



Shame in George Eliot's Adam Bede

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ABSTRACT:- *The Novel Adam Bede has shown the quality of George Eliot as a writer. Though the novel is named after a male character, the center of attention is a woman named Hetty Sorrel who is condemned by the Victorian Society for the murder of her baby. She desires to have a husband who would shower her with all the wealth. She abhors working on the farm and dreams to live a life of wealth. At times she is regarded as innocent and childlike and at times as a vain person. She uses her beauty to gain anything she desires. She is often compared to Dinah Morris, her cousin who is a complete contrast to her character. Though her act of infanticide is considered to be a crime but she is also regarded as victimized by many critics. Critics believe that Hetty was treated as a mere plaything for Arthur Donnithorne who could not resist her beauty and was attracted to her at his first sight. Hetty is eventually punished for crime.*

Keywords:- Victorian Society, desire, wealth, crime, infanticide

Adam Bede shows Eliot's quality as a novelist is better than any other of her works, with the possible exception of *Middlemarch*. Highly composed with natural convincing dialogues and skilful interwoven events, Lettice Cooper in *British Writers* adds, "her dialogue is nearly masterly. The tirades of her vigorous older women, the talk of men idling or working together, having the veracity of simple poetry and reveals the nature of the speakers more effectively than any description." (200) The novel, tells a tale of a young carpenter, embraced by tragic events and conflicts, is fabulous in tone and easy to read.

Adam Bede is a story of two women with very different ambitions. Though Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrel are not related to each other but are both found in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Poyser at the beginning of the novel. Dinah, who is discussed in the next chapter, only wants to preach the poor. Hetty on the other side is spoiled, has worldly ambitions. She wishes to have a husband who can save her from the toil of working on her uncle's farm and provide her with all the luxuries of life. Hetty being a penniless orphan is totally dependent on the charity of her uncle and his wife, yet with a beauty "which seems made to turn heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women" (85). It is this beauty which has given her a sense of entitlement. In chapter 9, Eliot notes that "Hetty was quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her." (100) The reader is first introduced to Hetty at her home, the Hall Farm. While Dinah is 'mending linen' for her aunt, Hetty is in the dairy 'making up the butter'. (75) Immediately a contrast is drawn between the two young women: Dinah is shown to be engaged in a task of restoration, while Hetty is creating something new. Hetty is immediately associated with nature, rich and sensuous, while Dinah is coupled with utilitarian and down-to-earth, what is considered to be necessary and useful. This contrast continues throughout the novel. Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon* believes that Dinah is presented as the "spiritual paragon in comparison to Hetty, who is childlike and vain." (175) The two characters in the novel are repeatedly juxtaposed to represent symbolically the pure and the fallen:

What a strange contrast the two figures made! Visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight. Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. (158)

In this above passage of contrast of the fallen woman with the saintly woman is purely unmistakable. The pure, angelic qualities of Dinah in her 'long white dress' are laid bare in contrast to Hetty, who is an

embodiment of the passionate woman: her flushed cheeks, her bare neck and arms, and her hair cascading down her back. Dinah is a representation of the spiritual in contrast to Hetty, who is known to be erotic and sensual. While Dinah is associated with the unearthly realm of sainthood, Hetty is associated with the earthly realm of nature. Hetty is associated with the dairy work, linking her to life, procreation and breeding, further made tough by Arthur's reference to her as "a butter maker". (130) Hence there exists an association with the erotic within this symbolic phrase. Further Hetty is pictured picking apples in the orchard, "Hetty was bending over the red bunches, the level rays piercing the screen of apple-trees boughs." (221) Her gathering of the apples implies her link with the Garden of Eden, original sin, the fallen state of mankind, and ultimately the death of innocence. Combining these symbols an image of life (the making of something new) and death (the fall of man) is revealed. This imagery further highlights the tension between the feelings and loathing that the infanticidal woman brought out.

