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Maggie Tulliver's no-self manifesto: an outcry against patriarchal oppression and familial surveillance – A study of George Eliot's *The Mill on The Floss*

البيان الاستشهادي لماغي توليفر: صرخة ضد الاضطهاد الذكوري والمضايقة العائلية. دراسة «طاحونة على نهر الفلوس» لجورج إليوت

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ملخص

أولت الكاتبة جورج إليوت لفلسفة التّضحية والاستشهاد أهمّية بالغة في روايتها «طاحونة على نهر الفلوس». هذا المقال يُسلّط الضوء على معاناة البطلة "ماغي توليفر" تحت النظام الأبوي الذي يُجبرها على قبول فلسفة الصَّلْب وتجسيد روح الضّحية والطّاعة التي عُرِفَ بها يسوع عليه السلام. تسعى هذه الدراسة لإظهار الدوافع الاجتماعية والنفسية التي نَمَّتْ روح التضحية لدى البطلة. والانزلاق نحو النّموذج المدمِّر للتّضحية الذي آلت إليه بطلتنا، يتطلب التّأمّل في التّبعية والعلاقة المرضية التي تجمع ماغي بأخيها. العَيْبُ المأساوي أو الاحتياج المرضي إلى الاهتمام والحب أدّى بماغي للتّضحية بنفسها من أجل إرضاء الأخ. تُبَيِّنُ الدّراسة أن هذا الاحتياج إلى الاهتمام ما هو إلا تعبير عن الحاجة إلى الاحترام والاعتراف بكونها امرأة، لها كامل الأحقية في العيش بكرامة في مجتمعها الذُّكُورِيّ.

الكلمات الدالة: جورج إليوت؛ *طاحونة على نهر الفلوس*؛ العَيْبُ المأساوي؛ الصَّلب؛ النظام الأبوي.

Abstract

The legacy of martyrdom, along with its No-Self manifesto, is central to George Eliot's *The Mill on The Floss*. The article devotes significant attention to the plight of Maggie Tulliver, a Christ co-sufferer, who is exhorted to anthropomorphize his sacrificial spirit and penitential death. A main focus of the article is to show how this sacrificial syndrome is the product of the politics of otherness, exerted by an environment that crucifies her passion and relegates her to an auxiliary position. More accurately, the syndrome is indexed by a toxic brother/sister relationship that enacts respectively a dominator/dominated model. The surveillance

maintained by the brother scars her autonomy and instigates an emotional insecurity, which convulses into selfless servitude and tragic death. The subjection of Maggie's penitential death to feminist diagnosis unveils the psychological layers of her decision to save her brother from the flood. The discussion reveals that Maggie dies as a crucified martyr not to her past ties, but rather to a frustrated ambition and unfulfilled desire. The desire to be loved, which draws her into the deadening floss, is no more than the desire to be recognized as man's equal in her provincial world.

Keywords: George Eliot; *The Mill on The Floss;* tragic flaw; crucifixion; patriarchy.

Introduction

The image of Christ hanging on the cross has long been flagged by patriarchal authority as a specimen of heroic martyrdom to plunge women into a similar lot. In George Eliot's *The Mill on The Floss,* the death of Maggie is evocative of the cross scenario. But unlike Jesus Christ, our heroine did not die to fulfill a moral mission or a divine verdict. Her death is rather geared towards assuaging a wrathful deity, called the brother. Throughout her life, the emotionally famished Maggie strives for the recognition of a paternalistic environment that defines her only with reference to man. Unable to give meaning to her life, Maggie tries to fill the void of unfulfillment by committing herself to others. This idea was quite comprehensively voiced by Patricia Beer. For her, "the unsatisfactory nature of a woman's life leads her to renunciation in an unrealistic and almost pleasurable way" (Beer, 1974, p.180). Concurrently, the constraints levelled against Maggie lead her to look for a compensatory mode of fulfillment that conforms adequately with social dictates. The need to be approved by her environment finds completion in a passionless and selfless existence, destitute of any individual accomplishment.

A main concern of this study is to reveal the psychological basis of Maggie's martyrish renunciation and show how the latter becomes a product of the feelings of despair and loss. The feminist theorizing of Eliot's No-Self vignette is instrumental to comprehend the selfless itinerancy of her heroines. Building on this theorizing, the paper pathologizes this selflessness as a psychological crisis, entrapping our heroine into a self-destructive masochism. Included in this diagnosis is the analysis of the religious norms and patriarchal practices that force Maggie to give up her life as a sacrifice to her brother. The model of the Crucified Healer to which our heroine reconciles herself stirs a critical feminist reading of the patriarchal bias and the social surveillance that seal up the status quo.

The attention then turns at the Christological accretions that prescribe suffering as a requisite condition to attain salvation. Feminist theologian Arnfritur Gutmundsdottir warns against the danger of turning the "theology of the cross into a glorification of suffering, by encouraging people to enjoy their suffering and to accept it passively" (Gutmundsdottir, 2011, p. 28). Maggie lapses into this category when she begins seeing her suffering as salvific, leading to reconciliation both with God and Tom. She fails to understand that God does not claim her life as what Joel Green and Mark Baker call a "ransom" (Green & Baker, 2003, p. 23) payment to reconcile her with Tom. The annihilation of the self that she vehemently supports was rather conducive to a suicidal ending, destitute of any heroic or salvific meaning. Contrary to some critical assumptions which project the end as an assertion of Maggie's power, the article sees her as a pitiful martyr to aborted ambitions. For Alison Booth, the heroine's rescue of Tom is "a foray into the battlefield to prove her might against his; the love of women (which Tom strangely avoids) triumphs over battle itself" (Booth, 1992, p. 147). The article argues that love, however, can be used as an instrument of oppression by the brother to curb his sister's autonomy and bring her into a paralytic submission. To account for Maggie's lot, her dialectical interaction with her brother, combined with the gender-based handicaps that have aborted her ambitions is brought under a deep feminist scrutiny.

