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Nothing Left to Lose:
The Disabling of Maggie Tulliver

By

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................. iv

INTRODUCTION:
A Risky Proposition ........................................................................ 1

CHAPTER ONE:
How Do You Solve a Problem Like Young Maggie? ......................... 25

CHAPTER TWO:
Maggie Finds Her Place ................................................................ 55

WORKS CITED .......................................................................... 102
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Introduction: A Risky Proposition

“Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin to look for it.”
Douglas Baynton

At first, it is easy to understand an argument against reading George Eliot’s protagonist Maggie Tulliver through a disability studies lens. The revised Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 2008 includes a three-part definition identifying a person as disabled who 1). Has a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities”; 2.) Has a record of such impairment(s); or 3.) Is regarded as having such impairment(s) “that substantially limits one or more major life activity[ies]” (Dept. of Justice). These terms do not define the fictional Maggie Tulliver. Unlike The Mill’s more conventionally-disabled character, the “humpback,” “cripple,” or “hunchback [Philip] Wakem,” Maggie has no physical or mental impairments or limitations nor is she regarded by society as limited or impaired. Opportunities should abound for the noticeably able-bodied little girl, who, unlike many representations that depict the disabled as immobile, uneducated, and/or impoverished, is active, intelligent, and situated in a comfortable socioeconomic class.

Although Victorianists have long engaged in heated and wide-ranging analyses of George Eliot’s novel and its controversial protagonist, none have labeled her “disabled.” Among such
scholarship, Rosemary Ashton describes Eliot's "most autobiographical" work as "problematic... puzzling in its comedy and tragedy, sometimes ambivalent in tone, deeply melancholy in spite of the narrator's emphasis on progress, and, above all, with its close relation to the sore spots of its author's life, very strongly felt" (9). Dozens of scholars, in addition to Ashton, have included their voices in the choir of Maggie Tulliver analysts, labeling her "sympathetic," "unrecuperably abject," and "a heroine of renunciation."1 In addition to these literary analyses, Maggie Tulliver has been more pointedly psychoanalyzed via both Freudian and Horneyan lenses with such analyses being informed by knowledge of Eliot's personal history of "sore spots." (Ashton 9). Psychoanalytic critics have declared Maggie "an example of abnormal psychology"; Maggie's relationship with her brother Tom has been defined as a "Liebestod" that reflects "Eliot's wish fulfillment"; and one of Maggie's most notorious, impulsive, and final choices has been evaluated as "a displacement" of Eliot's real-life domestic partnership with George Henry Lewes. One reviewer even demanded: "Ask, what good will [the novel] do? whether it lighten any burdened heart, help any perplexed spirit, comfort the sorrowful, succor the tempted, or bring back the erring into the way of peace;

1 See Ermarth, Lee, and Showalter.
and what is the answer? Silence.” Critics have applied dozens of descriptors—none of them “disabled”—to define Maggie’s physical and psychological states.

However, when reading Maggie according to criteria set forth by several disability studies theorists, it is she, rather than Mill’s hunchback, Philip Wakem, who fulfills the determining conditions of a disabled literary character. Further, Eliot utilizes the close friendship between Maggie and Philip to demonstrate that Maggie’s socially-imposed disabilities and their terminal effects are far broader and more significant than those of a conventionally disabled male character.

“...I do want to show that even in texts that do not appear to be about disability, the issue of normalcy is fully deployed. One can find in most any novel, I would argue, a kind of surveying the terrain of the body, an attention to difference—physical, mental, and national. This activity of consolidating the hegemony of normalcy is one that needs more attention, in addition to the kinds of work that have been done in locating the thematic of disability in literature.”

Lennard Davis

It is nearly impossible to imagine a world in which standards of normalcy and naturalization are not imposed. However, such

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See Smith, Comer, Hardy, and Craik.
constructions, though self-evident, are also somewhat contemporary. Lennard Davis traces the term “normal” to its genesis in “a particular historical moment....part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie” (15). Normalcy constructs have also generated concepts of abnormality, disability, and disabled persons as “problems”—issues that prevail in the twenty-first century. Therefore, Davis’s approach casts light on the “social process of disabling” rather than focusing on actual persons “with” disabilities (3). According to Davis, “[T]he social process of disabling arrived with industrialization and with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation, and so on” (3). It was not until about 1840 that the word “normal” came into English usage, extending over the following two decades to include the modern uses of “normality,” “norm,” and “normalcy” in 1849, 1855, and 1857, respectively. The European origins and timeline for developing ideas of “normal as imperative” (Davis 4) not only correspond with the events in Eliot’s novel, which occur between 1829 and 1844, but also the timeline of Eliot’s writing the book in 1859-60 (Lee 131); these historical factors also suggest Eliot’s reasons for emphasizing Maggie Tulliver’s
deviation from the norm, especially concerning matters of gender-related behavior and the racial and cultural connotations of Maggie's dark coloring.

The concept of a norm, however, should not be confused with that of an "ideal," and the discrepancy between these concepts provide additional support for reading Maggie Tulliver as disabled. Davis differentiates between "norm" and "ideal" by explaining,

[t]he norm pins down that majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve....So with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes....[P]eople with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. (Davis 6)

Davis traces the history of statistics-collecting during Victorian London as a means for monitoring the population and also for surveilling the poor. By its very implication, statistics-collecting followed the eugenic and Darwinist notions "that a population can be normed" based on the extremes represented by the bell curve (Davis 6). When the "hegemony of the middle" is operating, that which a society deems "normal" (read acceptable), even in matters of gender expectations and physical appearance, becomes the standard (Davis
According to such logic, "average" ideas and embodiments are desirable. To be "above average,"—or ideal, were it attainable—is to risk being labeled "deviant."

Allegiance to the average is displayed throughout the course of *The Mill on the Floss* whenever Maggie is held to standards that are either expressed outright or merely "understood." Unlike parents and relatives who compel a child to excel, Maggie's family members express disdain for appearances, behaviors, and desires that draw attention to themselves and/or threaten the status quo. What they desire—more exactly, require—is normalcy. Strangely, perhaps, since ideas of deviance have become often synonymous with destructive, even criminal behaviors, positive deviance may also be rejected by members of a society who prefer the "normal" to the "exceptional."

Davis cites Eliot's European contemporary, Gustave Flaubert, with having written the first literary depiction of a disabled character that society attempts to norm. Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, published four years prior to Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, features the clubfooted stable boy, Hippolyte, as the guinea pig subject of an experimental orthopaedic surgery that goes afoul when he develops gangrene and must have his entire leg removed. This, Davis maintains, is an early literary example of the unfortunate
consequences of “normal” standards being imposed and misappropriated on a person whose socially-perceived deviance necessitates a cure (10-11). Whether patent or obscure, such comparisons to standards of normal demonstrate the influence of eugenics on British society. It is quite plausible that Flaubert’s parody, in partnership with the Darwinism that strongly shaped George Eliot’s intellectual life, influenced her gradually disabling of Maggie, and her final obliteration when her “defectiveness” proved beyond remedy.

Davis traces a pattern by which “plot and character development of novels [of the nineteenth-century] tend to pull toward the normative” (11). These plots or characters are either overtly characterized by disability (as in the case of Dickens’ Tiny Tim), or covertly inconspicuous as in the works of Joseph Conrad in which metaphors of disability abound....to represent limitations on normal morals, ethics, and of course language. While it is entirely possible to maintain that these figures of speech are hardly more than mere linguistic convention, I would argue that the very regularity of these occurrences speaks to a reflexive patrolling function in which the author continuously checks and notes instances of
normalcy and instances of disability—right down to the linguistic level. (13)

Like many of her contemporaries, Eliot relies on illustrative metaphors, but her use of metaphors when assigned to Maggie implies both covert and blatant associations with deviance and disability. In addition, whenever depicting both Philip and Maggie, Eliot repeatedly relies on “[l]anguage that conveys passivity and victimization,” language that “relates the lack of control to the perceived incapacities, and implies that sadness and misery are the product of the disabling condition” (Linton 168). These are common, stereotypical markers of disability representation, especially during the nineteenth century.

Davis’s historical overview of the relationship between “normal” and “disabled” is useful to understanding the context of Eliot’s depiction of Maggie Tulliver, but Davis is not the only disability theorist who builds on constructions of “normal” rather than “abnormal.” Rosemarie Garland Thomson creates the term the normate to “usefully designate the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” (8). Because the normate is typically central in both society and literature, and therefore also an implicit identity, the normate often goes
unexamined. According to Simi Linton, Garland Thomson’s term invites people “to examine the nondisabled position and its privilege and power. It is not the neutral, universal position from which disabled people deviate, rather, it is a category of people whose power and cultural capital keep them at the center” (171). Garland Thomson also challenges “entrenched assumptions that ‘able-bodiedness’ and its conceptual opposite, ‘disability,’ are self-evident physical conditions,” rather than products of “legal, medical, political, cultural, and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse” (6). Her argument complements Lennard Davis’s assertion that disability, rather than being a medical condition, is imposed from without (in Davis’s argument, by society), as in the case of Maggie Tulliver.

By approaching her arguments about disability not from a “pathology” perspective (which sees disability as “the attribution of corporeal deviance”), but rather, from an “ethnicity” perspective, Garland Thomson, like Davis, contends that disability is “a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (6). In recommending that we examine the normate, Garland Thomson makes a case for more than normal vs. abnormal distinctions. Those who exist at center—in this case, the normates—who “possess...valued physical characteristics,” become the power-
brokers, the definers of cultural standards and expectations. When the normate “maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity,” it simultaneously and “systematically impos[es] the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others.... Corporeal departures from dominant expectations never go uninterpreted or unpunished, and conformities are almost always rewarded” (7). Simi Linton suggests, however, that social applications of “normal” denote “its obverse—abnormal—[and] they both become value laden. Often, those who are not deemed normal are devalued and considered a burden or problem, or are highly valued and regarded as a potential resource” (167). Each of these disabilities theorists—Davis, Garland Thomson, and Linton—constructs arguments about disability representations from the construct of normalcy rather than “abnormalcy,” a perception that is frequently synonymous with “disabled” and invites a disability analysis of Maggie Tulliver.

Because Maggie’s family and society are members of the normate, their power to determine and uphold definitions and applications of “abnormal,” is weighty. That power is routinely exercised by comparing Maggie to standards of the norm. Upon introducing her to readers, Eliot depicts Maggie as deviant among family members who attempt to trace the origins of her differentness,
its certain influence on her character, and its inevitable consequences. A large part of her family’s explanations include tracking the genetic origins of Maggie’s intellectual, emotional, and physical disparities, in search of someone to blame for her “darkness” and “cuteness” (acuteness). Maggie dark eyes and hair, are “like a mulatter” among her blond-haired, blue-eyed relatives—the normate—who often suggest she belongs to the gypsies who reside on the outskirts of St. Ogg’s (Eliot 12-13).

In keeping with the theory of disability-as-process and/or product, Tobin Siebers describes disability studies according to “a symbolic network” [that] defines disability... as the product of social injustice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment.” He provides further elucidation for analyzing an able-bodied character via a disability studies lens when stating:

Disability studies does not treat disease or disability, hoping to cure or avoid them; it studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigma attached to disability identity and asks how they relate to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression....[D]isability studies names the states of social oppression unique to people with
disabilities, while asserting at the same time the positive values that they may contribute to society. (Siebers 3-4)

In addition to her disabling by society, Maggie Tulliver, like Philip Wakem (indeed, to a larger degree, experiences stigmatization and social oppression, while her positive ambitions and traits are discounted, even ridiculed. As such, she is eventually seen as incapable of contributing to society in meaningful ways.

"Whereas the 'able' body has no definitional core..., the disabled body surfaces as any body capable of being narrated 'outside the norm.'”

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder

Also unlike Philip Wakem, Maggie meets the criteria of a “narrative prosthesis,” the term for a narrative’s “perpetual discursive dependency” on disability and the use of disability “as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (Mitchell and Snyder 205, 206). First coined by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, one function of narrative prosthesis is to depict disability as “a stock feature of characterization” that frequently represents disabled characters as hyper-sensitive or emotional, pitiful, stigmatized, uneducated, unemployed, indigent, beggars, unmarriageable, barren, passive, and/or sexually repressed or dangerous, at times suggesting
one's disability also portends a flawed or villainous nature. Another function of prosthesis is to serve as "an opportunistic metaphorical device" signifying "social and individual collapse" (205). In addition, Mitchell and Snyder argue that literary narratives depict disability "as an interruptive force that confronts cultural truisms...a metonym for that which refuses to conform to the mind's desire for order and rationality," and "a metaphor and fleshly example of the body's unruly resistance to the cultural desire to 'enforce normalcy'" (206).

