THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN
IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

by

ANNE GRANT PETRIE
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Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

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ABSTRACT

A mid-nineteenth century feminist anxious to enlist the support of the illustrious George Eliot in her cause would have found in the novelist a curious blend of progressive and conservative responses to the "woman question." Marian Evans' own struggle for a literary career coupled with the materialistic world view which she adopted from Ludwig Feuerbach gave her an acute understanding of the oppression women endured under a patriarchal system. But at the same time she felt that women had a distinctive psychological makeup which meant they could exercise a special beneficent moral influence in social life. She would not admit woman's full equality with man because she felt that the complete emancipation of her sex might coarsen the feminine nature.

George Eliot's contradictory attitudes to the position of women are reflected in her fictional writing, often marring the unity of her presentation of female characters. In The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda brilliant analysis of the effects of male supremacy turns into blind worship of the Victorian vision of woman as "the angel in the house." My argument is not with the traditional view of woman per se but that in George Eliot's work it is in direct opposition to a stronger and more aesthetically satisfying radical interpretation. The presence of stereotyped images of women in otherwise brilliant novels reduces complexity to artifice, realism to idealism and hard-edged irony to facile sentiment.
In *The Mill* Maggie Tulliver is clearly struggling for some personal identity other than the strictly "feminine" one her brother Tom insists on. However, by the end of the novel Maggie has apparently found fulfilment in passive submission to Tom's male superiority. Similarly, in *Middlemarch* Dorothea's quest for some greater meaning in her life than the cloistered position of a gentlewoman usually allows for is answered first with an idealized marriage to Will Ladislaw, and second with vague references to her goddess-like perfection.

One of Eliot's greatest achievements as a novelist is her determination to take the bitch seriously. With both Rosamond Vincy and Gwendolen Harleth she probes the usual stereotype of the evil woman to show that these two are as much victims of a repressive patriarchal society as are the more attractive characters such as Dorothea and Maggie. But she does not carry through her sympathetic understanding of the bitch character. Rosamond is finally declared to be the unregenerate evil woman who "flourishes wonderfully on a murdered man's brains." Gwendolen does change but as is implied by the comparison to Mirah Lapidoth, it is only to be removed from one role, the bitch and placed immediately in another, the good woman. This pattern is repeated in *Felix Holt the Radical* by measuring Mrs. Transome against Esther Lyon.

The ambiguous treatment of the female personality does not arise in George Eliot's other novels because none of the women characters is ever lifted far enough above stereotype
for there to be any question of a departure from realism. However *Adam Bede, Silas Marner* and *Romola* are briefly discussed with *Felix Holt* in Chapter IV.

Although this thesis dwells largely on certain aesthetic weaknesses in the fictional writing of George Eliot, I am not suggesting that her reversion to traditional images of the feminine character destroys the novels. On the contrary recognizing and exploring these obvious areas of failure dramatically points up the brilliance of the initial feminist perspective (i.e. the recognition that much of what is called the female character is in fact a response to patriarchal values) which George Eliot takes in introducing her women characters.
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THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT
I

Introduction

(i)

The first major document of feminism, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft. A friend of Thomas Paine and of French revolutionaries, she was sufficiently in touch with the radicalism of her era to insist upon the application of its basic premises to that majority still excluded from the Rights of Man. The reaction to A Vindication was wide and violent. Unfortunately, the attacks were not so much on the content of the book itself, but on Wollstonecraft's own life. Her love affairs, illegitimate child and attempted suicide made her book dangerous reading. Only a very few women in the early nineteenth century had the courage to look into its pages.

It was not until the 1830's and the coming of age of the reform movement in England that the struggle for woman's political, economic and social equality got new impetus. Although the Reform Act of 1832 did not itself reform very much, the wide discussion that the bill engendered brought many issues to public attention—among them the extension of the franchise to women and the deplorable conditions that working women endured. Still, open agitation around the
"woman question" did not really begin until the sixties. John Stuart Mill, with the assistance of Harriet Taylor, published the Subjection of Women and from this rallying point British women, under Mill's leadership, began to demand changes in the education, employment, political and legal status of women. Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon worked tirelessly for a woman's college and finally Girton was opened at Cambridge in 1872. Protective legislation for women and children factory workers was introduced and in a few rare instances women were organized into trade unions for the first time. Middle class women signed petition after petition to have the marriage property laws changed so that they could have at least minimal control over their financial lives.

The opposition quickly made itself heard. The most popular and probably most successful tactic was insult. Horace Walpole had called Mary Wollstonecraft a "hyena in petticoats" and in the mid-nineteenth century the epithet "strong-minded woman" meant that one was everything from a man-hater to war-monger. Even the most sincere reformers could often not stand firm in the face of the ridicule and accusations of "unfemininity" heaped upon feminist sympathizers.

John Ruskin, arbiter of popular taste, loudly denounced the feminist cause and in a widely-read public lecture, "Of Queen's Gardens," informed women of their true right--to serve their menfolk; popular moralists such as Baldwin Brown
blamed all the evils of society on women who had "been seduced by the ridiculous phantom of woman's rights when their true power, the birthright they would sell for a mess of potage is the 'power to love, to serve, to save'"; \(^2\) and many well-known women such as Mrs. T.H. Huxley, Mrs. Leslie Stephen and Mrs. Matthew Arnold signed a petition entitled "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage."