1. Excursus on George Eliot's no-self legacy

1.1 Self-negation as a way to antidote feelings of guilt and insecurity

The ethos of female sacrifice, combined with the philosophy of selfless servitude was extensively fictionalized in George Eliot's narratives. The Eliotian fiction tends to be very often punctuated by a "life beyond the self" language, which elects female characters as apostles of self-sacrificing goodness. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to Eliot's lifelong fascination with the theme of self-sacrifice. For them, her works are usually viewed in terms of "her obsessively feminine renunciation" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 466). But this obsessive fascination does not fit either her emancipatory life and feminist pen. One should not lose sight of the fact that Mary Evans, who wrote incognito under the pseudonymous name of George Eliot, succeeded in leaping beyond the limitation of her sex. She led, in this regard, an unconventional career and life, becoming respectively George Eliot and the mistress of George Henry Lewes. The liberal pathway she chose for herself is, however, denied to most of her female protagonists, who are

plunged into more conventional roles. Their matriculation as selfless angels would invite quite justifiable suspicion regarding her feminist credentials. For many critics, proselytizing for a philosophy of female sacrifice is tantamount to proselytizing for a philosophy of female self-effacement. As missionaries of self-sacrifice, women are resigned to an auxiliary existence and subjected to patriarchal oppression. Understandably, to live sacrificially is to live subserviently for the sake of promoting masculine agendas.

Eliot's model of the selfless angel has frustrated many critics and readers, who have labored to disentangle the threads of her ambiguous feminist credentials. For some critics, Eliot's vignette of selflessness has to be explained with reference to her religious mind. For Calvin Bedient, the sacrificial trajectory of Eliot's heroines is informed by "her celebration of duty, her translation into secular terms of the "ancient and powerful religious ideal of selflessness", and her belief that "a man's value increases in proportion to his self-denial" (Paris, 2003, pp. 23–24). The article rejects such a reading in favor of a psychoanalytic view which covers the emotional vulnerabilities that arise from patriarchal oppression. This means that the charity of the self-philosophy is not celebrated by the writer as a feminine ideal or a religious imperative. The study stresses rather the need to psychoanalyze Eliot's philosophy and thus weave her narratives into the matrix of the inner insecurities that marked her personal life. Eliot writes out of a guilt-stricken conscience and a painful past that combine the memories of her elopement and the unconventional dreams she pursued as a female writer. She uses her most remarkably autobiographical protagonist, Maggie Tulliver, to scrutinize the efficiency of her rhetoric of sacrifice in rectifying past offences and rehabilitating past ties. The sacrificial goodness that punctuates her narratives serves to antidote the feelings of guilt that harassed her, following her social and familial rejection. Marilyn Orr seems to concur vehemently with this view. She spells out the similarity between the writer and her fictional avatar in an accurate fashion. For her:

> *Maggie is Mary Anne Evans reincarnated: the precocious, affectionate child deeply in need of the love of her father and particularly her brother. Like Mary Anne, Maggie revels in the world of imagination and seeks safety and transcendence as a young woman in a strict religious otherworldliness that is actually a self- repression.* (Orr, 2018, p. 30)

The resolution to sacrificially rescue her brother becomes a self-destructive way to compensate for the feelings of loss, triggered by the breakdown of

the fraternal bonds. In a world where the woman is defined in relation to man, the loss of the brotherly bonds is synonymous to the loss of inner security and self-worth. Suffice to say, penitential suffering and excruciating death appear as curative measures whereby Maggie can extricate herself from consuming despair and loss. It is important to stress that her selfless itinerancy is tempered by a pathological emotional dependency on the brother who exerts a stifling surveillance over her. As suggested by Orr, "Maggie invests her own identity in her brother's unforgiving care, believing that he must love her because he knows her so well" (ibid, p. 31). The lot of Maggie becomes here summed up: she is coerced to believe that her happiness is dwelled in being loved by Tom. In order to fit his patriarchal gusto, she has to beg for his affections, attention, and forgiveness. It comes as no surprise that the inner security of the poor Maggie becomes keyed in propitiating the household patriarch and succumbing submissively to his dictates. The next section will show that Maggie does not incarnate only the story of Mary Evans' rejection, but also of George Eliot's frustrated ambition. She is then doomed to bear the frustration of exclusion implemented against the female sex.

1.2 Seeking fulfillment in self-negation

In *The Mill on The Floss*, George Eliot resorts to killing her protagonist in order to purge herself of the painful anxiety that constantly haunts her. Yet, the 'no-self' trademark, which continues to sponsor her writings, reveals that the death of the character brings little therapeutic effect on the restless author. In *Middlemarch*, for instance, Eliot creates her heroine, Dorothea, as a saint-like figure who devotes her life to selfless servitude. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar devote significant attention to what they label as the myth of "the Angels of Renunciation", promoted by Eliot's narratives. For them, "seeking to legitimize her efforts and then her success as a writer as an unusual transcendence of the limits of her gender, Eliot resorts frequently in her major novels to pledge of deference and doctrines of feminine renunciation that are directly at odds with her own aggressively pursued career" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 466). The difficulty of reconciling the conventional with the unconventional finds expression in "acts of vengeance against her own characters" (ibid, p. 479). Avenging her own characters would mean making them bear the burden of exclusion decreed against their sex. Understandably, the limitations imposed on her protagonists are constitutive of and contributive to the formulation of their self-effacing acts. Their inability to actualize their aspirations occasions feelings of frustration,

which are metamorphosed into compensatory self-sacrificing acts. So, the resolution to self-renunciation is meant to compensate for the inability to live up to the idealized conception of the self.

A deeper accounting of this assumption would require a psychoanalytical framing. To thoroughly explore Eliot's penchant for self-abnegation, the critic Bernard Paris invites readers to analyze her works from psychoanalytic lenses. He draws on the theories of the psychoanalyst Karen Horney to diagnose the Eliotian syndrome of sacrifice. He finds that the syndrome is birthed from a desperate resolution of the conflict between an idealized self and a despised self. It is sourced in feelings of weakness and despair. Bernard Paris argues that "To compensate for feelings of weakness, inadequacy, and low self-esteem, we develop, says Horney (1950), an "idealized image" of ourselves" (Paris, 1974, p. 7). For him, this self-idealized image gives rise to what he calls as "the despised self," which is what we feel ourselves to be when we fail to live up to our inner dictates or when the world does not honor our claims" (ibid, p.10). More bluntly, the despised self is the product of the frustration arising from the inability to measure up to the idealized conception of the self. Bernard Paris draws attention to the fact that "frustration of the basic needs produces pathology. It arrests our development, alienates us from our real selves, and leads us to devise strategies for making up for our deficiencies" (ibid, p.11). The strategies include altruistic acts, which are often expressive of a self-defensive policy against the feelings of frustration. Living for others emerges then as a panacea for a wounded pride and also as a way to fill the blank, vacated by the absence of self-fulfillment.

