense desire to unify her divided self, "my whole soul has never consented, it does not consent now."³⁵ Since Maggie fully recognizes her own guilt in the face of events, she becomes penitent and "tries to change her passionate error into unselfish love."³⁶

She goes back and faces the derision of St. Oggs' society. She is quite different from the Maggie of the former childhood days when she was afraid to assume the responsibility for her mistakes, and she now comes closer to Thomas à Kempis doctrine of self-renunciation, being sincerely penitent without egoism.

After Maggie leaves Stephen, she goes back to Tom for forgiveness; she is rejected once more, for Tom's mind, which is very narrow, "as set on the expectation of the worst that could happen: not death, but disgrace."³⁷

The letter Stephen writes to innocent Maggie is not enough because in accordance to Public opinion, Maggie had returned without a trousseau, without a husband, in the degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead."³⁸ Even Dr. Kenn, who has a long experience of suffering, is unable to help her. He feels that:

The persons who are the most incapable of a conscious struggle such as yours are precisely those who will be likely to shrink from you because they will not believe in your struggle.³⁹

External pressures are too strong; harsh judgements and the punishment inflicted on her when she confronts St. Oggs' society, only contribute to weaken and unbalance her nature--she becomes more passive and selfless. Formerly, Maggie does not accept Dr. Kenn's advice to leave St. Oggs because she does not want to be "a wanderer cut off from her past." But the pressures of public opinion (represented by "the world's wife"), which is too fond of gossip and malice, intensify until Dr. Kenn advises Maggie once more to leave St. Oggs for a time. By then, Maggie admits the possibility of "lightening the load to some other sufferers and so changing that passionate error into a new force of unselfish human love."⁴⁰

Now that Philip and Lucy have forgiven her, the letter from Stephen makes her feel as if temptation had just begun. Formerly striving to have patience so that she can rebuild her future, now Maggie has to

struggle against the temptation to write to Stephen to come. When Maggie starts brooding over a probable future, Stephen's insistence (which brings out the possibility of renewed conflict), immediately raises her longing to go back into the past:

It came with the memories that no passion could long quench; the long past came back to her and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve.⁴¹

This longing corresponds to her yearning for a unified self, which in Maggie's case seems to be utopian, at least at the present stage of society. This split self can only be unified symbolically by death and rebirth. Stephen's tempting letter arrives on the third day in which Maggie has been shut up from the world. This last scene before the flood seems like the Atonement of Christ.

Maggie succeeds in demonstrating the nobility of character at least to those who have feelings and who understand her suffering, but she does not succeed in resolving her inner conflict. The flood comes not as "a deus ex machina . . . an appearance of an arbitrary concluding rush" as Barbara Hardy concludes, since the flood is present from the beginning of the book in water imagery, in Philip's forebodings, in Maggie's dream, in the mythical legend of St. Oggs, in the deterministic image of the river as Maggie's fate, in Maggie's desire to be led by the flood and lose consciousness. The flood also has a sexual sense as well as the sense of life flux, of death and rebirth. In this religious imagery of death and rebirth is implied the novelist's belief in the education of the race.

Although the novel has a wish-fulfilling end, we disagree with Joan Bennett's conclusion that the end is "a dishonest contrivance" after a serious naturalistic novel. It has a wish-fulfilling end because Maggie is led by the flooding river for the second time, she returns to Tom and as in her fantasy, rescues her brother:

It was not until Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water--he face to face with Maggie--that the full meaning of

what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force--it was such a new revelation to this spirit of the depths in life that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear.⁴²

Now that Tom recognizes his narrowness of mind, Maggie feels "that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain."⁴³ But the novel answers to a query George Eliot raised in Mr. Gilfil's Love Story about the possibilities of the man of feeling in the present day society. The pessimistic tone that pervades Maggie's conflict is balanced by the possibility of the education of feelings (especially of those who are directly involved with Tom and Maggie's tragedy), and in Philip's case, Philip represents the man of feelings, Maggie continues to be an inspiration "that seemed to hover like a revisiting spirit."⁴⁴

Accidents and circumstances plot against Maggie's resolutions. She moves in circles. As soon as she decides to leave St. Oggs and look for a job, first of all Tom opposes her decision, then the incident of the boat trip occurs, which makes Maggie decide to return to St. Oggs. There are many circumstances that oppose her resolution and contribute to make her more and more passive while her conflict intensifies. Society's final rejection contributes decisively to Maggie's tragedy, since she does not want to be an outcast. The flooding river comes as the result of the intensification of conflict and as an escape, since Maggie has always been trying to escape from a moral dilemma. The novel ends in a circle that shows Maggie's actions in accordance with feeling and not reason. This circle closes in Maggie's desire to go back to the past.