Hetty is repeatedly associated with lower forms of life. Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon* points out that:

At various times Hetty is associated with a pound of butter, kittens, small downy ducks, babies, rose petals, a young calf, a butterfly, a blossom, a bird, a peach, a brooklet, a spaniel, a bird, a pet, a 'thing', a canary, a water nixie 'a round, soft-coated pet animal', a brute, a medusaface', a stone, and death. (174)

Hetty is at times linked with the innocent and defenseless, and at times with the dangerous and the deadly. This fact highlights the divergence of views linked to the infanticidal woman. Though her act of infanticide may be hideous, but she may be seen as victimized. Eliot further stresses this dual perspective when she addresses the reader:

Pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman- if you ever could, without hard head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the one supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you. No, people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it. (152)

This view is further laid bare when Hetty shown as a fallen woman is also depicted as an innocent child. Adam strengthens this fact when he comes face to face with Arthur after he seduces Hetty, "She's all but a child; as any man with a conscience in him ought to feel bound to care on." (309) Rosemary Gould states in her article *The History of Unnatural Act: Infanticide and Adam Bede* that Eliot argues that, "Childishness ought not to be an ideal quality in adult women, and that the idealization of women as children causes great harm." (264) The quality of innocence and childlike behavior may have been preferred among the Victorian women but it was a double-edged sword. On the other hand, innocence served as a measure to protect a woman from the improper stain of immortality, further it destabilized her ability to come with a sexual threat. It helped to make a woman extremely vulnerable, but also served to elicit sympathy for her. Hetty's first meeting with Arthur is a fusion of both passion and childish excitement:

They were alone together for the first time. As for Hetty, her feet rested on a cloud, and she was borne along by warm zephyrs; she had forgotten her rose coloured ribbons; she was no more conscious of her limbs than if her childish soul had passed into a water-lily, resting on a liquid bed, and warmed by the midsummer sunbeams. (130)

However Hetty's beauty could be dangerous and hides feeling and understanding, as the women with whom she meets tend to notice. Mrs. Poyser tells her husband "that she firmly believed 'the naughtier the little huzzy behaved, the prettier she looked'" (86) and "she's no better than a peacock as 'ud strut about on the wall and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folks i' the parish was dying: there's nothing seems to give her a turn i; th' inside" (162). The woman with whom Hetty studied the duties of being a ladies maid, Mrs. Pomfret discovered that though Hetty "gets prettier every day, she'll neither get a place nor a husband any the sooner for it. Sober well- to-do men don't like such pretty wives" (140). She hardly cares for the work she has been assigned at her uncle's dairy, nor does she show have any affection and warmth for baby Totty, whom she had cared for since infancy or for the uncle and aunt who took her in as a child. However Dorothea Barrett in *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines*, defends Hetty's lack of sympathy:

There is actually no reason for the dairy-worker to love the dairy as the dairy-owner does, for Totty's baby-sitter to love her as her mother does, or for a penniless relation tolerated in the home as an act of charity and source of cheap labour to love that home in the way a daughter of the family would. (45)

Nonetheless, as Susan Rowland Tush in *George Eliot and the Conventions of Popular Women's Fiction* notes, Eliot, "makes Hetty's moral inferiority a universality accepted conclusion long before Hetty herself ever commits any overt transgressions," (36). Specifically when contrasted with the puritanical Dinah as she is throughout the novel, Hetty falls short in every way: she is vain, shallow and unquestionably spoiled.

Hetty tutors herself to be a maid, but she realizes that the only way to achieve happiness and wealth is to marry a rich man and overpower him with her beauty. It is noted by Jean E. Kennard in *Victims of Convention* that, "Like all really vain women, she uses her beauty to gain power over others even if she has little or no

feeling for them.”(113) Hetty recognizes the fact that she draws the male attention including young Luke Britton, Mr. Craig and Adam Bede before she becomes involved with son of the local squire, Captain Arthur Donnithorne. Of the men who admire her, she does not object to Adam's attentions, as she recognizes that Adam is “something like a man”(100), but she has sights set on more than simply being the wife of “a poor man . . . who would not be able . . . to give her even such luxuries as she shared in her uncle's house”(102) As the impoverished ward of her uncle, Hetty is not in a position to be choosy about her suitors, and her Aunt and Uncle Poyser consider Adam to be an excellent match for her, but this does not stop Hetty from dreaming.