Mary Daly's feminist interpretation of the inner spring of this self-sacrifice syndrome may be weighed in favor of this view. For her, "People attempt to overcome the threat of nonbeing by denying the self. Part of the problem is that people, women in particular, who are seemingly incapable of a high degree of self -actualization have been made such by societal structures" (Daly, 1973, p.23). Eliot's protagonists echo strongly these realities and fit both Paris and Daly's theorizing. The threat of non being socially approved as a self-searching woman led Maggie to embark on a self-emptying journey. Eliot seems quite assertive in showing how women are coerced to realize themselves and find completion for their aspiration by pledging themselves to dutiful obedience. Realizing that her dreams are too bright to be achieved in her provincial world, Maggie labors to bridge this failure through an

altruistic commitment to her brother. Such a view was vehemently endorsed by the critic Nancy Henry. For her, Eliot's heroines "attempt to confront a personal crisis by submission and renunciation, but like Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Casaubon, and Marian Evans, the refuge in renunciation of self cannot be a permanent solution to human problems" (Henry, 2012, p.144). The sacrificing goodness flagged by Maggie aggravates her problems and wreaks emotional pain that gravitates into a masochistic self-punishment. At the end, Maggie dies as a pitiful masochist who derives satisfaction from her subservience to her brother. The next section will dwell on the social and familial pressures that led our heroine to the status quo. Notably, the brother-sister hierarchy, orchestrated by both a distant mother and a hostile environment will animate the upcoming discussion.

2. The need to be loved: the tragic flaw of Maggie Tulliver

2.1 Under the tyranny of a semi god called the brother

In *The Mill on The Floss*, George Eliot embarks on a retrospective journey into her childhood memories to incarnate her provincial past and write the *curriculum vitae* of Mary Evans. The six hundred pages, which are laden with episodes of oppression, suffering, and struggle are evocative of Mary Evans's predicament in her paternalistic world. In the Eliotian world of Maggie Tulliver, the struggle for transcendence is always stymied by the patriarchal dos and don'ts, which sentence women's crucifixion. Eliot uses Maggie to air the trauma of exclusion that continues to molest her integrity and progress. Integral to this trauma is the inconsolable pain, triggered by the loss of the brother-sister bonds that used to tie Mary Evans with her beloved Isaac. The brother-sister kinship, which comes to typify in the novel Maggie's relationship to Tom, is in fact more complex than it seems. The relationship is layered with a philosophy of male domination and female subordination that seems to weigh heavily on Maggie. As a girl, she is coerced into believing that her gender is a congenital weakness that incapacitates her from rising intellectually, like her brother. According to cultural norms, Maggie is deemed unfit to do Euclid, learn Latin, or even read Daniel Defoe's *The History of The Devil*. Mr. Stelling justifies this intellectual exclusion on the premise that girls "can pick up a little of everything… They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (Eliot, 200, p.104). Mr. Stelling's flawed verdict is colored by the philosophy of sex dimorphism, which draws on the supposedly emotional and physical frailties of women to exempt Maggie from intellectual exertion. Under the auspices

of sex polarity, the raison d'être of the intellectually ambitious Maggie is geared into the exercise of docility and servility. The type of education that is prescribed to her is rather corporeal, addressed to the mastery of cookery and housewifery arts. Mary Wollstonecraft was among the earliest feminists to address the issue of female education in her writings. She inveighs against the way women are weakly educated in order to make them uncompetitive with men. For her, the education given to women is meant to "prepare them to become chaste wives and sensible mothers" (Wollstonecraft, 2002, p. 37). Wollstonecraft labels this form of education "a school of coquetry and art" (ibid., p. 43), destined to cultivate the heart rather than the intellect. It is meant to root women deeply in the domestic sphere of duty and squeeze them in the diminishing mold of servility.

Maggie's parents seem to subscribe to this patriarchal rationale. The novel opens with Mr. Tulliver's pensiveness over where best Tom could be sent to pursue his education. Maggie, though endowed with intelligence, is doomed to be incarcerated in the domestic temple, taking care of Tom's rabbits. As suggested by the critic Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Maggie's imaginative reading and reasoning collide with cultural definitions of women's minds as 'quick and shallow'" (Bodenheimer, 1994, p.104). The intellectual exclusion exerted against women is given a comprehensible treatment in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf specifically sheds light on the predicament of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, whose gender incapacitates her to excel in her intellectual pursuits. Woolf calls attention to the fact that while Shakespeare was "practicing his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. …his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home" (Woolf, 1977, p. 53). Much like our protagonist, Judith, though imaginative and contemplative, "was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic" (ibid). Both Maggie and Judith are constrained by the same chains that freeze their potentials in a world of domesticity and servility. Their talents are lain dormant under the auspices of biological determinism which makes them passive spectators of male dictates.

This bifurcation of sexes will dangerously culminate into the categorization of men and women not only as essential/non-essential, but also as dominant/dominated, respectively. In such a schema, Maggie is endorsed to play the role of the pawn in this game of sex roles. Tom, on the other hand, emerges as a sovereign being, enjoying an ex officio position within his

family. The narrator whispers to his readers that by virtue of this masculine supremacy, the brother is immunized from all sorts of parental punishment. He adds that even though Tom is more troublesome than Maggie, the mother never scolds his misbehaviour: "If Tom Tulliver whipped a gate, he was convinced, not that the whipping of gates by all boys was a justifiable act, but that he, Tom Tulliver, was justifiable in whipping that particular gate, and he wasn't going to be sorry" (Eliot, 2000, p. 51). Under this brother-sister hierarchy, Tom is exonerated from any surveillance: he is free to act wrongly, subdue, and inflict pain on his surroundings. But Maggie's wrongdoings, though not harmful to others, could not receive even a lenient treatment by her mother and aunts. The slightest error will be met by exclusion and violent retaliation. The narrator recalls that when the poor girl cuts her hair, her aunt Mrs. Glegg warns her about the punishment she should undergo: "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread and water, —not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles" (Eliot, 2000, p. 53).

