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**SYMPATHY AND GENDER IN GEORGE ELIOT'S
THE MILL ON THE FLOSS AND W.M.
THACKERAY'S *VANITY FAIR***

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This MA thesis is concerned with the topic of sympathy and gender in the works of two Victorian novelists: W. M. Thackeray and George Eliot. The realist novel's ability of extending our sympathies was of considerable importance to the Victorians. It assisted in improving the novel's status in society, gradually rendering it a beneficial pastime. The main argument of the thesis is built around the idea that sympathy is not an 'innocent' emotion of fellow-feeling, but it is frequently influenced by dominant ideology. This thesis examines the ideology of gender and how it emerges through the encouragement of readers' sympathies with particular characters in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Vanity Fair*. The importance of the thesis lies mainly in the fact that sympathy is not a very widely studied topic, yet significant for the Victorians. The comparison between Thackeray and Eliot could also provide new insights about both, as the two are rarely studied jointly.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two main chapters and a conclusion. The introductory part provides an overview of the novels, briefly explains the relationship between Victorian gender ideology and sympathy, outlines the main sections of the work and their purposes. It also states the relevance of the narrator's gender and proposes that Thackeray's narrator is masculine, whereas Eliot's is generally feminine with tendencies to switch to a masculine voice.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the context and provides a theoretical framework for analysing sympathy. It consists of three larger sections. The first gives an overview of the main ideas governing Victorian understanding of gender. It focuses on the ideology of influence and separate spheres. The relationship of disability and gender will also be discussed. The second larger section deals with the changes in religion, science and economy that occurred in the 19th century. These changes caused much anxiety and provoked questions about the importance and purposes of humanity. One of the possible solutions was found in the creation of a 'religion of humanity' and a sense of something universally human. This was to be achieved through the extension of sympathy. The third section introduces the concept of sympathy, its position in literature and its relationship with ideology. Some ways of cultivating sympathy in readers are also pointed out.

The second chapter is devoted to a comparison of the two novels, relying on the theoretical framework and cultural context provided in the first part of the thesis. The analysis first deals with how sympathy is cultivated for certain central characters of the novels. In the following section, connections are made and sympathy is put in the context of middle class gender ideas.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
ABBREVIATIONS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
1. SYMPATHY AND GENDER	11
1.1. Gender in the Victorian Era.....	11
1.1.1 Gender and Disability	15
1.2. 19 th Century Humanism and Changes in Society.....	17
1.3. What is Sympathy?.....	23
1.3.1. Definitions of Sympathy and Related Concepts.....	23
1.3.2. Sympathy and Literature	24
1.3.3. Sympathy and Ideology	26
1.3.4. How the Reader's Sympathy is Invited	29
2. COMPARISION OF <i>THE MILL ON THE FLOSS</i> AND <i>VANITY FAIR</i> ...	31
2.1. Tom Tulliver and George Osborne	34
2.2. Amelia Sedley/Osborne and Maggie Tulliver.....	45
2.3. Major Dobbin and Philip Wakem	50
2.4. Sympathy in the Context of Gender Ideology.....	54
CONCLUSION	60
REFERENCES	63
RESÜMEE.....	66

ABBREVIATIONS

MOTF Eliot, George. 2002. *The Mill on the Floss*. London: Penguin Books.

VF Thackeray, W.M. 2001. *Vanity Fair*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

INTRODUCTION

Victorian culture was primarily a middle class culture and middle class values shaped its literary production. So too was the novel's function linked with its ability to invoke sympathy in its readers and encourage identification with those different from oneself. This sentiment is echoed in an oft-quoted statement of George Eliot (or Mary Anne Evans), according to which the purpose of fiction should lie in cultivating sympathy:

If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls: and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures. (Eliot to Charles Bray 5 July 1859, quoted in Anger 2001: 82)

Yet sympathy is often not merely a positive emotion of fellow-feeling. It also contains within it the dominant ideology and the objects of sympathy are often culturally determined (Jaffe 2000). The dominant ideology under focus here is that of gender. The analysis of these phenomena in two Victorian novels – W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* – shall be the subject of the thesis.

The Mill on the Floss was published in 1860, but it is set a few decades earlier, most probably in the 1820s. The novel focuses on the passionate and intelligent Maggie Tulliver, who struggles to adapt to the traditional feminine ideal, and her fraught relationship with her brother Tom, who possess the qualities of the traditional Victorian man: he is rational, values duty and justice. In contrast to Maggie, for whom the need to be loved and to love was dominant, Tom is unemotional and pragmatic, often unresponsive to Maggie's affection. The novel details their lives from childhood into adulthood, prominent are their financial struggles and Maggie's friendship with the sensitive, intellectual, 'hunchbacked' Philip Wakem, who is portrayed as the opposite of Tom. One of the novel's central themes is women's unequal education and the difficulty, if not impossibility, for a woman of intelligence and desires that go beyond the domestic sphere to find fulfilment and an appropriate place in life. Towards the end of the novel, Maggie is cast out from

society for having ‘eloped’ with the charismatic Stephen Guest and returned unmarried. Her brother Tom is also unable to forgive her. The novel concludes apocalyptically, with the deaths of Maggie and Tom in a flood on the River Floss. The flood symbolises their reunion, but it is also mercy shown to the defeated Maggie. Maggie’s struggles to find a place for herself were ultimately futile and the flood ‘saved’ her from a mundane life unsuited to her strengths and sensitivities.

While studying Eliot’s novel independently could certainly provide new insights to how she realised her own goals of cultivating sympathy, it seemed even more beneficial to compare her novel with *Vanity Fair*. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, published in 1847 is set approximately a decade before the events in *The Mill on the Floss*. Unlike Eliot’s high realism, which has some Romantic tendencies as well (Dolin 2005: 88-89), Thackeray’s novel is primarily a satire on the vain desires, hypocrisy and opportunism characteristic of high society. The novel’s anti-heroine is Becky Sharp, who is a manipulative, cunning young woman set on securing financial stability and social respectability for herself – things she does not have through birth. She is selfish, charming, insincere and intelligent. As the story unfolds, we see Becky climbing up on the social ladder through marriage, successful manipulations and financial deceptions, while her actions show a trend towards greater moral decay as the novel progresses.

An opposite of Becky’s is Amelia Sedley, who is a submissive, sweet and rather naive young woman. Amelia is deeply in love with George Osborne, whom she also marries, but George is emotionally distant and tires of Amelia. In many ways, parallels between the relationship of Maggie and Tom can be drawn, as both situations represent a sensitive woman’s unquestioned love and affection for a man who remains reserved and largely unresponsive. Maggie and Amelia are different, however, and they can be seen as the archetypes of the blond and sweet angel, and the dangerous passionate other. As

George dies at the Battle of Waterloo, Amelia raises their son alone, faces poverty and eventually marries her long-time devoted admirer William Dobbin. Similarly to *The Mill on the Floss*, there are no fully happy endings for any of the central characters in *Vanity Fair*.

Having provided a brief overview of the main themes and characters in the novels, the reasons for comparing these particular works might deserve closer attention as well. While Eliot is perhaps the most well-known 19th century speaker for the cultivation of sympathy through fiction, Thackeray's association with sympathy is less obvious. In the context of Victorian earnestness, satire was regarded with suspicion. It was elusive, whereas the readers and critics desired something definite, a clearer indication of where to channel their sympathies (Davis 2005: 305). Thackeray's work has also been characterised as cynical (e.g. in Davis 2005; or by his contemporary G. H. Lewes, quoted in Tillotson and Hawes 2003: 46), and *Vanity Fair* could be seen as offering little hope while outlining the various hypocrisies and delusions of human existence. Yet sympathy is not absent from *Vanity Fair*, even if it is challenged. Thackeray's novel is also not without its serious undertones and neither is *The Mill on the Floss* devoid of satire and irony. Similarities also exist in form. Both authors use omniscient narration and employ authorial intrusion in much the same way.

Furthermore, both novelists are known for being sympathetic to women and can be characterised by their awareness of women's harder lot in life, which makes the study of gender and sympathy particularly relevant. Thackeray and Eliot are also known as being difficult to interpret when it comes to attitudes towards the gender roles represented in their novels. For example, in his study of narrative voice in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, James Phelan (1990: 132-147) points out the tendency of the narrator to shift identities, including genders, which could lead to many different readings, as witnessed for example in Shaw

2005: 299-310. Phelan also stresses the inconsistency of Thackeray in exposing and criticising the patriarchal system. Tim Dolin (2005: 1-40) speaks of the contradictoriness of Eliot, asserting that Eliot was at the same time a conservative and an insurgent. Eliot saw the great need in society for reform and better opportunities for educating women (ibid.: 147), but she also believed, like many other Victorians (e.g. Ruskin), that men and women were made for different roles in life. This widely held belief was also supported by contemporary discoveries in science. Eliot believed that women's role was that of influence, and equated this with art, so if art was elevated, so was femininity (ibid.: 149).

In addition to the representation of gender, one cannot ignore the gender of the narrators, as it undoubtedly participates in the cultivation of sympathy and in its interaction with ideology. Thackeray's narrative style has been characterised as clearly masculine (Dowling 2001: 62, 67) and as gentlemanly (Tillotson and Hawes 2003: 14) and it is also the view subscribed to in this thesis. Eliot's narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* is more difficult to assign a gender. The reasons for Eliot's frequent use of the male narrative voice could be many. Among them her experience as a journalist.

While writing for periodicals was not uncommon among Victorian male novelists, Thackeray being a journalist also, then female journalists were rare and editors quite unheard of. In 1851, Eliot became the secret and unpaid editor of John Chapman's *Westminster Review* (Dolin 2005: 18), which was one of the three major quarterlies in Britain. It was a radical journal, rationalist in religious matters and supportive of reform, highly respected and aimed at a small educated upper class and upper middle class readership (ibid.: 91-92). This kind of higher journalism required the cultivation of a male narrative voice. For example, Harriet Martineau (quoted in Dolin 2005: 103) had confessed that she taught herself to write like a man in order to succeed as a journalist Eliot adopted the same masculine style when she was a journalist. One of the most well-known articles

published by her is titled 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1883). There she criticises the variety of novels written by women, which were currently available on the market. The article is a satire, speaking to the readers with the voice of an educated Victorian patriarch.

Returning to *The Mill on the Floss*, there are many indications of the narrator's masculinity. Eliot writes, for example of 'our youth and manhood' (*MOTF* 2002: 68), and describes the 'beauty of a woman's arm' in a manner more characteristic of a male spectator (*ibid.*: 476). Yet there are also clear traces of feminine sensibilities and it seems possible to argue that the general tone of the novel remains feminine. However, the presence of a masculine voice is often marked by a more exaggerated presentation of the values of a patriarchal society, making such instances show Eliot's narrator as more masculine than the confidently masculine showman narrator of Thackeray's. That said, the gender of the narrators shall not be the focus of the thesis, yet it is essential to keep it in mind.

The thesis itself is divided into two chapters. The first provides the context and theoretical framework, whereas the second chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the construction of sympathy and its relation to gender ideology.

The first chapter of the thesis will consist of three larger sections. The first two of these will be devoted to providing a context for the two novels in terms of Victorian gender ideas and changes in society. Since Eliot's novel also features a disabled character in the person of Philip, disability and what it adds to gender will also be briefly touched upon. The second part of the first chapter will slowly begin to introduce the notion of sympathy by providing a general context. This part first outlines the abrupt changes Victorian society faced due to secularisation, industrialisation and the scientific turn. It suggests the presence of multiple anxieties about the importance and centrality of humanity and points out the

solutions offered. One of the solutions also being found in a sense of universal shared humanity and the role of sympathy to deepen that sense.

The nature of sympathy will be dealt with in the third part of the first chapter. There, several possible definitions of sympathy will be provided. This section will show the centrality of sympathy for a Victorian novelist. It will underline the limitations of sympathetic identification and show how sympathy is a cultural construct and therefore subject to ideology. Some methods of analysing how sympathy could be invoked in the reader will also be mentioned.