(ii)

Determining where Marian Evans (as distinct, for the moment, from the writer George Eliot) should be placed in relation to this controversy over the proper role of woman is a difficult problem. In reading through her essays, and Gordon Haight's biography and collection of the George Eliot letters, one is firmly convinced she is partial to feminism only to turn the page and be equally sure she is not. For instance, in her essay on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft Evans quietly but strongly supports the feminism of both women:

There is \([\text{in the writings of both these women}]\) no exaggeration of woman's moral excellence or intellectual capabilities; no injudicious insistence on her fitness for this or that function hitherto engrossed by men; but a calm plea for the removal of unjust laws and artificial restrictions so that the possibilities of her nature may have room for full development. \(^3\)

Yet only a year earlier in "Women in France: Madame de Sable" she had marshalled all kinds of dubious, but popular, physiological and psychological "facts" in order to prove that English women were constitutionally incapable of great
literary achievement:

What were the causes of this earlier development and more abundant manifestation of womanly intellect in France? The primary one, perhaps, lies in the physiological characteristics of the Gallic race: the small brain and vivacious temperament which permit the fragile system of woman to sustain the superlative activity requisite for intellectual creativeness; while on the other hand, the larger brain and slower temperament of the English and Germans are, in the womanly organization, generally dreamy and passive....The woman of large capacity can seldom rise beyond the absorption of ideas; her physical conditions refuse to support the energy required for spontaneous activity; the voltaic-pile is not strong enough to produce crystallizations; phantasms of great ideas float through her mind, but she has not the spell which will arrest them, and give them fixity. This, more than unfavourable external circumstances, is, we think, the reason why woman has not yet contributed any new form to art, any discovery in science, any deep-searching inquiry in philosophy. The necessary physiological conditions are not present in her.

The list of Evans' close friends adds to the uncertainty surrounding her position on the "woman question." Charles Bray, who can be regarded as her earliest mentor, remained adamantly convinced that woman's only place was in the home and Herbert Spencer did not bother to disguise his anti-feminism. Even George Henry Lewes seemed to regard his "wife" as an exception to the general rule that "the Masculine mind is characterised by the predominance of the intellect, and the Feminine by the predominance of the emotions." On the other hand, Barbara Bodichon, one of England's leading feminists was, next to Lewes, surely Marian Evans' closest friend. As well, Marian corresponded regularly and warmly with many other feminists such as Mary Elizabeth Ponsonby, Mrs. Peter Taylor and Mrs. Nassau John Senior congratulating
them on their work. But even with these women she could not give her full approval to, let alone offer her active participation in, their cause. In a note to Bessie Parkes who was at that time editing the *Waverly Journal* ("Conducted by Women") Marian warns Bessie to be prepared "if I happen to write anything you don't like about women." Edith Simcox, with whom she had a long and (at least on Simcox's part) passionate relationship, spoke of this blend of conservatism and progressiveness which marked her attitude to the woman question,

She gave unqualified and unhesitating assent to what might be called the most 'advanced' opinions on this subject; only the opinions had to be advocated in practice with large tolerance and disinterestedness, and she wished to be assured that nothing of what is valuable in the social order of the past should be sacrificed in the quest of even certain future good.

But perhaps the most revealing instance of her ambiguous attitude towards the feminist cause can be seen in her response to the suffrage question. Gordon Haight describes the incident:

When John Stuart Mill introduced his amendment to extend the franchise to women, Mrs. Peter Taylor urged Marian to lend her influence in support of the cause. It was impossible to move her. To John Morley, who had discussed the issue with her, she wrote: 'If I were called on to act in the matter, I would certainly not oppose any plan which held out any reasonable promise of tending to establish as far as possible an equivalence of advantages for the two sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development.' But the fact that 'woman seems to me to have the worse share in existence,' she thought, should be the 'basis for a sublimer resignation in woman and a more regenerating tenderness in man.' However, she added, 'The peculiarities of my own lot may have caused me to have idiosyncrasies rather than
an average judgment.8

This last statement is at least a partial answer as to why one finds Marian Evans first on one side, then on the other of the woman question. Her "own lot," though in many ways a happy one including as it did her deep love for Lewes and the success of her writing, had still brought her continual tension and anxiety. When as a young woman she abandoned her passionate Calvinism for an equally enthusiastic agnosticism, the ensuing breach between Marian and her father distressed her deeply. Although they soon came to a compromise (she still accompanied him to church regularly) there was to be no such reconciliation with her brother Isaac when several years later she made the decision to live with George Henry Lewes. Isaac refused to communicate with her until many years later, when after Lewes's death she legitimately married John Cross. Marian always remembered her own struggles for an education matching her abilities, and consequently could usually be counted on to support proposals to expand women's opportunities in this field; but when it came to feminist demands for complete equality with men both in the home and the workplace, she was never able to conquer her own feelings of guilt at having broken the conventional rules of feminine behaviour.