The differential treatment that the two siblings are subject to cannot pass unnoticed. A boy who abuses his sister is not likely to be fed on bread and water. Tom is rather welcome to sit with his mother, whose conscience never accuses her of acting unjustly towards Maggie. It becomes difficult to resist feeling some resentment about this motherly-flagged injustice, maintained against our protagonist. The injustice would invite serious feminist examination of the brother-mother- daughter relationship. Though bell hooks' interventions operate within the Afro-American context, her insight on the psychological undertones of patriarchy seems very useful to our study. Her campaign against emotional abuse, and her psychological theorizing of the patriarchal mind, are very instrumental in understanding our protagonist's plight. Particularly, she hinges on the pivotal role the mother can play in enforcing the existentially hierarchical interaction between the daughter and the son. For her, "the teaching of a dominator model of relationships comes to boy children through both women and men. Patriarchy breeds maternal sadism in women who embrace its logic" (hooks, 2004, p. 43). Maternal sadism embodies the perils of a sexist masculinity, which does not only proselytize for anti-woman acts, but ventures to claim a female allegiance to the status quo. It is no surprise under this logic that some women convert into victimizers, coercing men to usurp power over their female fellows. Mrs. Tulliver pledges allegiance to this maternal sadism, by encouraging her son to play the role of what bell hooks calls "the mini

patriarch" (hooks, 2004, p. 44). This differential treatment of the two children will bear serious consequences on the daughter, who feels emotionally segregated by the supposedly dearest mother.

2.2 Suffering the pangs of emotional starvation

Eva Fuchs, in her article "*The Pattern's All Missed: Separation and Individuation in The Mill on The Floss",* carefully identifies Maggie's lot as an emotional starvation. The latter arises inevitably from the feelings of rejection that stifle her energy and hamper her sense of self-esteem. For Fuchs, "having suffered a terrible maternal rejection, Maggie, like Philip, is impelled by a "hunger of the heart", a fierce unsatisfied appetite for attachment. Maggie transfers to Tom much of the libidinal need which has been left unfulfilled in her relationship to her mother" (Fuchs, 1987, p. 424). Understandably, Maggie's neurotic attachment to Tom is colored by the need to fulfill the emotional void, left by her distant mother.

Mrs. Tulliver's affiliation with maternal sadism resulted in the dissolution of the motherly bonds that tie her to her daughter. The black- haired Maggie is emotionally famished in her relationship to the fair- haired mother. The latter dismisses her daughter's exotic beauty and analytical mind as incommensurate with the ideals of normative femininity. According to her, Maggie's boldness vibrates strongly with the image of the unwomanly woman, who roams beyond the cult of angelic femininity. Unwilling as she is to fit the conventional mold, Maggie is disregarded by her mother as a "small mistake of nature" (Eliot, 2000, p. 17), and a "wild thing" (ibid). As such, she would bear no correlation with the world of beauty and respectability, cherished by the aunts. As a disciple of this maternal sadism, the mother grows increasingly indifferent and distant from her little daughter. Maggie, as a consequence, is doomed to lapse in a world fraught with despair and loneliness. The narrator hints at the fact that the mother is more inclined to submit to the ideals of social respectability, than to care for her lonely child. Her anxiety, for instance, at her daughter' sudden disappearance has little to do with her safety. It seems rather tempered by her enquiry over "what the father would say if Maggie was lost" (Eliot, 2000, p. 77).

It is not only the fear of the household patriarch which troubles Mrs. Tulliver and eclipses her motherly attention towards Maggie. The narrator reveals that in case of misfortune that may befall her children, the mother seems more preoccupied with local gossip. She shudders, for instance, at the thought that people will accuse her of acting wickedly to deserve her

troubles. For the reader, Mrs. Tulliver indeed deserves her maternal troubles, for she fails to discern the psychological undertones of her daughter's running into the gypsies. It is worth noting that Maggie's escape is expressive of an outcry against the unrelenting surveillance, exerted against her by the brother. Being persistently denigrated as wild, stupid, and idiot, Maggie thinks naively that the gypsies "would gladly receive her and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge" (ibid). Seeking refuge among the gypsies is then seeking refuge from harassment, disparagement and humiliation. One can say with considerable certainty that her refuge is being sponsored by a low sense of the self. The latter propels her to search for recognition among people who are supposedly inferior to her. The heroine is aware that recognition would never spring from her aunts and mother, who keep comparing her unfavorably to Lucy, the Dodson's female prototype.

It is noteworthy that this low self-esteem does not only encourage Maggie to seek recognition from the outside, but it also leads her to live selflessly to comply with conventional dictates. The feminist critic Ursula King calls attention that women who "suffer from a low self-regard; too often they see their task as one of giving, of self-sacrifice, rather than of fostering their self-esteem and own sense of worth" (King, 1993, p. 79). As a consequence of this self-depreciating image, they start to accept the notion of "simply 'being' rather than 'doing' as a rationalization for their exclusion from the actions and decisions of the real world" (ibid). Given the way Maggie has been excluded from the sphere of "doing", she resigns herself to the stereotypical fate of being a self-denying angel. By squeezing herself in the mold of "being", Maggie accepts to prostrate herself before Tom.

Maggie's obedience to her brother continues to explain many of her actions. It is noteworthy that behind her escape to the gypsies lurks also an unfulfilled endeavor to assuage the wrath of the male deity. Upon her return, Maggie confessed to her father that she "ran away because (she) was so unhappy; Tom was so angry with (her) (and) (she) couldn't bear it" (Eliot, 2000, p. 83). Her words attest to a psychological crisis, whereby she is hooked in an emotional dependency on her brother. Displeasing a supreme being, called the brother, is awful to contemplate for the poor sister. Unable as she is to act autonomously, Maggie is always begging for Tom's consideration, love, and forgiveness. Even when being faultless or having accidently caused a minor lapse, she still starves for his pardon. The narrative voice intervenes

to explain that "the need of being loved would always subdue her, as, in old days, it subdued her in the worm-eaten attic" (Eliot, 2000, p. 252). This ascetic need to be loved takes precedence over the need to protect her pride against Tom's assaultive comportment. The pathological urge to claim love from her brother does not only strip her of a sense of dignity, but it also gravitates into a harmful jealousy. Seeing Tom and Lucy walking together would fan the flames of jealousy and anger for the lovesick Maggie. Refusing to be a third wheel in this relationship, she resorts to throw her cousin in the mud, as a way to drift her far from her brother.

A question that may intrude itself at this point of the discussion is: why does Maggie not quench her emotional thirst through a close attachment to her father, instead of the brother? Could Maggie, after all, find in Mr. Tulliver's arms a haven from the humiliation she is daily subjected to? When a chorus of familial disdain was hurled at her following her resolution to cut her hair, the father's shoulders were a locus of compassion for his little wench. But one should not lose sight also that the same shoulders fail to dethrone the brother from his supremacy. A speculative explanation of this failure may thread its way through the father's personality and stance towards his daughter's ordeal. Mr. Tulliver's weak personality and impotency to deal adequately with crisis would not make him eligible for playing out the surrogate role. In accordance with this claim, Bernard Paris may not overstate the situation, when arguing that Maggie, the "self-effacing person," is drawn to Tom, the "arrogant-vindictive person . . . because [she] needs to be protected by and to live vicariously through someone who can master life aggressively" (Paris, 1969, p. 178).