The second chapter of the thesis will be devoted to a detailed analysis of *Vanity Fair* and *The Mill on the Floss*, employing the theoretical information on sympathy, as well as relying on the cultural context provided in the first chapter. The intention is to reveal how sympathy is constructed in the novels and show how it is rarely a matter of harmless extension of fellow-feeling, but contains within it the dominant ideology of gender. The analysis of the two novels may also reveal a less unsympathetic and cynical Thackeray and show how the extension of sympathy can also fail in Eliot's novel.

1. SYMPATHY AND GENDER

1.1. Gender in the Victorian Era

Gender in the 19th century has been studied extensively and many keywords that are used to describe Victorian gender roles seem to have become part of common knowledge. This section does not aim to offer anything remarkably new, but merely to provide a background for the subsequent analysis of gender and sympathy. It should be kept in mind, of course, that what is presented here is the dominant ideology. In reality, more room for divergence and for different varieties of masculinities and femininities was possible.

Victorian society was a patriarchal one, patriarchy being founded on the idea of the male as a head of household with the exclusive right to property, with women and children in effect being regarded as belonging to the husband (Kent 2004: 94). Upon marriage, a woman's identity was subsumed in a man's, the wife thus losing her legal identity. As a result, women were unable to obtain a divorce until 1857. Such laws could be seen as an expression and extension of the middle class ideology of gender distinction. (Dolin 2005: 72)

Victorian understanding of gender came to rely heavily on the idea of separate spheres, which began to dominate in the 1830s when industrialisation and capitalism further divided the workplace from the home (Hartmann quoted in Booth 1992: 28). Capitalism encouraged aggressive competition and the morally corruptive nature of public life required a redemptive sphere, which was to be found in the tranquillity of the home (Dolin 2005: 142). Thus, men were associated with public life, whereas women's greater capacity for caring and empathy fitted them better for the domestic sphere. Public life was discouraged in women and popular conduct books warned of its harmful effects (ibid.: 73).

Charity was seen as a possible outlet, as it did not involve competition with men and dealt with social problems (Booth 1992: 42).

Discoveries in biological sciences also lent credence to the belief of the ultimate distinctness of the sexes not only in reproductive function but psychologically as well, and consequently reinforced the necessity for different roles. Women were not only suited for motherhood, but also better able to ‘preserve the most precious values of society’ (Dolin 2005: 143). Alison Booth (1992: 28) claims that Victorian ideology of influence set out to ‘redefine womanhood as a mission’. Dolin (2005: 142) also writes that Victorian women at their best came to be represented as desexualised ‘helpmates’ of men, responsible for the moral hope of society. The ideal 19th century woman was a Madonna, or an ‘angel in the house’. Dolin (2005: 71) further suggests that the ideology of influence aimed to change the legally subordinate and unequal position of women into a ‘cause for celebration’ and to grant women a sense of equality in the shared human effort. Without the redemptive sphere of the home, the feared alternative was a world of aggressive struggle and egotism. John Ruskin is possibly the most famous speaker for the ideology of influence. In his *Sesame and Lilies*, he outlines the distinct qualities and strengths of men and women and seems to advocate that both genders should complement each other, rather than be held in competition for superiority:

We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the “superiority” of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give. (Section 67)

Ruskin also supports better educational opportunities for women, as this is the only means through which they could truly complete men. *The Mill on the Floss* also deals with the unequal education of men and women, which tended to function as a way of confining women to the domestic sphere. Their limited intellectual (and other) achievements only

prepared women for marriage, where they could carry out their roles as wives, without any 'irritating' tendency or real capacity for questioning or protest. While 'separate spheres' was the dominant ideology, it was also often challenged. For example, John Stuart Mill (1879) has argued in his *On Liberty and Subjection of Women* that what was regarded as being innately feminine was a cultural construct, it was the 'result of forced repression in some directions' and 'unnatural stimulation in others'.

While the 'woman question' was part of the public debate in the Victorian era and beyond, there was no visible discussion of masculinity (Dowling 2001: 2). As an identity, it was too often neglected in the assumption of its homogeneity and unproblematic nature. In 20th century gender studies, the first wave feminists also tended to view masculinity as an unproblematic site of power, without any inner tensions of its own. In subsequent studies, it was revealed, however, that masculinity was not homogenous and it was more helpful to see it as a site of anxiety (ibid.: 4). In short, there did not only exist dominant codes of femininity, but also dominant codes of masculinity (ibid.), against which the Victorian man was forced to evaluate his success or failure as a 'proper man'.

Victorian masculinity was defined through control, discipline and reserve in opposition to excess and disorder (ibid.: 13). The Victorian male was thus identified by stoic silence and male identity was ideally expressed through actions, rather than words. It pointed to the male virtues of courage (daring to speak one's mind) and truthfulness (ibid.: 16-17). Furthermore, in addition to the demands of capitalism, one cannot ignore the impact of Victorian medievalism and the renewed interest in chivalric traditions on the understanding of what it meant to be a gentleman. The ideal Victorian gentleman was thus brave, courteous and protective of women and children, an idea disseminated through numerous stories of chivalry in history books, ballads, poems, novels etc. (Schwab 2005: 233).

The requirement of male reserve, as discussed by Dowling also implied that there was something that one needed to be reserved about, that something which could not easily be accepted into public discourse (2001: 18-19). While the 'fallen women' is a well-known Victorian social problem, for the Victorian male, a certain degree of fallenness was assumed to be natural. As Dowling (2001: 22) points out fidelity in marriage was an ideal for both, but it was generally agreed that it is harder for men to maintain. This is also reflected in law, as women could not obtain divorce on the grounds of the husband's infidelity alone, whereas a man was able to do so. Victorian ideology saw men as possessing a more bestial nature, but at the same time, in modern terms, it saw them as more fully human, with a greater variability in character permitted. (ibid.) A domestic woman was a childlike figure who had not experienced the darker side of the world (ibid.) and whose duty therefore lay in providing a redemptive sphere for the 'already fallen man'. Of course, the ideal guardian of the morals of society had to possess a gentle temperament, passion was seen as dangerous. It carried within it the Victorian fear of the beast within. If the beast was assumed to exist in a man, and required strength of character and the redemptive space of the home to keep it in control, then a passionate woman could not ensure such a climate. A passionate woman could provoke the beast to surface rather than tame it, since she was viewed as lacking the male resolve to repress her emotions.

Whereas the purely passionate woman was more often feared as an opposite of the 'angel', the already 'fallen' woman could also be a figure of pity, as seen in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* or in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The term 'fallen women' was most commonly used to refer to prostitutes, but also to any unmarried woman with sexual knowledge, and sometimes even any woman who failed to live up to middle class codes of morality. Fallen women posed a serious social problem for Victorian society and the middle class saw it as their duty to reform them. (Dolin 2005: 143)

1.1.1 Gender and Disability

As *The Mill on the Floss* also includes a disabled character who figures rather prominently in the novel, a brief overview of how disability and gender interact seems unavoidable. It might also be worth noting that in the context of this thesis, disability shall be viewed as a representational system or construction, rather than a medical condition.

Martha Stoddard Holmes (2004) also focuses on disability as a cultural construct in her book *Fictions of Affliction*. She points out that cultural narratives of disability often move along similar trajectories. For example, disability is generally seen in negative terms (ibid.: ix). It is almost exclusively regarded as a misfortune that can have no positive impact on a person's life. Furthermore, it is assumed of disability (as perhaps of any other type of difference) that such a difference must also involve suffering (ibid.: 10). Therefore, disabled people are often viewed as objects of compassion.

In the Victorian era, as Stoddard Holmes (2004: 4) convincingly argues, the representation of disability occurs in a strongly emotional manner. It is frequently associated with emotional excess, either in terms of representation (melodramatic) or the actual excess in the personality of the disabled character. This excess could take many forms. It could function for melodramatic effect (ibid.), but it may also be seen as facilitating a moral or emotional development in the main characters (Fratz 2008: 4-5). The latter is explored in greater detail by Deborah Mae Fratz (2008). She suggests that the disabled character's experience of social stigma makes them more attentive and sensitive to the difficulties faced by others, so that disabled people may function as mentors for more central characters (ibid.: 4-5, 20). However, their sympathy is rarely returned as the 'privileged' and non-disabled characters are often incapable of identifying with the disabled person (ibid.: 18).

In addition to facilitating the moral development of others, the disabled character was also often portrayed furthering somebody else's marriage or assisting them in their achievement of happiness (Stoddard Holmes 2004). As shown by Stoddard Holmes, the traditional Victorian marriage plot of courtship, love and marriage was commonly seen as a near-impossibility for the disabled person, whether a man or a woman. The discussions of whether disabled people should marry or reproduce figured in various non-literary and scientific publications. One of the central issues for the Victorians was, after all, heredity and the fear of the transmission of various impairments (ibid.: 7). It should also be added that the representation of disability in scientific literature was marked by similarly emotional language as employed in public discourse (ibid.: 25-26).

While the early Victorian works on disability and marriage depict disabled characters who desire to enter the marriage plot, but conclude by confirming the impossibility of it, later works also suggest some terms under which marriage could be achieved. Namely, a disabled woman of a 'meek and mild' disposition could be seen as marriageable, whereas the emotionally excessive disabled (and non-disabled) women were less desirable as wives. However, even if the disabled heroine follows the traditional Victorian plot of courtship and marriage, she still almost never becomes a biological parent. (Stoddard Holmes 2004)

Stoddard Holmes (2004: 94) also argues that the distinction between able and disabled could also be seen in terms of gender and what was supposed to be 'natural' to each gender. The disabled male was often characterised by his domesticity and financial dependence – qualities more commonly associated with women. As a result, a financially dependent man was in no position to marry. Alternatively, a disabled male could also be a beggar, who lacks a regular job and does not make money. A man of this type could also be seen as a threat to society. The disabled woman differs from non-disabled women

because of her working outside the home, her difficulties in marrying and having children as well as her own home. (ibid.) Therefore, one might suggest that the disabled man is feminized to some extent, due to his dependence on others, while the disabled woman becomes more masculine due to her greater need to manage independently. It should be added, however, that social class also has a major part to play here.

1.2. 19th Century Humanism and Changes in Society

Victorians, perhaps more so than any preceding generation, had to cope with great changes in the organisation of society, changes that had not been gradual, but rapid, disrupting previous modes of thinking and being. It was an era characterised by tensions and difficulties of accommodating the human aspect into a society of capitalism and machinery, a society increasingly lacking a grand supernatural purpose. This was further complicated by scientific developments, which could often be read as threats to the special position the human being had formerly held. One of the means of dealing with such tensions was through humanism and Christian morality, one of the manifestations of which can be seen in sympathy and the emphasis on what was universally human in a world marked by change.

By 1850s, England had become predominantly an urban country. Over a half of its population now lived in cities, whereas in the 1830s, it had been but a quarter. The chaotic expansion of cities and of industrial development led to many social problems. As the change had been so rapid and incomparable to anything in previous history, society lacked adequate solutions or responses to what they were now facing. There were no corresponding civic organisations to remedy the problems of housing, use of space, sanitation, sewage, ventilation, water supply, work conditions etc. (Davis 2002: 13-14). The society had to cope in human terms with what they had achieved materially (ibid.: 15).

This rapid change also led to an increased social consciousness. What the critics and thinkers of the age seemed to fear most was the creation of a more unfeeling humanity (ibid.: 26).

As Philip Davis (2002: 49) points out, one of the central problems was the difficulty of negotiating between what was good for the society in the long term and what was good for the individual. For example, Robert Williams (quoted in Davis 2002: 49) wrote that some theoretical economists seemed to ‘disregard the element of *time*’ when advocating their views – it seemed to go unnoticed that the short-term sacrifices for a future good of the nation were the entire lives of a generation thus sacrificed. There was constant tension and mismatch between the individual and the society. If we borrow an example from Davis’ book on the Victorians, Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) is torn between the desire to help the workers and the reluctance to prolong the strike (quoted in Davis 2002: 49). One is to do with the individual aspect, the other with the overall ‘greater good’. These doubts, it should not be forgotten, occurred in the background of the well-known Victorian self-confidence and faith in progress.

