Fathers, Daughters, and Domesticity in the Early Novels of George Eliot

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Abstract
This article explores how George Eliot shows fathers in domestic life in her fiction by focusing on the core components of Victorian fatherhood named by Claudia Nelson, that is, “authority, guidance and financial support.” In the 19th century Britain, fathers were having privileges of ownership and authority while mothers were confined to nurturing and comforting in domestic life. Most of the researchers on fathers in Eliot’s novels have tried to analyze the father-daughter conflicted relationship from a psychological, or Freudian, perspective. Alternatively, this study by drawing upon the theories of Lucian Goldmann and Alan Swingwood, focuses on the representation of fatherhood by Eliot with the help of comprehensive and interdisciplinary supporting literary, social, and historical resources from the Victorian age. The article argues that Eliot brings up the problems of patriarchy and authority of fathers of the transitional period of the 19th century. Eliot emphasizes that fathers are actually aware of their responsibilities even if they are not always able to carry them out completely. In middle class families, the failure or success of the father as head of the family has a deep impact on the other members of the home. The article concludes that by showing weaknesses, Eliot actually yearns and desires for the perfect father and admires the “intimacy” of “rare manly fathers” of the 19th century. Thus, Eliot idealizes future where individuals recognize and fulfill their duties and avow social and familial bonds.

Keywords
authority, domesticity, fathers, George Eliot, 19th century

Introduction
In 19th century Britain, the role of fathers changed dramatically due to the Industrial Revolution as fathers moved farther away from the home to the work places. The representation of fatherhood in 19th century fiction provides fascinating material about the historical, social, and cultural changes that occurred and offers a point of focus in the quest to understand the father’s shifting role during this time.

George Eliot is one of those writers who represented the social, cultural, and historical issues of their time. Most of her writings are about the middle class in a patriarchal society where fathers played an essential role in the development of their children in the male-dominated society of the Victorian age. Her works reveal and record the uncertainties about the place for the father in a culture that developed and underwent radical changes during the Industrial Revolution, the results of which are still present in society today.

Most of the researchers on fathers in Eliot’s novels have tried to analyze the father-daughter relationship from a psychological, or Freudian, perspective. The prominent researchers among those are Sadoff (1982), Pell (1982), and Wilt (1987), who make use of psychoanalytic analysis of Eliot’s life and works to identify the Freudian narrative of the father’s seduction of daughters as a salient point in Eliot’s life and literature. Because of her rejection of her “father’s faith practices and [her] declaration of intellectual autonomy” (Cole, 2011), Eliot and her father were in conflict. This father-daughter battle has motivated scholars (Pell, 1982; Sadof, 1982; Wilt, 1987) to study the effect of this conflict on Eliot’s representation of the father’s authority upon the families in her novels.

But the dominant concept of fatherhood in Victorian England was not confined to the psychological drama of domestic life; rather, it was spread wide over all political, social, and religious aspects of life. Every work of literature is affected by the social developments and changes so there is an inseparable connection among writer, society, and the literary work. As Goldmann (1967) asserts that different social groups offer their vision and the writer only provides

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artistic and creative form. Writer’s imaginary reality is directly related to the social reality of the time.

The study of reflection of society in literature has a long tradition. Especially, the emergence of literary form novel, is regarded a consequence of a particular social situation. The early novels and their relationship with contemporary society has been a focus of different scholars, for example, Brown (1977) in his study, “A Social Analysis of the Novels of Charles Dickens” argues that Dickens represents the society creatively with a generalized reflection of different aspects of Victorian Industrial society (pp. 12, 13).

Frost (2017) studies George Eliot’s engagement with the contemporary social theorists, particularly Ludwig Feuerbach. According to Frost “George Eliot responds in the formal techniques of her work to rapid changes in Victorian society and to what she sees as erosions of coherent social faiths and orders” (p. 148).

Henderson (2017) explores Eliot’s commitment to realism in her Middlemarch, Denial Deronda, and Adam Bede and concludes that Eliot puts forward an “element of dissatisfaction within her broadly satisfactory endings” (p. 11).