Doubtless, Mr. Tulliver is not such a man who masters life aggressively, as evidenced in his physical and financial collapse after the loss of his lawsuit against Mr. Wakem. Because of his character, the tender-hearted father could not curb the growing tyranny of his son. It would be hardly an exaggeration to say that sometimes Maggie's lot is made even worse by the father's unresponsiveness and sporadic acquiescence to her devaluation. He, in this regard, replicates his wife's discriminatory views, when he expresses his discomfort at his daughter's distinctive smartness. For him, this smartness is likely to constitute a source of mischief for her as a girl. Much like his wife, Mr. Tulliver is "bitterly preoccupied with the thought that the girl was growing up, was shooting up into a woman; and how was she to do well in life? She had a poor chance for marrying, down in the world as they

were" (Eliot, 2000, p. 181). At these attempts to mold her into a marriageable girl, Maggie begins feeling "hatred toward her father and mother, who were so unlike what she would have them to be; toward Tom, who checked her, and met her thought or feeling always by some thwarting difference" (Eliot, 2000, p. 186). Her surrogate attachment to a person who meets her thoughts by difference will not be salvific. The attachment seems to disempower her and disarm her of her perseverance. More dangerously, it turns into an instrument of oppression, used by the brother to usurp power over his sister.

2.3 Psychic mutilation to reciprocate emotional starvation

Throughout the novel, Maggie's thirst for intimacy is not quenched by the brother, nor by the mother. Puffed up with his masculine arrogance, Tom is unable to empathize with his sister's plea for closeness. He is rather inclined to meet her sympathy with emotional aridity. Though on some occasions a gleaming flicker of love may flash from him, he seems still unable to explicitly reciprocate affections with his sister. Doing so may castrate the mini patriarch and disarm him of the controlling power he continuously exerts. Tom is called to live up to the ideals of normative masculinity, which prescribe what bell hooks calls "psychic self-mutilation" (hooks, 2004, p. 45) as a requisite power to safeguard his authority figure. Hooks argues quite comprehensively that "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (ibid).

The psychic self-mutilation that men like Tom subscribe to is weaponized against women to reach twofold purposes. It serves then to reinforce the macho model and instigate patterns of female subordination. The purpose cannot, however, be attained without instilling the rhetoric of fear among women. This means that psychic mutilation interacts consonantly with a disempowering rhetoric of fear to reinforce these domination-subordination dynamics. Suffice to say, a man who is emotionally inexpressive is liable to be fearfully obeyed by his female subjects.

In the novel, Tom's coldness towards Maggie bears the imprint of this psychic self-mutilation. It allows him to preserve his macho persona and enjoy his ascendancy over her. This coldness grows steadily stronger under the sister's emotional vulnerability. Understandably, by virtue of Maggie's

restless begging for pardon, Tom's coldness does not go in vain. The more the poor girl starves for forgiveness, the more the brother grows arrogant, and thus the more she is incarcerated under his patriarchal thumb. The narrator seems aware of how the protagonist is yoked to her household master through this interplay of emotions. The accident of breaking Tom's pagoda could not pass costless for Maggie. The narrator reveals that without pouring out any word of disdain, Tom succeeds in bringing her into a state of infantile subjugation: "the morning had been made heavy to Maggie, and Tom's persistent coldness to her all through their walk spoiled the fresh air and sunshine for her" (Eliot, 2000, p. 68).

Caught on the wheel of such an emotional torture, Maggie feels obliged to choose suffering in silence as a strategy of survival. Though there are moments when she is driven by an inner voice to rebel against Tom, the temptation is put in abeyance. She wants to tell him that she is smarter than him, able to do Euclid, and read Latin. But the fear of exclusion always muffles her in silence. Maggie is called to tame her agitation, but also to dedicate herself to living in conformity with her brother's dictates. When her interest in Philip is encroached upon by her brother's will, it is the latter that steps into the podium of victory. For Tom, a relationship with the son of a man his father despises is an idea that he cannot reconcile himself with. The collision between Tom's will and Maggie's ambition is in fact a collision between inward impulse and outward reality. It is a clash between the desire to live freely from patriarchal clutches and the duty to comply with societal and familial imperatives. It is also a confrontation between the authentic self and the social self which is propelled to comply with outer pressures.

The intersection between the authentic self and the social self is more perplexing than it seems. The meeting gives rise to a divided self, doomed to live in a purgatorial space, fissured by wavering loyalties and conflicting polarities. Maggie tries despairingly to reconcile these polarities by pledging herself to a worldview in which duty to others establishes itself against any quest for self-aggrandizement. It is a worldview that decrees the neutralization of her hypnotic impulses in accordance with the provincialism and conformism of her St. Ogg's society. A way out of the labyrinth for the little Maggie is to live beyond the self and extinguish any flickering beam of intimacy towards Philip Wakem. The heroine seems unaware that by making her life a specimen of renunciation, she will lapse into an ecstasy, where she is dispossessed of the natural consciousness of being herself. A main concern

of the next section is to investigate the mythos and the ethos of the heroine' selfless trademark and discuss its implications for her life. We will examine the ability of her no-self manifesto to antidote the disempowering feelings of estrangement. Maggie's tragic martyrdom will be then accorded a significant critical space in order to discuss the heroic/unheroic scenarios of her death.

3. Penitential suffering as a reactionary defense against despair and loneliness

3.1 A new mode of living shrouded in fanaticism

A main lesson to be gleaned from the previous discussion is that the battle for sex ascendancy is often fought and won at the emotional front. Men like Tom succeed to imprint their ethos of domination by virtue of ~~a~~ psychic self-mutilation, or by coercing women to enact their inferiority. Denigrating and injurious words like "stupid", "ugly" and "wild" have a devastating echo on Maggie, who is dependent on her brother for her self-regard. The words addressed to her are poignant enough to molest her self-sufficiency and thus shore up an interactional temperament, quintessential for male tyranny. As seen previously, Maggie tries to combat the pain of insecurity through a morbid connectedness with her oppressor. This has exacerbated her otherness and reinforced the existentially unilateral power maintained against her. Her incapacitation to drag herself out of the slough of despond will set the stage for a new mode of living, flagged by submissive servanthood and fanatical altruism.