Hetty's life soon becomes centered on Donnithorne, who becomes captivated of her visit to her uncle's farm. Due to her gullibility, Hetty believes that her beauty can be her source to life she wants for Donnithorne will accept her and fulfill all her desires that she longed for. When Donnithorne visits the Hall Farm to meet her and watches her at the church, Hetty has confidence that she will be accepted by him as easily as the gardener Mr. Craig or Adam Bede. Donnithorne, on the other hand is attracted to Hetty's beauty, and though he is warned by his friend Mr. Irwine that he should leave Hetty but he lacks self control and cannot resist meeting her.

Though Arthur Donnithorne is accused by Adam Bede of taking an advantage of a young innocent girl, Susan Rowland Tush notes, “Hetty is not an innocent victim, her vanity and worldliness are obvious from the very first description of her” (44). She adds further that “There is never a suggestion that Hetty has any desire for Arthur exclusive of what he can do for her. Moreover his inability to see Arthur as a separate being with separate desires helps makes it possible for her to believe that he will share her fantasy about their future.”(45) Kennerd agrees, remarking, “Hetty's ambition, her yearning for a better life, has none of the nobility we associate with George Eliot's later heroines. Her desire is to be a lady, to have wealth and status, and she sees Arthur Donnithorne as the means to that life.”(113) Hetty knows what she wants, and she sees no obstacle to obtaining it.

However her ambitions are clashed when Adam's discovers her kissing Donnithorne. Donnithorne meets the terms with Adam to end the small time affair with a letter. After receiving this letter Hetty is disillusioned - despite her beauty, which Donnithorne had found difficult to resist. As Donnithorne writes, “if I were to do what you one day spoke of, and make you my wife, I should do what you yourself would come to feel was for your misery instead of your welfare. I know you can never be happy except by marrying a man in your station” (348). Everything goes awry as Hetty had not thought or imagined. Thinking to herself when she is admiring herself in her bedroom mirror, “He would want to marry her and make a lady of her; she could hardly dare to shape the thought- yet how else could it be?”(157). Arthur's rejection of Hetty causes a severe blow to her ambitions as well as self confidence. Patricia Beers notes:

If Arthur Donnithorne had contented himself with merely undermining Hetty's morale, with flirtatious treatment of her as an enchanting little kitten (which incidentally is exactly honest Adam Bede's view of her as well), he would have destroyed her peace of mind but not all her worldly prospects and eventually her life, as he does by seducing her. Hetty is not the spotless victim of Adam's imagination but she is unusually vulnerable, being protected by neither common sense nor the ability to love, and has no real chance of escape from a man like Donnithorne. (206)

In spite of the poignant suffering she went through from the collapse of her relationship with Donnithorne, Hetty's penalty for her ambitions is just the beginning. The moment she plans to marry Adam, she discovers her pregnancy. The first instinct that comes to her mind is suicide, though Eliot comments in Chapter 31 that this is not what would be expected of Hetty:

But Hetty's was not a nature to face difficulties - to dare to loose her hold on the familiar and rush blindly on some unknown condition. Hers was a luxurious and vain nature - not a passionate one - and if she were ever to take any violent measure, she must be urged to it by the desperation of terror. (351)

Being desperate and terrified by her situation Hetty does not have the strength to drown herself in the secluded pond. She fears the opinion of the public than death itself, “they might find her- they might find out why she drowned herself” (382). Finding death as not an option, she decides to flee away in search of Donnithorne. In the midst of her wanderings, she gives birth and abandons her baby. Jean .E .Kennard notes in *Victims of Convention*, “Hetty has very little understanding of what is happening to her.” (113) Hetty is puzzled and at the same time terrified when she is arrested and charged with the murder of her newborn baby.