Such multivalent purposes are set up within the opening pages of *The Mill on the Floss* when eight-year-old Maggie is presented as untamable and resistant to standards of normalcy as well as "a problem in need of a solution," yet another signifier of disability identity, according to Mitchell and Snyder (205). Representations of narrative prosthesis, its depictions, and its purposes are sustained throughout the novel via the able-bodied Maggie rather than the hunchback Philip Wakem. Included within their theory of narrative prosthesis, Mitchell and Snyder also formulate a "simple schematic of narrative structure" that demonstrates the term "disability" is laden with connotations that extend beyond archetypal representations. When applied to Maggie Tulliver's life trajectory, these four stages are executed in full:
First, a deviance or marked difference is exposed to the reader; second, a narrative consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an explanation of the deviation's origins and formative consequences; third, the deviance is brought from the periphery of concerns to the center of the story to come; and fourth, repair of deviance may involve an obliteration of the difference through a "cure," the rescue of the body, or the revaluation of an alternative mode of being. (209)

When Maggie's differences or deviances are exposed to readers within the first pages of the text, they are accompanied by a lengthy discourse in which her parents consider the origins of her anomalous appearance and behaviors. This becomes a recurring theme within the book until her “deviances” become central to the story’s narrative and Maggie eventually succumbs to a societal scrutiny reserved exclusively for women. Having thus fulfilled three of the four specifications of Mitchell and Snyder's theorized structure of narrative prosthesis, Eliot meets the theorists' fourth condition: that of a permanent “cure” or “obliteration” of Maggie’s improper differences. Readers who follow both Maggie and Philip's plotline recognize it is
Maggie, rather than Philip, who meets Mitchell and Snyder's four criteria.

Throughout the novel, Maggie’s continual dis-abling is administered via persistent disparaging remarks about her physically distinctive characteristics and admonishments for her intellectual and emotional hunger. Maggie is further debilitated by her own misappropriation of religious philosophies. Another legitimate contributor to Maggie’s disabling is her continual treatment as a stigmatized “other” in contrast to Philip Wakem, who suffers some effects of stigmatization, yet by novel’s end is virtually unscathed. Maggie’s disabling process can be understood via Simi Linton’s essay, “Reassigning Meaning,” in which she examines the meaning of the prefix that distinguishes the “abled” from the “disabled.” Linton’s exploration of dis illustrates the import of connotation within language, while also exhibiting how such connotations support a disabilities analysis of Maggie Tulliver.

The prefix dis, like the suffix ette, has...unchecked impulses [that connote small, diminutive, imitation, and inferior]....However, the prefix dis connotes separation, taking apart, sundering in two. The prefix has various meanings such as “not,” as in dissimilar; “absence of,” as
in disinterest; “opposite of,” as in disfavor; “undo, do the opposite of,” as in disarrange; and “deprive of,” as in disfranchise. The Latin root dis means apart, asunder. Therefore, to use the verb disable, means, in part, to deprive of capability or effectiveness. The prefix creates a barrier, cleaving in two ability and its absence, its opposite. (Linton 171)

Linton’s explication of dis complements Lennard Davis’s assertion of disability as social process, a concept directly related to his ideas about the origins of normal and its corresponding opposite, abnormal, a harbinger of disability-as-identity. Also, unlike Philip Wakem, whose “altruism and other-regardingness” are interpreted as “transcendent” traits, when manifested by Maggie, such traits are not deemed “transcendent”; rather, they are considered female obligations within a society of patriarchal men and women. As a result of her years-long intellectual and emotional famine, her misuse of religion, and ongoing societal condemnation and ostracizing, Maggie’s potential is undermined—hobbled and degenerated—disabling her in ways that eventually prove lethal.

Simi Linton clarifies some of the purposes of disability studies, showing its sociopolitical focus to be compatible with a disability
analysis of Maggie Tulliver. The field of disability studies investigates
disability via the elements of "linguistic conventions that structure the
meanings assigned to disability and the patterns of response to
disability that emanate from, or are attendant upon, those meanings"
(161). A non-medical emphasis also shifts the meaning of disability
from that of a condition (or person) who needs treatment rather than
"treating" the social processes and policies that constrict disabled
people's lives (Linton 162). Although Maggie is not conventionally
disabled, her socially-imposed disabling results in her socially-
imposed constrictions, suggesting that it is not Maggie, but society,
that needs modification.

Linton's expansion on the purposes of disability studies
provides an explanation for the kinship between Maggie Tulliver and
Philip Wakem. Linton defines the term disability "as a marker of
identity," which contributes to building

a coalition of people with significant impairments...with
behavioral or anatomical characteristics marked as
deviant, and people who have or are suspected of having
conditions...that make them targets of discrimination....
[T]he term is used to designate a specific minority
group.... a group bound by common social and political experience. (162 and 63)

While Philip and Maggie are separated by gender, status, and opportunity, they are united as social outcasts, persons who deviate from the standards of the norm. As such, it is not surprising that they are drawn together by more than their mutual interests in education, literature, and art. They identify with each other as non-members within a community of normates who reside at the powerful, privileged center, yet Maggie, rather than Philip, exhibits the stronger disability identity based on her gender.

Both Tobin Siebers and Iris Young acknowledge the disadvantages that abound for females living within patriarchal societies such as that of St. Ogg's. Siebers recognizes the possibility of reading “the differential and pejorative treatment of women as if it were a disability” (23), while Young presents a more flagrant assertion linking the female sex with disabled identity:

Women in sexist society are physically handicapped.
Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and
objectified. As lived bodies, we are not open and unambiguous transcendences which move out to master a world that belongs to us, a world constituted by our own intentions and projections. (65)

These arguments have pervasive applications that include diminished expectations and a lack of physical, intellectual, and psychological opportunities based solely on gender, as in Maggie's case.

"[I]t's easier not to explore disability because it, like all body studies, raises difficult questions about the bodies in which we live, work, and relate, especially with reference to power relations, values, justice, and communication."

Martha Stoddard Holmes

Because gender expectations and deviances play a significant role in Maggie's disabling, the work of Martha Stoddard Holmes is useful to this defining of disability terms. Holmes points to the distinctions:

between abled and disabled bodies in Victorian culture...

[and] the distinction between men and women and beliefs about what 'naturally' characterized each gender; the place where the two distinctions overlap is often the place where the meaning of disability is created in most influential and resilient ways... (94)
Both Maggie and Philip are distinguished by their gender disparities. Maggie is bored by the domestic confines of her mother and aunts. She desires education, loves reading and the outdoors—pleasures that are primarily male-related and therefore elicit disdain from her relatives. As a hunchback, Philip is described in eunuch-like terms. He sometimes appears disheartened while at other times he demonstrates “peevishness,” behaviors that, while expected from and more appropriately displayed by women, they are also “stock characterizations” of the disabled. His physical appearance is frequently compared to that of a woman, and while he achieves the education Maggie is denied, his interests in literature and art relegate him to the domestic sphere. This place of overlap between the two characters is one region of shared disability representation.

Holmes’s focus on Victorian literature and the emotional terms in which it defines disabled people’s social identities provides further support for connecting Maggie and Philip’s disabilities to their expressed and mutual “emotional excess” (4). The “emotional susceptibility” of disabled persons in nineteenth-century literature is also recognized by Karen Bourrier, who suggests such novels “are more interested in the psychology of disability than in the medical
details" (4). This fascination with the emotionality of the disabled contributed to

disability’s connection to a particular set of emotional codes and to permanently associate the experience of disability with an expectation of melodrama [that] also thematized Victorians’ concerns with identifying what kinds of bodies should marry and what kinds of bodies could work. (Holmes 5)

By pairing Maggie and Philip as “like” members of the same category—both outcast and “Other”—Eliot suggests they belong together, the deviant and the disabled.

This pairing of Maggie and Philip reinforces the concept of disability as an ethnicity, and also explains why Maggie is continually excluded from able-bodied society: like Philip, she is a foreigner. Siebers argues for describing disability in terms of “a cultural and minority identity,” a social category that is “elastic”: “both subject to social content and capable of effecting social change” (4). Disability studies purposes “to reverse the negative connotations of disability,” which, according to Siebers is best facilitated by accentuating its influence on one’s personal identity rather than focusing on the
“physical or mental characteristic” that normates tend to classify as “disability” (4). The application of various disability studies theories to a reading of Maggie Tulliver confirms that terms of disability are largely constructed by “normal” society yet serve to determine who is “in” and who is “out” of the mainstream. Being voted “out” by normate standards limits opportunity and restricts cultural status. While Philip Wakem is somewhat on the margins of St Ogg’s’ society of normates, by the end of the novel, it is Maggie whose cultural identity and/or ethnicity have wholly relegated her to her culture’s periphery.

Indeed, it is Maggie Tulliver whose appearance and behavior, gender and ultimate fate manifest in ways that share much in common with, in fact, exceed, archetypal representations of persons with disabilities. Further, in terms of narrative prosthesis, it is Maggie’s representation and plotline on which the novel depends to depict “representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (Mitchell and Snyder 206). By the end of The Mill on the Floss, Maggie’s deviance, rather than that of Philip Wakem, has come to the forefront of the story, demanding a cure, solution, or obliteration, thus meeting Mitchell and Snyder’s four-stage “schematic of narrative structure” (209). In lieu of a cure, Eliot provides an obliteration of
Maggie, while Philip lives out his natural life, grieving for Maggie, yes, yet presumably “uncured.”

Analyzing Eliot’s depiction of Maggie Tulliver through the lens of disability studies should raise more than eyebrows. Like the field of disability studies itself, this analysis should also raise questions about disability, its influences, constructions, and outcomes. Additionally, this analysis interrogates ideas of “normal,” asking who is empowered and how was their power determined to define “normal”? The representation of Maggie Tulliver also asks how gender, both in the nineteenth- and twenty-first centuries, influences perceptions and ensures mobility or lack thereof. Lennard Davis summarizes his objectives in ways that correspond with the objectives of this thesis when he states:

The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production....Characters with disabilities are always marked with ideological meaning, as are moments of disease or accident that transform such characters. One of the tasks for a developing consciousness of disability issues is the attempt, then, to reverse the hegemony of
the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal (Davis 15).

Maggie’s story, from beginning to end, showcases the ongoing tension between the normate and persons designated “abnormal,” even “deviant.” While Eliot lived during an era deficient in disability theories, she did not lack the personal prowess to ambiguously juxtapose an able-bodied woman and her counterpart, a male “humpback.” In doing so, Eliot repeatedly demonstrates that Maggie’s disadvantages and disbaring from society mirror, even exceed, those of Philip Wakem. Unless explicitly stated, Eliot’s motives behind her portrayal of Maggie cannot be verified, merely contemplated. Yet it may be argued that Eliot, either prudently or fortuitously, depicted her beloved Maggie Tulliver in ways that fuel the ongoing purposes and interests of the field of disability studies.
Chapter One

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Young Maggie?

"I was never satisfied with a little of anything."
Maggie Tulliver (Eliot 328)

Maggie Tulliver is introduced in *The Mill on the Floss* as a young girl whose appearance and behavior, gender and desires manifest in ways that oppose and threaten those of the norm represented by her family and society. As confirmed in a lengthy dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, Maggie's abnormal appearance, behaviors, and desires, made deviant in part by her gender, often present as intertwined and indivisible traits, rather than independent characteristics, thereby reducing the likelihood of Maggie's eventual "normalization" and its accompanying approval.

While discussing their educational plans for their son Tom, Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver insert their nearly-nine-year-old daughter, Maggie, into the conversation. As is the case in most conversations to follow, Mrs. Tulliver, "a patriarchal woman" (Lee 134), bemoans Maggie's acuteness, wildness, darkness, and unladylike ways, while Mr. Tulliver, as he is wont to do, "takes her part," defending Maggie's superior intellect and attributing it to her Tulliver genes. Yet Mr. Tulliver's pride in Maggie is tempered by his acknowledgment that
such "cuteness" (acuteness) is wasted on a girl. Mrs. Tulliver concedes that while Maggie is indeed acute, she is also "half an idiot i' some things." Besides demonstrating a tendency toward mischief, evidenced by her ever-dirty pinafore, Maggie’s easy distractibility and tendency to daydream "like a Bedlam creatur" perplex Bessy Tulliver. Not only has such behavior "niver run in [her] family," neither has such "mulatter" skin and black eyes (13). Bessy Tulliver also desires that Maggie should have a crop of curls, "like other folks’s children," specifically Maggie’s fair-haired cousin Lucy who sports "a row o’ curls round her head, an’ not a hair out o’ place." Like its owner, Maggie’s hair will not comply with imposed devices that attempt to flatten her; instead, her curly, wild hair refuses to be tamed, making her skin appear even darker (Eliot 62). Maggie is also too tall for a nine-year-old girl, another peculiarity that provokes Mrs. Tulliver to label her "comical." Life is hard for Bessy Tulliver since her "one gell" shows clear evidence of having taken after her father, rather than her mother’s side of the family (Eliot 9-13). This scene, establishing a theme of Maggie-as-deviant, meets the first two criteria of Mitchell and Snyder’s schematic of disability representation: “[F]irst, a deviance or marked difference is exposed to the reader; second, a narrative consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an
explanation of the deviation’s origins and formative consequences” (209), and thereby lays a foundation for reading Maggie through a disability studies lens.

The discrepancies between Mrs. Tulliver and her only daughter are verified for the reader when Maggie enters the house, tossing her bonnet to release her “dark, heavy locks.” Bessy Tulliver, “fair, plump, and dull-witted,” desires a daughter who is mild and accommodating, like herself. She scolds Maggie, sending her upstairs to brush her hair and change her pinafore and shoes before starting on her “pretty patchwork.” Demonstrating that Mrs. Tulliver’s lament is true—Maggie is unlike other girls—Maggie declares such work “foolish.” What’s more, Maggie voices her dislike for her aunt Glegg, the recipient of the patchwork in question (Eliot 13-14). Maggie wants to run, to speak, to learn, and to think, unhindered. Unlike her family and society, Maggie is not impressed with people who keep up appearances, nor has she any desire to impress them.