But it was not only alienation from a dearly loved brother which precipitated the bouts of deep depression from which she suffered for the rest of her life and prevented her from wholeheartedly embracing feminism. For many years she was cruelly ostracised by the whole of "good" London
society and it is difficult not to agree with Gordon Haight's analysis of why her physical and emotional health improved so much whenever she and Lewes travelled on the continent:

The malaise and languor that oppressed her in London would...vanish as soon as she reached the Continent, where she took strenuous all-night journeys by rail or diligence and endured long days of relentless sightseeing. One looks inevitably for some psychological explanation to reconcile these contradictions. The most tempting one is to be found in her equivocal marital state, which since she had become famous, was painfully conspicuous. "I can never think of her position without positive pain", Blackwood told Langford.9

One can easily understand the kind of pain John Blackwood must have felt for Marian given Charles Kingsley's unfeeling dismissal of her as "none other than Miss Evans, the infidel esprit forte, who is now G.H. Lewes's concubine"10 and Charles Eliot Norton's description of her social position:

She is an object of great interest and great curiosity [my italics] to society here. She is not received in general society, and the women who visit her are either so emancipée as not to mind what the world says about them, or have no social position to maintain.11

Those "emancipée women" who visited Marian Evans may have hoped to champion her as an example of feminine independence, but she violently recoiled from any such notoriety. She was not a defiant woman; on the contrary she desperately wanted to legitimize her union with Lewes and was always most distraught when one of her feminist friends insisted on referring to her as Evans rather than Lewes:

You must please not call me MISS EVANS again. I have renounced that name, and do not mean to be known by it in any way. It is Mr. Lewes's
wish that the few friends who care about me should recognize me as Mrs. Lewes.\textsuperscript{12}

The use of Lewes's surname may be a minor point, but it reflects Marian's intense desire for social acceptability. She regarded her own irregular union as an exception necessitated by insurmountable obstacles and felt that any feminist apology might encourage others to embark thoughtlessly upon the same course. She felt very keenly the spoken and unspoken accusations that she was somehow not a "good" woman—that she was a "pernicious"\textsuperscript{13} example of female liberation—and often seemed to compensate by preaching the most traditional of womanly virtues. In a letter to Emily Davies who was preparing a paper entitled "Some Account of a Proposed College for Women" Marian insisted on the special moral influence of women that springs from their physical and psychological differences from men,

In the face of all wrongs, mistakes and failures, history has demonstrated that gain. And there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be 'unsexed'. We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character than we can afford to part with...human love.\textsuperscript{14}

Congratulating a young man on the announcement of his engagement, Lewes and Evans sent a note projecting an image of the proper wifely role which would have undoubtedly pleased even John Ruskin:

Few things have given us more pleasure than the intimation in your note that you had a fiancée. May she be the central happiness and motive force of your career, and, by satisfying the affections, leave your rare intellect free to
work out its glorious destiny.  

Thus, as far as the contemporary struggle for female emancipation was concerned, Marian Evans feared that any substantial change in woman's status might mean the loss of those special "womanly" qualities which were vital to the moral stability of Victorian England. Although this kind of "woman worship" was touched with melodramatic and sentimental exaggeration, Walter Houghton points out in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* that

many intelligent women—George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Beatrice Potter Webb, for example—viewed with uneasiness or apprehension any emancipation of their sex which would weaken its moral influence by distracting attention to the outside world or by coarsening the feminine nature itself.

Marian herself put it this way,

I feel too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women and also I feel too imperfect a sympathy with many women who have put themselves forward in connexion with such measures, to give any practical adhesion to them. There is no subject on which I am more inclined to hold my peace and learn, than on the "Women Question." It seems to me to overhang abysses, of which even prostitution is not the worst.

This is an interesting passage. On one level it is certainly calm and objective. Yet on another there is a distinct note of fear and near-hysteria. The mention of prostitution has the kind of scare value that the "red menace of communism" elicits today. It would not take much thought to realize that prostitution is historically a result of female repression rather than liberation. Her comment about being out
of sympathy with many of the feminists of her day is also noteworthy. As is the case almost a hundred years later, some of them were undoubtedly foolish and ignorant but one cannot help speculating whether she rejected these women and the freedom they demanded because of her own deep feelings of guilt over her common-law relationship with Lewes.

Marian Evans did not openly engage in any feminist activities but the trials of her own intellectual and emotional life most certainly gave her a special insight into the difficulty of a woman adopting anything but the most conventional of lifestyles. Because she was a woman, and moreover a woman "living in sin," both she and Lewes knew her novels would have to be published under a male pseudonym:

You may tell it openly to all who care to hear it that the object of anonymity was to get the book judged on its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman, or of a particular woman. It is quite clear that people would have sniffed at it if they had known the writer to be a woman but they can't now unsay their admiration.\(^{18}\)

An article which appeared in the *Athenaeum* proved that their fears were all too well-founded:

> It is time to end this pother about the authorship of 'Adam Bede'. The writer is in no sense a 'great unknown'; the tale, if bright in parts, and such as a clever woman with an observant eye and unschooled moral nature might have written, has no great quality of any kind...you turn up a rather strong-minded lady, blessed with abundance of showy sentiment and a profusion of pious words but kept for sale rather than use.\(^{19}\)

Even when she was an established author it must have been difficult when, for example because "ladies were not admitted," she twice had to depend on Lewes's notes about the monastery
at San Marco, which she needed for Romola. The position of women in a patriarchal society became a more acutely personal concern given the legal and moral response to her union with Lewes. After endless investigation, divorce for Lewes was finally pronounced "IMPOSSIBLE" and although she made a show of not minding the social isolation which her common-law relationship brought,

nevertheless she smarted under the injustice of a society that ostracized her as a violator of the marriage tie while regarding the impenitent Agnes [Lewes's legal wife] as a blameless abandoned wife.

