**THESIS TITLE (ENGLISH):** Affect, Attachment, and Fate: The Transformative Power of Emotion in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*

**1-TOPIC**

This thesis examines the transformative power of emotions in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)and *Silas Marner* (1861*)*, applying Sara Ahmed's affect theory to analyze how emotions circulate, stick to objects and relationships, and ultimately shape individual identities. Focusing on Tom Tulliver's attachment to the family mill and Silas Marner's shifting fixations on gold and later Eppie, the study explores how these objects become conduits for emotions like pride, loss, and redemption. The thesis argues that emotional dynamics are central to understanding the protagonists' moral transformations within the social structures of Victorian society. Divided into three chapters, the study investigates the circulation of emotions within social networks, the "stickiness" of affect to objects and people, and the resulting transformative journeys of both male protagonists. By comparing and contrasting their emotional trajectories, the thesis illuminates Eliot's moral vision and her critique of societal norms, demonstrating how emotional experiences can both hinder and facilitate personal growth and redemption.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1 Foundations of Affect Theory**

Affect theory has emerged as a pivotal framework for understanding how emotions function as social, cultural, and material forces. Early contributions by Brian Massumi (1995) laid the groundwork for conceptualizing affect as dynamic, pre-cognitive, and relational. In *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation,* Massumi emphasizes affect’s capacity to influence perception and drive change, framing it as an ongoing process rather than a static state (Massumi, 1995). His insights provide a basis for examining how emotions in Eliot’s novels create movement, disrupt equilibrium, and enable transformation in her protagonists.

Sianne Ngai (2005) expands the discussion in *Ugly Feelings* by focusing on the narrative and aesthetic roles of negative affects such as guilt, envy, and paranoia. Ngai’s analysis of these “minor affects” highlights their resistance to resolution and their capacity to reveal the social and psychological underpinnings of a narrative. (Ngai, 2005). For Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, emotions like guilt and resentment become sites of stagnation, while for Silas Marner, paranoia and despair contribute to his early emotional isolation. Ngai’s framework situates these negative emotions as central to the characters’ development and to Eliot’s broader critique of Victorian social norms.

Lauren Berlant’s (2011) *Cruel Optimism* introduces the concept of emotional attachments that sustain individuals while simultaneously impeding their growth. This is particularly relevant for Eliot’s protagonists, whose attachments initially function as barriers to fulfillment. Tom’s fixation on the mill as a symbol of familial duty traps him within a restrictive identity, while Silas’s obsessive attachment to gold isolates him from human connection. Berlant’s exploration of affective stasis and the transformative potential of redirected attachments informs this thesis’s analysis of how emotions both constrain and enable change in Eliot’s narratives (Berlant, 2011).

**2.2 Affect in Literary Studies**

The integration of affect theory into literary studies has opened new avenues for examining the emotional dynamics of texts and characters. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* is foundational in this regard, advocating for a reparative reading approach that engages with the complexity of human emotions in literature. Sedgwick’s emphasis on the transformative potential of affect aligns with Eliot’s moral vision, where emotional trials lead to growth and redemption (Sedgwick, 2003). This thesis draws on Sedgwick’s insights to explore the reparative arcs in Tom’s and Silas’s journeys, particularly in relation to their struggles with duty, loss, and reintegration.

In the context of Victorian literature, emotions are not confined to individual experiences but operate as forces within broader social and material networks. Bill Brown’s (2001) "Thing Theory" offers a useful framework for understanding how objects mediate emotional relationships. Brown’s assertion that objects gain significance when they disrupt or fail resonates with the role of the mill in *The Mill on the Floss* and gold in *Silas Marner* (Brown, 2001). In both cases, these objects act as emotional anchors that shape the protagonists’ identities while also contributing to their crises and eventual transformations.

Similarly, Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) *The Social Life of Things* explores how objects circulate and acquire emotional and cultural meaning. Appadurai’s approach complements Sara Ahmed’s theories of affective economies by situating objects within networks of exchange and attachment (Appadurai, 1986). This perspective is vital for understanding how Eliot’s protagonists navigate their relationships with material possessions, community, and selfhood.

**2.3 Sara Ahmed and Affective Economies**

Sara Ahmed’s (2004, 2006) work provides the central theoretical framework for this study. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed (2004, 2006) argues that emotions do not reside solely within individuals but circulate between people, objects, and spaces, shaping identities and relationships. ‘’Her concept of affective economies—how emotions move and accumulate value as they circulate—is instrumental in understanding the emotional trajectories of Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner’’ (Ahmed, 2004, 2006).