This study sees into the representation of father characters in the novels of George Eliot within the social structure of the Victorian period. Furthermore, in the domestic sphere, the father also had influence over the lives of his sons, yet there has been no critical review in which these relationships have been explored. Naturally, the sons, being the eventual head of the family, took the same attitude as that of their own fathers. Thus, this study takes a different approach, not restricting the focus to the father-daughter relationships in Eliot’s fiction. It is argued that while the brief dispute between Eliot and her father undoubtedly influenced her representation of fathers in her work, it should be considered as only one factor among others, including the impact of historical changes on family life during the 19th century. Though, this study pays attention to the father’s responsibilities for children regardless of gender, it dismantles Eliot’s depiction of the gender-based perspective of fathers toward children. This study focuses on her early novels, that is, Scenes of Clerical Life (1857), Adam Bede (1859), The Mill on the Floss (1860), and Silas Marner (1861) by George Eliot, as these novels are based on the stories about middle class families set in country life. This article explores how George Eliot shows fathers in her fiction in a domestic context: How different are the father’s perspectives from the mother’s perspectives? How does a father, as an authoritative figure, decide for his children? What are the different perspectives that a father has for his male and female children?

Findings and Discussion

Domesticity in 19th Century

Before discussing more about fathers in the domestic sphere as presented in the novels of George Eliot, we must first look at the definition of “domesticity” and what it implies as the “empire of the father” in the 19th century.

Domesticity means “the quality or condition of being domestic” or “home or the family life.” The word “domestic” came into being in the 1520s from the French word “domestique” which came from the Latin word “domesticus,” derivative of “domus” (home). It means “devoted to home life or household affairs” (Cambridge Dictionary. “Domestic”, 2018). Domestic can also be defined in political, economic, and sociological terms. Politically it is related to a “country’s internal affairs,” economically it means “produced in or indigenous to a particular country,” while, according to the social sciences, it means “of or relating to the family or household” (Cambridge Dictionary. “Domestic”, 2018). Tosh (1999) defines domesticity in detail:

It denotes not just a pattern of residence or a web of obligations, but a profound attachment: a state of mind as well as a physical orientation. Its defining attributes are privacy and comfort, separation from the workplace, and the merging of domestic space and family members into a single commanding concept (in English, ‘home’) (p. 11).

Here the term “domesticity” is taken to mean simply home or family life, especially in the context of the 19th century.

Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have found that domesticity went through an evolutionary process with historic, economic, and cultural alterations in different parts of the world, as well as during different periods of time. In Britain, after the Industrial Revolution, the meaning of domesticity underwent a remarkable change in that men had to move to a work place in an industrial setting, which separated the home from the outside world (Ellis, 1975; Laslett, 1969). The home, or domestic environment, became the domain of the woman and a place of calm and relaxation for the man who worked outside of the home to earn a living. As a result, the word “domestic” became associated with women especially in studies of society and in literature. Langland (1992) examines the “Victorian domestic angels” in Charles Dickens’s David Copperfield and Elizabeth Gaskell’s Cranford and Wives and Daughters which embody the ideology of separate spheres. Another study, Losing One’s Place: Displacement and Domesticity in Dickens’s Bleak House by Kevin McLaughlin (1993) shows Esther’s displacement from her very domain of domesticity or home. Thus, Domesticity, home, or private life was regarded as the feminine sphere, while places outside the home, or public life, were regarded as the masculine sphere. According to Davidoff and Hall (1987), in the 19th century, masculinity came to be defined in terms of a “man’s ability to support and order his family” while “a woman’s femininity was best expressed in her dependance.” Men were seen as better able to cope with the responsibilities as provider, requiring them to struggle in the public sphere. Thus, “a man was to be defined in terms of his occupation and his consequent ability
to create the domestic setting where the religious life could be best lived.” Women were cut off from any direct contribution to enterprises. They were defined by their relation to men in the private sphere that was a “release from the drudgery and anxiety of economic activity” (pp. 114, 288). This distinction was made mainly in middle class households, where men were the providers and the protectors of the family. William Blackstone in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-69) calls this absolute power in the family “the empire of the father” (Blackstone, 1973).

George Eliot in her early novels shows the father in the middle class families having the privileges of authority and ownership. Home was the place where they could enjoy their masculinity without pressure, as opposed to the pressure they faced in the workplace. Home was a place of peace and tranquility for them. This peace and relaxation was provided for by the mother, who was expected to maintain the home, nurture the children, and make home life a type of haven for the father. The following section shows how Eliot shows father and mother in the domestic life.