Although her father often diffuses such situations, making comical asides in Maggie’s defense, his pride in her carries conditions and limitations, most of them imposed by cultural ideas of normalcy. Such scenes between the Tulliver parents and their relatives increase in frequency and intensity throughout the first half of the novel,
thereby intensifying Maggie’s sense of rejection. Within the first pages of *Mill*, Maggie is presented as “a problem in need of a solution,” yet another signifier of disability identity (Mitchell and Snyder 205). The theme depicted in this opening scene is one that will be repeated, with some variation, during the course of her life.

Laments about Maggie’s inherent “naughtiness” and queerness, while also predicting the inevitable misery she will incur, take a toll on Maggie. Eventually, realizing that her physical differences are somewhat fixed and that personal beauty is “out of the question,” she desires nothing more than to be thought “a clever little girl,” one in whom others do not continually find fault (Eliot 64). Eliot steadily represents Maggie Tulliver with the descriptors of Mitchell and Snyder’s theory of narrative prosthesis: She is a force that assails orthodoxy; a metonym that resists conformity, order, and rationale; and a living metaphor, from the top of her unruly, dark head to the tips of her toes. These criteria, together with the reactions Maggie evokes, the stigmatization she suffers, and her eventual, seemingly inevitable fate, provide additional support for reading Maggie as a disabled literary character.

Depictions of Maggie, juxtaposed with those of her predictable, yet average Tulliver and Dodson kin, sustain Lennard Davis’s
assertion that “normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on” (11). Davis’s historical overview of the relationship between concepts of “normal” and “disabled” is useful to understanding the historical context of Eliot’s depiction of Maggie. If one cannot be labeled “normal,” one thus becomes “abnormal,” cast out from the normate to identify with the outcasts of society.

St. Ogg’s and Maggie’s Tulliver relations esteem the Aryan coloring long associated with heroines and princesses, and their derision of Maggie’s dark hair and complexion is laced with culturally sinister suggestions. The first time Eliot presents cousins Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Deane side by side, she focuses on their physical and behavioral disparities. Lucy is domesticated, “a white kitten,” but Maggie, whose hair is described as “a reluctant black crop,” is “a rough, dark, overgrown puppy” (Eliot 61, 27, 61). Unlike her “pink and white” cousin (101), Maggie is “the picture of her aunt Moss, Mr. Tulliver’s sister, -- a large-boned woman, who had married as poorly as could be, had no china, and had a husband who had much ado to pay his rent” (60). Conversely, Lucy’s blond curls reflect her social perfection, her obedience, neatness, and sweetness, ensuring a bright future. While Maggie is “ten times naughtier” when her aunts and
uncles are present (a fact that is also noted as “unnatural” in a girl), “you may set [Lucy] on a stool, and there she’ll sit for an hour together, and never offer to get off” (43). Indeed, Mrs. Tulliver suffers a “silent pang” (60) as she watches her sister adjusting Lucy’s blond curls; “[Maggie] looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy” (61). Uninterested in the domestic chores associated with the narrow parameters of home, Maggie, unlike Lucy, is seldom still. Mrs. Tulliver at times threatens her with withheld love when her “naughtiness” results in a wet and dirty pinafore. But Mrs. Tulliver fears are fueled by the judgment of a society that might suppose she has “done summat wicked” to have “such a child” (28). Whenever her mother comes across Maggie—seated and immovable—enjoying a “fairy tune,” and wearing “that bright look of happiness...with her hands clasped,” Mrs. Tulliver is comforted “with the sense that Maggie could look pretty now and then, in spite of her brown skin” (Eliot 93).

The relationship between physical beauty, acceptable behaviors, and a promising future are both stated and understood within St. Ogg’s. Maggie’s aunts link her dark coloring to her resultant gender-inappropriate behaviors, such as “roughness” (61), and “wildness” (12, 104). They pity their sister Bessy’s “bad luck with her children” and although aunt Pullet expresses a half-formed idea of paying for
Maggie’s being sent to a distant boarding-school as a means for subduing some her vices, she also concedes that a boarding school education will not diminish Maggie’s brownness (Eliot 128). Deborah Epstein Nord describes Maggie’s status in her family, “and especially in the clan of Dodson women,” as that of a “foundling.” “Maggie’s mother cannot imagine how she ended up with such a child and, in the parental version of family romance, she and her sisters think of her as having come from the gypsies” (Nord 199). This persistent rebuff coincides with Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s proposal to perceive disability (“the attribution of corporeal deviance”) from an “ethnicity” rather than “pathology” perspective, based in part on the implication that disability, like ethnicity, is “a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (6). It is perhaps her chronic association with gypsies that most suggest Maggie’s deviances are innate, incurable, and threatening.

Her maternal aunts Deane, Glegg, and Pullett, reinforce gender standards that exclude Maggie and emphasize the consequences of violating those standards. The Dodson sisters “never regard themselves as personae in their own rights; they all define themselves entirely according to their roles of daughter, mother, wife, or sister, and their loyalties conform to a patriarchal code.” Believing that
"marriage, domesticity, and death all follow prescribed patterns" (Woodward 48), the Dodson sister's proscriptiveness:

serve[s] to determine Maggie's fate as an outsider of the Dodson family and the St. Ogg's community. They offer her no warmth or female kinship, spurning her for her dark complexion because no Dodson ever had such colouring. In excluding Maggie, they confirm her in her anti-social behaviour; as a child, especially, she senses her position as undesirable. (Woodward 49)

Her maternal aunts incite much of the reproach that befalls Maggie. Their continual comparisons between the Tulliver siblings, emphasize Tom's genetic links to them as well as Maggie's disparities. When combined with Maggie's aversion to their commandments, these disparities mean Maggie will never truly "belong" to her normate family.

Contemporary readers need to understand Eliot's deliberate references to literary stereotypes of women, by which she conveys the "the light lady/dark lady dichotomy" also present within nineteenth-century American literature. Light hair and complexion, like those of Lucy and the Dodsons (including her brother Tom in whom the
Dodson genes are dominant), symbolize angelic traits of unselfishness and purity, “while dark hair and complexion often symbolize the opposite, selfishness and active female sexuality that Victorians considered depraved” (Kubitschek 199). As a young girl, the disenfranchised Maggie displays her desire to share in patriarchal authority in a tri-fold fantasy in which she becomes queen—“in Lucy’s form”—of “a world in which people never got any larger than children of their own age...” (61). Eliot provides a meta-reference to this light/dark symbolism much later in her text when Maggie and Philip Wakem “discuss a French novel in which a light-haired, conventional woman wins the love of a man away from the dark-haired heroine” (Kubitschek 199). Maggie notes that it is the blond-haired women of books who “carry away all the happiness,” and expresses her desire to find a story “where the dark woman triumphs” (Eliot 332).

Understanding her darkness signifies more than mere familial dissimilarity is important to appreciating a disability analysis of the Maggie.

Her father focuses on Maggie’s abnormalities as related to her gender, declaring her acuteness not only “bad,” but also “a pity,” because “she’ll fetch none the bigger price for that” (12). Rosemary Ashton acknowledges Eliot’s multi-purposes within Mr. Tulliver’s
remarks, the widest of which exposes the “prevailing notion of society that boys should be educated more seriously than girls in preparation for the active lives they are to lead. Intelligence in a girl is a misfortune, being a hindrance to her chances in the marriage market. This is an important theme in the novel...” (34-35). This theme continues after Maggie disrupts Mr. Tulliver’s conversation with his friend, Mr. Riley, to insert her own opinion:

[T]urning to Mr. Riley, as though Maggie couldn’t hear [Mr. Tulliver said], “She understands what one’s talking about so as never was. And you should hear her read,—straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand. And allays at her book! But it’s bad—it’s bad,” Mr. Tulliver added sadly, checking this blamable exultation. “A woman’s no business wi’ being so clever; it’ll turn to trouble, I doubt. But bless you!”—here the exultation was clearly recovering the mastery,—“she’ll read the books and understand ’em better nor half the folks as are growed up.”(17)

This scene not only shows Mr. Tulliver’s discussing Maggie as though she were a non-entity; it also displays one of many scenes in which Mr. Tulliver is flummoxed by the “topsy-turviness” of the world, most
frequently manifested in the disparate levels of intelligence and their apportioning to his daughter and son.

In a scene Karen Hottle describes as showing Maggie's "creative ability to think for herself and go beyond the bounds of the printed page...," Maggie discusses with Mr. Riley the merits and symbolism of several texts, including Daniel Defoe's *History of the Devil* (18-19). This is one in a number of scenes in which Maggie identifies with witches, indicative of her acknowledgment of herself as a defendant before an unjust jury. While talking to Riley, Maggie "is drawn to the picture of a witch being submitted to the trial of drowning and understands the impossibility of fair play at the hands of a judgemental [sic] society....The witch becomes an emblem for Maggie" (Woodward 49). She is soon dismissed by her father to "go and see after [her] mother." Planted instead behind her father's chair, she listens as he expresses amazement at Maggie's acumen, made more astonishing by Mr. Tulliver's deliberate choice of a wife whose intellect "was a bit weak like." Mr. Tulliver once again labels it a "pity but what [Maggie]'d been the lad,—she'd ha' been a match for the lawyers, she would." Mr. Tulliver's "brains," in combination with Mrs. Tulliver's "soft[ness]" have produced "stupid lads and 'cute wenches," resulting in a "topsy-turvy" world, "an uncommon, puzzlin' thing," according to
Mr. Tulliver's societal standards for "normal" (Eliot 20). Maggie's love of books—including stories of witches and women warriors like the Old Testament's Jael—and learning are her pathway out of St. Ogg's' "oppressive narrowness," one that will be continually obstructed by "a society that differentiates potential for growth on the basis of gender" (Lee 129).

As a young child, Maggie's problematic behavior manifests as obstinacy, clumsiness, distractibility, and emotionalism. Her older brother Tom takes her devotion for granted, also discounting it. He routinely bullies and judges his sister, treating her like an object to manipulate. He believes Maggie is silly and of no consequence (Eliot 24), branding her an idiot on several occasions. When she habitually displeases Tom, he marches off, declares he no longer loves her, and refuses to speak to her for days. Because the need to be loved—especially by Tom—is "the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature" (37), whenever he withholds his affection and approval, she often throws herself at him, clinging to him and begging his forgiveness. Despite his exploitation of Maggie, Tom sees it as his future adult role "to take care of her, keep her as his housekeeper, [and] punish her when she [does] wrong" (Eliot 40). This brother/sister relationship
parallels the male/female dynamic that prevails within their culture, one in which men have most of the power.

Elaine Showalter highlights the gender differences between Maggie and Tom exhibited in the “expectations, education, and daily treatment by the family” that form the siblings and their relationship. She concedes that while Tom’s life may be no easier that Maggie’s, “the disciplines to which he is called are lighter for him to assume because they are basically in accordance with his [authoritarian] personality.... [W]ill, self-control, self-righteousness, narrowness of imagination, and a disposition to dominate and to blame others” are represented as masculine traits by Eliot, and these same traits are linked with male status and self-esteem (126). Whenever “Tom is shown to be less than clever, kind, or particularly intelligent, he remains confident, based upon the gender-sanctioning” of society” (127). Conversely, when Maggie expresses her opinion or intelligence, she is quieted while her less-than-kind remarks (most of them insightful observations about her relatives or society) are shamed and condemned. This treatment is not unlike that suffered by societal outcasts—often the disabled—who are often represented in literature as having no meaningful contributions to make.
Unified by their loyalty to misogynistic values that excuse Tom's "juvenile errors," while excoriating Maggie's (310), the Tullivers and Dodsons share an "assumed agreement [about] what is normal,...set[ting] up an aura of empathy and 'us-ness' [in a] process [that] enhances social unity among those who feel they are normal, necessarily excluding the other or abnormal group," in this case, Maggie Tulliver (qtd in Linton 167). According to Lerita Coleman, "Two of the most common ways in which nonstigmatized people convey a sense of fundamental inferiority to stigmatized people are social rejection or social isolation and lowered expectations" (147). Ironically, by ascribing to patriarchal gender expectations, the women of St Ogg's earn a bit of capital, a share in the power that is brokered by men. This fraction of power suggests their superiority when passing judgment on people who fail to comply with their standards. Compliance buys the women junior membership in the men's club; noncompliance means Maggie Tulliver, like conventionally-disabled persons, will remain an outsider.

Maggie's stigmatization and its infinite ramifications may be best understood by first mapping the Greek origins of the term stigma, which refers "to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier....signs
advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places” (Goffman131). Erving Goffman’s additional explication of “three grossly different types of stigma,” attests to its lethal implications in Maggie’s disabling process since, based on the standards of “the normals”—“those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue”—she meets most of the criteria for all three types, categorized according to “abominations of the body,” “[b]lemishes of individual character,” and “[t]ribal stigma.... an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated” (132).