Ahmed’s theory of emotional stickiness, which describes how emotions adhere to specific objects or individuals, offers a critical lens for analyzing Eliot’s protagonists. For Tom, the mill represents more than a familial asset; it is an emotional locus tied to duty, pride, and social ambition. This attachment constrains his capacity for emotional growth, as his identity becomes entangled with the mill’s fate. In contrast, Silas Marner’s gold serves as a substitute for lost trust and community, anchoring him in isolation. However, as Ahmed’s (2006) framework suggests, emotional stickiness is not static; it can be redirected. Silas’s eventual attachment to Eppie marks a profound shift, enabling his reintegration into the community and emotional renewal.

Ahmed’s insights into how emotions circulate and transform within social and material contexts underpin this thesis’s analysis of the protagonists’ emotional dynamics, highlighting their relevance to broader Victorian concerns about identity, community, and morality.

**2.4 Relevance and Gaps in Scholarship**

George Eliot’s works have been widely studied for their psychological realism, moral vision, and social critique (Shuttleworth, 2011). However, the emotional dynamics underpinning her characters’ transformations remain underexplored. Most scholarship on *The Mill on the Floss* has focused on Maggie Tulliver’s struggles with gender, morality, and social expectations (Ashton, 1983; Beer, 1986), often sidelining Tom’s emotional journey. Similarly, analyses of *Silas Marner* frequently emphasize themes of isolation and redemption (Carroll, 1978; Dentith, 2000) without fully examining the affective mechanisms that drive Silas’s transformation.

Hence, this thesis addresses these gaps by applying Ahmed’s affective theory, particularly her concepts of “affective economies” and “emotional stickiness” (Ahmed, 2004, 2006), to Eliot’s narratives, offering a new perspective on how emotional circulation and stickiness shape character development and narrative structure. By combining foundational affect theory with object studies, it demonstrates how Eliot’s examination of material and emotional connections both mirrors and critiques Victorian values.

Additionally, this research adds to the expanding field of affect theory in literary studies, highlighting its ability to reveal the links between emotions, objects, and social networks. Future studies could extend this framework to other works by Eliot or her contemporaries, enhancing our comprehension of the emotional dynamics that shape 19th-century fiction.

**2-PURPOSE/IMPORTANCE**

The purpose of this thesis is to dissect the transformative job of emotions in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* through Sara Ahmed's affect theory, zeroing in on how emotions course, stick to items and connections, and shape individual identities. By analyzing Tom Tulliver's connection to the mill and Silas Marner's moving obsessions with gold and Eppie, the review investigates how these connections drive pride, responsibility, and redemption, molding their moral and emotional excursions. The importance lies in offering a new viewpoint on Eliot's works by tending to underexplored emotional elements and their job in character improvement and Victorian cultural study. It bridges gaps in existing grant by coordinating affect theory with abstract examination, displaying how emotional tenacity and course impact social and moral transformations. This adds to more extensive discussions in abstract examinations, upgrading comprehension of emotions' impact on identity, connections, and cultural standards.

**3-FIELD, RESOURCES, PLACE-DURATION AND SUPPORT**

As a qualitative study, this thesis will utilize comprehensive data from academic sources, including journals, articles, essays, and books. The final thesis is planned to be submitted by June, 2025.

**4-METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

The methodology for this thesis will draw primarily on Sara Ahmed’s affect theory and her “cultural politics of emotion” as outlined in her seminal work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Integral to this approach is her notion that emotions do not simply reside within individuals but rather develop cultural meaning and significance through their attachment to particular signifiers. By tracing the “stickiness” of affects, the study will investigate how these emotions become “conduits” for the moral transformations of the male protagonists, Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner in the two novels under study.

Employing an interdisciplinary methodology grounded in the influential work of affect theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Kathleen Stewart, and Brian Massumi, the study focuses on the conceptualisation of emotions as dynamic, circulating forces that “stick” to various objects, bodies, and social relationships, providing a nuanced framework for investigating the transformative power of affect in George Eliot’s selected novels *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner.*

Additionally, the project plans to engage with complementary affect theories, such as those proposed by Raymond Williams’ notion of “structures of feeling”, Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affective economies, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of the rhizomatic nature of affect to further elucidate the multifaceted nature of emotion and its role in shaping subjectivity and social relations. These theorists' concepts of "structures of feeling," affective economies, and the rhizomatic nature of affect are assumed to situate Eliot’s depictions of emotion within broader social, cultural, and philosophical frameworks. By drawing on this rich tapestry of affect theory, the study will study the transformative power of emotions such as pride, loss, and redemption, as depicted in The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner as they navigate the social structures of Victorian society. The analysis will closely investigate the multidirectional and non-linear ways in which emotions shape the protagonists' identities and relationships and explore the emotional dynamics within the social networks depicted in the novels, tracing how emotions become conduits for the characters' journeys.