Maggie finds in her reading of Thomas Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* an explanation and solution to her former problems and frustrations. The book brings her into an epiphanic awareness that "all the miseries of her young life [have] come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of the universe' (Eliot,2000, p. 187). Seen in this light, "renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain" (ibid). Maggie resigns herself into a life destitute of any aggrandizement of the self and dedicated mainly to promote familial and communal benefits. As such, needless and useless will be to fulfill her passions, or confront her mother's and brother's will. Voluntary submission becomes the order of the day that will regiment her future interactions. Bernard J Paris gives this life-beyond-the-self philosophy a comprehensive treatment in his reading of George Eliot's novels. For him, the Eliotian heroines strive to attain martyrdom by putting people's interests ahead of

their own. Paris is, however, careful to single out that "their living for others is often a defense against despair" (Paris, 2003, p. 12). As seen previously, it does not spring from any appetitive instinct, but rather reflects a compulsive drive to live up to the feminine ideals. Disfranchised by the sentiments of worthlessness, these heroines try to gain a sense of recognition by embarking on selfless trajectories.

In *The Mill on The Floss*, Maggie's response to the familial and social surveillance exerted against her lends weight to this ongoing discussion. Her search for books where "the dark woman triumphs" (Eliot, 2000, p. 213), reflects her urge to avenge herself against social handicaps. Maggie cannot, however, avenge herself, because in her society the female urge to act is always monitored by the male urge to control. The inability to carry out this revenge triggers sentiments of uneasiness and insecurity, which will be assuaged by subduing herself to the will of others. Tom endorses vehemently this view, when he tries to strip his sister of her autonomy and subdue her to his own will. His intention is laid bare in his reply to Maggie's enragement at the way her sex is being disadvantaged by her society: "Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can" (Eliot, 2000, p. 223). His words are poured out from a deep consciousness that since women lack self-command, they should succumb to the will of men. Such ~~a~~ reasoning would encourage Maggie to adhere to a fanatic worldview that demonize passion while valorizing selfless commitment to others. The path of martyrdom that she clings to requires a great deal of suffering, but also an uncomplaining endurance of this suffering. Under the auspices of this philosophy, Maggie strives "to be contented with that hardness, and to require nothing. That is the path (she) likes when (she) sets out on (her) abandonment of egoism, – the path of martyrdom and endurance" (Eliot, 2000, p. 189). Our heroine seems to subscribe to the view that "in a small provincial town, a woman's passion, however noble its nature or object, is morally dangerous" (Dolin, 2005, p. 138). A passion which is morally dangerous should be crucified and thus purged of its threatening implications for the masculine order.

3.2 Evaporating passion at the altar of paternalistic interests

Maggie's decision to adhere to the ethos of martyr-like selflessness would drain her enthusiasm and bring her into a state of disempowering obedience. By meeting her brother's hardness with endurance and submission, she spirals into the status of what John Stuart Mill calls "the willing slave" (Mill, 1869, p. 27). Women like her are not only required to behave as inferiors, but

also to cast themselves in the role of willing slaves, deriving satisfaction from their subjugation. A willing slave is more liable to propitiate his male master and perpetuate the cycle of oppression maintained against him. Simone De Beauvoir warns against the danger of what she terms "the delight of passivity" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p. 359). It is thus a sentiment whereby a woman wittingly makes herself an object to her male victimizer. For her, "to *make* oneself object, to *make* oneself passive, is very different from *being* a passive object" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p. 448). By enduring passive suffering and engaging in acts of self-effacement, Maggie makes herself a passive object to the patriarchal gaze. Her mother observes with delight her rite of passage into a willing slave. She says that "Maggie should be "growing up so good"; it was amazing that this once "contrary" child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will" (Eliot, 2000, p.189). Indeed, the willing slave, who had an aversion to feminine adornment, decides now to succumb to the styling of her burdensome hair to the conventional tastes of her mother. Refusing to confront the mirror, Maggie tries to repress her distaste at seeing her hair braided "into a coronet on the summit of her head" (ibid).

It appears very surprising that the ex-rebellious Maggie turns to derive satisfaction from doing things that please others, and not herself. Even perhaps harder to expect from her is the idea of bringing her romantic relationship with Philip into a screeching halt. One should not lose sight of the fact that the decision is meant to please her father and her brother. It seems important now to pause briefly and comment on Maggie's relationship with Philip Waken, which similarly proves to bear the stump of her altruistic promptings. The reader is able to discern these promptings, when the melancholic lover persuades her to declare her love to him. Unable to pour out or feign the kind of love Philip seeks, Maggie asserts: "I don't think I could love any one better than I love you. I should like always to live with you to make you happy" (Eliot, 2000, p. 215). The love the adult Maggie feels towards Philip takes a particular complexion. It is a love colored by an awakening sympathy for others, or an ascetic need to sacrificially serve the crippled and melancholic son of Mr. Waken. The deformity and loneliness of Philip are both able to stir the pity and the selfless services of Eliot's heroine. The pursuit of individual happiness will, of course, be expunged from the agendas of the sacrificing pilgrim, who feels "a great deal happier …., since (she) (has) given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant" (Eliot, 2000, p.194).

But Maggie has to give up thinking also about what is easy for the pitiful Philip, when the call to preserve familial ties intrudes itself against her former altruistic maneuvers. This means that when the dutiful bondage to her family intersects with her sympathy for Philip, the latter will be unhesitatingly brought into an abrupt abortion. With a heart brimful of sorrow, Maggie confronts her friend with her decision: "I must part with you; we must never take any notice of each other again" (Eliot ,2000, p. 193). For the heartbroken Philip, these farewell words are underwritten by what he calls "a narrow, self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of (her) nature" (Eliot, 2000, p. 210). He seems aware enough that her fanatic devotion to duty bears no correlation with any religious grandeur, and it is rather a product of a low self-image.

Not only Philip who is attentive to the patriarchal layers of his friend's fanaticism. Feminists like Mary Daly are very outspoken against this matriculation of women as selfless pilgrims. For them, the religious mantle with which the ideal of sacrifice is being wrapped contributes significantly to plunging women into Christ-like roles. Daly calls attention that to the fact Jesus' "functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women" (Daly, 1973, p. 77). Under this model, women like Maggie become easily scapegoated to boost patriarchal agendas. Even worse, they are often coerced to believe that by affiliating themselves with Jesus Christ's sacrificing acts, they can be justified under God's sight. To reconcile themselves to God, the daughters of the temptress Eve have to anthropomorphize the pietistic image of Christ through enacting his suffering. Maggie Tulliver, upon reading Thomas Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, wants similarly to emulate the spirit of the cross and make her life a specimen of heroic martyrdom. Her penitential death which will be thoroughly discussed later on comes, in this sense, to enact Christ's death on the cross. As a Christ co-sufferer, Maggie dies to save her brother and repent for the sin of disgracing the family's name.