**Domesticity in George Eliot’s Novels**

The domestic situation of the 19th century shaped the plots of Eliot’s novels by expressing different perspectives of family life based on gender. For example, the family dramas of *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton* show the situation of middle class families in the historical context of the first half of the 19th century. Both novels show the anxieties of fathers, the caregivers, and the providers of the family. At home, the wives offer a soothing shoulder to their husbands, who take shelter from the anxieties of the outside world. In this way, domesticity eliminates the function of women in economic and political fields, confining them to the house where they become “angels of the home” (Kent, 1999). (The term was coined by Coventry Patmore, in a narrative poem written by him, titling *The Angel in the House* (1854, 1856). It was the idealized account of his wife but became the reference to the Victorian Feminine ideal.) Furthermore, while mothers take all responsibility for raising children and performing housework, the main decisions for the family are made by fathers.

As a domestic novel, *The Mill on the Floss* explores what happens in the Tulliver family. The first scene shows the father and the mother sitting together in front of the fire place, discussing their children. The father refers to his current position as the owner of a mill and his aims for his son. He announces his decision to educate Tom: “What I want to give Tom is a good addication, an addication as ‘ll be a bread to him” (Eliot, 1860, p. 11). His first speech shows the thinking of a true 19th century father who struggles to rise above his impoverished origin and wants his son to have a brilliant future where he can face the challenges of a dynamic society. At the same time, the mother is perceived as “conspicuously inferior in intellect” (Eliot, 1860, p. 11), where she thinks only about nurturing, showing her concern about Tom’s food and clothes when he is away from home. “I shall like him to go where I can wash him and mend him. . .I could send lad a cake, or pork-pie or an apple.” Here, the different approaches of the father and mother are clear and show the 19th century ideology defined by Nelson, that is, “mothers nurtured, fathers disciplined” (Nelson, 2007, p. 16). Indeed, the title of the first chapter of *Mill on the Floss*, “Mr. Tulliver of Dorlcote Mill, Declares His Resolution about Tom,” leaves no room for argument from the mother.

Thus, the mother and the father have different outlooks. The mother is restricted to a nurturing role while the father only wants his offspring to be the future provider of the family, like himself. Claudia Nelson (2007) describes the different ways of male and female thinking during Eliot’s time in these words: “The ideology of separate spheres held that the public world was dominated by masculine values of competition and achievement, the private world by feminine ones of nurturance” (p. 54). Mrs. Tulliver does not contribute to the decision made by Mr. Tulliver and she leaves it to the father, saying, “Well, Mr Tulliver, you know best. I’ve no objections” (Eliot, 1860).

Mrs. Tulliver prefers to ask Tom’s aunts and uncles about the issue of Tom’s education, but her desire is rejected by Mr. Tulliver. He is independent in making his decision and says defiantly, “I shall ask neither aunt nor uncles what I’m to do with my own lad” (Eliot, 1860). He is the king of his home, so he does not like to consider anyone else’s opinion, and he looks at the issue from the perspective of the outside world, which is dominated by the masculine values of competition and achievement. Here the mother is talking in a domestic context. Although he has no objection to invite Tom’s uncles and aunts to his home, Mr. Tulliver is not ready to follow their advice on the matter, especially from women who are “obtrusive flies” to him. For him, there is no value in the opinion of Tom’s aunts, and his pride does not allow him to accept any opinion against his resolution.

In the case of Amos Barton in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Mrs. Barton is not much different from Mrs. Tulliver. Although Mr. Barton shares the situation he is facing outside of the home to his wife, she is only concerned about her children and remains busy with her “heap of stockings” because, in the words of the narrator, “a loving woman’s world lies in the four walls of her own home” (Eliot, 1857). She is responsible for nurturing; Mr. Barton does not have any concern regarding his children in the home and takes refuge from their noise. As he says to his wife, Milly, “some of these children must go away. I want to be quiet” (Eliot, 1857). At home he needs a calm environment, and his wife is expected to deal with the nursery on her own.