Stigmatization is achieved when a person or group of people feels superior to another person or group of people who are “perceived to be or who actually feels inferior” (Coleman142). The implicit power of the stigmatizer(s) implies that if the stigmatized holds any hope for gaining status or power, he or she must appeal to the power(s)-that-be. Rosemarie Garland Thomson acknowledges this dynamic within her analysis of relationships between abled-bodied (non-stigmatized) and disabled persons (for whom stigmatization is likely).

To be granted fully human status by normates, disabled people must learn to manage relationships from the beginning. In other words, disabled people must use
charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort....supplicants and minstrels, striving to create valued representations...[among] the nondisabled majority. (13)

Most women who are accepted (as much as acceptance is possible) into a patriarchal culture, like that of St. Ogg's, learn to behave in ways that curry favor. Charm, beauty, deference, sexual favors, indispensability—all are means for earning patriarchal capital. Lacking these contrivances or loath to employ them, Maggie's status holds at "less-than" human. However, the gifts Maggie Tulliver might impart—intelligence, insight, empathy, adventure—are devalued, discounted, and disdained unless exhibited by males members of society. Deprived of "the masculine power that society will not grant her.... [Maggie is] stigmatized and "stifled by her position in society" (Woodward 49).

"George Eliot is intent on portraying Maggie as a true isolate, a solitary pilgrim who is unable, because of the nature of the St. Ogg's community, to form genuine bonds with anyone."
Wendy Woodward

Deborah Nord provides substantial historical insight, shedding light on Victorian literature's use of the gypsy, thus showing her
family’s repeated suggestion that Maggie is “like a gypsy” conveys more than references to the swarthiness and dark curly hair they share in common (Eliot 104). As “a constant, ubiquitous marker of otherness,” gypsies could also signify “marginality, nomadism, alienation, and lawlessness.” Their placement “on the outskirts of the English world”— in The Mill’s example, Dunlow Common rather than St. Ogg’s—depicts them as “inassimilable” and “socially peripheral,” not unlike Maggie herself (Nord 189). Within nineteenth-century English literature, the gypsy, like Maggie Tulliver, suggests cultural differences and “an almost racial separateness,” but perhaps more relevant to their link with Maggie, literary gypsy females transmit “a deep sense of unconventional, indeed aberrant, femininity….their deviance from acceptable modes of feminine thought, behavior, and appearance” (Nord 190).

Following a day-long family get-together that begins “ill” (85), Maggie is made more aware than ever of her displacement in her family and larger society, and resolves to seek citizenry among the gypsies on the outliers of St. Ogg’s. Running away to the Gypsies was by no means a new idea to Maggie; she had been so often told she was like a gypsy, and “half wild,” that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of
escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances would be to live in a little brown tent on the commons: the gypsies, she considered, would gladly receive her, and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge. She had once mentioned her views on this point to Tom, and suggested that he would stain his face brown, and they should run away together; but Tom rejected the scheme with contempt, observing that gypsies were thieves, and hardly got anything to eat, and had nothing to drive but a donkey. To-day, however, Maggie thought her misery had reached a pitch at which gypsydom was her only refuge.... (Eliot 104)

Maggie’s dark appearance is not the sole motivator of her family members’ comparing her to gypsies. The gypsy metaphor, like most metaphors Eliot elicits, is embedded with meaning that also passes judgment on Maggie’s character. While the full meaning of the metaphor may as yet be lost on Maggie, Tom understands its implications and uses Maggie’s suggestion as another opportunity to further humiliate her.

During the course of her brief afternoon visit to the gypsy camp, Maggie finds a fleeting respite from “her mother’s brand of femininity”
(Nord 202), and suspects she has found a community of people like herself. This pseudo assurance is temporarily reinforced when she sees a gypsy woman who resembles herself who also refers to her as a “pretty lady.” Attempting to exhibit some sense of influence or superiority, Maggie introduces herself as the gypsies’ future queen, promising to be kind to each one of them and also offering to educate them about geography and the history of Christopher Columbus. She soon feels like she in a story herself; her eyes begin “to sparkle and her cheeks to flush” as the amused gypsies engage in conversation with her (109). Of this moment, Karen Hottle remarks, “Maggie comes truly alive when she feels that she has authority, and this authority is based on the knowledge she has gained through her reading” (36-37), knowledge that is discouraged at home. Yet after just a few brief moments, a sense of homesickness is ignited within her.

As the habits and hospitality of the gypsies remind her of her displacement among them, Maggie goes from attempting to hide from her father to peeling her eyes for him on the horizon. With the exception of the “maternal face that mirrors her own,” (Nord 201), she detects derision from the surrounding gypsy women. An older woman’s offer of dry bread and a piece of cold bacon is politely rejected by Maggie, who requests “bread-and-butter and tea instead.”
Another couple of women converse nearby in their own dialogue while a tall young woman constantly stares and grins menacingly at her. After the young woman gives a "shrill cry," alerting a "young urchin" about the age of Maggie's brother Tom, she becomes afraid of the "incomprehensible chattering" that ensues about her. Entertaining fears that the gypsies are perhaps thieves, kidnappers, cannibals, or in one case, the Devil personified, she begins to feel "very lonely, and...quite sure she should begin to cry before long; the gypsies didn't seem to mind her at all, and she felt quite weak among them" (110-112). Whether among her "proper" Dodson relatives, or these strange, dark gypsies, Maggie is discovering that, not unlike a disabled member of society, she is considered undesirable by those who sit in the seats of power as well as those who live on the margins.

Recognizing Maggie's increasing trepidation, the gypsies offer her a donkey ride back to St. Ogg's, which she accepts with apprehension, further showing her displacement within gypsy society. When she and her gypsy escort encounter Mr. Tulliver at a crossroads, Maggie collapses, sobbing against her father and promising never to run away again. This scene, like most Eliot depicts, suggests more than that a cursory reading provides. Alicia Carroll analyzes Maggie's failed venture as one that "poignantly
illustrates that double bind that becomes the crux of the novel and
the source of [her] painful stasis (49).” Carroll also sites Nina
Auerbach, who

has illustrated the psychological aspects of Maggie’s
static role, [making] it...clear that Maggie’s psychological
stasis is located in a culturally constructed system that
defines and limits the behavior of women by placing them
in a rigid anthropological standard of ‘civilization’ that
insists upon their sequestration under male agency. (49)

Carroll and Auerbach’s examination of this scene further supplements
a disability analysis of Maggie Tulliver, but it is Deborah Nord’s
summation that utilizes actual disability terms when referencing
“Maggie’s kinship with the gypsies, her rebelliousness as a child, and
her transgressiveness as an adult,” as evidence of her inability to
recover “an acceptable feminine course.” Maggie is “trapped in a
stigmatized femininity that finds its own reflection in no credible
image save a gypsy woman glimpsed near Dunlow Common.... The
deformity Eliot describes is thus imagined... as an impossible
identification with... an alien, proscribed, even outlaw group” (Nord
207). This scholarship, as well as Eliot’s text, demonstrates the far-
reaching and weighty insinuations of suggestions that Maggie belongs
to the gypsies, yet her brief and failed visit to Dunlow Common verifies only her physical resemblance to some of its residents. Little by little, Maggie is gathering evidence that suggests she belongs to no one anywhere.

Upon returning home, Maggie escapes the reproach and taunts of family members who are strongly warned by Mr. Tulliver to make no mention of "this foolish business of her running away to the gypsies" (Eliot 115). However, she is on the threshold of two new adventures, one that will expose her to a formal education while at the same time reinforce its female exclusion; the second event, embedded within her visit to Tom at King's Lorton School, is her introduction to the hunchback Philip Wakem, with whom Maggie will form an attachment that exceeds her bond with fault-finding relatives.

Reading is male territory and, just shy of nine-years old, Maggie has already encroached on that domain and desires to explore it further. Karen Hottle writes:

To Maggie, books are real; they give her the information that her growing mind craves as well as the freedom to create and explore her own ideas about herself and the world around her. She does not, however, have the ability
to discriminate between fact and fiction, or to question what she reads. Her ‘small mind’ may be like a country over which one can travel, but it seems to be a country in need of development. (37-38)

Like most children her age, Maggie lacks sophisticated thinking skills; therefore, her naivety informs her expectations, reflected in her earlier interaction with Mr. Riley for whom she reads while faintly aware of his “admonitory patronising tone” (18). “Highly tuned to Riley’s reaction makes Maggie realize that, despite her abilities, ‘he thought her silly and of no consequence’ (Eliot 24). Her first attempt to use books to help define herself has failed, unappreciated and cut short by the authority figures whom she had wanted to impress” (Hottle 36).

Mr. Stelling, Tom’s King’s Lorton schoolmaster, provides Maggie with a similar scenario during which he reinforces the idea that a formal education is wasted on women. Upon meeting Mr. Stelling, Maggie anticipates a positive relationship with the “charming man” after he gathers her between his legs and asks her from whom she stole her dark eyes (145). Stelling then insists Maggie remains a fortnight with he, his wife, and Tom, and Mr. Tulliver agrees “to leave his little wench where she would have an opportunity of showing her cleverness to appreciating strangers” (145). After a scene in which
Tom teases Maggie at length concerning her mathematical ineptitude. Eliot describes an “illustrative” scene that depicts Maggie’s delight in discovering new words within Tom’s Latin grammar text (Weed 431). Maggie

quickly found that there was an English Key at the end, which would make her very wise about Latin, at slight expense. She presently made up her mind to skip the rules in the Syntax—the examples became so absorbing....The most fragmentary examples were her favorites. (Eliot 147)

Seeking a “key” that will at last unlock to her “a whole magical world,” Maggie demonstrates once again her aptitude for learning this “interesting” topic that “that Tom said no girls could learn” (Eliot 147). Stelling humors Maggie under the guise of encouraging her intellectual curiosity, only to concede afterward that “girls couldn’t go far into anything,” that although girls “can pick up a little of everything....They’re quick and shallow” (150). Maggie, who has “been so proud to be called ‘quick’ all her little life,” now decodes “quickness” as being synonymous with a “brand of inferiority” (Eliot 150). Mr Stelling’s flippant remark fortifies the previous dismissals Maggie has received from adult authority figures, increasing her self-
doubt, thereby decreasing her opportunities. Lerita Coleman describes such forms of stigmatization as

a special and insidious kind of social categorization or,...a process of generalizing from a single experience. People are treated categorically rather than individually, and in the process are devalued....[C]oding people in terms of categories ("X is a redhead") instead of specific attributes ("X has red hair") allows people to feel that stigmatized persons are fundamentally different and establishes greater psychological and social distance (Coleman 145).

Despite her observable intellectual curiosity and aptitude for learning, Maggie, categorized as a “girl” rather than an individual with specific attributes, will not attain the education she desires because “it is not her place to learn” (Hottle 38). Despite Tom’s merely “promising [academic] stupidity” and its resultant frustration, which makes him feel “so much like a girl” (Eliot162, 142), Tom’s “category”—male—trumps his individuality, entitling him to an education.

The status (or lack thereof) inherent in gender categorization is disbursed indiscriminately in St. Ogg’s, profiting men while harming women. Maggie, not unlike countless conventionally-disabled literary characters, is put on notice repeatedly that the world beyond the
walls of hearth and home offers her nothing; what's more, as an object (in this case, "female") rather than an individual, she has nothing to offer the world. This powerful form of stigmatization often "results in a special kind of downward mobility," causing people to "lose their place in the social hierarchy" and as such, is a component of her disabling process (Coleman 142). The above scene, in which Maggie is again informed by an "expert" of her inferior status, exemplifies Rosemarie Garland Thomson's statement that disability "representation tends to objectify disabled characters by denying them any opportunity for subjectivity or agency" (9). Maggie's options are being eliminated; in truth, she is being told her desires are not options at all. Like a disabled literary character whose identity is somewhat other than human, she is discovering that certain privileges, such as an education, are reserved for those who are more worthy than she.

While Sung-Ae Lee's criticism of *The Mill on the Floss* focuses on suggestions of dystopia and abjection, many of her assertions complement stigma and disability scholarship. Lee too elaborates on *The Mill*'s depiction of "a society that differentiates potential for growth on the basis of gender." She also acknowledges Maggie's exclusion from male-sanctioned realms as a sentencing of sorts, a "process of
abjection," which includes "transgression, renunciation (submission),
and death" by which Maggie is eventually "condemned to the
periphery" of a "dystopian" society with no hope for recovery (129).³
Lee's perspective, not unlike that of a disability studies perspective,
examines "how religion, patriarchy, and education as teleology affect
an individual's Bildung...." (130). Likewise, disability scholarship can
demonstrate that the disabling process not only affects, but finally
terminates her development. Disability, like abjection, "is best
understood as a marker of identity...[for] people with behavioral or
anatomical characteristics marked as deviant..." (Linton 163) and who
thereby suffer discrimination. C.J. Gill maintains disability "is mostly
a social distinction...a marginalized status" assigned by "the majority
culture tribunal" (44). By the age of nine, Maggie is learning that the
world to which she desires to belong provides her no access. Gender,
stigma, ambitions, in the hands of the majority tribunal—normates—
combine to disable her potential before it gains momentum.