If her own union was illegitimate at least she was not bound by many of the laws which reduced the married woman's status to that of a mere possession of her husband. Marian strongly supported the proposed Married Women's Property Act and did not seem to be shocked at the idea that there could be such a thing as rape in marriage,

They [George Eliot and Lady Amberly] talked about a book on the Social and Political Dependence of Women; Lady Amberly, having read only a quotation from it in the Pall Mall—'that a man ought to be able to be punished for a rape on his wife'—was surprised when George Eliot would not allow that the book was coarse.

But perhaps most significantly she seemed to realize that the conventional Victorian pattern for a woman's life in which she was expected to devote herself wholly to her husband and children, might do serious harm to her individual self-development,

We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have,
we ought also to have our share of the more independent life—some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed—because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. Yet surely women need this sort of defence against passion-ate affliction even more than men. 24

(iii)

One can understand much about Marian Evans' contradictory ideas about feminism through the events of her personal life. But an examination of Ludwig Feuerbach's philosophy, which had such a great influence on her thinking—"with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree"—might also be productive. Feuerbach did not write specifically about the position of women, but implicit in The Essence of Christianity are both the progressive and the conservative attitudes which mark Evans' response to the "woman question." Feuerbach's thesis was that the divine being worshipped by Christians (or any other religious group) is not a "divine" being at all, but only an extension of man's ideas about himself,

God as God, that is, as a being not finite, not human, not materially conditioned, not phenomenal, is only an object of thought. He is the incorpo-real, formless, incomprehensible—the abstract, negative being: he is known, i.e., becomes an object, only by abstraction and negation (via negationis). Why? Because he is nothing but the objective nature of the thinking power, or in general of the power or activity, name it what you will, whereby man is conscious of reason, of mind, of intelligence. There is no other spirit, that
is (for the idea of spirit is simply the idea of thought, of intelligence, of understanding, every other spirit being a spectre of the imagination), no other intelligence which man can believe in or conceive than that intelligence which enlightens him, which is active in him. He can do nothing more than separate the intelligence from the limitations of his own individuality. The 'infinite spirit', in distinction from the finite, is therefore nothing else than the intelligence disengaged from the limits of individuality and corporeality,--for individuality and corporeality are inseparable,--intelligence posited in and by itself.  

The problem is of course that in positing this divine being the individual man had separated himself from the rest of mankind. A true religion, Feuerbach says, would be a "religion of humanity" wherein man would develop his moral consciousness not in response to the laws of a divine being, but in consideration of the needs and desires of his "human" brothers and sisters. His emphasis was on the concrete "sensuous" (in its broadest sense) world, not on any romantic and illusory "heaven." To many 19th-century thinkers it seemed that here in The Essence of Christianity the "spell" of religion had been simultaneously explained and broken. The enthusiasm with which many of his contemporaries greeted Feuerbach's work is best expressed by Frederick Engels:

Then came Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity. With one blow it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflections of our own essence. The
spell was broken; the "system" was exploded and 
cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist 
only in our imagination, was dissolved. One must 
himself have experienced the liberating effect of 
this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was 
general; we all became at once Feuerbachians. 27

Marian Evans' response to Feuerbach, as her correspondence 
during the period of translating The Essence of Christianity 
points out, was equally positive if perhaps a little more 
subdued in tone. Feuerbach's materialism certainly attracted 
er, and the axiom she adopted for Felix Holt, "that there 
is no private life which is not determined by a wider public 
one" is Eliot's version of Feuerbach's "man is what he eats." 
Here "Man" of course includes woman, and Eliot saw that the 
common belief in woman's ignorance and frailty had its root 
at least partially in social institutions rather than some di­
vine law of female inferiority,

complete union and sympathy [between man and wo-
man] can only come by women having opened to them 
the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as 
men have, so that their grounds of judgment may 
be as far as possible the same. The domestic 
misery, the evil education of the children that 
come from the presupposition that women must be 
kept ignorant and superstitious, are patent 

enough. 28

And as much as she abhorred the vain and foolish women 
who constituted such a large part of London society she 
still realized that theirs was not an evil inherent in the 
feminine nature, as was commonly believed, but a product 
of the patriarchal system itself:

Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to 
encourage self-help and independent resources 
in women. The precious meridian years of many 
a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of 
routine, that an 'establishment' may be kept up
for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll—Madonna in her shrine. No matter. Anything is more endurable than to change our established formulae about women, or to run the risk of looking up to our wives instead of looking down on them. Sit divus, dummodo non sit vivus (let him be a god, provided he be not living), said the Roman magnates of Romulus; and so men say of women, let them be idols, useless absorbents of precious things, provided we are not obliged to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings, to be treated, one and all, with justice and sober reverence. 28

Although Eliot criticized many of the results of patriarchy, she never really attacked the system itself. The same can be said of Feuerbach. As Karl Marx pointed out in the fourth of his "Theses on Feuerbach," the latter might have separated the religious from the secular world but he did not go on to reveal why that separation existed at all. Except for very isolated statements like "man thinks differently in a palace or a hut" he never seemed to understand that the creation of the religious world was the chief way by which the mass of men could understand the oppression that was a part of their daily lives, or on the other hand that the ruling class could enforce that oppression. All that Feuerbach actually discarded was God. The ideas and concepts of conventional Christianity he maintained, merely saying that they should be followed as the laws of man rather than the laws of some abstract divinity. The chief of these concepts, to Feuerbach, was love. The love that God has for men is actually the love that man has for man, and it is this concern for our fellow human beings that Feuerbach
feels should be exalted to the level of a religion, and which will as a matter of course bring about the liberation of mankind. However, even the most cursory examination of human relations demonstrates the idealistic nature of Feuerbach's thinking. Engels spluttered:

But love!—yes, with Feuerbach love is everywhere and at all times the wonder-working god who should help to surmount all difficulties of practical life—and at that in a society which is split into classes with diametrically opposite interests. At this point the last relic of its revolutionary character disappears from his philosophy, leaving only the old cant: Love one another--fall into each other's arms regardless of distinctions of sex or estate—a universal orgy of reconciliation!

In short, the Feuerbachian theory of morals fares like all its predecessors. It is designed to suit all periods, all peoples and all conditions, and precisely for that reason it is never and nowhere applicable. It remains, as regards the real world, as powerless as Kant's categorical imperative. In reality every class, even every profession, has its own morality, and even this it violates whenever it can do so with impunity. And love, which is to unite all, manifests itself in wars, altercations, lawsuits, domestic broils, divorces and every possible exploitation of one by another.

The last sentence of this quotation shows where Feuerbach's thinking would lead in regard to the position of women. His emphasis on the validity of sexuality in love was certainly meaningful given the repressive atmosphere of Victorian society, but without a correspondingly radical re-definition of the mutual responsibility that male-female love entails, then greater sexual freedom might actually work to woman's disadvantage by giving her husband even more power over her. It was under that very name of "love" that women were expected uncritically to "honour and obey." All too often.
love, for a woman, meant giving up her rights under the law, submitting to her husband's will and limiting her personal ambitions to the rewards of motherhood.

Marian Evans' acceptance of Feuerbach's religion of love was enthusiastic and complete:

The powerful appeal the book had for her sprang, not from his bold humanism—'Homo homini deus est'—for she had long been familiar with that, but from Feuerbach's daring conception of love: 'Love is God himself, and apart from it there is no God...not a visionary, imaginary love—no! a real love, a love which has flesh and blood, which vibrates as an almighty force through all living.' She agreed whole-heartedly with Feuerbach's distinction between 'self-interested love' and 'the true human love', which 'impels the sacrifice of self to another.' Such love is, and must always be, particular and limited, finding its expression in the sexual relation, the frankest recognition of the divine in Nature.31

Her healthy recognition of sexuality certainly marked Evans as a radical in at least one aspect of the debate over the true nature of woman. But like Feuerbach she did not seem to want to investigate thoroughly other aspects of male/female relationships that might threaten the stability of existing social institutions. When confronted with the fact of women's and men's oppression she took the Feuerbachian way out. Concern for our own difficulties is selfish and egotistical. One must resign oneself to one's "own lot," as it were, and the highest achievement of human existence is to repress self-interest for the interest of others.

Consciousness of the world is the consciousness of my limitation....My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel
myself, dependent on the world, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I did not need man, I should not need the world, I reconcile myself with the world only through my fellow-man. Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious. 32

These are fine sentiments, as Engels suggested, if one did not live in a "society which is split into classes with diametrically opposite interests." Given the facts of 19th-century British life, Feuerbach's and Evans' calls for resignation sound more reactionary than progressive. As far as the feminist struggle for emancipation is concerned, Evans' statement quoted previously ("if a female has a worse share in existence that should be the basis for a sublimer resignation in women") can be interpreted only as a justification for maintaining the present system of sexual inequality. She handled the larger question of class politics in the same way. In her "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," she pleaded with working men not to misuse the power of the ballot or to "allow the mob and mob orators to mislead them and destroy the class who have leisure and refinement to think and legislate." 33 It may be noted that her very conservative publisher, John Blackwood, was most enamoured of this kind of "radicalism."

Feuerbach's greatest strength—that he perceived the world materialistically—is also Marian Evans'. But his failure is hers too. Both saw what man was and how he had become what he was, but neither saw that he could or would
become anything else.