The limited domain of mothers keeps them and their children ignorant of the economic challenges and crises faced by the fathers in their work places. As a result, Mr. Tulliver’s bankruptcy brings great shocks to Mrs. Tulliver. She is concerned about her “household gods” and keeps mourning over this loss even when her
husband becomes paralyzed and unconscious. She is mocked for showing sorrow for her lost household goods rather than showing concern for her sick husband. She complains to Tom, saying, “your father should have married me to bring me to this...we shall be beggars” (Eliot, 1860). Her range of looking at things is confined only to her home and herself. This is perhaps the first strong emotion which she has shown in her life. Mr. Tulliver lets his wife continue her angry remarks despite the children’s interruption. He confesses that he is the one who is “bringing of you to poverty,—this world’s too many for me—I’m nought but a bankrupt; it’s no use standing up for anything now” (Eliot, 1860). The father is central to the family unit, and though Mr. Tulliver’s failure brought crisis upon his family, he still has courage and shows a fresh resolution to continue the struggle to win everything back. He wants to compensate for what has been done to Bessy (Mrs. Tulliver), saying, “let us bear one another, no ill will” (Eliot, 1860). This new determination to work hard to revive the family honor is also shared by the male child, Tom, who sheds the disappointment of the family through his determination to earn everything back.

In both novels, the eldest children continue their parent’s respective tasks of providing, protecting, comforting, and caring. In Mill on the Floss, Mr. Tulliver expects his son, Tom, to take responsibility for his mother and sister. In Scenes of Clerical Life, where the mother dies, the motherly responsibilities are expected to be fulfilled by the eldest daughter. Mrs. Barton, on her deathbed, advises the eldest daughter to take over the motherly duties to care for her father and nurture her younger siblings. She says, “Patty, I am going away from you. Love your papa, comfort him; and take care of your little brothers and sisters” (Eliot, 1857). This scene also shows the affection of fathers and mothers of the 19th century who, just before their deaths, want to insure that their partners are taken care of for the rest of their lives.

The warmth of home is always created by the presence of mothers, and fathers are the “consumers of the domesticity rather than its creator” (Nelson, 2007). In the homes where there is no mother, centrality is lost. For example, in Silas Marner, in Cass family, there is no mother and Godfrey and Dunstan, the sons of Mr. Squire Cass, grow up in neglect and idleness. Eliot comments on the situation of the Cass family, saying:

For the Squire’s wife had died long ago, and the Red House was without that presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and fear in parlour and kitchen; and this helped to account not only for there being more profusion than finished excellence in the holiday provisions, but also for the frequency with which the proud Squire condescended to preside in the parlour of the Rainbow rather than under the shadow of his own dark wainscot; perhaps, also, for the fact that his sons had turned out ill-mannered. There is no pleasant morning greeting between them, because “the sweet flower of courtesy is not growth of such homes as the Red House” (Eliot, 1861). In this way, centrality of the household is lost without maternal benevolence in the home, and “the hearth has no smiles.” (Eliot, 1861) The daughter-in-law to be is expected to be “a fine change” and she “would be a saving to old Squire” (Eliot, 1861). Mr. Squire Cass is aware of the fact that the motherly presence of a woman can bring warmth into the home, so he wants his son, Godfrey, to marry Nancy Lamenter, who has been taught the values of being a lady by her father, Mr. Lammeter. Godfrey is also attracted to “neatness, purity and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter Household” (Eliot, 1861). As a daughter, she brings reverence for the father, and the family becomes integrated in centrality because of the presence of a mother figure.

In summary, Eliot presents fathers in the home as authoritative figures while she presents mothers as sources of nurture and comfort. In this paradigm, the proper sphere of life for women is the home, where they are to provide comfort for the working men and are “expected to fulfil the roles of a calm and nurturing mother, a loving and faithful wife, and a passive, delicate, and virtuous creature” (Welter, 1966). Eliot shows that in the middle class home, a family such as the Tullivers, men as husbands and fathers are not active participants in daily household life, and yet, they are significant and present. Eliot’s middle class homes provide space for fathers to take the privileges of their status of authority given by society as guide and planner for their children’s future.

**The father and domesticity**

According to Tosh (1999) the father was often “protector of his family in the figurative sense of shielding them from knowledge of what was disturbing or threatening.” To fulfil these responsibilities, the father required an understanding of the social changes around him in order to train his children such that they would have a better future. George Eliot showed the anxieties of fathers and the planning for their children in the dynamic period of the 19th century.