Eliot's use of metaphorical language depicts Maggie's rage and
also reveals the perceptions of those who disable her. Maggie enjoys
the "luxury of vengeance," which she inflicts on "a large wooden doll."

³Julia Kristeva originated the psychoanalytic term "abject" to represent the concept
of body fluids such as tears, blood, and excrement as unclean and therefore avoided
via elimination.
a defaced fetish, that she "punish[es] for all her misfortunes" (20). Her fury toward patriarchal society and her need for strong female role models points her to Jael, an Old Testament woman warrior who is celebrated after killing her male enemy, Sisera, by driving a tent stake through his temple (Judges 4-5). Dorothea Barrett describes Mill as "riddled with madwoman images and their historical associations: attics, fetishes, witches, gypsies, idiots, demonic possession" (73), suggesting Maggie’s association with mentally or psychologically impaired individuals. Specifically referencing Jane Eyre’s resident madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason, Elizabeth Donaldson explains that within historical England and its literature, “the figure of the madwoman in general, became a compelling metaphor for women’s rebellion” (2). Elaine Showalter conjectures that Maggie’s fetish is her alter ego, a type of Bertha Mason, “the semi criminal double, who is violent and sexual,” playing “no real part in the novel” other than that of Maggie’s “childish fantasy...fleeting, silly, and quickly repressed” (125-26). These metaphors and Maggie’s interaction with them imply she understands, either subconsciously or otherwise, her role within a society of normates.

Serpent metaphors, although not signifiers of disability, suggest provocative indications of Maggie’s stigma-inducing characteristics. In
one scene, Eliot likens her to “a Pythoness” (29), a metaphor that indicates deistic powers, yet is also “a passive medium for forces outside her control” (Birch xxi). This metaphor proves more than coincidental when Maggie, in keeping with the stock characterizations of disability representations, assumes a passive posture that makes her susceptible to a powerful society of patriarchal normates. After lopping off her hair during a fit of “defiance against her female condition” (Weed 438), she is described as “a small Medusa with her snakes cropped” (98). Labeling this metaphor “jarring,” Elizabeth Weed cites Freud’s interpretations of Medusa’s snakes as penis symbols. Barbara Creed elaborates on the Medusa metaphor as one that “evokes fear of female sexuality as a danger because the Medusa’s head takes the place of a representation of ‘the female genitals’—‘the toothed vagina’—....grounded in monstrousness .... [and] invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator” (36), in this case, the citizens of St. Ogg’s patriarchal society. Dorothea Barrett attributes Eliot’s heavy reliance on metaphors to “an absence of [existing] vocabulary... to communicate ideas that disrupt and subvert the assumptions of Victorian and our own society, both as to gender politics and as to human possibilities” (73). Yet Eliot’s metaphors, when analyzed with a psychological lens, also complement a disability
studies analysis. In addition to inciting stigmatization and ostracizing, Maggie, as a societal Other, also incites fear within her patriarchal society, fear that is perhaps best conveyed via serpent metaphors.

Her physical appearance and narrow societal expectations make her an alien among both her family and the gypsies, yet when exhibiting her intellect and imagination, she is reminded repeatedly (especially by Tom) that she is “a stupid,” “only a girl,” and even “an idiot” (Eliot 86, 35, 105). As her possible spheres of exploration are reduced, so are her options, which sets the stage for her strong emotional bond between herself and the “humpback” Philip Wakem, whom she meets while visiting Tom at King’s Lorton school.
...an impairment only becomes a disability when the ambient society creates environments with barriers—affective, sensory, cognitive, or architectural.”

Lennard Davis

Having been repeatedly branded gender-anomalous, and gradually disqualified from education and opportunity, Maggie meets her male doppelganger, “the humpback,” Philip Wakem. Familiar with stigmatization and limited expectations as well, Wakem serves, among other things, to reveal the parallels between himself—a conventionally-disabled man—and Maggie, whose disabilities are imposed via the perceptions, expectations, and limitations of her society. Elizabeth Weed acknowledges Philip as the only character with whom Maggie “can find a truly analogous relationship...who is described as androgynous and who is, like Maggie, [is] excluded from the real world of men by his deformity” (439). Laura Comer Emery attributes their initial kinship to the fact that Maggie, “who sees her sex as a deformity,” finds succor in the company of one whose deformity is perceived to “pervade[ ]his very being” (31). However, whereas Philip’s disability and its consequences present numerous obstacles for him to endure or overcome, Maggie Tulliver’s disabilities and their consequences prove fatal to her.
Before introducing fifteen-year-old Philip to readers, Eliot conceals him behind the references of those who know him only from afar, demonstrating that stereotypes of “the deformed lad” and “hump-back” (72) dominate societal understanding of him. When Tom Tulliver learns Philip will be his sole schoolmate during his second semester at King’s Lorton, he feels “an uncomfortable flutter” because, although he has seen Philip on the streets of St. Ogg’s, he “always turned his eyes away from him as quickly as possible” (159). Like Maggie, Philip is impeded only by the imposed perceptions and limitations of the able-bodied who also falsely assume his “deformities” cast aspersions on his character. George Eliot draws attention to these assumptions when Tom and Philip are first introduced to one another, making clear that even if he had not been the son of “a bad man” (the lawyer of Mr. Tulliver’s enemy, Mr. Pivart), Tom “disliked having a deformed boy for a companion” (160).

Tom attempts to overcome his personal repugnance toward Philip while at the same time mentally mulling humpback archetypes that envisage a local humpbacked tailor who is “ugly,” “unamiable,” and “hooted after by public-spirited boys solely on the ground of his unsatisfactory moral qualities” (161). Although Philip’s hump is non-congenital, Tom suspects “the deformity...had some relation to his
father's rascality, of which he had so often heard his father talk with hot emphasis” (162). Tom assumes Philip, although unable to fight physically, is a spiteful and underhanded person with “cunning ways of doing you mischief by the sly” (161). Because Philip remains unknown by most people with whom he comes into contact, he is continually identified by stereotypes or affiliations that assume his physical abnormality reflects on his character, making his lot in life “irremediably hard” (181).

According to Martha Stoddard Holmes, Victorian Britain was a time in which “afflicted” and “defective” bodies permeated not only the plots of popular literature and drama but also published debates about heredity, health, education, work, and welfare. These texts’ recurrent ways of representing bodies and feeling helped produce only a social identity for disabled people that was significantly defined in emotional terms, but also the distinctive identity of “disabled” and its co-product, “able,” in a century in which disability and ability were not the established (if ambiguous) rhetorical categories that they are in Anglo-American culture today. (4)
At first, Philip's introduction to readers appears consistent with the initial criterion of Mitchell and Snyder's schematic of disability representation: "[F]irst, a deviance or marked difference is exposed to the reader" (209). Philip's deformity, like Maggie's deviances, is emphasized along with insinuations that such abnormalities transcend physicality. Emphasizing their disparities accentuates the divide between them and those in power—the normates who have authority to classify able and disabled bodies—and thereby determine the conditions under which Philip and/or Maggie may be accepted or denied citizenship among the normates.

In addition to meeting the first criterion of Mitchell and Snyder's four-part schematic, Philip also serves as an imperfect narrative prosthesis, "a crutch on which the novel lean[s] for [its] representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (Mitchell and Snyder 205, 206). Rosemary Ashton validates this suggestion, recognizing Eliot's use of Wakem "to push on the ironic, tragic plot." Ashton also labels Philip's role in the novel "puzzling" at times, due in part to the ambiguous nature of Maggie and Philip's "friendship" several years after first meeting at King's Lorton (70). Such descriptors are consistent in prosthetic characters; they are
props, of a sort, rather than rounded individuals.

Yet Philip repeatedly demonstrates his dimensional qualities, revealing that he is more than a “crutch” in Eliot’s narrative. Ashton concedes that Philip’s role, at times, is more significant rather than formulaic. She labels him “a natural foil” to Tom during their school days, noting his placement in the story “immediately after Mr. Tulliver’s decision to go to law against a Mr. Pivart...Mr. Pivart’s lawyer being the already distrusted Mr. Wakem” (Ashton 70). Given “Mr. Tulliver’s unreasoning anger and Tom’s vengefulness,” Philip and Maggie’s friendship is therefore “proscribed from the start” (Ashton 70). Karen Bourrier notes disability’s association with “emotional as well as physical susceptibility,” thereby identifying Philip’s function as that of “an affective center in the text [because he] understand[s] emotions and their consequences better than any other character in the novel” (10). Additionally,

Philip becomes Maggie’s first admirer; in the absence of proper schooling for Maggie, he is the instrument of her education through his discussion of books with her.”
After Maggie it is his argument for life and art that
shakes her out of an excessively submissive spirit of
renunciation, brought on by solitariness and the reading
of Thomas à Kempis. He is the first cause of Maggie’s
[eventual] estrangement from Tom, Stephen being the
second, and finally, it is his nonappearance that makes
way for the fateful boating trip. (Ashton 71)

Philip’s role, like that of a narrative prosthesis, certainly moves the
plot along. From the time he first meets twelve-year-old Maggie
until her death at age twenty, Philip Wakem, the “hunchback”
of St. Ogg’s, is one of the few persons able to recognize and endorse
her extraordinariness, rather than condemn it. While the
novel benefits from Philip’s “representational power, disruptive
potentiality, and analytical insight”—in keeping with a prosthetic
representation—these same characteristics are also manifested by
Maggie, particularly near the end of her life and the end of the novel
(Mitchell and Snyder 206).

Victorian literature’s use of disability representations reflects
the medical community’s burgeoning interest in orthopaedic
deformities and its association with particular characteristics and moral effects (Bourrier 3). Eliot demonstrates a link between Philip's deformity and his morality when stating that his "'sense of his deformity' and not the deformity itself...causes his 'nervous irritability'" (Bourrier 8). Medical texts of that time also developed theories about a "psychology of disability," which assumed sensitivity and introspection were resulting characteristics of "deformity" (Bourrier 6). George Eliot's reading of medical literature was "extensive," and while writing *Mill* she also assisted her partner George Lewes in writing *The Physiology of Common Life* (Bourrier 3).

Karen Bourrier notes that Eliot, "draws on the psychology of disability that was being developed in tandem in medical texts and novels," reflected in her depiction of Philip's "peevishness, morbidity, and artistic sensitivity" (Bourrier 7). Such disability representations correspond with the medical assumptions of her day, deformity providing a means for a novelist "to visibly mark a character as having a deep interiority—of writing the emotions on the surface of the body" (Bourrier 11).

Bourrier provides further evidence that such perceptions of disability were initiated and authorized by nineteenth-century medical experts:
The idea that a sense of shame about deformity would produce a sensitive and emotionally susceptible man is, I think, new to the nineteenth century.... We can see the deformed man, who is brooding, introspective, and sympathetic, as a descendant of the man of feeling, whose sensitivity stemmed in part from his nervous system. (5)

It is worth considering that these characteristics, rather than mere "affective state[s] presumed to go with disability," may instead suggest the manifestation of protective coping mechanisms among socially stigmatized individuals (Bourrier 6). Attributions aside, however, when combined with additional markers that distinguish Philip and Maggie as Other, these characteristics lay the groundwork for a disabilities alliance between the two.

Victorian culture's growing awareness of "curing" deformities via orthopaedic surgery also influences perceptions of Philip's disabled status. Rather than describing the extent or specific appearance of Philip's hunch back, Eliot represents it simply as "the result of an accident in infancy," appearing "more conspicuous when he walked" (Eliot 170, 161). Revealing this information partly meets the second criterion of Mitchell and Snyder's schematic of disability narratives: "a narrative consolidates the need for its own existence by
calling for an explanation of the deviation’s origins and formative consequences” (209). After learning Philip’s deformity is non-congenital, readers know implicitly that his condition is not hereditary. Unlike Maggie, whose multiple deviances appear intrinsic and untreatable (some of them genetic), Philip’s deformity begins and ends with him. Although unmarriagability is a stock characterization of disability, the dissimilar origins of Philip and Maggie’s abnormalities make the likelihood of Philip’s marrying and producing offspring greater than that of Maggie. In keeping with its Victorian counterparts, a novel like *Mill* “reflect[s] the concerns and explorations of Victorian medical science, which was itself in the midst of positing theories of disabilities, their transmission, and their inherent markers” (Stoddard Holmes 5). While it seems reasonable to apply such theories to Philip rather than Maggie, contemporary disability theories make a strong case for their application to Maggie.

Just as Philip’s deformity, like those of Maggie, implies an equally deformed temperament, it also draws attention to his gender-deviant features and interests. One of the first allusions to his androgyny is provided courtesy of Mr. Tulliver, who assures Tom that the “poor, deformed creatur, [who] takes after his mother in the face” (159). Philip also falls short of societal gender expectations based on
his love of art, music, and literature. Additionally, his academic superiority, sensitivity, and empathy exceed Tom’s and are incongruent with society’s standards for masculinity. Although Tom internally concedes that Philip’s face is not disagreeable, he notes that it is “very old-looking” (161), and the boy’s brown hair, surrounding his “melancholy face” is wavy and curly at the ends, “like a girl’s,” a fact that Tom deems “truly pitiable” (160).