As Patricia Beers notes of Hetty, “Her character, as established by George Eliot in the first three-quarters of the book, is not of a potential killer. She is cold hearted and has fixed views of what she wants of life, which is to be a lady and wear fine clothes.”(204) Hetty finds herself desperate and fraught when she does not get what she had wished for. An unsympathetic court appalled by “the unnaturalness of her crime”(456) finds Hetty guilty, and she is sentenced to death. Hetty's dream was to achieve the love, wealth and glory of a rich man, and she almost succeeded in doing that. Instead of the life of leisure she dreamt of, she gets pregnant which was unwanted by her. Hetty is not even emotionally equipped to handle her situation. She denies constantly that she was even pregnant and is apathetic at her trial. Her mental block would likely earn her an insanity plea in modern times, but in the century court of the 18th century, where *Adam Bede* is set; her lack of

emotion is seen as coarse indifference and another sign of her guilt. Patricia Beer writes, "After her flight from Hayslope, which her advancing pregnancy seems to her to make essential, she is in a state of diminished responsibility, which in a more medically informed age would have acquitted her completely." (204) Kennard comments:

George Eliot attributes Hetty's disasters in part to her lack of education and experience. She tells her readers to remember that Hetty is quite uneducated, a simple farmer's girl. But Hetty is not excused on these grounds; others almost as uneducated, among them Adam himself, are seen to be of stronger moral character. Hetty's lack is spiritual. (113)

One could also understand that Hetty was innocent to the extent of being young (just 17), immature and naïve. She also had the disadvantage of being an orphan because intimacy shared with a parent cannot be shared with any close friend or relative. It is also one of the reasons for her confusion and lack of preparation to face the situation she found herself in. Her fears of censure of society and shame because of her predicament is probably the reason of the crime. It is a crime because crime and subsequent justice is always based on the society norms which are the result of the thought process and discussion of the leaders and elders of that particular land and period.

Society today in the west has a better counseling system and safety net for the kind of problem Hetty faced in this novel. Probably one of the reasons for this crime is that Victorian Society in the middle 1800's had no system to deal with unwanted pregnancy especially in the rural and still feudal English Society. In Victorian times female honour was linked to being passive and relied mostly on chastity. A female losing chastity lost honour; on the other hand male honour was based on land, profession and overall identity. Therefore the situation and subsequent crime can also be attributed to the fact that this work is based in the Victorian times where chastity was a great issue.

In today's western world Hetty judged as a villain by lots of readers of that time would be more kindly reviewed: she's vain, she's stupid, she's materialistic; which are basic human character flaws but she only wanted to escape the monotonous life at the farm dairy or the life of a carpenter's wife. What other choice did she have except marrying above her station which she tried to achieve with Arthur Donnithorne. One in today's world may not like Hetty's character but does end up feeling sorry for her. Hetty does something really stupid and unforgivable and eventually pays a very high price.

Despite her confession of the crime to Dinah and the counseling she receives from Dinah, Hetty does not achieve any mental growth or maturity. Dinah also admits, "her poor soul is very dark and discerns little beyond the things of the flesh." (477) Her walk with Dinah to the gallows still reveals her childish behavior, similar to when she was first caught flirting with Arthur Donnithorne. Patricia Beer writes, "In the course of the book, Hetty passes from dream world to nightmare with no intervening period of wakefulness, and though perhaps we cannot join Adam in putting the blame entirely Arthur Donnithorne, to hang Hetty as a murderess seems as inappropriate as executing a cat for killing its kitten." (205)

Although pardoned from death due to Donnithorne's timely arrival, Hetty still does not mend her egocentric ways. She is transported from England and dies overseas on her return home after the completion of her sentence. As Beer comments, "She is disposed of before she can return to embarrass everybody, with no more than a stilted comment from Dinah . . . and regret from Arthur Donnithorne that he cannot salve his conscience with some sort of handout." (206) Kennard adds, "We are never asked to accept Hetty as mature - merely as punished for her past." (114) This is the reason why Eliot has chosen death sentence to Hetty - she does not undergo any change and her character remains the same throughout the novel. Her soul is far away, even from Dinah who could save her from death.