Similarly to a change from a rural to industrial society, there occurred a change from religious to secular ways of perceiving the world (Davis 2002: 55). A part of this shift was due to science and the ideas of Charles Darwin. There were those who did not find Darwin’s claims in the *Origin of the Species* to necessarily conflict with the idea of a God. It was suggested, for example by Robert Chambers, that God may not have created each individual species, but provided a mechanism for how they could evolve independently (ibid.: 65). Scientific discoveries did not only cast doubt on the existence of God, but also posed a threat to the special place humanity had held in the world. This effect can be seen not only through Darwin’s claims as to the origins of the human species, but also through the entire discourse on evolution as a process indifferent to and independent from human

valuation (ibid.: 75). If one considers the survival of the fittest idea, then that which survives or does not survive is neither morally good or bad. Thus, Darwinist ideas led sometimes to a rejection of meaning in the humanist sense (ibid.: 76).

One of the opponents of such a way of seeing the world was John Ruskin. These differing opinions of the humanist and the scientist carry much broader implications as well. Davis (2002: 79) writes of Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which gives a dispassionate argument that emotions were learnt and had a survival value. For Ruskin (quoted in Davis 2002: 79), on the other hand, human emotions were not an 'anthropomorphic fiction', but a part of inner reality – that the sight and smell of a rose was beautiful was a fact. In Ruskin's view, everything had its origins in human passion and hope (*Modern Painters*, vol. 5, pt. 9, ch. 1, para. 7). Whereas for Darwin (quoted in Davis 2002: 79-80), what he admired in the tail feathers of a pheasant was the same thing that attracted the female of the species. As a result of sexual selection 'beauty was a physical and not a spiritual factor' (*The Descent of Man* 1871, ch. 13). According to this scientific view, there was little real value in human emotion or human imagination for creating meaning.

Yet for Ruskin (quoted in Davis 2002: 80-81), the ideal synthesis would be to approach an object both as a scientist and an artist, to employ both reason and feeling to reach a more complete understanding. He was of course aware that a single human being can only add their understanding selectively and to a small part of the universe. Neither did he believe that human emotion could improve the object, but rather it could make it visible by giving it value. This addition of human emotion he distinguished from mere projection of one's own emotions (the pathetic fallacy) as well. In sum, the error Ruskin felt science was making was not caring for the human being at all, but only for the universe. For him, humanity is not something we ought to strive to transcend, as it will only destroy us in the

process (ibid.: 87). Herbert Spencer, on the other hand, believed that the function of science was to go beyond such everyday concrete experiences to more abstract laws and the admission of the existence of the inconceivable and unknowable (Davis 2002: 85) These examples here given are not dissimilar to the debates that occurred in regard to economic developments and industrialisation, where the individual and the human was often felt to be threatened by the impersonalisation of economic relations.

The developments in science also impacted those in religion. Victorian era was perhaps the last period in English history when religion still possessed considerable influence. Even though the 19th century was marked by gradual secularisation, religion was very much present not only among the believers, but the non-believers as well (Davis 2002: 100-101). For example, George Eliot herself was regarded as an atheist writer of religious novels (Dolin 2005: 183) and it is certainly more helpful to think of the Victorian age as one of religious doubt (Davis 2002). In addition, it was a time when the presence of religious heritage was more visible in secular thought than at any subsequent period. Victorian middle class ideology was largely founded on Christian morality and the inheritance of evangelicalism played no small role in it.

Evangelicalism had its roots in the second half of the 18th century. The name of the movement is derived from their commitment to spreading the Evangel or the Gospel. The aim of evangelicalism was to purify faith of all that was deemed unnecessary when communicating with God, such as ceremony and sacrament. (ibid.: 103) It also stressed the role of emotions in inspiring moral action and preaching was central to the movement (Knight & Mason 2006: 23). Evangelicalism saw absolute authority in the Bible, rather than in any institutionalised religious structure. It claimed that human nature was corrupt through the Fall into original sin and was therefore born into suffering. Evangelicals also emphasised the importance of individual adult conversion. (Davis 2002: 103-104)

The emotional emphasis on ‘individual inner seriousness’, which characterised evangelicalism, also reached Victorian secular thought. The first example of course is George Eliot herself, whose works are marked by the same realist seriousness inherited from the evangelicalism of her youth. The evangelical inheritance then was the extremely developed sense of individual conscience and earnestness. (ibid.: 104) Davis (2002: 104) suggests that this might be the result of the harsh evangelical discourse on the dangers of the Fall and the resulting necessity for self-discipline.

Evangelicalism also affected political thought. Because the evangelical God was a hard God, the world of economic suffering could be seen as man’s trial on earth. Charity was to be confined to the individual and spontaneous acts, state intervention was seen as wrong as it destroyed the necessity for self-help. Self-help was a Victorian idea of the ‘voluntary struggle in moral effort’ to secure one’s ‘salvation both on earth and in heaven’. (ibid.)

Evangelicalism lost a lot of its force by the 1830s, partly due to the inability of any fresh developments within the movement, but it had by this time seeped into the middle classes and made its mark. It had led to practices of ‘frugal economy, paternalistic discipline and self-help’. (ibid.: 105, 107) Even if it had fallen into disfavour by the time in which Thackeray and Eliot wrote their novels, an evident influence of evangelicalism on Victorian morality and the middle class moralising tendencies is apparent. There were of course other religious movements, like Tractarianism, but evangelicalism still seems to have had the greatest legacy on Victorian morality.

Towards mid-century the evangelical harshness was found wanting and was replaced by compassionate forgiveness and appreciation of humanity with its imperfections. There was a general shift towards incorporating human emotion and meaning within religion. For instance, Matthew Arnold argued for the necessity of reading

the Bible as a literary text with its many nuances rather than as anything to be approached scientifically (ibid.: 133). Against the puritan work ethic and gloom of evangelicalism, Arnold sees the need for adding to religion positive human emotion e.g. that which accompanies an achievement of having done a good deed (ibid.: 135). Religion was also viewed as something naturally present in human life that did not require any formal dogmas. It was not any formal belief, but the religious nature of human goodness, values and emotions. According to this Feuerbachian view, God was created out of human qualities, as human beings projected on God their own ideals (Dolin 2005: 24).

As secularisation became more pronounced, and yet linked with religion, this 'gentler' view of humanity also had its impact on Victorian culture and particularly the realist novel (Davis 2002: 148). It might be useful to retrace the reasons why religion was not abandoned but turned into a religion of morality. It has been suggested that due to the rapidity of changes and their unprecedented nature, the new secularised world was difficult for the Victorians to process without retreating to old terms and ideological certainties. Thus, a transitory half-religious Christian morality was created. John Stuart Mill (quoted in Davis 2002: 144) had written, for example, 'that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable'. The same belief has been expressed by Eliot (quoted in Dolin 2005: 175), and in her novels religion is turned into humanist realism.

This humanist realism and sympathy as one of its expression is also the focus of the present thesis. Sympathy in the realist novel can be associated with creating a sense of universal humanity. This kind of thinking also elevated the ordinary and made it significant (Dolin 2005: 87). Therefore, this type of humanism can be seen as a response to the doubts about human agency and importance, which sprang from the great changes in economy, religion and science.

1.3. What is Sympathy?

1.3.1. Definitions of Sympathy and Related Concepts

Before one can embark on a study of sympathy, the concept needs to be defined. It is by no means an easy task – not only because definitions in themselves are often hard to come by and subject to variations, but also because sympathy is closely related to several other terms, often showing a considerable overlap with them. The related concepts of empathy, compassion and pity shall figure in the analysis of the novels as well. However, sympathy has been preferred due in part to its relevance as a term for the Victorians, but more importantly as a result of its added moral dimension.

Oxford Dictionaries Online (ODO) defines sympathy firstly as a ‘feeling of pity or sorrow for someone else’s misfortune’, and secondly as an ‘understanding between people’ or a ‘common feeling’. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides some insight into older usages of the word. It defines sympathy as ‘the quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a *feeling similar or corresponding* to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling’ (italics mine). A further definition is also provided, according to which sympathy is a ‘feeling of compassion or commiseration’. The definition in OED seems closer to the 19th century understanding of sympathy, as it combines the characteristics of empathy (similar or corresponding feelings) and sympathy. Indeed, the word empathy only entered English language in the early 20th century, as a translation of the German word *Einfühlung*. For the purposes of this study, however, some distinction has to be made between these two closely related concepts.

Suzanne Keen (2007: 4) suggests that empathy can be seen as a precursor to sympathy. It is a ‘spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling’. Empathy is thus a mirroring of what one imagines the other person to be feeling. ODO also offers a similar definition, with empathy being seen as ‘an ability to understand and share the feelings of another’. Sympathy, on the other hand, is not only an ability to feel a corresponding emotion, but can be described as a reaction to that emotion. It is a feeling for another’s feeling rather than its reflection (Keen 2007: 4). Suzanne Keen (ibid.: 5) illustrates the distinction with the following examples:

Empathy:	Sympathy:
I feel what you feel.	I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings.
<i>I feel your pain.</i>	<i>I feel pity for your pain.</i>

She concludes that sympathy is therefore a ‘moral emotion’ (ibid.: 4). Rae Greiner takes this understanding even further and offers a definition of sympathy, with a focus on its role in literature. She writes that sympathy is a ‘mechanism of feeling-production’, it has the capacity to create feelings, but it is not a feeling in itself (Greiner 2009: 293).

1.3.2. Sympathy and Literature

Empathy has tended to be associated with females, but it is also a quality of high cultural value. An absence of empathy is generally labelled inhuman. One could think, for example, of the representation of violent criminals and their respective lack of empathy. (Keen 2007: 9-10) Given the cultural status of empathy and sympathy, it is not surprising that the novel’s ability to extend the reader’s sympathies was responsible for its improved position in 19th century society (ibid.: 38).

In the 18th century, the status of novel-reading was low. Novels were often feared and generally considered a waste of time. Reading novels was seen as a mere escape from reality and novels could be potentially misleading to the readers in terms of the 'actual' purposes of life. Novels dealt in sensations and could inspire 'dangerous passions'. (ibid.: 37) The dangers of the 'French novels' are well-documented in 19th century literature as well. Female readers were said to be particularly threatened by this pastime, as it could instil in them 'unrealistic' expectations of love and marriage (ibid.). This thinking continued in the Victorian era and was encouraged by evangelicalism and the censorship practices that characterised circulating libraries (esp. Mudie's) and publishing in general (ibid.: 38). However, in mid-century, the appearance of condition-of-England novels that dealt with social problems invoked a different view of the novel. The novel was no longer exclusively associated with stirring the reader's passions, but good novels could 'sway the readers' minds' instead. (ibid.)

This 'swaying' was best achieved through the cultivation of sympathy. George Eliot is most obviously associated with this practice as she clearly defined her aims and saw 'the extension of our sympathies' as the purpose of art. In her essay 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856) Eliot (quoted in Keen 2007: 54) writes that 'more is done towards linking the higher classes with lower' through art than 'by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations'. Art could 'extend our contact with fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot' (ibid.). Encouraging sympathetic identification may not have been of primary or equal importance to all novelists, but it was certainly an age where the need for and encouragement of sympathy figured prominently not only in literature but also in public discourse. It was common for reviewers to evaluate a work of fiction based on its success or failure to inspire sympathy (Keen 2007: 53). It was also not rare for the writer to be criticised for misdirecting the reader's sympathies towards such characters the

reviewers or readers deemed immoral, as was the case with Thomas Hardy's Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Roberts 1997: 91-92).

1.3.3. Sympathy and Ideology

Sympathy was also one of the tools through which the moral or ideological message of the novel could be expressed. Victorian middle class had its role to play in this, as it was their tastes that came to dominate 19th century cultural production, along with the respective ideologies of class or gender. Here it becomes necessary to look more closely at the concept of sympathy to see how it operates.