To me materialism is the foundation of the edifice of human essence and knowledge; but to me it is not what it is to the physiologist, to the natural scientist in the narrower sense, for example, to Moleschott, and necessarily is from their standpoint and professions, namely, the edifice itself. Backwards I fully agree with the materialists; but not forwards. [Feuerbach] 34

At the point where they were challenged to attack or even threaten existing social institutions, both Evans and Feuerbach escaped into the very idealism that they initially were determined to reject.

If in her private life Marian Evans had contradictory feelings about the popular feminist issues of her time it is not unreasonable to expect this same confusion will show up in the fiction of George Eliot. The purpose of this thesis is to point up these contradictions if and when they occur and to show to what extent Eliot's ambiguity with respect to the position of women can be helpful in explaining both the undeniable brilliance and obvious weaknesses in her novels. I am not at all trying to suggest that a feminist bias makes good art or that expressions of male chauvinism doom a novel to failure. To pick out such attitudes in an author's writing is merely a process of description and does not contribute in any way to the analysis of the work as art. It does seem to me, however, that a novel is bound to run into difficulties if two diametrically opposed approaches to female character are present in it, and the contradiction has no specific literary function. This is, I believe, characteristic of many of the novels of George
Eliot. She initially presents her women characters from a feminist perspective (i.e. from the standpoint of one who sees that much of what is called the female character is in fact a response to patriarchal values) but ultimately measures them against the standards of a conservative anxious to preserve all the traditional ideals about the proper place of women.

Given the subject with which this thesis deals, I found a thematic approach to all the novels impossible. Although the same contradictory attitudes in the presentation of female characters occur in much of her work, the problem manifests itself in different ways, making any comparisons or cross-references subject to too much qualification. I have concentrated on three of the novels—The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda—partly because they are representative of the three major periods of her writing but more importantly because the weaknesses of these novels are inextricably bound up with their greatness as works of fiction. The Mill on the Floss falls apart in the last book because the deus ex machina death by drowning is far too simple a way of resolving the complexity of Maggie's situation. In Daniel Deronda, part of the reason why Deronda is such a weak character is because he does not provide a satisfactory answer to the problems with which Gwendolen Harleth confronts him. In this way Gwendolen's story, the best part of the book, is weakened too. Middlemarch does not have the marked failures of the other two novels, but
the vague dissatisfaction one feels about Dorothea's marriage with Ladislaw seems to me to arise because it avoids the very compelling questions about a woman's life that Dorothea has posed earlier in the book.

There is only one other woman character, Mrs. Transome in *Felix Holt the Radical*, whom I feel warrants extensive discussion but since her part is relatively small in that novel I have included that discussion with the brief reviews of *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* and *Romola* which make up Chapter IV. The conclusion recaps the main points of the body of the thesis and tries to offer some general conclusions about George Eliot's treatment of women in her fiction.

One final note: in all the criticism of George Eliot I have read in the past year, only rarely is she referred to by her surname, whether Evans or the pseudonymous Eliot. The same applies to Jane Austen, the Brontes, Harriet Martineau, Charlotte Gaskell and other female writers, but of course not to Charles Dickens or William Thackery or Henry James. I am sure George Eliot, had she been consulted, would have chosen "Mrs. Lewes." Notwithstanding her preference, I shall give her equal treatment with her male contemporaries. In dealing with her personal life and early writings up to *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) I have used either Marian, Marian Evans or Evans; in discussing the novels written under her pen name, either George Eliot or Eliot is used.
NOTES


9 Ibid., p. 338.


19 Ibid., 290-1

20 Ibid., 326.


23 Ibid., p. 391.


30  Engels, p. 384.

31  Haight, *Biography*, p. 137.

32  Feuerbach, p. 82.

33  Haight, *Letters*, IV, 403. [John Blackwood to George Eliot, Edinburgh, 6 December 1867]

34  Quoted by Engels in "Feuerbach," p. 373.
II

The Mill on the Floss

(1)

She sat quite still far on into the night; with no impulse to change her attitude, without active force enough even for the mental act of prayer—only waiting for the light that would surely come again. It came with the memories that no passion could long quench; the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan of the wind: "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me."

By this point in The Mill on the Floss Maggie Tulliver has achieved that renunciation of self, that resignation of will which George Eliot considers the highest achievement of human existence. Maggie has given up Stephen—resisted his last appeal to her—chosen duty instead of passion, and exchanged easyful joy for the "willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed—that you don't expect to be allayed" (MF, 363). Only one final action is necessary to complete her metamorphosis from egoism to true Christian humility. Maggie must effect a reunion with Tom. And so, filled with a strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the later impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only
the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union (MF, 567)

Maggie poles her boat down the suddenly flood-swelled Floss to find final peace for herself through reconciliation with Tom. Brother and sister go down happily to their deaths in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together. (MF, 570)