While Hetty dreams of a future with Arthur, Arthur's relationship towards Hetty's relationship is that of loitering. His traits are similar to Hetty, selfish and self-centered, but unlike her, he lacks vulnerability. He does not think, in fact he cannot even conceive of her vulnerability. He casually dismisses the fact that his advances towards Hetty will lead to her ultimate destruction. He attributes less feeling to woman "such as Hetty" than to himself, "Perhaps he had better not take any more notice of Hetty; it might put notions into her head, though Arthur thought girls were not by any means so soft and easily bruised; indeed, he had generally found them twice as cool and cunning as he was himself." (127)

Arthur is also responsible for the problem Hetty faced and the subsequent infanticide because he escaped at the particular time she needed him the most. Her faith in him and the disappointment to discover that he would not be able to stand by her at the hour of her need is probably one of the major causes of this crime. The basic nature of Arthur Donnithorne was that of a person who yields to temptations and has no control over his desire to seduce and have an immoral physical relationship. He is also a man of conscience and is struck by remorse and guilt while sleeping. But also one should give Arthur the benefit of doubt because he was ignorant of Hetty's pregnancy. Still Arthur comes out as a carefree, selfish rogue who takes advantage of Hetty's starry-eyed love for him and cannot be absolved from the responsibility of Hetty's immature and impulsive actions which leads to infanticide.

What makes the reader soften his stance towards Arthur is his young age and that the relationship between Arthur and Hetty is consensual. Arthur though elder than Hetty, educated, is still young enough to make a mistake. It should be noted that both lovers in essence are orphans because Arthur repents and suffers somewhat. He becomes as a character more likeable.

Merryn Williams in *Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900* emphasizes that, "Hetty's fall is not prompted by her love of Arthur, but rather by her love of for the luxuries." (141) He represents the class and status; not the man whom Hetty loves. Hetty's desire to transcend the class results in her fall; not her vulnerability. Her main focus is on her own progress. People around her hardly concern her. Her concern is her beauty and with what she might attain with the help of it. Virginia B. Morris in *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction* asserts that, "Hetty is interested in Arthur Donnithorne because she thinks he will provide an escape from the unexciting existence of the family's dairy and the prospect of a dull marriage and its inevitable marriage" (77) According to Virginia B. Morris it is this first intimation of Hetty's hardness that reveals her, "lack of conventional womanliness and this suggestion is later reinforced by her lack of remorse for her dead child." (78)

Just as Hetty is merely a plaything for Arthur, so Adam is merely a plaything for Hetty, "Hetty was quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her, she knew that Adam who was often rather stern to other people, and not much given to run after the lasses, could be made to turn pale or red any day by a word or a look from her." (97) Jean. E. Kennard remarks, "The base of Hetty's power is her beauty, regardless of the feelings, if any, that she has for others." (113) Hetty delights in her own beauty and in the power over men that her beauty affords, "She liked to feel that Adam was in her power, and would have been indignant if he had shown the least sign of slipping from under the yoke of her coquettish tyranny. But as to marrying Adam, that was a different affair!" (99) Hetty desires to be the focal point of all male affection. When class and status is not an issue, Hetty is more interested in the game than the prize.

According to Virginia B. Morris in *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction* Eliot presents Hetty as a woman driven to violence through "self absorption: her self-devoted rather than her self-devoting love. While these traits are not admirable, they are neither immoral and unnatural." (79)

However Hetty's narcissism may not be morally wrong and not natural, Eliot clearly depicts her dislike for children as unnatural. Hetty is shown to be a complete contrast to Dinah, who is represented as a pious woman, and also to Mrs. Poyser, who is represented as the ideal mother. Mrs. Poyser lovingly dotes on her daughter Totty throughout the novel while Hetty clearly displays her dislike for the child:

'O dear aunt, I wish you'd speak to Totty, she keeps putting her legs up so, and messing my frock. What's the matter wi' the child? She can niver please you', said the mother. 'Let her come by the side o' me, then I can put up w' her.' (262)

Totty is an irritation to Hetty, who is more concerned with her own vanity than with her young cousin. Not only does Hetty lack naturalness but also lack of connection to others, even those who depend upon her. Hetty regards Totty as "a day-long plague" and "Hetty would have been glad to hear that she never see a child again; they were worse than the nasty little lambs, for the lambs were gotten rid of sooner or later." (154) Hetty is least concerned even when Totty falls into a pit. Mrs. Poyser observes about Hetty:

She's no better than a peacock, as 'ud strut about on the wall and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folks I' the parish was dying: there's nothing seems to give her a turn I' th' inside, not even when we thought Totty had tumbled into the pit. But Hetty niver minded it though She's been at the nussin' o' the child iver since it was a babby. It's my belief her heart's as hard as a pibble.' (155)

However Hetty's aversion to Totty appears to be reciprocated. Even Totty does not show any concern for Hetty in return. When Mrs. Poyser asks Totty to allow Hetty to put her to bed Totty's dislike for Hetty is quite evident: Before her mother had done speaking, Totty had given her answer in an

Unmistakable manner, by knitting her brow, setting her tiny teeth against her underlip, and leaning forward to slap Hetty on the arm with her utmost force. Then, without speaking, she nestled to her mother again 'It's no use tryin' to persuade her', said Mrs. Poyser. 'She allays takes against Hetty when she isn't well. Happen she'll go to Dinah.' Totty turned her face towards Dinah, and looked at her an instant, then lifted herself up, put out her little arms, and let Dinah lift her from her mother's lap. Hetty turned away without any sign of ill-humour, and stood waiting with an air of indifference. (146)

It is evident that Totty prefers her mother and Dinah to Hetty. Again, Hetty is openly compared to the two paragons of virtue, Mrs. Poyser and Dinah. Totty's contempt Hetty in favour of the ideal woman and mother is evident in the novel.

Jointly with this aversion for Totty, Hetty also displays neglect for her own biological child. In her book, *The Mothers of England*, Sarah Ellis states that a mother's love for her child is instinctive, this induces a mother to sacrifice herself in order to save her child:

A mother's love which is strong enough to overcome the universal impulse of self-preservation can never have been given by the Author of our existence, for any mean or trifling purpose. As there is an existence

beyond this, for which she has to prepare, so the love of the human mother, by its continuance to the end of life, is beautifully adapted to those higher responsibilities which devolve upon her as the parent of an immortal being, whose lot, it is her privilege to hope, will be cast amongst the happy, the holy, and the pure, forever. (2) The purity of motherhood, with its self sacrificing nature and the undying love, is evident in this passage. Clearly Hetty's love for her child is not instinctive, undying nor is itself sacrificing. When she cries; her tears are not of remorse but for her unfortunate situation. She cries not for neither the pain she caused to others, nor the pain she inflicted upon her child but for herself only, "Hetty's tears were not for Adam or for her unborn child, they were for misery of her own lot."(367)

After her child is born, Hetty wanders aimlessly, filled with despair and desolation. Isolated and impoverished, Hetty's options are bleak:

It was impossible for [Hetty] to enter into any service, even if she could obtain it; there was nothing but immediate beggary before her and to ask anything of strangers; to beg; lay in the same far-off hideous region of intolerable shame, that Hetty had all her life thought it impossible she could ever come near. The dread of bodily hardship mingled with the dread of shame; for Hetty had the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal. (380)

Hetty's loneliness is aggravated by shame and stigma she suffers as the fallen, "All the force of Hetty's nature had been concentrated on the one effort of concealment and she had shrunk with irresistible dread from every course that could tend towards a betrayal of her miserable secret."(365) Hetty feels perplexed by her dilemma. She feels abandoned and helpless. Due to her melancholy, she also loses the hope of Arthur coming to her rescue, "Arthur could do nothing for her that would shelter her from discovery and scorn among the relatives and neighbors, now her airy dream had vanished. Her imagination no longer saw happiness with Arthur, for he could do nothing that would satisfy or soothe her pride."(365)

Eventually in her sadness, she contemplates suicide, and in keeping with the conventional end of the fallen woman, Hetty thinks of drowning herself:

Hetty felt that no one could deliver her from the evils that would make life hateful to her; and no one, she said to herself, should ever know her misery and humiliation, she would wander out of sight, and drown herself where her body would never be found, and no one should know what had become of her. (385)

Again, her thoughts are self centered. She thinks of drowning herself in order to save herself from public shame and a life impoverishment. She is different from other infanticidal women who take their babies lives in an effort to protect their children from some trouble; Hetty's child is not even mentioned in her musings. The questions that arise in her mind are concerned with her own misery. It's not even mentioned once that how she would provide help for the helpless baby. Her happiness comes prior to the life of the child.

