**Emotional Circulation, Stickiness, and Resilience: The Interplay of Affect and Transformation in the Protagonists of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner**

**Submitted by**

**Contents**

[Introduction 2](#_Toc187358611)

[Chapter 1: Emotional Circulation and Social Networks 3](#_Toc187358612)

[Chapter 2: Stickiness of Affect and Emotional Anchors 3](#_Toc187358613)

[Chapter 3: Transformation Through Emotional Dynamics 4](#_Toc187358614)

[Conclusion 5](#_Toc187358615)

[Implications 5](#_Toc187358616)

[Future Directions 6](#_Toc187358617)

[References 6](#_Toc187358618)

# **Introduction**

This thesis is an analysis of affective economies in George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner employing affect theory by Sara Ahmed which comprises emotions as the flowing circuits, sticky subjects, and emotional resilience. These novels offer very useful examples for the analysis of how constituents enter into the creation of selves, as well as into the regulation of relations and interactions in societies. This work investigates how and through which patterns of emotion circulate in a network with a particular focus on Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner.

In this research, the problem of emotional labor is going to be analyzed using the affect theory by Sara Ahmed. Her elaboration of affective economies outlines a method for understanding how feelings circulate both within and between people, in governing conduct and relationships (Ahmed, 2014). Moreover, the theory of ‘emotional coupling’ is one of the qualities that provide a way of understanding how feelings become connected to things or persons and as a result, influence their meaning (Ahmed, 2010). Seeing Eliot’s protagonists endure different stages of emotional development as narrated in the reading assignments suggests that affect entails transformative capability, that protagonists transform through it. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the field of affect theory as it applies it to the writings of Victorian literature.

This line of inquiry moves this research beyond merely interpreting literature and into the realm of how and why emotions will lead to certain societal norms, as well as how emotions dictate the course of an individual’s actions.

# **Chapter 1: Emotional Circulation and Social Networks**

**1.1 Emotional Interplay in Family and Social Domains**

In the first chapter, the authors analyze how emotions are constructed and navigated over the social and family domains of the novels of George Eliot paying attention to how emotions affect the main characters’ agency and orientation. It is for this reason that the various relations between the main character, Tom Tulliver, and his sister Maggie, as well as with his father, and with the common neighbors, 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 halted by the sensitive Maggie whose sexual desire battles with her innate yearning for social acceptance of her needs (Eliot, 2019a).

**1.2 Isolation and Reintegration through Emotional Bonds**

This kind of betrayal isolates Silas Marner who later on reintegrates into the broad society of Raveloe. 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. The text shows how people’s relations facilitate or hinder the circulation of emotions and determine characters’ paths (Eliot, 2019b).

**1.3 Relational Qualities of Emotions in Victorian Culture**

Ahmed’s concept of emotional circulation at this point because it emphasizes the relational quality of emotions. The exchange of feelings in Victorian culture could help uphold or subvert the strict class concepts that regulated conducting one’s self. Drawing out the affective lines and processes of the characters in Eliot’s novels, this chapter shows how affect is deployed on the personal level, positioning characters within their social environments and preparing them for changes (Ahmed, 2014).

# **Chapter 2: Stickiness of Affect and Emotional Anchors**

**2.1 Emotional Stickiness and Familial Attachments**

With the help of the insights from the theory of emotional circulation, this chapter moves further to address another concept of emotional attachment referred to as the concept of ‘Emotional Stickiness’. In The Mill on the Floss, 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 (Eliot, 2019a).

**2.2 Redemption and Reoriented Affection**

In Silas Marner, 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 book are the theft of his gold and the arrival of Eppie which dramatically overcome his emotional relationships. Through this act of redemption, Eppie is established as the new object of Silas’ affection meaning love, hope, and association. Such redirection of affect establishes the possibilities of affective resilience and the appraisal of relationships (Eliot, 2019b).

**2.3 Affective Stickiness and Freedom from Trauma**

From the analysis of affective stickiness by Ahmed (2010), it is useful to derive the following 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 (Ahmed, 2010). This chapter shows how Eliot enfolds and transforms a theory of emotional attachment by translating it into the material and relational objects of her novels and how it might work in the tangle of emotional stickiness on the one hand, and in the sphere of freedom from past trauma on the other. The affective units in these stories are important for identifying the key transition points in the shifts of the characters’ emotional arcs.

# **Chapter 3: Transformation Through Emotional Dynamics**

**3.1 Tom Tulliver: Pride, Guilt, and Unresolved Transformation**

The last chapter looks at how the processes of circulation and stickiness give life to the character transformations of Tom Tulliver and Silas Marner. From pride to guilt, and a tentative search for redemptiveness, Tom’s arc is outlined. That is why the attempts to regain the honor of the family show the main character’s compelled and, at the same time, some desire does not let him experience deeper emotional evolution. Despite happiness and the resulting marriage with Maggie, his final change is also filled with various unresolved conflicts that make it rather intricate (Eliot, 2019a).

**3.2 Silas Marner: From Isolation to Hope**

While Silas Marner starts as an isolated and greedy man and ends as 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 as well as demonstrates the importance of affection instead of gold. This journey shows how the effect is reparative because, until the end of his journey, Silas transitions from hopelessness to hope through the connections he fosters (Eliot, 2019b).

**3.3 Comparative Transformations and Emotional Catalysts**

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 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 the novel in relationship to the socio-cultural norms of Victorian society (Ahmed, 2014).

# **Conclusion**

Conclusively, this thesis integrates the analysis of the four chapters and reiterates the functions of the three discursive structures to support and shape Eliot’s narratives. The affect theory by Sara Ahmed allows for considering the fine marriage of emotions as a key to understanding both The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner from their Victorian context and now in the context of the affect theory.

The discovery presents the power of emotions highlighting how societies, individuals, and identities are constructed through affectivity, as well as how affective practices can open spaces for subversion of dominant regulatory discourses. The characterization of recovery of emotions and personal development offends Victorian principles and portrays a much more humane life. This study adds to the conversations between literature and affect theory, which suggests directions for future analysis of feeling operations in fiction.

# **Implications**

Ahmed’s affect theory provides a perspective by which the reader can view Eliot’s characters anew and discuss the role that emotional currency plays in Victorian literature as far as relationships and changes are concerned. Concerning the role of the relational aspect in emotions, the study reveals how Eliot’s stories subvert the class-entrenched sexual norms and untangle the antagonistic relationship between individual and collective morality. It is not only helpful for the interpretation of Victorian literature but also helps us to remember that affect remains an influential factor in structure of the human life. It is therefore through the integration of affective theory into literature analysis that this study advances the existing knowledge on identity formation and critique of society in Eliot’s works (Ahmed, 2014).

# **Future Directions**

It provides possibilities for using the affect theory of Ahmed with other Victorian writers including Dickens and Brontë to link emotions and economies to the processes of characters’ formation and social interactions. Complementing Victorian texts, the framework can be used to analyze the affective aspects of post-Victorian issues in modern society. Applications of such work would afford a sound approach to studying identity, community, and resilience in a variety of cultural and historical settings. Connecting historical and contemporary approaches to literary analysis, this study demonstrates affect as the key concept that can explain the emotional backdrop of change in both ancient and postmodern narratives (Ahmed, 2010; Taylor, 2020).

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