George Eliot shows the intensification of Maggie's emotional conflict, which results from a tragic heritage. Maggie's flaw (like her father's) is her incapacity to deal with emotions. Her conflict with the outside world, which grows to tragic dimensions, results from inner conflict. Although Maggie is an essentially noble character, Tom's rejection and unforgiveness and Stephen's insistence do not help her find

an escape from the present moral dilemma, except by going back into the past.

Eliot's approach to the novel is humanistic in its implied criticism of society's artificial values and in its approach to the novel as Bildungsroman, when the novelist shows Maggie's lack of emotional growth both because of the clash of individual's aim versus society's prejudices and because of Maggie's psychological incapacity to grow as a unified human being.

6. SUMMING UP

George Eliot is at the same time a preacher and an artist and her world view results from the religious and ethical clash of doctrines: Calvinism versus Wesleyanism, and Utilitarianism versus Humanism. In the Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, the preacher is more evident than the artist, while in The Mill on the Floss, the preacher gives place to the artist in the subjective and romantic approach to character.

Eliot focusses on the education of the individual and the protagonist's moral growth is analysed in the light of the social implications of his actions. These actions are viewed as being more or less determined proportionately to his awareness of his moral weakness. The less conscious the protagonist is, the more fated he will be, and vice versa. But the artist in Eliot does not believe in the actions of an implacable destiny, as is shown in The Mill on the Floss, where the artist prevails, and employs a humanistic approach to the character's inner conflict. But her identification with suffering humanity does not exclude her moral judgement--Maggie's conflict results from error--since she does not manage to keep a balance between reason and heart. In the same way, in Adam Bede, Hetty's wandering is the wandering of an outcast, not just the wandering of a suffering soul--since Hetty's conflict results from sin and guilt.

Within the theme of moral growth through conflict, Eliot shows that although man is basically selfish, he can outgrow this egoism by the education of feelings achieved through a "religious" revival. By focussing on this moral vision of life, in Adam Bede and in the "scenes", she tries to awaken the reader's consciousness to the moral reality of life.

In the "scenes", she takes a sociological approach to the theme of moral growth, and each short story illustrates the individual and social improvement towards an altruistic ethic of love and fellow-feeling. These stories are basically didactic and usually end happily with the positivist approach to the theme of human growth through suffering.

The novelist presents Amos Barton as a commonplace and inarticulate character, who believes he is superior to everyone. Through an ironic but sympathetic approach to Amos's flaws, the novelist reveals the social implications of his blunders, that result from his many shortcomings. But Amos learns through experience and suffering, and the pathos of Milly's death and Amos's suffering (his repentance and recognition of his former harshness), awake the feelings of sympathy and fellowship in the small community of Shepperton. The sharp contrast the novelist draws between Milly and Amos Barton illustrates the novelist's belief in the historical development of mankind, which is paralleled by the moral growth of the individual. Amos is a good example of inarticulateness, since he has the opinion but does not have the will.

The characters in the "scenes" are deterministically fated and their conflicts are mainly conflicts of conscience, as we find in Catarina's confession of guilt in Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, and in Mr. Tryan's and Janet's mutual confession of sin and guilt.

Janet's recovery from alcoholism, her religious conversion to Evangelicalism, the suggestion of a love affair between Tryan and Janet and Tryan's death are the main incidents that focus and intensify the emotional tone of the novella and its melodramatic ending results from the author's anxiety to render an edifying moral impression.

Although Janet is also inarticulate--and all protagonists in the novels are inarticulate, in the sense that they can only communicate their conflict at the moment of catharsis or recognition--she is a

"naturally" good character and serves as an example for Eliot's doctrine of love and sympathy.

Since the simple man is incapable of tragic response, the novelist subsequently moves away from the thematic emphasis on the ordinariness of her heroes, which gives little or no scope for pathos or violent crisis. The deterministic approach to character, showing man's everyday life and his shortcomings, was not enough to create the necessary dramatic tone which Lewes and George Eliot claimed to be essential in the novel. The main protagonists in the scenes run the risk of facing tragedy because of their inability to communicate with other men. Dramatic presentation, which is an aesthetic device for intensification of feelings, is restricted in the "scenes" to the pathos of some melodramatic scenes, while in Adam Bede, Hetty's drama and the psychological analysis of character, help to disclose the moral truth of George Eliot's fictional world.

Adam Bede (who is not an average man like Amos Barton), has the necessary awareness of his flaws that permit him to recognize his hardness and the lack of understanding between himself and his relatives. Unlike Amos Barton, Adam Bede is a matter-of-fact man, but both of them lack fellow-feeling.