The Victorian feminist Florence Nightingale rails against this androcentric reading, which inflicts pain and suffering on women to find acceptance in the sight of God. This atoning model does not only valorize masochistic suffering as a requisite virtue to attain salvation, but also projects a wrathful image of God. Nightingale was among the first Victorian feminists to air her rejection of the idea that Jesus' death on the cross was a penalty paid to

redeem a sinful humanity. For her, there is no biblical evidence which attests that ''God's anger had been bought off—as if God had been bribed into giving us heaven—a fancy place which we had done nothing to create—by sufferings merely 'to satisfy God's justice" (Macdonald, 2001, p. 27). A hundred years after, Nightingale's view still retains power among modern feminists, who also interrogate the redemptive power of suffering. Interestingly, the feminist theologian Julie Hopkins rejects wholesale any atoning model that prescribes suffering as a gateway leading to the path of redemption. For her, "sins that lead to the death of Christ and demand penitential self-denial, the result is not redemptive" (Hopkins, 1994, p. 54). Hopkins remarks cautiously that the death of Christ on the cross is rather an act of violence. Accordingly, a redemption that is channeled through violent death will be destitute of any biblical significance. Such a feminist logic would have a watering down effect on Maggie' sacrificing death. It would, more precisely, problematize the redeeming implications of her decision to rescue Tom from the flood. To put it in a more illuminating wording, the death of Maggie should not be considered as a prerequisite for reconciling her with God.

3.3 A crucified martyr to an aborted ambition

The death of Maggie does not catalyze any earthly or heavenly rewards, but rather marks a premature abortion of promising aspirations and bright dreams. The critic K.M Newton sees the protagonist's return to St Ogg's as the main incentive for her tragic demise. For him, Maggie's return to her village lacks "satisfactory result for anyone in the novel—with Stephen Guest being forced into exile. Maggie having no prospect of being accepted by the St Ogg's community and no way forward for Lucy Deane and Philip Wakem so that the reader is confronted with a tragic impasse" (Newton, 2018, p.141). The homecoming brings a relapsing fate for the poor Maggie, as it accentuates her frustration and her proclivity for masochistic suffering. Being rejected both by her brother and her community, she tries to find security by giving up her life as a compensation for the pain she has inflicted on those around her. One can say with a considerable certainty that the prescription of sacrificial death is an inevitable outcome of her misdiagnosis of her conditions. Maggie fails to understand that she has no voluntary hand in the disgrace that befell her family and she is rather a victim of Stephen. The latter appears to be another patriarchal figure seeking to deprive her of her ability to act on her own. The protagonist has never been an agent of her own choices, which have always been shaped by others' desires and interests. When the sea waves drive the boat into an unknown destiny,

Stephen tries to confront the poor Maggie with the *fait accompli*: to start a new life with him away from St. Ogg's and turn her back on her past.

Betraying the past would mean betraying those she loves most_ an act that is tantamount to stabbing her cousin Lucy and disgracing the name of her family. But, the selfless Maggie, who wants to make herself a spiritual trophy of Jesus Christ, seems aware of the painful implications of the step. Seeking her own happiness at the expense of others is incommensurate with the selfless trajectory she sets up for herself. Now, she is pressurized to put the selfless ideals into practical terms and renounce "all delights then, before she knew them, before they had come within her reach" (Eliot, 2000, p. 302). For her, it is difficult to resist feelings some bitterness at her current predicament, but the urge of martyrdom seems overpowering. Maggie decides finally to bear the cross, as evidenced in the following words: "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand: I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou has laid it upon me" (Eliot, 2000, p. 328). The narrator hints that it is only at this impasse that the heroine is able to come to terms with the true meaning of renunciation. Prior to the boating episode, she thinks of sacrifice as a "quiet ecstasy" (Eliot, 2000, p. 302). Bearing the cross, however, is something antonymous to feelings of ecstasy; it is rather bearing the agonies and the injuries of self-mutilation.

Not only is Philip right when castigating Maggie's immaturity in understanding the true meaning of renunciation; the reader, as well, is aware of her tragic flaw, but more importantly of the psychological undertones of her altruistic promptings. The fear of inflicting pain on others is not the sole motive dictating her maneuvers. The crippling inability to define herself beyond her brother is very central to her return to St. Ogg's. The return to St. Ogg's is mainly a return to the sovereign brother. For Maggie, the meeting with the brother represents a fulfillment of a nostalgic yearning for forgiveness and a desperate attempt to amend a broken past. Tom, however, lacks any sympathetic reading of her motives, as he accuses her of plotting a clandestine trip with Stephen Guest. He meets her plea for reconciliation with cold rigidity and vengeful rage: "You have disgraced us all… You have been base, deceitful; … I wash my hands of you forever. You don't belong to me….I can't believe in you any more" (Eliot, 2000, p. 309). The truth is that Tom has never believed in his sister, even when she was obedient to him. The mini-patriarch has always sneered at her potentials, curbed her autonomy and brought her into a state of infantile subjugation.

What is even thwarting is to see the duty-bound sister abasing herself before an oppressor, who refuses to bestow his forgiveness for a sin she did not commit. Bearing the pangs of Tom's rejection is something Maggie is not prone of. The sedative remedy, this time, is not to cut her hair or take an escape route among the gypsies, but rather to give her life as a sacrifice to her brother.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call attention to the fact that Maggie "punishes herself, finding in self-abasement a sign of her moral superiority to the man she continues to serve". (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 498). She chooses to embrace such a gloomy mode of moral heroism because, she "understands that she cannot triumph in her world except through a man" (ibid, p. 493). One is not overstating the matter in considering that in Maggie's world, man is the pivot around which the female' self-definition, survival, and triumph are all determined. The flood event provides our heroine with an unexpected opportunity to "triumph through a man" and regenerate the desire of renewal with her brother. The idea of rescuing Tom from the drowning waters seems to gleam at her mind, more than the fear of the imminent death rushing towards her. The narrator underscores with considerable economy the protagonists' sacrificial endeavors to save Tom:

> *Then with one yearning look toward her uncle Deane's house that lay farther down the river, she took to both her oars and rowed with all her might across the watery fields, back toward the Mill…With panting joy that she was there at last, –joy that overcame all distress, – Maggie neared the front of the house.* *(Eliot, 2000, p. 331)*

A curious reader may rush into enquiring whether the risky voyage did attain its objectives. This means whether the cherished reconciliation between the savior Maggie and the saved Tom is finally concretized. "In their death they were not divided" (Eliot, 2000, p.331): these are the concluding words whereby the narrator chooses to bring the suspense into a dead halt. It is then up to this curious reader to bring forth his own judgment, and subject the tragic death of his protagonist into examination. A careful examination would reveal that Maggie died not for a familial cause, nor for the sake of being loved by her environment, as may be understood by many. She died as a martyr to a frustrated ambition, or as suggested by Marilyn Orr "to an "idealism in that her hopes and dreams can never be realized in the actual world of her experience" (Orr, 2018, p. 34). Maggie died for a struggle which

no one in her provincial world believes in: the struggle to be her brother's equal.