Mr. Tulliver plans for the education of his son, “an addication as ’ll be a bread to him”’ (Eliot, 1860) and he will be able to “make a nest for himself.” Being a miller, he doesn’t want his son to be a miller but rather a “scholar”’ who “could talk fine and write with a flourish. ... And it will help me wi’ these lawsuits.” The father looks for the solution to his own challenges in his son’s future. Mr. Tulliver’s competition is with the lawyer Mr. Wakem, who is a powerful man in St. Ogg’s society.

It was also the requirement of this era that the father’s planning for his son should be predominantly vocational. Mr. Tulliver wants his son to be what he himself could not be and what the new circumstances of the period require. This also shows the ambitions and struggles of all English fathers. The narrator tells us that “the state of mind in which you take a billiard-cue or a dice-box in your hand is one of sober certainty compared with that of old-fashioned fathers, like Mr.
Tulliver, when they selected a school or tutor for their sons” (Eliot, 1860).

For Mr. Tulliver, who is trapped in a “bewildering legal forest,” Tom seems to be the only hope for solving his legal troubles, by realizing greater success; accordingly, all efforts are made for Tom’s education. As Henry (2008) describes Mr. Tulliver:

He wants Tom to be something better than a miller, but also a son who will help him to negotiate the bewildering legal forest into which he has naively wandered. The way in which he talks about Tom as an instrument for achieving his own designs contributes to the sympathetic portrait of pressures facing sons whose fathers make decisions about their futures without consulting them.

To this end, Mr. Tulliver plans for his son to be able to cope with the challenges of life, but he is not able to choose the proper education for Tom. The old-fashioned “gentleman’s” education is hard for Tom and is useless for the business environment. The father, unable to recognize his son’s practical inclinations, imposes a theoretical education on him. The father shows blind confidence in a matter he himself is not clear about. Tom requires an education which can help him to advance within the framework of the changing business and economic environment. Thus, out of hubris and short sightedness, Mr. Tulliver—the father as guide, with good intentions—leads his son into trouble.

To make his son able to cope with the challenges of the new age, the father must know what kind of education his son should have, what type of knowledge is necessary in order for his son to be independent in the future. For this reason, Mr. Tulliver consults one of his acquaintances, Mr. Riley, who apparently doesn’t have any more knowledge about life than Mr. Tulliver—“even he was more under the influence of small promptings than of far-sighted designs” (Eliot, 1860), and severely limited. Mr. Riley recommends a teacher for Tom, named Rev. Walter Stelling, because he’s an “Oxford man and the Oxford men were always—no, no, it was the Cambridge men who were always good mathematicians” (Eliot, 1860). Mr. Tulliver is easily convinced and follows the advice of an equally unaware person, sending his son to the recommended man, ready to pay more than one hundred pounds.

Mr. Tulliver wants his son to be a gentleman in the future and to appear “scholarly,” with refined conversation. Mr. Tulliver having a foggiest notion of education thinks that learning Latin can make Tom a gentleman. But Tom, as a middle class son, who would have to provide for the family, cannot earn a living by simply spouting Latin phrases to people who are hardly interested.

Mr. Deane is the exact counterpart of Mr. Tulliver not only in coping with the new trends of business but also on the issue of educating Tom. Mr. Tulliver chooses a classic teacher for Tom and feels proud that the tutor’s knowledge is “so applicable to the everyday affairs of this life. Except Counsellor Wylde, whom he had heard at the last session, Mr. Tulliver thought the Rev. Mr. Stelling was the shrewdest fellow he had ever met with—not unlike Wylde, in fact: he had the same way of sticking his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat” (Eliot, 1860). On the other hand, Mr. Deane refers to Tom’s education as absolutely useless and presses on scornfully by saying, “Your Latin and rigmarole may soon dry off you, but you’ll be but a bare stick after that.” (Eliot, 1860) Mr. Deane becomes a guide, a professional mentor to Tom, teaching him matters of business and helping him to repair his father’s mistake. As a result, Tom emerges as a model of entrepreneurial independence.