Throughout the course of the novel, Philip’s physical appearance and his interest in art, music, and literature elicit ongoing allusions to his femininity, expressed both by the narrator and by Tom. In addition, Philip’s “pale” and “puny” stature further indicates his lack of athleticism to Tom, who, upon meeting him, seeks some means of common ground (Eliot 161). Near the end of their first conversation, Tom asks Philip if he might want to go fishing, implying that even a humpback could meet the minimum requirements of “standing and sitting still” (165). When Philip winces at his insinuation, declaring fishing a foolish sport and a waste of time, Tom determines that such a response is “just what he should have expected from a hunchback” (Eliot 165). When Philip fires a verbal missile at Tom, “who had never been assailed with verbal missiles that he understood so well,” Tom retaliates by attacking his father’s
character and telling him he is “no better than a girl” (173). Philip’s perceived “peevishness” and defensiveness bolster Tom’s perceptions of his gender deviance. Karen Bourrier conjectures that physical weakness and increased sensitivity are “more congruent with nineteenth century ideals of femininity” (5).

Martha Stoddard Holmes emphasizes the gender distinctions that exist between men and women with disabilities, providing another case for drawing parallels between Maggie and Philip. Holmes asserts that “the place where the two distinctions overlap is often the place where the meaning of disability is created in most influential and resilient ways” (94). The disabled woman’s distinction is marked by her either working at a low-paying job or wandering in public, begging for alms. Such depictions sever the disabled woman from the domestic scene and complement an accompanying stereotype, that of “the difficulty of her having her own home and the ‘impossibility’ of her marrying and having children” (94). Maggie becomes destitute by age thirteen after her father loses his money and most of his possessions in a lawsuit with Mr. Pivart. Denied a formal education, Maggie’s income-generating options are nearly non-existent. As a result, she takes on the tedious job of “plain sewing” as a means of contributing to the family finances, an outcome consistent with stock
characterizations of disability. Holmes provides the disabled man's corresponding differences, "that he either is tied to the domestic sphere or else roams the streets without a regular workplace, and that he does not, in the eyes of the public, 'make' (earn) money but begs" (Stoddard Holmes 94). Eliot's representation of Philip clearly relegates him to the domestic sphere, but unlike Maggie, he will never be impoverished. While he may or may not earn income from his artwork, as the son of a lawyer, he will never live on the street. Additionally, his education provides him with an intellectual foundation upon which he continues to build. It may be argued that Philip's privileges and socioeconomic status, even as a disabled man, qualify him to participate in the social circles of ladies and gentlemen of society, an unfeasible option for Maggie.

Although Philip and Tom have suffered a breach in their relationship "that was not readily mended," Maggie and Philip are drawn to one another when she visits Tom at school (176). Maggie, whose "tenderness for deformed things" is ever-hungry for someone to love her as Tom refuses to. She tells her brother Philip "seems a nice boy" who had no say-so in choosing his father (177). Her curiosity grows as she watches Philip study effortlessly before the fireplace, unlike her brother for whom all academic work is arduous. At the
same time, Philip finds “this sister of Tulliver a nice little thing, quite unlike her brother [and] he wished he had a little sister” (178). Her eyes, “full of unsatisfied intelligence and unsatisfied, beseeching affection,” remind Philip of “stories about princesses being turned into animals” (178).

After Tom suffers an injury to his foot, initiating a peace treaty between Philip and himself, Maggie and Philip’s friendship develops, stimulated by their personal attributes and deficiencies. Both adolescents have suffered criticism and desire love and acceptance from those who are kind. Philip, who has grown up without a mother or sibling, craves the kind of love and tenderness he has witnessed Maggie bestowing on the injured Tom, and he asks her whether, if she had a brother like him, she could love him as well as Tom (183). During time spent together, Philip suggests his personal identification with disabled heroes when he tells Maggie and Tom the story of Philoctetes, the Greek hero who was exiled on a desert island after suffering a serpent’s bite. Maggie wonders whether Philoctetes had a sister, and if so, “why she didn’t go with him on the desert island and take care of him” (Eliot 182). Maggie’s pity for and admiration of Philip are genuine, reflected in her remarks about his cleverness and musical aptitude (183). In return, Philip expresses his fondness for
Maggie, admiring her “dark eyes” that seem to “speak kindly.” Maggie puts her arm around his neck and kisses him “quite earnestly” in the same way she would kiss Tom, were he to tolerate it. Having vowed to remember one another always, the two part ways, and Maggie returns home to her family. Philip and Tom return to their previous states: Philip’s, “peevish and contemptuous,” and Tom’s, filled with suspicion and dislike for this “queer” “humpback and son of a rogue” (185).

When Philip and Maggie meet again, the tables of fortune will have turned for her. What little promise she harbored during that first extended visit with Philip will have been snuffed out by the circumstances of life and her responses to them.

“Disability lends a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any character that differentiates the character from the anonymous background of the norm.”

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder

Making a case for reading Maggie Tulliver rather than Philip Wakem as the most disabled character in The Mill on the Floss requires a context and explanation of terms. Whereas citizens of the twenty-first century may perceive disability in a variety of ways, most of them medical, disability studies uses the term disability in a more capacious manner, that includes “a marker of identity” (Linton 162). As such, this marker “has been used to build a coalition of people with significant impairments, people with behavioral or anatomical
characteristics marked as deviant...that make them targets of discrimination" and members of a specific minority group (Linton 162). Disability studies favors a social/political rather than category in which people are bound “by common social and political,” rather than medical, experience, thereby identifying them as members of a constituency (Linton 163). Such constituencies, in the twenty-first century, may establish a network that promotes beneficial change for disabled persons, but within Mill’s context, they provide a society of belonging, particularly represented by Eliot’s clandestine scenes between Philip and Maggie during their young adulthood.

After Maggie returns home from King’s Lorton School, her life continues on much the same course for a while. She attends boarding school with her cousin Lucy, where, unlike Tom, who continues to struggle with matters of history, Latin literature, math, and Christian doctrine, she is instructed in manners and mores. Her maternal aunts find her rapid growth “reprehensible” (185), and she grows “almost indifferent to her mother’s continual depreciation of her” (205). Tom’s inability to live peaceably with Philip during school means Maggie seldom sees him “during the remainder of their school life” (185). That fact, and her father’s growing sense of bad will toward the Lawyer
Wakem, restrict Maggie and Philip’s friendship to “long intervals in the streets of St. Ogg’s” (186).

Months pass before Mr. Tulliver’s “pride and obstinacy” lead to his financial downfall, taking a toll on each family member, and paving the way for Maggie’s further stigmatization and disabling (Eliot 197). Maggie fetches Tom during his “last quarter at King’s Lorton,” notifying him that their father has not only lost his lawsuit against Mr. Pivart, initiating an inevitable domino effect that will cause him to “lose the mill and the land, and everything...” (189, 188); in addition, Mr. Tulliver’s reaction to the disgraceful news instigates a physical and emotional state in which “[h]e seems to have lost his senses,” and is “heedless of everything around him” except for Maggie (Eliot 190, 202). Besides its months-long incapacitating effects on Mr. Tulliver, the Tulliver downfall also leads to the family’s eventual bankruptcy and the selling of most of the family furniture and household goods, including Mrs. Tulliver’s china, silver, and personally monogrammed linens, which she brought into the marriage. Tom, motivated by reproach for his father, pity for his mother, and “indignation against [Lawyer] Wakem,” promises his mother he will right their situation. While assimilating the consequences of their unexpected impoverishment, Tom and his mother form an alliance that further
“shuts [Maggie] out from the common calamity” (Eliot 205). Her father, who “had always defended and excused her,” lies in a tenuous, catatonic condition while Maggie’s status devolves temporarily to that of an orphan (Eliot 205).

A family council meeting following Mr. Tulliver’s financial downfall provides Maggie’s relatives with further opportunity to excoriate her. While Mr. Tulliver lies stricken in his bedroom, the Dodson aunts and uncles fill the Tulliver home to learn the extent of their hardship, simultaneously delivering a message of disgrace to Mrs. Tulliver for having “married a man that has brought her to beggary” (213). At one point, Maggie moves toward defending her father’s honor, but is quieted by Tom who does so instead. The Dodson relatives, particularly aunt Glegg, persist in taking every opportunity to berate Mr. Tulliver for having taken down the family’s fortune and reputation. When Maggie can stand it no longer, she comes to her father’s defense, insisting on his superior kindness and generosity. Refusing financial aid from her aunts, she then tells them to keep away from her family. Rather than considering the ill-timed tactlessness of their words, aunts Pullet and Glegg warn Mrs. Tulliver that she hasn’t “yet seen the end o’ [her] trouble with that child” who
will “come to no good” (215). The aunts then mutually agree to have nothing to do with furthering Maggie’s education.

“...[I]f life had no love in it, what was there for Maggie? Nothing but poverty and the companionship of her mother’s narrow griefs – perhaps her father’s heart-cutting childish dependence....Maggie...looking from the bed where her father lay, to the dull walls of this sad chamber which was the centre of her world, was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it.”

George Eliot 235

During this time of “continued misfortune,” exacerbated by “the constant presence of her mother’s regretful bewilderment” and “her father’s sullen incommunicative depression,” Maggie takes on additional stock features of disability representation (Eliot 280, 277). Devoted to menial household chores and futile attempts at cheering her father, Maggie is further isolated from the larger world due to continual domestic demands and a dearth of visits from family
members and acquaintances who eschew those "who have ceased to count as anybody" (Eliot 280). Besides leading a near hermit-like existence, Maggie now has "a poor chance of marrying, down in the world as they were" (Eliot 280). Mr. Tulliver, "grim[ly] melancholy" and unresponsive, is "bitterly preoccupied with the thought" that Maggie might marry poorly, as had his sister Gritty Moss, and thereby become "pulled down by children and toil" (279, 280). Previously excluded from male-privileged opportunities, Maggie, now impoverished and relegated to the domestic sphere she so despises, is more tightly tethered to the stifling environment of home. These conditions make for a "sameness of days" that further restrains Maggie, emotionally, intellectually, and physically, not unlike disability representations in which "pitiful" characters must subsist within narrow realms, lacking opportunity and enrichment that might enhance their condition or otherwise inevitable fate (280).

The constraints of her bleak state of affairs make Maggie vulnerable to the paternal principles she has long resisted, and her consent to such doctrine further cements her disabled identity. Hungering to know "the secrets of life," contained in books that "held real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew," Maggie is intellectually and emotionally starved for information that will help
her make sense of life (286). Among a collection of used books, she finds Thomas á Kempis’s didactic text, *The Imitation of Christ*, “corners turned down in many places,” where “strong pen-and-ink marks” point her to words that speak to her “with a low voice,” asking (Eliot 289-90):

> Why dost thou here gaze about, since this is not the place of thy rest?... Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace Then shalt all vain imaginations, evil perturbations, and superfluous cares fly away; then shalt immoderate fear leave thee, and inordinate love shall die. (290)

Kempis’s voice, like that of a “supreme Teacher,” engages her, creating “the sense that [the text] has been annotated for Maggie alone.... speaking to her with an immediacy and intimacy that encourage her to embrace the monks’ teaching with especial fervor” (Eliot 290 and Ablow 82-83). Rather than acknowledge her “sense of loneliness, and utter privation of joy....,” the “oppressive emptiness of weary, joyless leisure,” and “the heavy weight that had fallen on her heart,” Maggie chooses to suppress it “[s]ince her attempts to use her intelligence and prove her worth have met with so little encouragement or approval from those around her” (Eliot 285-286 and Hottle 38),
Maggie instead selects certain segments of Kempis's text to build a foundation for her future. Rather than helping her “to grow and expand her horizons, as her earlier encounters with books had led her to do,” Kempis's book “diminishes her, making her see herself as insignificant” (Hottle 38).

Maggie’s misappropriation of Kempis’s text has provoked many scholarly critiques, most of them complementary to a disability studies analysis of her. Missy Dehn Kubitschek attributes her “misconstrued religion” to reinforcing “the social ideal of womanly self-sacrifice,” best demonstrated when Maggie becomes “a parody of self-denying virtue” by contributing to the family income via “the most tedious, least aesthetic kind of needlework (‘plain sewing,’ [Eliot 293])” (197-98). Such a depiction evokes representations of virtuous and non-complaining disabled characters, such as Dickens’ Tiny Tim and Alcott’s Beth March who attempt to supplant evil, ingratitude, or sorrow in their midst. Sung-Ae Lee labels Maggie’s “zeal of self-mortification” a degradation of religion “without any transcendent spiritual or moral unpinning....its social assumptions install patriarchy as the order of things” (Eliot 293 and Lee132). Adherence to a religion that relies on proscribed forms of behavior, such as Maggie’s implementation of Kempis’s text, is frequently an exchange
of one form of internment for another. Maggie’s aspirations have always exceeded those of her female relatives and the patriarchal women of St. Ogg’s who accept, rather than resist, their inherited gender roles. Unlike her female contemporaries, Maggie has long been dissatisfied by such standards; therefore, her compliance with them further disables her, making her somewhat liable for the intensified state of disability that follows her conversion.