4. Self-annihilation as a penalty of self-fulfillment

The masterful campaign maintained against Maggie freezes her in a quivering world of silence and chores up an interactional terrain quintessential for self-immolation. Contemplating further this self-immolation would lead us to see her death as a debt satisfaction, owed to a wrathful brother and a hostile environment. Understandably, the abnegation of the self emerges as the penalty payment required by patriarchal authority to redeem Maggie from the sin of self-fulfillment. According to the prevailing cultural dictates, a woman who transcends the limits of her sex and claims existence in the intellectual realm is dismissed as unfeminine. As argued by Dale Spender, "femininity demanded that women recede into the background and not be prominent figures in the foreground" (Spender, 1988, p. 174). In a male normative society, a woman is a woman only by virtue of her inferiority, passivity, and alterity.

But one should be attentive to the fact that to demonize female willfulness as unfeminine or immoral is to recognize its power to understand, debunk, and subvert patriarchal authority. Men like Tom are aware that his sister's expansive self would hold restrictive implications on his patriarchal ego. The abnegation and the abdication of this expansive self-provide the domineering brother with the requisite power to reassert his ascendancy. As seen previously, molesting her self-sufficiency and making her strive for closeness proves to be very instrumental to bring her into a lamb- like submission. The article has shown that to attain this closeness, Maggie has to tame her desires and take another persona. Shulamith Firestone may be right, in this context, to see that "social recognition is granted only for a *false* individuality" (Firestone, 1970, p. 151). Maggie embraces this false individuality when she casts herself in the scapegoat role, accepting to give her life as a ransom to a vindictive brother. This metaphor of ransom payment uncovers the power dynamics and the psychological layers lurking behind Maggie's punitive model of the cross. Seen from this light, it may not be an overstatement to regard the death of Maggie as both homicidal and suicidal. Our heroine died as a hapless casualty of an environment that aborts her dreams and refuses to legitimize her quest for self-making. She is also a masochist who strives for a paternalistic approval that decrees her crucifixion. Echoing the critic Manon Garcia, Maggie succumbs to the

patriarchal rationale that "her value comes from the outside, that it comes from man's gaze and love" (Garcia, 2021, p.164). The inability to grasp this outside recognition erupts into a psychological malaise that finds expression in self-defeating altruism.

Building on the previous insight, it would be fair to see Maggie as a victim of patriarchal surveillance and psychological oppression. To be psychologically oppressed is to be incapacitated to exercise autonomy, develop a sense of self-esteem, but also to be haunted by what Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo call "an alternate self" (Bailey & Cuomo, 2008, p.53). An alternate self may correlate with Shulamith Firestone 's notion of false individuality. It is "a truncated and inferior self that (women) have, in some sense, been doomed to be all the time" (ibid). The truncated self which takes a selfless silhouette reflects the depersonalizing effects of psychological oppression. Maggie fails to be her own person, as she strives for recognition through an alternate self or a false individuality. It is only through her death that she comes to voice the unvoiced trauma of this alternate self. This means that death grants her the recognition and the legitimacy she was looking for. Her ardent ambitions are awarded credit by the reader, rather than by the social milieu she sacrificially strives to satisfy. The recognition of the sympathetic reader legitimizes her aspirations and immortalize her as a martyr of aborted ambition and shattered dreams.

Conclusion

The death of Maggie may be cautionary against the culture of male ascendancy that elects mini-patriarchs to exert constraining surveillance over women. The article has shown how the unilateral power governing the brother-sister relationship has occasioned for the protagonist an incurable psychological damage. The latter finds expression in pathological altruism and masochistic suffering. We have seen how the altruistic fantasies of Maggie are really the product of her psychic alienation and the politics of exclusion laid out against her sex. Unable to measure up to the legacies of the Dodsons and the Tullivers, she harks back to the time of martyrs and saviors, in order to grasp acceptance in her provincial world.

The tragedy of Maggie embodies the peril of her impoverished education, which fails to make her competitive with her brother. An opportunity to quench her ardor for knowledge would free her from the pathetic emotional bondage that ties her to Tom. An education dedicated to bolstering the feminine intellect would fulfill her emotional void and resurrect an

independent Maggie, able to claim agency. In such a scenario, our protagonist may appear as a fictional trophy of George Eliot, incarnating both her intellectual perseverance and transcendence of social constraints. But Eliot wants our heroine to be an atrophied version of her persona and an incomplete allegory of her feminist struggle against gender bias. Unlike Mary Evans who ran away with her beloved Henry Lewes and succeeded to become George Eliot, Maggie Tulliver died without pursuing any success.

The schizophrenic communion between the writer and her protagonist may find a speculative explanation in Eliot's attempt to protect Maggie from the guilt-stricken feelings she herself grappled with. She has, in this sense, to kill her heroine in order to calm down her remorseful conscience and appease the pain of estrangement from her brother. Whilst the death of Maggie may have provided the restless writer with a handkerchief to staunch her wounds, it serves also to promote her artistic pursuits. According to Marilynn Orr, Maggie "might be seen as a martyr, not only to the cause of women and to "historical advance", but to the cause of George Eliot's writing" (Orr, 2018, p. 42). Her writing, Orr continues, "is actually a vocation that charges her with an ethical responsibility to arouse sympathy in her readers for the sufferings and shortcomings of their fellow mortals" (Orr, 2018, p. 44). As readers, we do sympathize with the lot of Maggie and feel pity for the way her struggle for equality has tragically taken this sacrificing itinerancy. Though her death may have frustrated many who wished a more assertive ending, it succeeds to stir our scorn of the whole patriarchal system that catalyzes this tragic demise.

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