As was shown earlier, sympathy could be seen as incorporating two elements – empathy or sympathetic identification with the sufferer and a moral-emotional reaction to it. Audrey Jaffe (2000) writes of the limitations of sympathetic identification from an ideological perspective. She defines identification as the placement of the self in the position of the other and suggests that the identification of the reader with the object of sympathy is limited. Jaffe (2000) argues that the object of sympathy becomes a representation, a cultural image; it ceases to be an individual. Sympathy is thus a cultural construct. Jaffe (2000: 6) also suggests that a complete identification may be withheld due to a reluctance to do so, as identification with a beggar would pose a threat to the integrity of one's self image.

Jaffe (2000:7) argues that the expression of sympathy can also be seen as an act of self-definition. The middle class person is most commonly the one who is expected to perform this act. Victorian fiction is strongly associated with the middle class subject's status as spectator (ibid.: 8). Spectator is Jaffe's preferred term, which makes reference to the visuality and theatricality of Victorian fiction (e.g. Dickens' novels, *Vanity Fair*). It will be

used here synonymously with 'the reader'. Sympathy, representation and identity construction can thus be seen as interlinked, and the expression of sympathy in Victorian culture participates in the construction of middle class identities.

The middle class occupied a complicated position in the 19th century. On the one hand, it aspired to the upper class ideal, on the other hand it was haunted by fears of economic and social failure. Jaffe claims that the objects of Victorian sympathy are inseparable from Victorian middle class self-definition, because they embody to the Victorian reader the possibilities of their own decline (ibid.: 9). They reveal the fragility of respectable identities in an increasingly mobile society (ibid.), where the middle class self is positioned between the upper and lower levels of society and is defined in terms of rise and fall (ibid.: 12). To see the predominance of these ideas, one could think of the numerous Victorian novels that deal with middle class character's loss of social and financial status, or conversely the gain of social and financial status. In a capitalist system, one person's rise is connected to another's fall.

Jaffe argues that the middle class respectable subject encounters their 'social shadow' during sympathetic exchange (ibid.: 12). By withholding full identification, the middle class self and the respectability of the sympathetic subject finds confirmation through what it is not and what it fears to be. When sympathy is expressed, both the subject and object of it are substituted for cultural fantasies of what is desirable and ideal, and what signifies degradation or the undesirable.

Another important point to make regards the purpose of sympathy in Victorian era. In Victorian fiction, the term sympathy was used to describe a possible solution to social differences. It was seen as a way to alleviate such problems through stressing the sense of a shared, universal humanity. Jaffe (2000) points out, however, that what came to be regarded as common to all humanity concerns qualities that are the least political (in the

broadest sense of the word). In Jaffe's words, Victorian identity, which was inseparable from markers of class and one's place in society, redefines its most central features through sympathy as being but accessories in comparison to the shared universal human nature (ibid.: 15). The purpose of sympathy – perhaps paradoxically to its nature – is to eliminate representation and social inequality and reach a common ground.

Jaffe writes that during sympathetic exchange, there may occur identification in the context of common humanity, but at the same time, disidentification is also encouraged (ibid.: 12). She continues: 'Victorian objects of social sympathy thus convey both cultural value and its absence. For the subject desiring to align him or herself with such values, they represent an insurmountable distance from it.' (ibid.) Sympathy with particular social figures takes place as sympathy 'for and against images of cultural identity', the valued and the devalued identities (ibid.). While identification with what is regarded as more generally human (e.g. feeling of sadness at the death of one's child) can occur across a variety of social classes and statuses, this identification is always partial. For the middle class person, sympathy for a poor working class woman also carries with it a distance from the same object. Sympathy is then at once identification and self-definition against the other.

Whereas Jaffe focuses on sympathy and class, the same could be true for any other category through which difference is created. Hence, if we posit that the 'third person' in a sympathetic exchange is the dominant middle class identity, with its well-defined attitudes to gender, the analysis of how sympathy is created should provide some insights about how gender was understood. A study of gender through sympathy should then show the processes of 'self-definition' of the middle class male against various objects of compassion (women, the disabled man, the poor). In the context of this thesis, the self will be the narrator, more generally perhaps the narrative itself. The aim is to study the various

objects of sympathy and see what they reveal about the narrator's position on gender and how it affects the novel as a whole.

1.3.4. How the Reader's Sympathy is Invited

The nature and role of sympathy has been discussed at some length, but in order to carry out an analysis of the texts, it is also necessary to underline some of the mechanisms that are used to cultivate sympathy. These include knowledge and omniscience. It is believed that the reader's privileged knowledge of the characters inner life and of the full scope of the novel's world facilitates sympathetic moral judgements (Greiner 2009: 291). Rae Greiner writes about the relationship between knowledge, omniscience and sympathy, questioning the extent to which knowledge can invite the reader's sympathy.

As stated earlier, there are limitations to sympathetic identification. While Audrey Jaffe (2000) focuses on the cultural aspect, the disinclination and inability to identify with less privileged social groups, Greiner approaches it from a slightly different angle. She refers to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, an influential work for Victorian understanding of sympathy as well. Smith speaks of the inability of identifying with actual feelings and shows how we are only able to identify with their abstractions. Greiner (2009: 296-297) suggests that sympathy can thus be seen as an exercise of the imagination or a speculation. Since we do not have immediate access to other people's feelings, sympathy bridges that gap through speculations about another's possible condition (ibid.: 297). Drawing on Smith, Greiner states that the limitations of identification are necessary and that the prerequisite for sympathy is *not* knowing fully. She offers as an example a story of George Eliot's titled *The Lifted Veil*, where the narrator Latimer is able to see into the future and into other people's minds, but instead of encouraging sympathy, his unnatural

ability destroys his capacity of fellow-feeling and compassion (Greiner 2009: 305). The same sentiment is echoed in *Middlemarch* (2003: 185):

‘If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.’

Knowing ‘too much’ would thus be excruciating and unlikely to invoke sympathy.

Providing the reader with *necessary* knowledge to understand and sympathise is the task of the omniscient narrator. 19th century realist fiction often made use of omniscient narration, which also characterises Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*. Greiner (2009: 291) points out that omniscient narration is seen as encouraging sympathy by minimizing the distance between the reader and the characters by allowing the reader privileged knowledge. As shown earlier, there could be limitations to how far this knowledge can be taken without losing the reader’s sympathy (if inviting sympathy is seen as the purpose of a work, of course). Thus, it would be interesting to look at what is told to the reader and whether this new knowledge detracts from or adds to their sympathies. Greiner (2009: 293) also refers to the importance of time for understanding the cultivation of sympathy. She writes that ‘sympathy requires repeated effort’ (*ibid.*). It occurs in time, but it also must be sustained throughout the novel, and is therefore a slow process in spite of its effects being more fleeting (Greiner 2009: 295). Therefore, what shall be analysed in the second chapter of the thesis – among other features – is the repeated cultivation of sympathy in time and its relationship to the effects of privileged knowledge.

2. COMPARISON OF *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS* AND *VANITY FAIR*

George Eliot and W. M. Thackeray may not number among the writers in whom a seemingly natural, evident similarity existed, a similarity that would easily suggest a comparison. True, their narratorial techniques are often found to show a likeness and parallels have been drawn in various academic publications (e.g. Shaw 2005: 304). Yet in their choice of subject matter and artistic temperaments, much less that is suggestive of a fruitful comparison can be detected. Indeed, in a study of sympathy, Charles Dickens and his sincere idealism would have been a more obvious choice for a comparison with Eliot's moral seriousness. Nevertheless, it is surprising how alike the aims of Thackeray and Eliot were as to the nature and purposes of their art.

Both Eliot and Thackeray have expressed their understandings of the purposes of novelists and of truthfulness in realism. Thackeray states in his *Charity and Humour* (1911: 233) that he is only able to tell the truth as he sees it, owing to the partiality and imperfection of his vision. In his preface to *Pendennis* (quoted in Tillotson and Hawes 2003: 88-89), he also laments the fact that he is restricted in his portrayal of life by conventions of decorum. Eliot concurs with the former, acknowledging in *Adam Bede* (quoted in Dolin 2005: 81) the difficulties of an absolutely faithful representation of human life, stating that the mirror through which she sees the world is undoubtedly defective. Yet she seems slightly more invested than Thackeray in the effort of striving for as objective a portrayal as possible, comparing her situation to a witness in court who narrates her experience under an oath.

Eliot's commitment to the idea that the purpose of art is the extension of our sympathies has been indicated a few times already, yet little has been said of Thackeray's humanism. Eliot may indeed have been the spokesperson for the cultivation of sympathy in

fiction, but Thackeray's values are certainly not dissimilar. Quite the contrary, they show a close match with Eliot's.

Thackeray's ideas of the role of a novelist are illustrated in *Charity and Humour*, where he discusses 18th century English writers as well as his contemporary Dickens. In this text, he speaks of the role of humorists, or more generally novelists, and sees it in their 'mission of love and tenderness'. Thackeray writes that literature is able to educate the readers morally, provide them with amusement and increase their understanding of those around them. (1911: 217) He stresses the importance of fellow-feeling, pointing out his inability to love Swift, because the latter – in his view – bore hatred and contempt for the human race (1911: 222). He also makes the telling statement that 'the best humour is that which contains the most humanity' (1911: 220). It seems then possible to claim that Thackeray's humanism and appreciation of art's social and moral function show clear parallels with Eliot's values. Yet shared values may not lead to remarkably similar executions in art, or indeed, values and beliefs of any kind may be there in the writer's theoretical works, but not in his or her art. Thackeray's supposed cynicism and lack of faith in human nature which contemporary critics (e.g. Lewes quoted in Tillotson and Hawes 2003: 46) often found in *Vanity Fair* is well-known. Yet one cannot just dismiss these contradictions and simplistically claim that Thackeray did not practice what he preached. Inconsistent he may have been, but contradictions can unproblematically coexist, without one automatically excluding the other.

Thackeray clearly saw himself as both a moralist and a humorist. When commenting on *Vanity Fair*, he states that his purpose lay in exposing human nature as it was, its selfishness and hypocrisy, yet he adds that he also meant to *hint* at better things, things which he does not find becoming to stress too strongly (quoted in Tillotson and Hawes 2003: 50, italics mine). In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, we can thus look for the hints

first, hints of that which is valuable or deserving of sympathy. Eliot, we might argue, was focused on showing a more equal distribution of the positive and negative aspects of human nature. In *The Mill on the Floss* it is possible then to directly proceed to evaluating the division of narratorial sympathy.

However, due to the intricacy of the subject matter and the length of the novels, it does not seem feasible to undertake an analysis of the full novels as such, given the limited scope of an MA thesis as well. A suitable emphasis and a narrower angle of approach are needed. This is to be found in establishing pairs of central characters whose representation in terms of gender and sympathy will then be compared. The pairings are by no means arbitrary and will be illustrated subsequently. Firstly, it is perhaps not surprising that parallels can be drawn between George Osborne in *Vanity Fair* and Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Both are representatives of a fairly similar type of proud, egotistic, patriarchal masculinity. That parallels could be found between the masculinities of Major Dobbin and Philip Wakem is not unexpected either. Theirs is the moral strength of the novel, while both are to a lesser or greater extent disadvantaged due to their various physical ‘shortcomings’. The third pairing is perhaps the most controversial. Amelia and Maggie Tulliver seem to represent opposite types of femininity, but considering the plots they are involved in, and the centrality of love to the lives and self-definition of each, similarities do emerge. Their seeming opposition as the ‘angel’ and the dark ‘other’ is by no means as clear-cut as the differences in their physical appearances suggest, and this is also one of the intentions of the following analysis to reveal. The omission of Becky Sharp may appear surprising, but since Amelia was found more comparable to Maggie and the sympathy for Becky – if present – is very limited, it should be clear why a discussion of her is less relevant in the present thesis.

It should also be noted that given the serio-comic tone of Thackeray's narrative, the interpretation of *Vanity Fair* and its sympathies is probably more subject to the researcher's value system than the interpretation of Eliot's novel could be. The study of Thackeray's novel involves with it the necessity of detecting where the narrator is in earnest and where mocking, which is not always absolutely clear.

The analysis of the novels shall be carried out in two stages. In the first, cultivation of sympathy for the three pairs of characters will be discussed. The second part shall be devoted to putting these findings in the context of middle class gender ideology and seeing what this reveals about the attitudes to traditional gender roles.