Yet Maggie’s acquiescence to patriarchal doctrines, while universally disappointing to readers, should come as no surprise. No one exists in her St. Ogg’s world to nurture her aspirations for more than hearth, home, and intellectual confinement. No woman among her relatives or acquaintances models genuine virtue or personal agency. Maggie’s desire for “more” is what sets her apart from the females of her society who may not be similarly read as disabled. Her adoption of patriarchal religious values also substantiates the long-term effects of stigmatization in which

...people are not encouraged to develop or grow, to have aspirations or to be successful....Lowered expectations also lead to decreased self-esteem. The negative identity that ensues becomes a pervasive personality trait and inhibits the stigmatized person from developing other
parts of the self....It seems that the paradoxical societal norms that establish a subordinate and dependent position for stigmatized people while ostracizing them for it may stem from the need of nonstigmatized people to maintain a sense of superiority. Their position is supported and reinforced by their perceptions that stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior, passive, helpless, and childlike. (Coleman 147)

Maggie has finally assented to her helpless ranking in society, "consign[ing] herself to the will of others," convinced that her own desires are selfish (Showalter 128). This childlike adaptation, although similar to representations of submissive wives, shares much in common with disabled characters, such as Dickens' blind Bertha Plummer, who guilelessly trust authority figures (in Bertha's case, her father) on whom they rely for some kind of support.

Rachel Ablow and Elaine Showalter's analysis of Maggie's "conversion" further supplements a disability reading of her. Ablow observes Maggie's pattern of "losing herself" in ways that "compromise[s] [her] ability to function as the responsible, self-conscious agent for her own actions" (84). Showalter sees her "spiritual submersion" as a "drown[ing]" of "her will in a sea of sacred
devotion and social consent," a smothering of her agency (128). Like
depictions of disabled characters as dependent, childlike, and in need
of guardianship, so Maggie’s embracing of patriarchal religion places
her at the mercy of others. Absent of expressed desires and opinions,
she suppresses her goals, sharing much in common with
representations of deaf characters whose accompanying muteness
contributes to their perception as non-entities.

Maggie’s religious fervor provides an additional component to a
disability reading, that of “passing.” Karen Hottle reads Maggie’s
internalizing of Kempis’s doctrine as a concession to the fact that “she
cannot continue to assert herself in a world that thwarts her every
time she attempts to do so,” resulting in the reward of her mother’s approval
(38). Soon after her capitulation, Maggie is shown having laid aside
“that wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge,” works of Virgil, Euclid,
and Aldrich in exchange for the Bible, Thomas á Kempis, and a
hymnal, which she reads “eagerly and constantly” while “[h]anging
diligently over her sewing” (Eliot 293). Her mother looks on her with “a
sort of puzzled wonder...it was amazing that this once contrary child
was become so submissive, so backward to assert her will” (294).
Maggie often finds her mother staring at her, the “tall, brown girl” of
whom she has finally grown so fond. Eliot’s text makes clear that
Maggie's inherent deviances, her height and coloring, remain unchanged. In fact, for the first time, Mrs. Tulliver begins “call[ing]...attention to Maggie's hair and unexpected virtues” (294). Her willingness to live without a will of her own is the source of her mother's delight, transcending even her physical deviances, once a source of her mother's shame. In her current state of financial and relational destitution, Maggie's compliance with normate standards endears her to her lifelong maternal critic.

Simi Linton describes the phenomenon of “passing” and its usefulness among stigmatized people; her explication, although directed toward actual persons rather than fictional characters, is constructive to a disability analysis of Maggie Tulliver. Linton acknowledges the variety of reasons—personal, social, and economic—for which people attempt to conceal their race or sexual orientation in much the same way as disabled people who are “able to conceal their impairment or confine their activities to those that do not reveal their disability” (166). Such attempts may be either a deliberate or “almost unconscious” means for avoiding discrimination or stigmatization, “to protect oneself from the loathing of society” (166). Passing is an “ambivalent personal state” that judges one's genuine state “unacceptable” (167). Having evaluated her longtime
desires as selfish, “Maggie defines the loss of her own will as a change that has a positive result, and thinks that she has given it up voluntarily. It seems, however, that her will has met with so much resistance that she has had to subdue it in order to survive within her family and her society” (Hottle 39). It may be argued that Maggie, having spent her life on the margins of normate society, finally deteriorates under the added stresses that accompany her family’s poverty. Lacking any genuine prospects for pursuing a life outside the walls of the Tulliver household, Maggie must gain the approval of those with whom she remains confined. Passing allows her to gain such approval, yet disables her further.

When Maggie and Philip encounter one another in the Red Deeps, five years after their last meeting, Eliot depicts the brewing irony that will mark their young adult relationship. Philip’s face, previously described in feminine terms, is, at twenty-two, “a larger, more manly copy of the pale small-featured boy’s face,” evoking in Maggie old feelings of pity and new, ambivalent feelings she cannot name. Now in her seventeenth year, she has “the mould of early womanhood....the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and rounded, the full lips are red” (Eliot 298-99). Although “very much more beautiful that [Philip] thought [she] would be,” her spirit, the
essence of her self, has also been transformed by her decision to "give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given to us" (301-02). Maggie further divulges that she has "given up books," a passion for which Philip remembers her. Refusing his offer to accept a book on the grounds that "It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be...it would make me long for a full life," Maggie provokes Philip's first admonition of her, one that is based in pity: "But you will not always be shut up in your present lot: why should you starve your mind that way? It is a narrow asceticism - I don't like seeing you persist in it, Maggie. Poetry and art and knowledge are sacred and pure" (Eliot 306).

Philip metaphors of disability are repeatedly applied to Maggie, suggesting additional links between disability and her. Lennard Davis notes the use of literary disability metaphors as "more than mere linguistic convention," arguing that their regularity "speaks to a reflexive patrolling function in which the author continuously checks and notes instances of normalcy and disability—right down to the linguistic level" (13). During the course of their ongoing clandestine meetings in the Red Deeps, Maggie and Philip engage in numerous conversations in which he, motivated by pity and anger, repeatedly applies disability metaphors to her, alluding to her physical and
mental precariousness. When Maggie admires Philip’s varied interests in painting, music, classic, mediaeval, and modern literature, she also struggles against her flaring, internal discontent, insisting that she has found “great peace” and “even joy in subduing my own will” (Eliot 327). Philip responds by telling her she is shutting herself up “in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism,” representing confinement and association with mental instability (327). Philip insists that rather than enjoying the joy and peace of “resignation,” she is willingly enduring pain she perceives as interminable, suggesting the incurable outcome of her deviances and her temporary state of acceptance by normates. Philip renames her resignation “stupefaction,” a choice “to remain in ignorance – to shut up the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you...” (327-28). Philip’s metaphors of confinement and inaccessibility hold connotative suggestions reminiscent of madwomen, contained in secret rooms where they remain shut off from the larger world. Additionally, Maggie’s religious fervor evokes disability representations in which piety is often reflected via the non-complaining acceptance of one’s circumstances or the pseudo-martyrdom of suffering on behalf of those who might learn from one’s example.
Philip’s metaphors persist, his use of disability serving “as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse,” providing further evidence for reading Maggie, rather than Philip, as a narrative prosthesis (Mitchell and Snyder 205). He refers to Maggie’s present “veil of dull quiescence,” contrasting her to the childish version of herself, which had been “all wit and bright imagination” (329). He predicts her “wilful senseless privation....will not end well,” beseeching her to accept books from him, rather than “commit this long suicide” (329). Philip’s ominous warning with its implied outcome connotes Maggie’s hopeless mental instability. Finally, before Tom learns of their meetings and halts them, Philip fires a triple-salvo at Maggie, equating her “self-conquest” with a form of “blindness” and “deafness” that drive her to fixate on “all but one train of impression,” like that of a monomaniac (335). With this final and strongest among his disability metaphors, Philip reveals the expansive chasm that exists between himself, and Maggie, a woman whose imposed disabilities now exceed that of a “hunchback.”

According to Dr. Sung-Ae Lee, Mill’s conventionally-disabled character, “the humpback, Wakem,” “transcends” the abjection of his disability “because his altruism and other-regardingness are overtly commendable” (142). Indeed, the novel depicts genuine spiritual and
psychological development within Wakem, who upon his introduction to readers appears petty, bitter, and emasculated. During the course of the novel, Philip's intellect develops, unlike Maggie's, as do his capacities for empathy and human sensitivity. When admonishing her so forthrightly, yet compassionately, St. Ogg's "hunchback" reveals a sense of equality with, rather than inferiority to, the able-bodied Maggie. His words, if spoken by another (her brother, Tom, for example), might sound harsh, his heightened awareness and courage instead demonstrate a sensitivity to and concern for her that no one has thus expressed. As a lifetime recipient of pity and sympathy, it is the disabled character, Philip Wakem, who now evaluates an able-bodied Maggie Tulliver with pity, imparting a sense of disability-transcendence to Wakem. While Eliot never overtly implies Philip transcends his disability and/or its stigmatization, Maggie assumes the disabled role more fully than he until her premature death, while Philip lives out his natural life.

After Tom learns of Maggie and Philip's secret meetings in the Red Deeps, he verbally attacks Philip, focusing on his deformity while, according to Laura Comer Emery, simultaneously "reviv[ing] Maggie's resentment of her sex, which she sees as a deformity" (31). Tom forbids any further rendezvous between them, an action that further
instills his patriarchal role in her life; although a grown woman, Maggie is in no position to make her own choices. Tom’s choice, made on her behalf, emphasizes her surrender of personal agency and promotes her passivity, a common disability stereotype. While patriarchy shapes St. Ogg’s society and its male/female relationships, Maggie, unlike other females, has resisted this dynamic all her life. Her decision to consign her will to that of a man who is intellectually and emotionally mediocre demonstrates her diminishing resistance to the normate.

Eliot introduces Stephen Guest, Lucy Deane’s fiancé, to showcase the eroding consequences of Maggie’s “utter passivity and lack of individual will” (Hottle 39). Following her father’s death, she temporally resides in “a dreary situation in a school...,” sewing for its female students to avoid having to live with her aunt Pullet (Elliot 366). When her cousin Lucy invites her to visit, Maggie, though wearing “shabby clothes” (her “best frock”) and a “contemptible” butterfly brooch (372-73), looks lovely, even when seated near Lucy’s “faultless drapery of silk and crape” (372). When Lucy’s fiancé Stephen Guest meets Maggie, he can “not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair,” an experience she finds “very agreeable” (376). Stephen does not
attempt to cover up his bewilderment, pronouncing Maggie “so much more beautiful than my preconceptions” (376). Unfamiliar with such flattery and “so unused to society,” she engages in innocent coquetry, further infatuating Stephen. Though typically “not fond of women who had any peculiarity of character,” Stephen grows more smitten with Maggie during the course of the boat ride, calculating each opportunity in which she will be required to take his proffered hand of assistance (379, 382). During the course of her stay with Lucy, she enjoys “for the first time” a life of leisure, which includes ongoing socializing and repartees with Stephen who gradually feels “thrown into a fever by her” (400, 409). At a dance during which Stephen’s “eyes...devour[ ] Maggie,” he finds a private moment to clutch her arm, showering it with kisses (440, 442). Several days later, he confesses to her that he is “mad with love,” and begs her to marry him (446). Maggie resists Stephen for days, until a series of events, each appealing to Maggie’s vulnerability, leads to her assent to Stephen’s persistent appeals. Alone together, he speaks to Maggie: “Let us go,” taking her by the hand. Maggie, feeling “that she was being led...by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will,” follows Stephen (464). While Maggie, unlike a conventional “prosthetic” character, is not enabling others’
plots at this point in the story, her passivity is situating her deviances to become central to the novel and its conclusion.

Their boat ride further emphasizes Maggie’s disabled identity and Eliot’s use of disability metaphors. At first, the couple glide along, Maggie “only dimly conscious of the banks” and susceptible to “fits of absence” (464). Alarm overtakes her when Philip fails to stop at Luckreth, begging her once again to marry him. Maggie implores him to let her go, insisting he has “deprived [her] of any choice” and has “dared to take advantage of [her] thoughtlessness” (466). Embarrassment and reproach overtake her, and she is “paralysed,” this yielding described as “more fatal than the other yielding” (466). They continue to glide, Maggie existing within dithering states of passivity, including sleep. Rachel Ablow analyzes this critical scene of Maggie’s “[y]ielding” rather than choosing, “subjected” rather than acting consciously, and “asleep” although taking a course of action that will have enormous consequence for her future: throughout this passage, Maggie hovers on the edge of “submer[sion],” drowning her will, her consciousness, and her personality in her lover’s. Such a
situation may hold “charm,” but that charm takes the form of a spell that robs her of her autonomy. (Ablow 78)

Maggie’s states of passivity—from surrendering to Stephen’s suggestion that they leave together, until nearly the end of their unconsummated journey, when Maggie once again channels Kempis’s teachings, and claiming “it has never been my will to marry you”—demonstrate that Maggie remains submitted to the will of male authority rather than assenting to her own agency (476). Again, Maggie plays a part in her own disabling.