In defense of Hetty's pride, it is noted that her fears of disgrace and shame were altogether justified and were not simply the imaginings of a vain and a proud woman. Hetty is given a little sympathy from Aunt, but no sympathy from her Uncle, Martin Poyser. When the news of Hetty's crime reaches her home, "the Hall Farm was a house of mourning for a misfortune felt to be worse than death." (415) The mourning, mentioned here is neither for Hetty nor for the death of the newborn child. In fact, the life of the child appears to be disposable when contrasted with the stigma it has brought to the extended family. The disaster felt to be worse than death is the humiliation brought to the family by Hetty's actions, "Hetty had brought disgrace on them all—disgrace that could not be wiped out, a scorching sense of disgrace, which neutralized all other sensibility."(415) Mr. Poyser feels that transfer is the family's only escape from the shame and stigma brought by Hetty's act. Even when Hetty's death sentence is changed to transportation, Martin Poyser worries over his misfortune, "But I doubt we shall ne'er go far enough for folks not to find out as we've got them belonging to us as are transported o'er seas, and war like to be hanged. We shall have that flyin' up in our faces, and our children's after us."(464)

Hetty is put on trial, not only because of her immoral act, but also because she refused to behave like an ideal woman. During her trial, "Hetty stood like a statue of despair. She stood motionless."(435) Her lack of response during the trial is interpreted as unnaturally cold. The onlookers "thought she looked as if some demon had cast a blighting glance upon her, and withered up the woman's soul in her, and left only a hard despairing obstinacy."(433) Hetty stands speechless, neither she breaks down nor does she cry. Quite unlike the character from *Man and Wife* Hester Dethrige, whose silence saves her from the trial, Hetty's silence leads to reinforcing her unnaturalness and multiplies her guilt in the mind of the jury present.

Surprisingly, it is the two ideal women, Mrs. Poyser and Dinah, who display some understanding of Hetty's actions. This fact is particularly noteworthy when put together with the historical accounts of male sympathy directed towards the infanticidal woman. It was often the male juries and judges who refused to denounce infanticidal women during the nineteenth century; on the other hand it was women who showed less sympathy towards those of their own sex who committed sexual indiscretions. This fact may account for the astonished reaction of the parson, Mr. Irwine, who "was struck with surprise to observe that Mrs. Poyser was less severe than her husband."(415) Furthermore, it is Dinah who goes to Hetty in an effort to provide her a sense of forgiveness. Virginia B. Morris in *Double Jeopardy* states that, "The 'harsh judgment' of the 'male

dominated' judicial system stands in contrast to 'the forgiveness' her cousin Dinah offers in the prison cell." (78) This serves as a curious inversion of historical reality at a time when the large majority of women charged with infanticide were plead not guilty by the male dominated judicial system.

Although the jury may have condemned Hetty on the grounds that "the unnaturalness of her crime stood more harshly by the side of her hard immovability and obstinate silence (during her trial), Virginia B. Morris asserts that Eliot's point is different, "the crime is not unnatural; rather, it is all too natural consequence of Hetty's personality in the context of her environment." (79) Hetty, like many infanticidal women of the era, was faced with a problem; the father of her child would not marry her, she was broke and had no means to support herself and her child, and she disposed by her family who offered her no sanctuary or safety, but rather criticism.