2.1. Tom Tulliver and George Osborne

Philip Davis (2002: 389) writes that in creating *The Mill on the Floss* it was necessary for Eliot to 'split herself', so that she may be able to sympathise with both Tom and Maggie, while portraying their respective weaknesses and strengths. Eliot articulated her aims for her publisher as well. She wrote that her intention was 'the exhibition of the right on both sides' (quoted in Davis 2002: 389). Whether Eliot succeeds in this is one of the major points to be drawn from the following analysis, or whether indeed her sympathy for Tom fails. The representation of Tom will be compared with that of George Osborne. It is fairly evident that there is little sympathy shown for George in *Vanity Fair*, and the subsequent study does not mean to challenge it, but merely to show where attempts to construct it occur and where it is withheld in a similar manner to the representation of Tom.

The existence of parallels between Tom and George has been mentioned, but very little has been said to illustrate this similarity. Tom and George are first of all positioned in contrast to two sensitive, feeling women – Amelia and Maggie, which functions to highlight their patriarchal masculinities and show their own shortcomings. Tom is frequently described as severe and hard by Maggie as well as the narrator. He shows strength of will, ability of self-denial and self-control. These qualities reveal themselves in the most positive light when he is forced to take up a job at a very young age as a result of his father's bankruptcy. Tom intends to pay his father's debts and restore the family's good name, in which he is also successful. Since his childhood, Tom is characterised as possessing a strong feeling of justice, founded on his sense of righteousness and manifesting itself through the belief in just punishment. He believes that those who deserve must be punished, the deserving being determined by his rather inflexible and masculine moral principles. The narrator also points out that Tom never feared that he should be punished as he would never do anything wrong. Eliot refers to Tom as a 'lad of honour' and indeed we can speak of the concept of honour, the influence of chivalric codes and of 'men of honour' in connection to Tom.

Seeing himself as a gentleman and man of honour was also important for George's self-definition. When his friend Dobbin asks George if he means to break off his engagement to Amelia, George retorts angrily by asking if he means to question whether he is a man of honour (*VF* 2001: 107). It is perhaps helpful to see the masculinity of George in the context of the chivalric ideal. Thackeray often describes him, or allows Amelia and George's army comrades to describe him, as 'gallant' or a 'hero'. Perhaps also, being named George is not insignificant. As pointed out by Schwab (2005: 218), the two major ideals for chivalric masculinity were King Arthur and St. George. It seems possible to argue that in the person of George, Thackeray is parodying the chivalric gentleman, and

the hollowness of these ideals if present only superficially. He also shows a preference for the early 19th century understanding of manliness, which favoured a more sensitive, emotional masculinity (2005: 217-218), such as Dobbin's.

In comparison to Tom, George is an altogether more morally flexible character. He is sociable, charming, fond of gambling, occasional drinking and women. He lacks Tom's self-discipline. Yet both define their manliness through inherited notions of proper conduct for the so-called honourable man of the patriarchal system. George's lack of appropriate self-control makes him diverge from that ideal, but he is nevertheless caught measuring himself against these standards. He intends, for example, to reform when he marries Amelia. George's self-indulgent behaviour and the emphatic purity of Amelia illustrate the Victorian notion of the already fallen man in possession of a more 'bestly' nature, who requires an angelic wife to purify him.

George's moral 'flexibility' aside, he and Tom both subscribe to some notion of justice and right 'manly' conduct. Thackeray shows us that George is motivated by his sense of his own value as a gentleman when he 'does his duty' and marries Amelia. He is aware of his own noble sacrifice in defying his father. Again, parallels with chivalric ideals can be drawn. For Tom, morally acceptable behaviour seems to come half-naturally due to his superior self-control, but his sense of right is often described as being narrow, and he himself as lacking in emotion and ability to sympathise.

As stated already, Eliot's intention in *The Mill on The Floss* was to show how both Maggie and Tom were right in their own ways, this should entail with it a fairly equal distribution of sympathy. Since sympathy requires repeated effort, it is necessary to look at its construction from the outset of the novel. In the chapters of Tom and Maggie's childhood, Tom emerges from the start as self-consciously superior, showing mastery over

Maggie. In the episode where he discovers that Maggie has forgotten to have his rabbits fed and they have consequently died, Tom is characteristically hard upon Maggie and punishes her by forbidding the girl to come fishing with him. Prior to this chapter, the reader has had privileged knowledge about Maggie's inner struggles and been able to follow her around the Mill, whereas Tom is a distant figure away in school. This naturally makes the reader identify with Maggie upon the meeting of the brother and sister. Maggie's sorrow over the death of Tom's rabbits having been related in the previous chapter also contributes to the reader's sympathy with the girl. Yet there is a point in their quarrel over the rabbits when the right on Tom's side begins to emerge. It is when Tom starts to list previous instances in Maggie's behaviour where she had inadvertently done a bad deed. Maggie begins to appear impulsive and forgetful, and the argument that she did not *mean* to kill the rabbits has less power against the knowledge that things of that kind have occurred before. Yet just at this point, the two part and the omniscient narrator informs us of Maggie's private suffering in the attic. Sympathy for Tom is not left room to develop with this shift in the point of view. When the narrator returns to him, we learn that he had put no further thought in Maggie and occupied himself with 'other matters', which makes him appear hard-hearted indeed. However, as he goes up to the attic, still resolved in the necessity of punishment for Maggie, the narrator tells us of there being 'tender' fibres' in Tom, which made him succumb to Maggie's emotional and affectionate appeals to forgive her. The brother and sister are thus reconciled.

This episode shows an attempt to provide a balanced portrayal of Tom, yet the reader's greater knowledge of Maggie, combined with Tom's indifference prior to their reconciliation do not seem to encourage sympathy. Had the reader not known of Tom's mental and emotional state before going upstairs to Maggie and only witnessed their embrace and harmonious eating of the plum cake, would not the sympathy for Tom have

been possible too? Yet we know that Tom forgot all about Maggie as soon as they had parted. We also know that he went upstairs to meet Maggie in no amiable mood. Nevertheless, the 'tender fibres' show some promise.

This promise is quickly withdrawn. In a few pages, we witness Tom and Maggie sharing jam puffs, where Tom, an honourable lad as he is in Eliot's words, divides a jam puff between the two, accidentally into unequal parts, and makes Maggie pick with closed eyes. Maggie is reluctant and would rather have the smaller one, but Tom insists for the sake of fairness. When Maggie wins the larger piece and ends up still eating it while Tom has finished his, he calls her greedy for not sharing. This episode seems to function almost as a parody on Tom's fairness. He stresses the justice of dividing fairly, yet grudges Maggie her larger piece. Tom thus appears more selfish than before and his sense of justice shows signs of serving only his ends. And again, we are told of Maggie's subsequent suffering and of how Tom forgot all about the incident at once. It can be concluded then that the representation of Tom in his early childhood does not encourage sympathy. The knowledge that we gain of his inner thoughts through omniscient narration often seems to serve opposite ends instead.

A much more sympathetic Tom appears in the chapters where he is sent away to study at a clergyman's. The type of education offered him by Mr. Stelling is classical, and thus unsuited to Tom's strengths, him being a more practical person. As a result, Tom is made to feel inferior, his former sense of superiority and its foundations are challenged. The reader also learns about Tom's bashfulness – a quality surely unexpected given his masterful nature at home and his boast of fighting and impressing boys at his former school. It is said that Tom was even afraid of being asked if he wanted more pudding at the dinner table (*MOTF* 2002: 144). Tom's shortcomings and his sense of his own inadequacy are carefully underlined in these chapters. Tom begins to understand that the standards by

which he had formerly measured his superiority weighed very little with his teacher Mr. Stelling and that Stelling's standards were more valued in the world than his practical skills.

The narrator also states that during this part of his life Tom was almost feminized. This could perhaps be seen in him babysitting the clergyman's wife's daughter Laura, who he seems to be rather fond of as well. Yet the narrator's immediate reference to Tom's femininity is placed elsewhere. It is his bruised pride that apparently gave him the 'susceptibility of a girl' (*MOTF* 2002: 151). Yet this alleged feminization enables the reader to sympathise with Tom. The 'tender fibres', which were referred to in an earlier chapter but overshadowed by his masterful nature, become foregrounded during his time at school. We are told, for example, that as he was taking care of Laura, he could have hated her as an unpleasant duty, but as there was too much in him of the 'fibre that turns to true manliness and protecting pity for the weak' (*MOTF* 2002: 154) he could not, and found consolation in his young playmate. The narrator also informs us of how Tom misses Maggie.

Upon the arrival of Maggie at Tom's school, a similar situation occurs as in the early chapter of Tom's arrival at home. Prior to Maggie's arrival, the reader has been given an account of Tom's struggles and his longing for Maggie, which have functioned to encourage sympathy. However, almost the moment he is again placed in contrast with his sister, Tom begins to appear narrow-minded and hard-hearted once again, showing for example his contempt at Maggie's knowledge, intellectual aspirations and wish to teach Tom. Tom's fear of Maggie's knowledge is the reflection of his own sense of superiority, which would be seriously challenged once again if Maggie knew things he did not. Although Maggie is described as conceited, with desires of superiority of her own, Tom's egotism appears more unproblematic and inflexible in contrast. Nevertheless, it could be

claimed that in the chapters of his school time, the reader learns also to sympathise with Tom to some extent. Although conflicts with Maggie and also Philip sometimes function to challenge it, the privileged knowledge one gains in these chapters of Tom's struggles facilitates sympathetic feelings.

In subsequent chapters, dealing with the downfall of the Tullivers, Tom's 'masculine' qualities of restraint, courage and purposefulness could become causes for admiration were these chapters also not marked by confrontations with Maggie and Philip, where his narrowness of imagination and apparent lack of emotion contrast in no favourable light with the broader understandings of the two more sensitive characters. Eliot does make attempts to encourage sympathy for Tom. We are told, for example, of Tom's mortification upon realising he is worth very little yet in the adult world of work and how self-denying he is in saving money to pay his father's debts. Yet this part of the novel does not place as great an emphasis on Tom's feelings than the school-time part, and the unpleasant clashes with his sister and Philip begin to dominate as the tale proceeds.

After Tom's confrontation with Maggie and Philip in the Red Deeps, the former attempts to cultivate sympathy seem to meet their failure. Tom is described as being sure of his own right, never questioning it. The omniscient narrator also adds that in his animosity to Philip, there was more than blaming Wakems for his father's downfall, Tom's own boyhood conflicts with Philip also played a role, making his severity half-selfish, albeit done in the name of his father's well-being and in order to protect Maggie. The lines spoken by Maggie seem to put the balance clearly on her side. She admits to Tom that she has done wrong, but claims that the times when she did do wrong, it was because she had feelings, and Tom would be better off if he had them too. Maggie continues by adding that if Tom had done anything wrong, she would be sorry for the pain it caused him. She would not desire to punish his brother. (*MOTF* 2002: 373) Tom shows little emotion in reacting to

these remarks, he is described as cold and the episode ends in a similar way as the others discussed here – Tom goes to town to do ‘business’ and the reader accompanies Maggie to her room and her suffering. We learn little of what Tom felt after this, or if he felt much at all.

In the following chapters, Tom becomes more distant and the focus is very much on Maggie’s inner turmoil. When Maggie returns after her elopement with Stephen, another confrontation with Tom occurs, but it does not differ greatly from the previous ones, nor show Tom from a more sympathetic light, rather the opposite. Before Maggie’s arrival, the narrator informs us that Tom’s mind was focused on expecting the worst – ‘not death, but disgrace’ (*MOTF* 2002: 521). However, since the reader has privileged knowledge of Maggie’s struggle and Tom does not, his judgement would not seem as severe in this light. As Tom puts it, Maggie has carried on secret relations with Stephen as she had previously done with Philip and she has used Philip ‘as a screen’ to deceive her best friend Lucy. While one may debate the word ‘relations’ in the first fact, this did occur in secret as her relationship with Philip had done. Maggie also may not have deliberately used Philip to deceive Lucy, but the effect was similar. Lucy was deceived by believing Maggie to be attached to Philip. Maggie never made any protestations to the contrary. These are the facts, the facts into which Tom believes and builds his judgement on, but few Western readers would do similarly, nor is the purely factual view condoned by the narrator.