Simi Linton offers background about the use of literary representations that reinforce disability stereotypes; such representations are at work in this scene of impulsive “quasi-elopement” (Ashton 43):

Language that conveys passivity and victimization reinforces certain stereotypes when applied to disabled people. Some of the stereotypes that are particularly entrenched are that people with disabilities are more dependent, childlike, passive, sensitive, and miserable and are less competent than people who do not have disabilities. Much of the language used to depict disabled
people relates the lack of control to the perceived 
incapacities... (168)

In this lengthy scene that follows Maggie, in passive narrative voice, 
from her relegation of personal agency to her days afloat with Stephen 
Guest, she is depicted in somewhat catatonic terms—immobilized, 
trancelike, incapacitated until her demand to return to St. Ogg's 
demonstrates her acquiescence to yet another male authority, Thomas 
á Kempis.

Maggie's five-day boat ride with Stephen and her return to St. 
Ogg's facilitate her ultimate stigmatization, making her a woman 
without a home. Returning to the mill where Tom is now “master,” 
Maggie trembles to face “the human being of whom she had been 
most afraid from her childhood upwards” (483). Although she feels his 
hatred “rushing through her fibres,” she nevertheless approaches 
him, expressing her need for “refuge” and the opportunity to explain 
“everything” (484). Tom's response portends the impending response 
of St Ogg's’ citizens:

You will find no home in me....You have disgraced us all... 
[including]...my father's name. You have been a curse to 
your best friends. You have been base – deceitful; no
motives are strong enough to restrain you. I wash my hands of you forever. You don't belong to me. (484)

Tom then interrupts Maggie's attempted explanation, accusing her of long-term deception, immodesty, and indiscretion. He tells her Lucy, "the kindest friend you ever had," is ill, unable to speak due to Maggie's actions, which are "ten times worse than" those of Stephen Guest (485). Declaring the thought of her "disgrace[ful]" and the sight of her "hateful," Tom turns his back and enters the homestead (485).

The provisional asylum Maggie finds after Tom's rejection provides her a sense of paradoxical comfort. Mrs. Tulliver's finest moment follows Tom's rejection of Maggie, when her love for her daughter exceeds her sense of dread, rousing her to embrace Maggie while pronouncing, "My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother" (485). The women—"the old Misses and the young Miss"—find lodging in the home of the Bob Jakin family, a long-time acquaintance whose magnanimity and chivalry exceed his curiosity and censure (487). Maggie makes a request of Jakin, that he will fetch the Rev. Dr. Kenn, and ask him to visit her. These unlikely companions, Mrs. Tulliver, Bob Jakin (and his dog Mumps), and Dr. Kenn form Maggie's initial consortium of support when all others forsake her.
As St. Ogg's passes judgment on Maggie, her deviance becomes central to the story, executing Step Three of Mitchell and Snyder's schematic of disability representation (209). Although "Mr. Stephen Guest had certainly not behaved well" during his venture with Maggie, it is she, rather than he, who sits in the court of public opinion, suffering a sentence that precipitates her death (490). Stephen, at "five and twenty," is not judged too severely, rather perceived to be the victim of "a designing bold girl" about whom society had always found "something questionable" and "prophetic of harm" (491). Her response to their condemnation haunts Maggie, making "every sensitive fibre in her...too entirely preoccupied by pain" (492). Her confidant, Dr. Kenn warns her that although Stephen Guest "has vindicated [her] to the uttermost," he suspects she will never transcend "the painful effect of false imputations" and fears her life "will be attended not only with much pain, but with many obstructions," the very descriptors that might be applied to a conventionally-disabled character (496).

The extensive fallout of Maggie's venture with Stephen Guest is revealed after she determines to remain in St. Ogg's and enlists Dr. Kenn's support in finding an "occupation that will enable me to get my bread and be independent" (501). Despite the expressed support Maggie receives from Mrs. Tulliver, Philip Wakem, and, surprisingly,
her aunt Glegg and cousin Lucy, Dr. Kenn’s testimony cannot sway the “obstinate continuance of imputations against” her (504-5). His attempts to refute the false accusations “yielded much the same result as before. Miss Tulliver had undeniably acted in a blamable manner…which must cause her to be shrunk from by every woman who had to take care of her own reputation (505). Having “been rather adored” by his female parishioners, Dr. Kenn is disappointed in the women’s opposition to him, and discovers that news of Maggie’s scandal not only fuels societal gossip, but has made her the butt of jokes among the men of St. Ogg’s. Dr. Kenn’s job search on her behalf is futile, possible employers offering a variety of excuses, all of them based on the belief that “they could not risk any contact with her” (506). Her decision to remain in St. Ogg’s, rather than being perceived an indicator of strength, is interpreted as evidence that “[s]he must be very bold and hardened to wish to stay in a parish where she was so much stared at and whispered about” (506). When Dr. Kenn, a widower, finally hires Maggie as a governess for his young children, the women of St. Ogg’s further suspect she is an “artful creature” who has beguiled the reverend and threatened his propriety (507). At this point in the narrative, so near its conclusion, Maggie’s deviance becomes central to the plotline as well as its outcome. Philip Wakem’s
deviance, on the other hand, becomes inconsequential to the plotline other than serving as a metaphor for Maggie's condition and reputation.

Perhaps only in Mill's conclusion do Maggie and Philip's disabled identities contrast so intensely, resulting in disparate outcomes for the two characters. Maggie's death meets the fourth criterion of Mitchell and Snyder's schematic, which calls for a "repair of deviance [that] may involve an obliteration of the difference through a 'cure,' the rescue of the body, or the revaluation of an alternative mode of being" (209). Following Dr. Kenn's advice that she "go away from St. Ogg's for a time," Maggie remains in her room "battling with the old shadowy enemies that were for ever slain and rising again," wondering how much longer she endure until death comes (511-12). While on her knees, begging God to make her life matter to others, she feels "a startling sensation of cold about her knees and feet," and realizes floodwaters are rising into the Jakins' house (515). Maggie has nothing left to lose by yielding to her impulsive instinct to seek out a boat and row toward the mill in search of Tom. Her life has been steadily disabled, to the point of near extinguishment; therefore, there is no cost to count. Maggie attempts to rescue Tom, thereby initiating the "fatal fellowship" of their mutual deaths (521). Maggie's deviances,
for so long impermeable, prove lethal to her, whereas Philip’s “deformity” escapes cure or repair; he survives, solitarily visiting her grave, experiencing the “buried joy” of her companionship “among the trees of the Red Deeps” (522).

By the end of Mill, many first-time readers are speechless, even enraged, hence, the decades-long scholarship discussions that ask: How did Maggie meet this end by the age of twenty? What were George Eliot’s motives for allowing Maggie, of all people, to come to ruin? What was Eliot’s message? Whose side was she on, anyway? Maggie’s disabling and her demise no doubt reflect Eliot’s own “comfortless history” (Birch ix), an exploration of Marian Evans’s life had Evans “never left her home, never broke the ties most sacred to her, never discovered the George Eliot in herself” (Barrett 53). Indeed such possibilities, Barrett conjectures, were perceived by Eliot as “a life of frustration, a deathlike life, or death itself come early” (Barrett 53).

The “fundamental difference” between Eliot’s narrative and her real life trajectory is that of “life decision” (Barrett 53). Having made different decisions than Maggie, she “thereby gained the fulfillment of her life both in terms of work and love, [and] must necessarily be critical of Maggie. Her relation to Maggie is extremely
ambivalent...[and] provides the central tension of the work” (Barrett 53). Of Maggie’s depiction and demise, Karen Hottle writes:

....[T]he final chapters simply chronicle Maggie’s gradual disappearance from society and her early death....Maggie’s death is not merely inevitable; it has already occurred. The tide that sweeps her away is not the final flood, but is instead the constant, steady erosion of her idea of herself as an intelligent person, worthy of respect and capable of thinking and acting for herself....The book seems to...allow[ ] Evans [Eliot’s paternal surname] to separate herself from the weaknesses she has overdramatized in Maggie and to reaffirm in herself the strengths that Maggie was not allowed to develop. (40)

Eliot demonstrates early in her text that the richness of Maggie is too potent a dose for most people she encounters. The novel reveals consistent expressions of societal values, conduct, expectations, and stigmatization that eventually erode her very essence. In addition, she is undercut by her inordinate need for love and approval, most notably from her brother Tom. She not only makes some egregious, even devastating concessions rather than pursuing her dreams; her
impulsiveness and passivity eventually lead to her definitive ostracizing by society, heralding her inevitable fate.

Eliot was faced with similar choices as those of Maggie, yet she ultimately chose differently. Although she pursued education, developed intellectual friendships with leading scholars of her time, and directly confronted her father about her decision to stop attending the evangelical church of her youth, she waited until after his death to make more assertive decisions, most notably that of living with writer George Lewes with whom she partnered for more than two decades. This choice resulted in a decades-long rift between her and her brother Isaac Evans. Perhaps undercut by her own desperate need for familial love and acceptance, especially from Tom, Maggie demonstrates her undying hope for approval and requited love. In this regard, Maggie contributes to her disabling. Patricia Beer remarks on this "fatal[] hampering" of Maggie, contending that it is her "own lack of creativity, which includes creative intellectual powers" rather than provincial society that impedes her; after all, "George Eliot herself triumphed over greater handicaps than any of her women characters are faced with" (181). Nevertheless, Beer labels Mill "a positive compendium of the handicaps imposed on women" by a society that deems "[n]ot only must the wife be inferior...but so must the sister
and the daughter. Fatherly and brotherly tyranny conditions even a spirited and intelligent girl into accepting their viewpoint" (189-90). Female complicity with patriarchal values makes Maggie akin to a woman without a tribe or a culture to call her own.

In applying a disability analysis to Maggie Tulliver, it is important to acknowledge that she had no fewer options than most women of her day. However, her physical appearance, aspirations, and need for love and acceptance make her aberrant, an easy target for those who feel threatened by her desires. Is this "disability" reading possible only because Maggie wanted what was inaccessible to her? Can we therefore label the other females of St. Ogg's "able-bodied" because they did not feel impeded (by society), or because of their unexamined willingness to conform to societal expectations? If so, this supports the theory that disability identity is imposed on others by others, persons who identify themselves with/ by standards of the normals/normate/able-bodied, a group to which Maggie never acquires access.

Dorothea Barrett commends Mill's representation of female psychology, noting its "heavily metaphorical language designed to communicate ideas that disrupt and subvert the assumptions of...society, both as to gender politics and as to human possibilities
Lacking the psychological vocabulary that would emerge after her death, Eliot, either wittingly or unintentionally, depicts Maggie Tulliver, arguably her most vibrant and promising female heroine, as a victim of her own desires and the imposed expectations of society—a character who shares much in common with a conventionally-disabled man, yet unlike that man, Maggie does not survive her condition(s).

As noted in the Introduction, a disability studies analysis of Maggie Tulliver is a risky proposition in that, if misappropriated or taken out of context, such analysis could appear demeaning to persons with conventional disabilities (whatever that means); such appropriations may also raise questions such as “Who, then, is not disabled?” In her analysis of disability representations within Victorian Literature, Martha Stoddard Holmes traces the starting point of her study, which began with fictional characters who were not isolated as “freaks” but rather placed parallel to “normal” lives, close enough to mark a notable falling-away from normative outcomes (marriage, for example) and thus to build a compelling and melodramatic “if only” gap that the works themselves never explain in full. . . . [T]he near-normal is a more
troubling cultural issue than the freak, and the one that we most resist unpacking. In both fiction and nonfiction, representations of disability may be invoked to construct or shore up the unstable category of ability, but they seem just as liable to critique and erode ability and normalcy. (MSH 15)

Similar to Holmes' scholarship, this thesis germinated while studying the juxtaposing of literary abled and disabled bodies and the implications therein. While the simultaneous assigned readings of the stigma and disability essays of Goffman, Coleman, and Mitchell and Snyder were no doubt intended to cast light on the depiction of Philip Wakem, their applications most consistently fit the depiction of Maggie, a discovery that was both inadvertent and startling.

Assuming it intends to do more than merely pose as avant-garde, what purposes are served by a disability analysis of an able-bodied character? While limitations are inherent within such an analysis (the aforementioned diminishment of conventional disabilities perhaps the most probable drawback), there are also advantages. By depicting Maggie Tulliver, arguably St. Ogg's' most precocious, creative, and promising citizen, as the victim of societal impediments and stigmatization, Eliot raises questions about the
nature and constructions of disability identity. Had Eliot chosen, like Maggie, to remain close to home, appeasing her controlling brother and provincial society, *The Mill on the Floss* may never have been written. The courage she exhibited and the grief she experienced as a result of her decisions to transcend societal barriers allowed her to decline an inevitable status, perhaps equivalent to that of disabled persons within Victorian culture.

By setting herself within a disparate social structure from that of her childhood and young adulthood, Eliot was no longer "disabled" in any way; she survived to tell a tale filled with scenarios that remain relevant in the twenty-first century. Her depiction of Maggie Tulliver should, among other things, prompt individuals to ask "Whom do we fear, and what are we willing to do/allow in order to prevent such persons from gaining equal access to the same rights and privileges enjoyed by those in power? Who, among us, are members of the normate, and what responsibilities do said members have to extending the same rights and privileges to Others? A Victorian novel, published one-hundred-fifty years ago, suggests that a disability is not defined by reserved parking spaces and special accommodations. Disability status is, in part, imposed on Others by others; analyzing the contributors to such a status suggests that no one, not even
existing members of the normate, is immune from the consequences of social disabling. That truth remains relevant and worthy of contemplation.
Works Cited

“Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as Amended.”