Hetty's death sentence is later transmuted to transportation and she is removed from England. Though she is saved from immediate execution, but the sentence of transportation was a slow death sentence. Eliot's treatment of Hetty acts as a justification for the English law and moral values. England is cleansed of the infanticidal woman. Josephine McDonagh in *Child Murder and British Culture: 1720-1900*, Eliot casts "England as a country in which child murders like Hetty Sorrel will not be tolerated. Furthermore, the restoration of social order is established in the final scene with the harvest supper. There is a sense of community with everyone eating the traditional English roast beef, drinking beer, and singing." (250)

Early feminist critics like Gillian Beer disapproved the ending of the novel, which had put Dinah on the same level with the pitiful Lisbeth, "always on the outlook for Adam" (7). This psychoanalysis is part of wider critical feminist debate about Eliot heroines who submit to the duty of marriage and control their desires rather than continue to be headstrong, aspiring and unconventional. Elaine Showalter in her article "The Greening of Sister George" from *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* noted that Eliot has been accused of supporting the values of the Victorian society by "living the revolution but not writing about it." (307) By marrying Dinah to Adam, Eliot appears to be supporting the values of the Victorian culture. However by reducing Dinah's power as an independent character may indicate a more rebellious meaning in the conclusion. Even during her exile Hetty continued to develop autonomy in order to save herself from the hardships. Dorothea Barrett in *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* assesses that "what George Eliot tells us elevates Dinah and condemns Hetty, but what she shows us tends to question Dinah and vindicate Hetty." (44), suggests a more revolutionary Eliot than publishing conventions would allow.

In *Child Murder and British Culture: 1720-1900*, Josephine McDonagh asserts that, "Hetty's crime paradoxically facilitates the constitution of the new society at the end of the novel, symbolized by the marriage of Adam and Dinah, Hetty's crime takes on the role of a sacrifice that will enable the eventual reconstitution of the social order." (248) This is highlighted by the absence of Hetty at the end of the novel. Moreover, the only mention of Hetty after her transportation is as Adam's inferior love, "Adam's love for Dinah was better and more precious to him than his love for Hetty." (530)

At the end of the novel both Dinah and Hetty are manipulated by Eliot to stick to the cultural norms of the day. Hetty is punished for her departure from the ideal woman, and Dinah is transformed from saint to angel of the house. Hetty is removed from English society, while the pure and saintly Dinah gives up her preaching and her role as a Methodist minister and becomes the Victorian ideal woman when she marries Adam: The love that had brought hope and comfort in the hour of despair, the love that had found its way to the dark prison cell and to poor Hetty's darker soul; this strong, gentle love was to be Adam's companion and helper till death. (534)

Both Hetty and Dinah are maneuvered by Eliot to adhere to the strict standards of the Victorian morality, and moreover Hetty is defined unnatural from her departure from the ideal womanhood. Community rules the day, as Eliot appears to be stressing not only idealized womanhood, but also an England free from the taint of the fallen woman.

Even then all the readers of this novel end up with a feeling of sympathy towards Hetty and also to an extent towards Arthur. It is to Eliot's credit, taking us through the chain of events she has projected the thought process of both these characters leading the reader with a better understanding of the motive behind the crime. The Power of If (Unsaid) remains in the readers mind. If the relationship was not physical, if Hetty had not become pregnant, if Arthur had known of the pregnancy before writing the letter, if Hetty had been able to meet Arthur when she left her home. All of these possibilities could have changed the story and the infanticide would have been avoided.

CONCLUSION

Critics have accused Eliot for meddling with the thoughts of the characters and giving the story a tame ending with Adam marrying Dinah. The other side remains that Eliot has unfolded events in a period and breathed life and character into both Hetty and Arthur. She has gone into depths of the minds of the main characters and besides unfolding the events, brought forth the thoughts and psychology leading to the final

event. The story is after all hers and based on an event narrated by her Aunt and she retains the right as an author to shape events and characters.

She may be a writer who is a radical with an unusual life-style, but as an intellectual in Victorian times she also had to probably restrain herself and make the story palatable to the readers who would not definitely be as outgoing as her. This is probably the reason for the tame ending and bringing tranquility back in the village. To pick up a real life incident, re-arrange the characters and try to explain the events, human weakness and psychology of an infanticide due to an illicit relationship of a young misguided couple of different social classes is probably Eliot's main achievement in this novel. It has to be appreciated that as an author she also needed her work to be read and accepted while touching a subject unusual as this. The outcome is definitely a novel which was not only read but also acclaimed by majority of readers and critics.

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