A similar line of analysis is pursued by Davis (2005: 390-391). His focus is *Middlemarch*, but he makes the important point that rescuing that which occurs on the inside from failure or oblivion was central to Eliot’s sympathetic realism. Thus, the knowledge that we have of Maggie’s battles with herself and her motives, makes the reader sympathise with her. Tom’s narrower view cannot be shared by the reader due to us having superior knowledge compared to Tom. Tom appears cruel and unjust. It is further

highlighted by the unexpected sympathy of Mrs. Tulliver, who in Maggie's childhood and afterwards had clearly a preference for Tom. When Tom forbids Maggie to stay with him, Mrs. Tulliver runs to her and promises to accompany her, an action very much supported by the narratorial commentary of 'one draught of simple human pity' being 'more helpful than all wisdom' (*MOTF* 2002: 524).

It is possible then to conclude that while Eliot clearly strives to create sympathy for Tom, the reader's greater knowledge of Maggie and her point of view, makes it difficult to sympathise with him. In the final chapter of the flood, when Maggie comes to rescue Tom, he feels in awe of her and the narrator informs us that Tom has finally gained an insight into Maggie's view of things. Yet it could be too late in more than one sense. The final lines of the chapter suggest that while drowning, they relived their childhood experiences when they had 'clasped their little hands in love'. Considering the portrayal of Tom that had predominated in the later chapters, or perhaps since his leaving school, these lines come across as perplexing and almost wishful. There was not a lot of 'hands clasped in love' in the episodes of Tom and Maggie's childhood. The novel is rather built around their conflicts and Maggie's *desire* for 'clasped hands'. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that sympathy for Tom is more likely to occur when he is separated from Maggie and represented independently. There are hints of his unrequited love for Lucy, but none of it is elaborated on. The omission is significant. It could have altered the reader's perception of Tom prior to the flood and shown him as more feeling, perhaps leading to Eliot's desired aims of showing the right on both sides.

The portrayal of George in *Vanity Fair*, as mentioned before, does not aim for reader's sympathies, but since the representation of Tom was found to fail in this as well, some parallels could be suggested. The introduction of George is fairly harmless, yet like Becky, the reader is made suspicious when the narrator tells us of George's fondness for

his own reflection and awareness of his good looks. When George develops a dislike for Rebecca, and is not in favour of her marriage to Jos, it seems possible to claim that the narrator's attitude remains neutral. George's love for Amelia redeems him. However, with George's growing indifference to Amelia and the narrator's sympathy for her, George begins to appear unworthy of Amelia's love. A similar contrast with Maggie functions to withdraw sympathy from Tom. This evaluation of the situation persists throughout the remainder of the novel, George being shown as unreliable, egotistic, vain and hedonistic. The narrator says, for example, that he was seen lighting a cigar with one of Amelia's letters (*VF* 2001: 105).

Yet there are instances, as in the portrayal of Tom, where George shows promise of reform and comes across as more likeable. When the Sedley family is financially ruined and George's engagement to Amelia made to appear impossible under these circumstances, George and Dobbin share their sorrow over the situation. George is described as having pangs of regret over his loss of Amelia. He sees her as angelic and good, and feels mortified that he had not prized her appropriately when he had had the chance. The narrator also tells us that George felt ashamed at his own conduct and neglect of Amelia. This sympathetic chapter is soon followed by one relating their meeting, in which that promise of change in George is reverted. As he meets Amelia, he is described as being as much touched by Amelia's submission as her sadness and beauty. George delights in his mastery over Amelia. The narrator also adds that George considered himself to be a very generous person and making a great sacrifice when marrying Amelia. This does not allow any more favourable impressions of George to develop. After their marriage, George goes back to his old habits and neglects Amelia. Prior to going to war, he is again shown as touched by Amelia's purity and regrets his own shameful behaviour. The kiss he adds to an envelope meant for his father also shows kindness. The events of the war are not related

from the perspective of those actively involved. If the knowledge of Tom's love for Lucy may have encouraged sympathy, a detailed account of George's death would not have led the reader to sympathise with him, given Amelia's subsequent foolish worship of the man.

While the portrayal of George is generally unsympathetic, with a few softening touches, Rawdon's is overall more positive. There are hints from the start that Rawdon may yet turn out alright, in spite of his recklessness, similar fondness for gambling and other 'manly sports'. It seems difficult to believe, upon evidence, but as he develops an attachment to his son and enjoys the company of the angelic Lady Jane, a more generous Rawdon emerges. On the background of Becky's exploits, Rawdon appears a mere loving pawn. When he finally confronts her, Becky as well as the narrator feel a certain admiration. It could be claimed then that in contrast to Becky, the narrator shows sympathy for Rawdon. This is facilitated by the contrast in their capacity for loving and Rawdon being a passive partner in Becky's deceptions. In short, although Rawdon and George show fondness for similar pursuits, it is love that ultimately earns Rawdon sympathy and withdraws it from George. One is reminded here of Thackeray's own statement in regards to his *Vanity Fair* (1911: 233), where he says that 'truth must be told, faults owned and pardon prayed for', and that 'love reigns supreme over all'. It is for the characters who love that *Vanity Fair* bestows some sympathy on.

And perhaps this remains true of Eliot's novel as well. Although Eliot attempted to cultivate sympathy for Tom, his unfeeling and unsympathetic nature made it so difficult that it seems Eliot tried to encourage sympathy in spite of the actual turn the novel had taken. On a different level, Eliot's novel also highlights the fault of an absence of sympathy as manifested in Tom. Thackeray manages to cultivate the reader's sympathy for Rawdon, while George is condemned by his failed attempts at reform and Amelia's blind worship.

2.2. Amelia Sedley/Osborne and Maggie Tulliver

It has been stated that Maggie and Amelia may represent seemingly opposite types of femininity, and yet have considerable amounts in common in spite of it. Amelia is submissive and less bright, Maggie more rebellious and clever. Amelia is the unidealised version of the ‘angel in the house’, Maggie is the passionate, but well-meaning other. However, both are dependent on a man’s love and approval, both are depicted as vulnerable. The young Maggie’s happiness seems to be tied up with Tom’s consent to be thus loved and not rejected by him. Thackeray’s narrator also states about Amelia and George that ‘there are two parties to a love-transaction: the one who loves and the other who condescends to be so treated’ (*VF* 2001: 109).

Thackeray’s novel is subtitled *A Novel without a Hero*, and indeed, no character emerges at the end of the novel as such, and no unmingled sympathy is bestowed on any character. Amelia is among the few who has received sympathetic treatment, and it could be claimed that this sympathy is not completely exhausted by the end of the novel. James Phelan (1990: 137) argues that at first Amelia’s constancy and love function to expose the vanities of those around her, while later the same qualities are shown to lead to vanities and delusions of their own kind. Amelia is not only represented in contrast to Becky, but also to George and his more worldly sisters by which comparison she benefits. For example, one could think of the parting of Amelia and Becky, which is accompanied by the commentary that one person (Amelia) was in earnest and the other a complete performer (*VF* 2001: 56). Yet unlike Phelan, and many other critics, the withdrawal of this necessity for contrast in later stages, I would argue, does not lead to a complete withdrawal of sympathy.

The narrator seems interested in encouraging admiration and sympathy for Amelia at the start of the novel in particular. He stresses, for example, the admiration of all men of the regiment for Amelia and the dislike of most females. The narrator is sometimes arguing with the imagined reader and Amelia's other critics in defence her. The defence is usually mingled with irony and does list Amelia's faults as well, but seems to uphold her value in spite of it. For example, the narrator underlines the opinions of other women on the very trifling merits of the 'domestic goddess' and satirizes their bewilderment at what can men see in these 'silly little things'. Yet he concludes by affirming his own partiality for women of this type. Amelia's genuine love for George is also contrasted to the 'respectable attachment' of George's sister Maria. By respectable the narrator means founded on reason and financial calculation. Furthermore, the narrator shows concern for Amelia's strong, all-encompassing attachment and wishes her parents had been able to interfere and discourage the girl, or that she would have had a confidante, so that she may not be disappointed later (*VF* 2001: 103-104). Occasional references to her selfishness and other shortcomings are made, but they do not seem to dominate. The following paragraph could be quoted to show how the narrator does offer some criticism of Amelia, yet prefers her imprudence to the calculated marriages of the likes of Miss Bullock:

I am not praising her conduct or setting her up as a model for Miss Bullock to imitate. Miss B. knows how to regulate her feelings better than this poor little creature. Miss B. would never have committed herself as that imprudent Amelia had done; pledged her love irretrievably; confessed her heart away, and got back nothing.../

Be cautious then, young ladies; be wary how you engage. Be shy of loving frankly; never tell all you feel, or (a better way still), feel very little. See the consequences of being prematurely honest and confiding, and mistrust yourselves and everybody. /.../. At any rate, never have any feelings which may make you uncomfortable, or make any promises which you cannot at any required moment command and withdraw. That is the way to get on, and be respected, and have a virtuous character in Vanity Fair. (2001:162)

The final line that this is the way to be successful in *Vanity Fair* says as much as is needed about the narrator's sympathies at this stage. Also, when George neglects Amelia after their marriage, she one night prays, and the narrator states that he has no right to retell

these prayers as they are not part of the domain of Vanity Fair, referring to the existence of forces in Amelia which are better than the hypocritical and selfish ones dominating in society at large.

Gradually, Amelia's failings come to be highlighted more. Her devotion to her son seems to come at the expense of her parents. She is shown to repent of her selfishness, which does not allow for full withdrawal of sympathy yet. Amelia continues to be described as a true lady, and it appears that even during the chapters detailing her holidays with Dobbin, Jos and her son, Amelia still has some sympathy from the narrator. For example, Amelia's reaction to music shows that she has 'fine sensibilities' and that greater education would have done much good to her.

The narrator's sympathy, challenged before, is fully withdrawn upon the arrival of Becky and Amelia's foolish persistence in helping her. Amelia is described as a selfish tyrant, ordering Dobbin about as if he were a dog. We are also told that Dobbin's good qualities weighed little with Amelia in contrast to his 'large feet' and that Amelia made Rebecca the pretext to free herself of any duty of loving Dobbin. Furthermore, the narrator tells us that Amelia did not wish to marry Dobbin, but desired his friendship. In other words 'she wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all' (*VF* 2001:640). Even Rebecca, who was formerly contrasted with Amelia for her vices, is able to recognise the worth of Dobbin. The narrator's sympathy is thus irrevocably withdrawn, yet it seems to happen at such a late stage of the novel, and without sufficient force – Amelia regrets her folly after all – that the sympathy that has been cultivated, alongside enlisting her shortcomings, remains ultimately alive by the end of the novel, even if mingled with the awareness of her failings.

When it comes to Maggie, hers seems to be the narrator's and consequently the reader's sympathy, which is only superficially challenged. As was shown in the analysis of Tom's representation, Maggie is generally the character whose inner struggles receive privileged portrayal. It would be simplistic to claim that it was only because she had them (inner struggles, that is) and Tom did not. Maybe not to the same extent, certainly, but as suggested before, very little was said of Tom's feelings for Lucy, and ultimately, towards the end of the novel, one knows comparatively little of Tom in contrast to Maggie. Thus, this knowledge enables us to sympathise with her more readily.

While Amelia seemed to function for half of the novel as a contrasting force to other, morally inferior characters, Maggie is shown in contrast to Tom. Whereas Amelia directly benefits from the comparison, such representation encouraging greater sympathy as well, Maggie benefits slightly less unproblematically. It would probably be a mistake to say that Amelia's portrayal was not without references to her shortcomings in nearly the same way as Maggie's, yet the contrast in Amelia's case was greater. In the world of *Vanity Fair* and the first half of the novel, there is no one who could truly challenge Amelia's virtue, apart from Dobbin. Maggie's right is challenged, however, and done so throughout the novel, from the chapter on dead rabbits to confrontations about Philip and Stephen.