The process of education becomes more evident in Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. The protagonists learn the lesson of human solidarity and the effects of this process of education are revealed in their altruism (after the recognition of sin there is a change in conduct). At the climax of each novel (Hetty's confession of her crime and Maggie's monologue on the boat), there is the recognition of the character's flaw, followed by penitence and final redemption through suffering.

The author focusses on the social implications of the private lives of the character, which introduces the actions of an obstrusive destiny. Adam's catharsis acts as a test of his moral values, and he

undergoes a religious conversion (to Dinah's religion of the heart, since Dinah's Methodism transforms itself--she becomes less spiritual and more earthly). After Adam's catharsis, there follows the recognition of his flaw, and conciliation. We might say that Adam is the adequate character for George Eliot's ideal of redemption. He is an understated hero and a Carlylean example of the ethic of work. His conversion or the recognition of his flaw and final redemption is part of the Puritan ethic, since Adam is the spokesman for the Calvinist ethic of work. Although Eliot decries didacticism, Adam Bede is a didactic character who knows that the private values overlap with the social values, and who answers to a desire for social integration. Society is a positive example and altruism is the kind of sentiment that fits with Adam's ethic of work.

In The Mill on the Floss, the two main characters' early affective ties and the conflict of their childhood are reflected in their final tragedy, after Maggie is rejected by a dehumanized society. In The Mill on the Floss, the reader has an intuitive understanding of the life of feelings. The importance of Maggie's emotional attachment of Philip--he is her spiritual brother--is directly related to Tom's recovery of the mill, since it is through Philip's love for Maggie that Wakem agrees to sell the mill back to Tom. While in Adam Bede she employs a rationalistic approach to the character's moral dilemma, The Mill on the Floss is an essentially intuitive novel.

Maggie's process of education does not finish after recognition and penitence; she has to struggle against external pressures and inner conflict because her moral and psychological dilemma is not resolved. Maggie's intelligence and sensitiveness, and her moral earnestness are sufficient to make her understand the extent of her wrongdoing. After she recognizes her guilt, her struggle is a passive one, since she is trying to make amends for her error. By self-renunciation Maggie

tries to avoid becoming an outcast. Since Eliot's realism is moral, the worst thing that can befall a man is to break with one's past. But Maggie's is not only a moral problem, she also has a psychological problem, and the recognition that she has not resolved her conflict shows that she does not grow emotionally, only intellectually. As such, she does not become an integrated being.

The pathetic and melodramatic endings that recur in the early works are a consequence of the conflict between instinct and morality. In Adam Bede, Hetty's instinctive wandering contributes to the pathos of the last scene, when she goes back to the place of her crime, and is found sitting with a loaf of bread in her hands. At the same time, Hetty's tragedy has been romanticized and there is a consequent break in Eliot's naturalistic approach to character; the pathos of Hetty's final rescue and of her religious conversion results in "poetic justice" or ineffectual melodrama (in spite of poetic justice, Hetty is not reconciled), which goes against the novelist's successful, realistic portrayal of Hetty's wandering, which is rendered in accordance with Hetty's character and action. The ending of Hetty's trial does not agree with the novelist's moral realism.

Because Hetty is unconscious of the conflict between instincts and morality, determinism is the dominant feature of her experience. In contrast, Maggie is always conscious of this struggle that goes on within herself, and she is led to error because she does not control the emotional side of her nature. But she is free to will and she chooses to keep faithful to her early affections.

George Eliot moves away from religious determinism to humanism. This change in treatment reflects Eliot's life-experience, since she experienced a moral dilemma when she gave up Evangelicalism. As F. R. Leavis complains, in The Mill on the Floss, the novelist draws too much on her own emotions. Nevertheless, from the analysis of the novel, we

can conclude that the accurate study of Maggie's emotional extremes shows that Eliot deals with conflict and Maggie's subsequent mistakes almost like a psychologist. Eliot shows Maggie at odds with her time and place (moral conflict) and reveals Maggie's psychological conflict by showing that Maggie does not succeed in mastering her natural impulsiveness. So the criticism that the novelist does not distinguish Stephen's inadequacies is irrelevant, because Stephen's mere presence and final insistence serve to indicate a renewal of Maggie's conflict. It is necessary that Maggie receive his letter to show that her conflict is not resolved. Maggie's tragedy results from the intensification of conflict. The pictorial visualization of the protagonist's inner conflict, in the last scene of the flood, reveals Maggie's tragic self-renunciation and her tendency to martyrdom. Symbolically, the river is Maggie's fate, but Eliot humanistically implies that Maggie's tragedy results from her psychological problem.

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CHAPTER 1

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¹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

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¹⁷Willey, op. cit., pp. 226, 227.

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²⁷Ibid., p. 436.

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