This study explores the groundbreaking force of emotions in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)and *Silas Marner* (1861) as they provide rich and contrasting depictions of the role of emotion in shaping the moral transformations of their respective male protagonists, Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner, as they navigate the social structures of Victorian society.

**5-THESIS OUTLINE**

**Chapter One** aims to explore how emotions are constructed and navigated over the social and family domains of both novels of George Eliot, paying attention to how emotions affect Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner’s agency and orientation. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) the various relations between the main character, Tom Tulliver, and his sister Maggie, as well as with his father and with the common neighbours, express the spirit of pride, jealousy, and guilt. These emotions are not standalone feelings; they come between characters and create some specific number of connections and clashes. For instance, Tom, who depicted the traditional probe of a male provider is continually prideful of protecting his family’s honor from the disgrace of their financially struggling peasant background, only to be ceased by the sensitive Maggie whose sexual desire battles with her innate yearning for social acceptance of her needs (Eliot, 1860). Likewise, this kind of betrayal isolates Silas Marner, who later on reintegrates into the broad society of Raveloe. In such circulation of emotions, the character builds an association with Eppie, illustrating how transfer operates to forge new relations and alter personal definitude and associationality which illustrates how relations facilitate or hinder the circulation of emotions and determine characters’ paths (Eliot, 1861). Drawing out the affective lines and processes of the characters in both Eliot’s novels, this chapter aims to how affect is deployed on the personal level, positioning characters within their social environments and preparing them for changes.

**Chapter Two** focuses on addressing another concept of emotional attachment, referred to as the concept of “emotional stickiness,” and relates it to the insights from the theory of emotional circulation in the first chapter. In *The Mill on the Floss* (Eliot, 1860), the attachment of Tom Tulliver to the mill stands for desire for love and recognition more than mere compliance of a son with his father’s will. His obsession with rebuilding the family’s reputation serves as his strengths; however, they are also his weaknesses since he cannot grasp the issues Maggie has to face. In *Silas Marner* (Eliot, 1861), the main character’s greed is the primary sin; the gold he gathers becomes a source of surrogate fellowship in the place in which he was betrayed by people. The two significant incidents in the novel are the theft of his gold and the arrival of Eppie, which dramatically help him to overcome his emotional relationships. Through this act of redemption, Eppie is established as the new object of Silas’ affection which represents love, hope, and association. Such redirection of affect establishes the possibilities of affective resilience and the appraisal of relationships. Drawing on Ahmed’s (2010) analysis of affective stickiness provides useful insights into such dynamics. She has pushed the claim that emotions become embodied through bodies and are at the same time socially and materially constituted, altering people’s ways of seeing and experiencing the world. This chapter tries to explore how the theory of emotional attachment is enfolded and transformed by translating it into the material and relational objects. It explores how emotional attachment might work in the tangle of emotional stickiness, on the one hand and in the sphere of freedom from the past trauma, on the other. The affective units in these stories are significant for identifying the key transition points in the shifts of the characters’ emotional arcs.

**Chapter Three** seeks to unlock how the processes of circulation and stickiness lead to the transformations of both protagonists: Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner. From pride to guilt, and a tentative search for redemptiveness, Tom’s arc is outlined. Hence, the attempts to regain the honor of the family show Tom’s obligation and, at the same time, there is also an individual desire involved beyond just duty that does not let him experience a deeper emotional evolution and maturity such as restraining his feelings or prioritizing external goals over internal growth. Despite a moment of reconciliation and forgiveness with Maggie, his final change is also filled with various unresolved conflicts that make it rather intricate. Silas Marner begins as an isolated and greedy man and transforms into a loving and fully integrated member of the community. Such a relationship between the protagonist and Eppie not only redeems his character but also satirizes main Victorian values and demonstrates the importance of affection instead of object. This journey illustrates how the effect is reparative by the end of his journey, Silas transitions from hopelessness to hope through the connections he fosters.

In this comparative approach, two stories of change are presented—one, of a man who is prevented from spiritual transformation by his ego and society; the other, of a man who helped to transform by love and camaraderie. Using Ahmed’s theory these transformations are explained by internal as well as external forces of change where emotions are depicted as catalysts of both positive transformations and restoration. The change or constancy of the characters’ feelings about Tom and Silas is implicated in the moral vision that Eliot employs in her novel in relationship to the socio-cultural norms of Victorian society.

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