The main complaint Tom makes about her is that she is unreliable. Maggie frequently claims that she did not mean to do what she did. She did not mean to allow the rabbits to die and to 'give way to her feelings' for Stephen, thus Maggie emerges as being unable to exert necessary self-discipline, and only succeeds in this during her half-religious period of renunciation. It may be a little far-fetched, and yet can be argued not unconvincingly that Maggie and Tom seem to stand as personifications of the separate spheres ideology. Not as a successful implementation of it, but a failed one, only able to

achieve harmony in death. It seems that Maggie's fault of limited self-discipline is represented in over-abundance in Tom, whereas Tom's lack of sympathy and emotion is drawn to the excess in Maggie. It is these excesses that prevent their friendship, while the harmonious co-existence of these qualities is seen as desirable. As Ruskin wrote in *Sesame and Lilies*, 'each has what the other has not', and this belief in men and women complementing each other appears to be the foundation of Eliot's novel.

Nevertheless, Maggie's 'lack' receives a more sympathetic treatment. One could think of her statement that she would feel sorry for Tom even if he had done wrong, but also of the narrator's commentary that the 'responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision' (*MOTF* 2002: 538). The wider vision is also the strength of Maggie. Furthermore, Maggie's renunciation of Stephen and of purely selfish desires also reflects positively on her. It is not irrelevant that in Eliot's novels (but also in *Vanity Fair*) there is a strong tendency for selfishness in certain main characters and their subsequent humbling or punishment. Think of Maggie's pride in her cleverness and her desire for a more varied life at the expense of her old ties.

It has been claimed here that the feminine emerges as more sympathetic and preferred in *The Mill on the Floss*. Alison Booth (1992: 66), in contrast, writes that Eliot's preference lay with men, as she seems to have considered men to be in possession of 'inherently' superior qualities, although she had much sympathy for women as well (*ibid.*: 67). This may be true for other novels and particularly in consideration of Eliot's journalistic persona, but in *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie does win the reader's and narrator's sympathy and is preferred over Tom's masculinity.

In conclusion, neither the portrayal of Amelia, nor Maggie is without reference to the shortcomings of the two women, yet sympathy is maintained for both by the end of the

novels, to a lesser or greater extent. Given the more cynical nature of *Vanity Fair*, the sympathy for Amelia is founded more on the continual effort of previous chapters and her marked contrast to other characters, less on her own merit. The sympathy for Maggie is certainly stronger and much less mingled with her failings. In contrast to Tom, Maggie's shortcomings appear to be of a better quality. It seems that the narrator concurs with Maggie when she states that she has done wrong because she had feelings, and Tom would be better off if he had them too.

2.3. Major Dobbin and Philip Wakem

It is generally believed that if there is anyone with the right to be a hero of *Vanity Fair*, it must be Dobbin. He is shown as constant, honest, with high regard for truth and justice, but also as sentimental and misguided about Amelia's virtues. George's representation was compared to a parody of the chivalric. Dobbin, in his noble defence of George in his childhood, devotion to Amelia in the form of 'countless unselfish acts', seems to fulfil this ideal in some way. Yet Thackeray could not have a hero, so ridiculous touches are added to Dobbin's characterisation: his clumsiness, large feet, lisp, and the representation of his servitude to Amelia. Nevertheless, if Dobbin does not properly fulfil the knightly ideal, he is set up as the only gentleman of the novel, the same way Amelia is frequently described as being innately a lady. The narrator describes his ideal of a gentleman, stating that such men are but few and says he would put Dobbin in his list without any doubt (*VF* 2001: 591-592). Dobbin is also paid the high compliment of being so honest that the arts of Becky had no impact on him (*VF* 2001: 221). Yet in spite of all these merits, he is made to appear foolish for his blind devotion to the image of Amelia.

It is possible to argue that similarly to Amelia, narratorial sympathy is gradually withdrawn from Dobbin towards the close of the novel. We are told, for example, that Dobbin cut out a picture from a book of fashions for its supposed resemblance to Amelia. The narrator informs us that he has seen the picture and it is only 'a picture of a highwaisted gown' with a doll's face (*VF* 2001: 411). The narrator also declares that he has written the story for almost no purpose if the reader has not already observed that 'the Major was a spooney' (*VF* 2001: 632). This statement is made in the same chapter where Amelia is explicitly described as a selfish tyrant over him. However, when Major is cured of his delusion, the narrator's earlier sympathy seems to return, which does not happen for Amelia. Dobbin, like the narrator, is unable to view her in the same light as he used to. Thus, one can claim that Dobbin is the character to emerge at the end of the novel with the greatest amount of readerly and narratorial sympathy.

Part of Amelia's failure, the narrator informs us, is her inability to look past Dobbin's large feet and clumsiness, which contributed – besides her devotion to George – to her rejection of the Major's love. In one sense, these qualities make him a more suitable occupant of *Vanity Fair*, allowing for comic representation, in another, they 'disable' him in much the same way Philip is disabled in *The Mill on The Floss*.

Disability in both novels emerges as misfortune with no positive impact on a person's life. For both Philip and Dobbin, it becomes a hindrance to their desires of marriage and a source of social discomfort or failure. As regards marriage, Dobbin ultimately triumphs in spite of his 'large feet', whereas Philip does not. Of course, Philip's is a 'genuine' disability, apparently the cause of an accident early in his life, rather than anything he was born with. Yet this does not explain why Maggie and Philip are not married, as they are indeed two of the most intelligent, sensitive characters. Stephen's characterisation in contrast remains sketchy and it is difficult to deduce what captivated

Maggie beyond physical attraction and the possibility of social rise. Perhaps it is in the latter where the answer lies. The varied intellectual life Maggie yearned for she could have experienced more fully with Philip, as he was more similar to her in temperament and experience, yet a marriage to a disabled man would increase her social disabilities, as is suggested by Fratz (2008: 82), whereas a marriage to Stephen would have a ‘normalizing effect’. After all, at this period in her life, Maggie is working as a governess with little hope for anything like the life she longs for. Furthermore, Fratz also suggests that Philip does not exert masculine authority over Maggie. Living with Tom for a brother has taught her to see submission to the male will as part of feminine identity (ibid.). Yet this seems a less likely cause, as Stephen is shown dependant on Maggie, suffering great agonies because of her, and ‘beseeching’ her to love him. Maggie is ultimately the one that makes the decision about their future, and shows greater resistance to passionate impulse than Stephen – qualities that ought to be reversed if Stephen was exerting full masculine control over Maggie. Philip’s persuasion of Maggie to stop renouncing intellectual pleasures and a fuller life, and agree to meet him is not unlike her relations with Stephen. Nevertheless, there is a difference in degree in favour of Stephen as the more masculine. Philip’s disability feminizes him.

Philip is portrayed as feminine both in appearance and personality. He is described as having inherited his mother’s looks, of being in possession of delicate features. His hair is described as ‘curling at the ends like a girl’s’ (*MOTF* 2002: 173) and his nerves are told to be as sensitive as a ‘woman’s’ (*MOTF* 2002: 459). These are but a few examples of Philip’s portrayal, but the novel abounds in similar references. Furthermore, as argued by Stoddard Holmes (2004), disabled men are also feminized by their domesticity and financial dependence. This is also true for Philip and his dependence on his father. Philip’s primary role in the novel, akin to other representations of disability in Victorian fiction, is

as a mentor or facilitator of the development of a more central character, Maggie. Interestingly, the same is also true for Dobbin in his relationship to George and Amelia.

However, while Philip has been represented in feminine terms, Dobbin's masculinity does appear to be put in 'feminine' contexts of sentimentality, emotion and absence of rationality, yet a similar conscious feminization does not seem to occur. The following quotation illustrates how Dobbin is described as tender-hearted and sentimental, but the narrator's commentary seems to suggest that he does not agree with the implied reader who would think it unmanly:

Dobbin was very soft-hearted. The sight of women and children in pain always used to melt him. The idea of Amelia broken-hearted and lonely tore that good-natured soul with anguish. And he broke out into an emotion, which anybody who likes may consider unmanly. (*VF* 2001: 165)

In other words, the novel suggests that sentimentality is sentimentality, rather than directly relatable to a feminizing force. This could be explained by the period in which the events of *Vanity Fair* take place. The early 19th century apparently favoured a more emotional masculinity (Schwab 2005: 232) and Dobbin's show of emotion may have been slightly more acceptable then than at the time of the events in *The Mill on the Floss*. In addition, Dobbin's military success also contributes to his masculinity, while Philip has little in this regard. Nevertheless, if the narrator does not necessarily encourage Dobbin to be viewed as feminized, such an interpretation can still be made.

Masculinity has been discussed at length, sympathy for Dobbin also stated. This leaves us with the question of sympathy for Philip. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the analysis, as modern readers are wont to read Eliot's narratorial commentary in a different light than the contemporaries might have done. On one level, Philip can almost be seen as Eliot's mouthpiece. In his letter to Maggie, he expresses Eliot's favourite idea of

the universalizing power of sympathy and the importance of self-sacrifice. Themes later developed to a greater depth in *Dorothea* and *Middlemarch*. On the other hand, there is something almost grating in the repeated remarks about him being 'like a woman'. I would suggest that this is one example of the occurrence of Eliot's masculine narrative voice, as surely, sensitivity and delicate features as feminine is part of the patriarchal viewpoint. These remarks lead one to doubt the grounds for narratorial sympathy. Does the narrator side with Tom in thinking Philip pitiable? The novel does prefer Stephen as Maggie's suitor after all. While the sympathy for all other characters seems to have some egalitarian aspirations, Philip's disability and resulting femininity appears most markedly to place him as the object of pity at a greater remove from the narrator and the able-bodied reader, and thus to discourage sympathetic identification. However, this has the opposite effect. The use of the voice of the patriarch encourages sympathy precisely because it attempts to create a distance and stress Philip's failure as a man. The repeated remarks to his femininity create resistance in the reader, the same way Tom's extremely patriarchal remarks on the folly of Maggie's intellectual aspirations and knowledge do. The novel thus functions as a criticism of the limited identities available to men (and women) within Victorian gender ideology.

2.4. Sympathy in the Context of Gender Ideology

The preceding parts of the analysis showed how sympathy is constructed for certain central characters of the novels. The extent of narratorial sympathy was determined and the factors that could influence reader's sympathy were also suggested. Simultaneously, the gender identities of the characters were analysed, as they will be of relevance in this

section. The aim of this part of the thesis is to connect these findings and to show the impact of middle class gender ideology on the distribution of sympathy.

None of the characters could be said to evoke unproblematic sympathy, nevertheless, Maggie seems to have received the most sympathetic treatment. Relying on Audrey Jaffe's (2000) understanding of sympathy, it is possible to begin disentangling its meaning. One of Jaffe's main arguments is that the object of sympathy embodies to the Victorian reader the possibilities of their own decline. She regards the object of sympathy as signifying degradation or the undesirable for the middle class 'respectable subject'. When one considers the representation of Maggie, she is considerably different from the middle class feminine ideal, and is in most aspects positioned against the conventional woman. Maggie indeed seems to represent that which is feared and seen as undesirable in a woman. Therefore, while sympathy for her struggles and difference is created, this is ultimately the only answer offered. Maggie fails, drowns and the middle class ideal ends up confirmed. One could think of the sympathetic portrayals of fallen women in Pre-Raphaelite art and elsewhere which (ideally) evoke the spectators' sympathetic reaction, but by this very sympathy, they distance the object of sympathy from the desirable and the respectable. Thus, sympathy has also been seen as a solution in its own right to social problems.

Feminists have blamed Eliot for her endings, where the independent, intelligent and passionate women almost never triumph over middle class gender ideology (Booth 1992). *The Mill on the Floss* is regarded among them. However, it is important to add that Eliot did not believe in the efficiency of radical change, but into a more gradual, step-by-step improvement of women's role in society (Booth 1992, Dolin 2005). Although Maggie fails, the traditional gender roles have at least been challenged, and challenge could never be seen as a complete affirmation of the status quo, as it has voiced its shortcomings. In

agreement with Jaffe, it seems that the only solution the novel offers for the intellectual, passionate woman is increased sympathy of the society. However, building on or slightly departing from her emphasis, this sympathy could be seen as a precursor to change as well. Change may not always follow, but the precondition seems to be fulfilled.