These fathers try to fulfill their responsibility as guide to prepare their sons “to hold their own in a competitive and impersonal society” (Tosh, 1999). Mr. Tulliver, despite all his efforts to protect and guide, couldn’t adjust to the historical shift not only in his own business career but also in providing a professional education to his son, Tom. The narrator describes the Tullivers’ home “where the unexpectant discontent of worn and disappointed parents weighs on the children like a damp thick hair, in which all the functions of life are depressed” (Eliot, 1860). Eventually, though, Tom is able to redeem his father’s failure and establish himself as a masculine adult.

**Daughter and domesticity.** According to the gender-based separate sphere ideology of the 19th century, the father and the mother were each concerned with different spheres of life so that they planned for their children in quite different ways, training them respectively on how to manage in this division of spheres in the future. Middle class girls were trained according to the notion that they should assume the responsibilities of domestic affairs. For example, Mr. Tulliver in *Mill on the Floss* loves his daughter, but being a man of tradition, he does not plan to educate his daughter.

In the opening chapter of *Mill on the Floss*, we read about Mr. Tulliver’s plans for the future of his son, Tom, but later we find that he also has a deep love for his daughter, Maggie. She is his “little wench,” and he appreciates her distinguished quality, that is, reading books. He is very happy that “she is behind other folk children, and she can read almost as the parson.” He encourages her and appreciates her and tells Mr. Riley about her cleverness and her ability to read books. But still, he is a man of safe traditional opinion and believes that studying books is useless for a woman, saying, “a woman’s no business wi’ being so clever” and “the child will learn more mischief nor good wi’ the books” (Eliot, 1860). So Maggie’s fondness for reading books has no use in society, and her father does not support enhancing her knowledge despite the fact that he admires her cleverness and knowledge.

Mr. Riley, whose advice Mr. Tulliver seeks concerning Tom’s schooling, also prefers to invest money in the education of a son even though his offspring are all female, which
demonstrates the tendency of fathers to be primarily interested in educating their male children according to the prevailing ideology of the time.

Better spend an extra hundred or two on your son’s education than leave it him in your will. I know I should have tried to do so by a son of mine if I’d have one, though God knows, I haven’t your ready money to play with, and I have a house full of daughters (Eliot, 1860).

Maggie’s situation shows the overall social and cultural phenomenon that daughters were supposed to stay at home to help their mothers in the house. Davidoff and Hall (1987) describe this situation very well:

Men were defined by their specific public occupation, women only by their private relationship to a man. Men’s education, for the industrial middle class at least, ought to be commercial and scientific, preparing them for business; women’s education ought to be in the decorative accomplishments necessary to entertain men in their leisure hours.

Maggie is also supposed to learn household chores, and her mother stresses to her the importance of doing patchwork, saying, “go on with your patchwork like a little lady” (Eliot, 1860). In this way, daughters of middle class families were expected to assist their mothers in household work (Nelson, 2007). Although Maggie is eventually sent to Miss Finiss’ boarding school, her education has no practical value compared to the education of her brother, Tom. Indeed, when Mr. Tulliver encounters financial ruin, Maggie is withdrawn from school.

Lucy Deane, the daughter of Mr. Deane in *Mill on the Floss*, also provides comfort to her father, just like Maggie does to Mr. Tulliver. Her presence is cherished by her father. Like Maggie, she takes a seat near her father, giving him “the more agreeable moments his merits had purchased him in life” (Eliot, 1860). While Lucy is ideally feminine and delicate, as compared to Maggie, she is also discouraged by her father. When she claims that she has her father’s business talent, her father doesn’t react, or even answer, because doing business is not a daughter’s job. This social norm for women is summed up well by Mr. Wakem when he says, “we don’t ask what a women does—we ask to whom she belongs” (Eliot, 1860). Thus, all females in this era must follow the male’s perspective as to whom they belong, and daughters are to delight and attend to their fathers with affection and care by learning patchwork and household duties and maintaining a reflection of heaven in the home.