So run the last scenes of an otherwise brilliant novel. After being presented with one of the most realistic and exciting portraits of a woman's life to be found in English fiction we are suddenly expected to accept completely the ridiculous combination of sentimental idealism, incredible events, and overblown religious rhetoric that makes up the final book of The Mill on the Floss. Of course it did not then, nor does it now work. Ever since The Mill's first publication, Book VII "The Final Rescue" has irritated critical sensibilities. According to Henry James, the story is told as if it were destined to have, if not a strictly happy termination, at least one within ordinary probabilities. As it stands the denouement shocks the reader most painfully. Nothing has prepared him for it; the story does not move towards it; it casts no shadow before it. Did such a denouement lie within the author's intentions from the first or was it a tardy expedient for the solution of Maggie's difficulties?²

In The Great Tradition F.R. Leavis says that in the final scene on the river Eliot loses the "insight and understanding" which so powerfully informs the rest of the novel:

Something so like a kind of daydream indulgence
we are all familiar with, could not have imposed itself on the novelist as the right ending if her mature intelligence had been fully engaged, giving her full self-knowledge. The flooded river has no symbolic or metaphorical value. It is only the dreamed-of heroic act—the act that shall vindicate us against a harshly misjudging world, bring emotional fulfilment and (in others) changes of heart, and provide a gloriously tragic curtain. Not that the sentimental in it is embarrassingly gross, but the finality is not that of great art, and the significance is what I have suggested—a revealed immaturity. 3

Even Joan Bennett, one of Eliot's recent and most enthusiastic supporters, can find nothing very good to say about this aspect of The Mill:

We are temporarily carried away by the vivid description of her death, but the inflated, melodramatic style of the close is a symptom of the relaxation of the author's serious concern with her characters. 4

Unfortunately, disagreeable and irritating as the final scenes may be, they are still there (as Mirah is still "there" in Daniel Deronda) and must be dealt with. It is obvious that Evans herself had a special feeling for the end of this novel, "which I had looked forward to with much attention and premeditation from the beginning." 5 In letters to Barbara Bodichon and John Blackwood, Lewes reported Marian's tremendous emotional involvement with the final destinies of Tom and Maggie:

Mrs. Lewes is getting her eyes redder and swollener every morning as she lives through her tragic story. 6

'My good lady' (style choisi!)...is reddening her eyes, and blackening her paper, over the foolish sorrows of two foolish young persons of her imaginary acquaintance. 7
And Herbert Spencer mentions that at about the same time when he called upon the couple, Lewes, who was just leaving the house said, "Oh, Spencer do go in and comfort Polly [a pet name for Marian]; she is crying her eyes out over the death of her children." Eliot's own letter written to John Blackwood the day she finished the manuscript suggests that she had no doubts about the denouement of *The Mill on the Floss*. Her usual tone of self-effacement is certainly there, but the sense of personal satisfaction "with a job well done" is even stronger,

> Your letter yesterday morning helped to inspire me for the last eleven pages, if they have any inspiration in them. There were written in a furor, but I daresay there is not a word different from what it would have been if I had written them at the slowest pace.

If Eliot was as content with the ending of the novel as this letter suggests, when the critics have been so consistently negative, there must be a serious problem of interpretation. Are we reading the novel in a way different from that Eliot intended us to? What are the problems she felt Maggie Tulliver was dealing with and how does her return to Tom and their mutual death by drowning resolve them? And where and why in the novel does our understanding depart from hers so that we are left dissatisfied by the final scenes?

(ii)

As Barbara Hardy points out in Chapter IV of *The Novels of George Eliot*, one of Marian Evans' main concerns as a
novelist (and one can only conclude from reading her letters, as a human being too) was with the problem of egoism. Like Feuerbach, Eliot saw personal pride and wilfulness as the factors most antagonistic to and destructive of social harmony. The truly moral or "religious" (in its broadest sense) life must, in her words, "express less care for personal consolation and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man." And it is towards this understanding of the individual's duty to the larger community in which he lives that she tries to move her characters. Renunciation of self, or at least the abandonment of that part of self-love which blinds one to the needs and concerns of others is of course the means of effecting this end. As Bernard Paris comments:

The primal undeniable ground of value for Eliot is the individual's importance to himself; it is a fact that his own pleasures and pains are of great moment to him. This is the subjective basis of morality. The objective basis of morality is other men; and we become aware of it only when we regard our fellows objectively, that is, as subjects in themselves to whom we are objects. If I am important to myself, and other men have an inner life like my own, then they must be important to themselves. I evaluate the actions of my fellows in terms of the effects which they have upon me. Similarly, they must evaluate my actions by the effects which I have upon them. Other men, then, give my deeds, my life, an objective value. The moral satisfaction that we derive from living for the good of others is dependent upon the degree to which we regard our fellow-men objectively, upon our ability to project ourselves imaginatively into the consciousness of others and into the future. By living for others, we also live in others, and by envisioning the effects of our existence upon those who live after us we can experience a sense of impersonal immortality. "I think it is possible," Eliot wrote, "for this sort of impersonal life to attain great intensity."
Eliot fully recognizes too (in theory at least) the distinction between real self-abnegation and the glories of easy martyrdom. She had little patience with those who thought renunciation was painless, that it was a matter of merely small and unimportant sacrifices to insure one's moral superiority. In an essay on Geraldine Jewsbury's *Constnace Herbert* she criticizes the author for her promotion of this idea. The heroine in the novel has had to renounce her fiancé because of a family heritage of insanity, but everything is ultimately resolved to her advantage when in the end he is discovered to have been an "egoistic, shallow worldling" who is not worth marrying anyway.