The portrayal of Amelia is less sympathetic. Yet she is among the few characters for whom it could be said to exist, and probably does exist for the major part of the novel. Unlike Maggie, Amelia seems to represent the middle class ideal. How could middle class ideology be involved in cultivating sympathy for her if she represents that ideology? Jaffe's theory suggests after all that sympathy is created for the divergent and the undesirable. Amelia does diverge, however, even if superficially she seems to correspond to the ideal. Amelia's greatest shortcoming after all is the force of her love, which is blind to all reason and fact. She represents emotional excess, the same way Maggie does, although Amelia's is of a different nature. Emotional excess was not part of the feminine ideal, even if all other Amelia's qualities would match it perfectly. Whereas Maggie's emotional excess receives a sympathetic portrayal, even if it leads to harm, Amelia's excesses function at first as her strengths, but later become questionable too.

Furthermore, it seems possible to argue that upon the gradual withdrawal of sympathy from Amelia, Thackeray is criticising the 'angel in the house' ideal. In spite of Amelia's many virtues, she is too timid and submissive to even have the courage to question George's value. Thus, it could be argued that the attempt at withdrawing sympathy contains within it an attack on the prevailing feminine ideal.

There is little sympathy for George, and while some sympathy is cultivated for Tom, it ultimately fails. Jaffe's approach that sympathy is bestowed on what the middle class fears and finds undesirable is obviously not applicable here, nor is it perhaps meant to

apply everywhere, but to underline a trend in Victorian fiction. Yet sympathy can still be discussed as containing within it the middle class ideology. The absence of sympathy for George suggests that he fails to meet not only the ideals of the Victorian gentlemen, but perhaps also what are regarded as universally human virtues in the 19th century. A failure to conform to gender ideology is less detrimental to sympathy than a failure to meet what are regarded as general human virtues. Similarly, Rawdon's ability to do so in the end leads to some sympathy.

As stated earlier, the representation of Tom and Maggie has certain parallels with the separate spheres ideology, indicating that men and women complement each other. Sympathy is present for Tom when he is – in Eliot's words – feminized, whereas sympathy is almost destroyed by the repeated occurrences of his unfeeling inflexible masculinity, tendency to rely on facts and his limited imagination. Tom and Maggie are like archetypes that appear incapable of a full existence due to too strong tendencies in opposite directions. When Tom gains the reader's sympathy, he is no longer in a privileged position. He is made to feel inferior and he suffers. It might be possible to draw the conclusion that feminization encourages sympathy, and if so, a feminized male is undesirable within the ideology of patriarchy. Although, such an interpretation does not hold in the context of Eliot's novel.

Dobbin could be seen as deserving of sympathy for his social failures, caused by his clumsiness, large feet etc. The same is true for Philip and his representation as disabled. Again, we can trace in these sympathetic identifications Jaffe's theory that sympathy frequently involves with it what the middle class finds undesirable. Disability is undesirable as much in a man as in a woman. Dobbin's failure to gain Amelia's love is also in part determined by her aversion to his appearance. Neither corresponds to the middle class ideal of the healthy, handsome marriageable male. Thus while sympathising with

each, the reader is also likely to withhold full identification due to the undesirability of these qualities. Furthermore, Philip is also feminized, which links him with the ideas hinted at in connection to Tom. A feminized man does not fit the middle class ideology and is thus deserving of sympathy. Of course, the necessary precursor to any sympathy is that the object should be in possession of many good qualities, or rather, qualities that exceed the requirements for the average middle class man or woman. Such is Maggie, but also Philip, Dobbin, and Amelia.

It is possible to suggest that in *The Mill on the Floss* the characters that diverge from the middle class ideals – Philip and Maggie – are made into objects of compassion. In both cases, such sympathy could be regarded as a criticism of the established gender roles, but also as an indication of the middle class gender ideology which is responsible for channelling the reader's sympathy towards the less 'powerful'. Such sympathy could function to challenge, but it could also be a solution in its own right. Tom, on the other hand, is perhaps too similar to the Victorian idea of the middle class male for this formula to work. The representation of George is also not dissimilar to Tom's.

Thackeray's novel is more complicated in this respect and such neat conclusions are not possible. One could suggest that Amelia's emotional excess during the first part of the novel is similar to Maggie's. Hence, she also diverges from the 'angel in the house' ideal and is thus regarded as an object of sympathy. Yet towards the end of the novel, as this sympathy is withdrawn, the middle class ideal is criticised in quite a different way from Eliot's and the excesses that formerly led to sympathy are shown to be foolish. Sympathy for Dobbin could have parallels with Philip. He is after all dismissed as a potential husband for his clumsiness and large feet, which indicates a certain degree of failure as a man. This may be where the similarity ends, however. When Dobbin is treated with narratorial sympathy, he does not diverge too greatly from the middle class ideals in

other respects but appearance. In later chapters, when he is feminized as a result of his growing submissiveness to Amelia, sympathy is also challenged, though maintained. Nevertheless, one could probably argue that sympathy for Dobbin is dependent on his failure to marry and his capacity to feel deeply. Qualities that are not very compatible with the idea of the successful, rational middle class male. Yet all such suggestions are made with much greater reservations in regards to *Vanity Fair*. In a way, one could claim that Thackeray's novel eludes clear involvement with gender ideology, or any ideology by refraining from unmingled sympathy, whereas Eliot's message and the meaning of her sympathy is much more apparent. It is also worth suggesting that while Eliot's clever and ambitious woman fails and is transformed into an object of compassion, Thackeray's Becky has her triumphs as well.

CONCLUSION

This MA thesis was concerned with the relationship between sympathy and gender in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. It set out to examine how sympathy is constructed and how middle class gender ideology interacts with the presence (or absence) of sympathy.

The first chapter provided an overview of the cultural context and discussed the research done in connection to sympathy. It showed how sympathy could be seen as a way of dealing with social problems and how it was part of 19th century humanism and the 'religion of humanity', which was created in response to the challenges presented by industrialisation and secularisation. The ability of extending the reader's sympathy could also be seen as responsible for the novels improved status in society. Drawing on Audrey Jaffe's (2000) analysis, it was also pointed out how sympathy contains within it the middle class ideology. Thus, sympathy is not a simple emotion of fellow-feeling, but culturally determined. The first chapter also suggested how sympathy could be studied from the perspective of omniscience and privileged knowledge.

The second chapter presented an analysis of the novels. It looked at how omniscience and the knowledge the reader is presented with encourages or discourages sympathy. It was concluded that in spite of Eliot's efforts to cultivate sympathy for her representative of the Victorian patriarchal masculinity, Tom, such sympathy failed. Sympathy is also not present for George in *Vanity Fair*, who in many ways holds a similar position to Tom. As regards *Vanity Fair*, it was argued that sympathy is still present for Amelia at the end of the novel and could not be undone completely by the narrator's shift in attitude later. Major Dobbin emerges as the most sympathetic character of *Vanity Fair*, although such sympathy is mingled with a sense of the comic, given his 'disabling'

clumsiness and questionable devotion to Amelia. Philip in *The Mill on the Floss* is treated with sympathy as well. His disability functions to feminize his portrayal, which while encouraging pity, also challenges such pity by the employment of the masculine narrative voice, thus leading to a more egalitarian sympathy. Maggie's representation was found to be the most sympathetic, helped on considerably by the reader's privileged knowledge and the contrast with Tom.

When examining these findings in the context of Victorian middle class gender ideology. It was found that Amelia and Maggie could be seen as representing emotional excess, which was what the middle class domestic ideal strongly discouraged. It is possible to suggest that sympathy for these characters contains the middle class fear of such excess. Philip is sympathised with because he diverges from the capitalist masculine ideal. With Dobbin, one could more tentatively suggest the same. George and Tom do not emerge as objects of sympathy, perhaps because they represent an all too common type or show an absence of the strongly positive qualities that the sympathetic characters have alongside their 'shortcomings'.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that Eliot's novel encourages sympathy with the less valued gender identities – the passionate and sensitive woman and the disabled man. Whether this is a convenient but inefficient way of dealing with the limitations of gender ideology, or whether sympathy functions as a precursor to actual change remains open to debate. *Vanity Fair* also includes two more or less sympathetic characters, Amelia and Dobbin, but the case here is more complex. The portrayal of Amelia has more direct implications of the criticism of the 'angel in the house' ideal encouraged by society. Sympathy for Dobbin, while upholding the gentlemanly virtues of honesty, loyalty, kindness to the weak, is also dependent on a sense of his emotional excess and his disabling 'large feet'. Thus, it is possible to suggest, albeit with much greater reserve, that

Dobbin's representation also has parallels with Philip's and he may be regarded as an object of sympathy for his incomplete success at conforming to the established gender role. However, Thackeray's novel is much more elusive in terms of its ideological message. *Vanity Fair* may initially follow a similar pattern to Eliot's novel, but it concludes by withdrawing or challenging former sympathy, and thus also the middle class ideology on which it could be said to depend.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Mari-Liis Sepp

Sympathy and Gender in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (Kaastunde kujundamine ja soolisuus George Elioti romaanis „Veski Flossi jõel” ja W. M. Thackeray teoses „Edevuse laat”)

Magistritöö

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Lehekülgede arv: 66

Annotatsioon:

Selle magistritöö üldiseks eesmärgiks on uurida Victoria ajastu realismis olulist kohta omava kaastunde mõistet. George Eliot nägi kaastunde kujundamises ning lugejate maailmapildi avardamises ilukirjanduse peamist eesmärki. Võib väita, et sarnased väärtused iseloomustasid tolle ajastu realismi ka üldisemalt. Töö peamised argumendid põhinevad arusaamal, et kaastunne ei ole pelgalt emotsioon, vaid kannab endas kultuurilisi väärtusi, eelkõige valitsevat ideoloogiat. Selles magistritöös keskendutakse seega viktoriaanlikele soorollidele ning neid kujundanud keskklassi ideoloogiale. Analüüsitakse kahte 19. sajandi keskpaiga romaani, milleks on George Elioti „Veski Flossi jõel” ja W. M. Thackeray „Edevuse laat”. Eesmärgiks on näidata, kuidas lugejas kaastunde tekitamise (või mittetekitamise) läbi avaldatakse samaaegselt ka arusaamu valitseva soolise ideoloogia kohta.

Sissejuhatus antakse põgus ülevaade kaastunde olulisusest 19. sajandi realismis, tutvustatakse Elioti ja Thackeray teoseid ning mõningaid nende analüüsimiseks vajalikke eelteadmisi ja väiteid.

Esimeses peatükis keskendutakse peamiselt kultuurilisele ja ideoloogilisele kontekstile. Esmalt tutvustatakse viktoriaanlike soorolle. Peatüki teises osas antakse ülevaade 19. sajandil aset leidnud muutustest teaduses, religioonis, majanduses ja tehnoloogias ning nendega kaasnenud hirmudest ja kahtlustest, millest kasvas välja ka inimkonna ühtsuse rõhutamise idee ning sellega seotud kaastunde mõiste. Järgnevalt kirjeldatakse täpsemalt kaastunde mõistet, määratletakse selle võime kanda endas ideoloogiat ning tutvustatakse mõningaid viise, kuidas kaastunnet lugejas kujundatakse.

Teises peatükis võrreldakse Thackeray ja Elioti teoseid lähtudes eelnevalt välja toodud ideedest kaastunde ja ideoloogia seotuse osas. Vaadeldakse peamisi tegelasi ja seda, kas romaan julgustab lugejat kaasa tundma või mitte ning milliseid viiteid viktoriaanlikele soorollidele sellisest käsitlusest tuletada võib. Analüüsi põhilised tulemused leiab kokkuvõttest.

Märksõnad:

Inglise kirjandus, George Eliot, W. M. Thackeray, soolisuus, ideoloogia, kaastunne, 19. sajand, „Edevuse laat”, „Veski Flossi jõel”

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