In *Silas Marner*, Nancy Lammeter and her spinster sister Priscilla Lammeter are educated in the farm’s dairy and kitchen duties by their father. Pricilla expresses her appreciation for her father saying, “thank God, my father’s a sober man and likely to live” (Eliot, 1861). The Lammeters’ home is delicate with the presence of two daughters who serve as care givers to their father, “she manages me and the farm too,” says Mr. Lammeter about his daughter Priscilla (Eliot, 1861). Mr. Lammeter transfers the economic power to his eldest daughter, who then takes on the responsibilities reserved for a son, as well as the responsibilities of a daughter—she combines the private sphere of home and the public sphere of business. But this kind of situation is rare in Eliot’s oeuvre, as well as in other sociological writings of the 19th century.

It was very typical in the 19th century that after the death of the mother, the eldest daughter would take responsibly to fulfil all the duties as mother (Devidoff & Hall, 1987). Bernard Barton, a contemporary poet of George Eliot, wrote the poem “To a Little Housekeeper” based on his daughter Lucy, who took over her widowed father’s housekeeping. For such daughters, if there were younger siblings, she was credited as being their mother. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Mrs. Barton, before her death, appointed her eldest daughter to take care of her younger siblings, saying “Patty will try to be your mamma when I am gone” (Eliot, 1857). Patty becomes the companion of her father, bringing up little ones as well as comforting her father. Thus, she “passively and obediently fulfils this duty as daughter, and mother” (Sadoff, 1982). The final advice of her mother is for her to fulfil all duties regarding her father, too. Her mother tells her to “Love your Papa, comfort him, and take care of your little brothers and sisters” (Eliot, 1857), which Patty does faithfully. “Patty’s treat was to stay at home, or walk about with her papa; and when he sat by the fire in the evening, after the other children were gone to bed, she would bring a stool, and placing it against his feet, would sit down upon it and lean her head against his knee. Then his hand would rest on that fair head, and he would feel that Milly’s love was not quite gone out of his life” (Eliot, 1857). The “Conclusion” of the story, which shows Mr. Barton and his children’s visit to Milly’s grave after a span of 20 years, indicates that Patty has been fulfilling her duties as mother and daughter. In this last scene, she is an unnamed woman of thirty, “strongly recalls” Mrs. Barton and her presence in the home is reflected through Amos’s “neat linens” that tells of “a woman’s care.” Patty “remains by her father’s side, and makes the evening sunshine of his life” (Eliot, 1857).

It was the requirement of the social and cultural phenomenon of the 19th century that the male child should be able to fulfil the fatherly duties. Sanders (2002) asserts that *Mill on the Floss* “in effect, re-enacts the practices of Victorian society in seeing the man’s needs as fundamental and the woman’s as marginal, the man’s skills as essential, and the woman’s as incidental.” It shows the patriarchal society’s preference where men were considered apt to manage and accept the burden of providing and where women should live merely as dependents. Maggie is supposed to live her life...
according to the wishes of the father, or the father figure in the form of her brother Tom, her whole life.

**Conclusion**

Eliot’s novels have a social, political, and cultural background which stresses the sense of history and society in action. The changing phenomena of the 19th century affected all things in Western society from the domestic sphere to the political sphere. Masculinity of the father, being a major aspect of these changes, acquired a redefined role in society. George Eliot tries to show the successes and failures of her male characters, especially fathers, or the figure of fathers, and to reveal the evolution and re-evaluation of their role as played out over a certain time frame. She emphasizes duties in the private sphere of home and thinks that an ideal society is only possible through individuals’ recognition and acceptance of their duties. The father, being the authority in the family, governs, guides, and provides for his dependents. Because fatherhood is inherently important, and George Eliot’s writings are a historical, albeit subjective, record of the development of a type of fatherhood that is still linked to societies of the world today, the study of fatherhood, and of the family as a whole, is not only meaningful but also necessary to the understanding of the human society. I found that Eliot presents in nearly all of her novels the dynamics of the public and domestic spheres of 19th century British families. The father, being the authority in the family, governs, guides, and provides for his dependents. Eliot emphasizes duty not only in the private sphere of home but, for her, an ideal society is only possible through individuals’ recognition and acceptance of their duties. The duties of fathers to their families are the foundation of the broader range of duties held by private individuals on a societal level. This private-public sphere dichotomy is interconnected by the social standing of fathers or father figures in that “familial and public masculinities were inseparable.” I also detected that the idea of gender-based spheres in 19th century bourgeois society was complicated when the father or mother had to switch roles in order to fill the absence of the other.

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