The notion that duty looks stern, but all the while has her hand full of sugar-plums, with which she will reward us by-and-by, is the favourite cant of optimists, who try to make out that this tangled wilderness of life has a plan as easy to trace as that of a Dutch garden; but it really undermines all true moral development by perpetually substituting something extrinsic as a motive to action, instead of the immediate impulse of love or justice, which alone makes an action truly moral.12

But for the individual who does achieve true selflessness there is reward. In return for the loss of worldly pleasures one gains the joys of inner harmony and peace of mind much in the same way that Jesus promised that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

Although it is perhaps a little simplistic to say that individual egoism is the root of all human misery, given the context of Eliot's novels one cannot help sympathizing
with her point of view. Throughout *The Mill on the Floss* we see all too clearly the dangers of pride and exercise of personal will without regard to the sensibilities of others. The determination of Tom, his father, Wakem and Stephen Guest to follow their own immediate desires leads only to misery for others and deep dissatisfaction with themselves. But the moral lesson of *The Mill on the Floss* is played out, not through the lives of these people, but through Maggie Tulliver.

To my mind this is the root of our basic uneasiness with the denouement of the novel. The process of renunciation is worked out, not through the life of one of the men who most needs to learn that lesson, but through a woman. Women are certainly as liable to the sins of pride as men, but in Maggie's case her egoism is so clearly revealed to be a healthy reaction against the limitations imposed on her self-development by the system of patriarchy that it is difficult to see her final scenes of self-abnegation as anything else but a tedious re-statement of all the old myths about woman as self-sacrificing martyr. The problem then is not with the idea of resignation—though limited, it is a valid enough theory—but that it is not worked out where it should be and that, in fact, it is worked out in direct contradiction to what we feel are very different needs of a particular character.
Tom has always been the centre of Maggie's life and the nature of their relationship is the clue to the process of understanding her behaviour and thus our dissatisfaction with "The Final Rescue." Although Maggie may worship Tom, he has little if any respect for her. Tom has completely absorbed (and in this way he too is a victim) the anti-feminist bias of the world around him which scarcely recognizes girls or women as human beings.

Timpson had a large family of daughters; Mr. Riley felt for him. (MF, 40)

Mr. Tulliver felt very much as if the air had been cleared of obtrusive flies now the women were out of the room. (MF, 93)

You've got enough o'gells, Gritty," he added, in a tone half compassionate, half reproachful. (MF, 100)

Tom feels smugly superior to the poor female Maggie,

I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy. I always have half-sovereigns and sovereigns for my Christmas boxes because I shall be a man, and you only have five-shilling pieces because you're only a girl. (MF, 51)

Although Tom may despise the opposite sex as lesser human beings, ironically he will accept Maggie only if she is the model of perfect femininity; for he has also understood from his father and the males around him that the supposedly feminine qualities of passivity, obedience and decorum enhance a man's sense of his own virility.

I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute--being a good looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing, but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose 'cause she was a bit weak,
like, for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. (MF, 33)

And his second subject of meditation was the "contrariness of the female mind", as typically exhibited in Mrs. Glegg. That a creature made—in the genealogical sense—out of a man's rib, and in this particular case maintained in the highest respectability without any trouble of her own, should be normally in a state of contradiction to the blandest propositions and even to the most accommodating concessions was a mystery in the scheme of things to which he had often in vain sought a clue in the early chapters of Genesis. (MF, 144)

Maggie has a little trouble in fulfilling this male ideal. She is definitely not the charming little "piece of fluff" that Lucy Deane is,

And there's Lucy Deane's such a good child—you may set her on a stool, and there she'll sit for an hour together, and never offer to get off. I can't help loving the child as if she was my own. (MF, 60)

Nor is she particularly masculine, or in any other way unusual. In her early childhood at least, Maggie has the high spirits of any child regardless of sex. Rather than a "white kitten" she is more like a "rough, dark overgrown puppy" (MF, 79). She thinks patchwork is "foolish work" and is not interested in having her hair curled. But to Mrs. Tulliver these are indications of a lack of "normal" femininity nothing short of catastrophe:

Folks 'ull think it's a judgment on me as I've got such a child—they'll think I've done something wicked. (MF, 42)

She and the other adults in Maggie's world use a double standard in judging even childhood behaviour. What is "natural" in Tom as a boy is reprehensible in Maggie because
she is a girl:

"Maggie's ten times naughtier when they [the aunts] come than she is other days, and Tom doesn't like 'em, bless him—though it's more nat'rul in a boy than a gell."

Even Maggie's obvious intelligence is suspect:

"An o'er 'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep--she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." (MF, 25)

It is Tom, the male, who should have had the family brains,

"But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to, an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing." (MF, 33)

Maggie would like to please her family and often wishes that she had Lucy's kind of social acceptability:

She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy, with a little crown on her head and a little sceptre in her hand...only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy's form. (MF, 79)

But there is another part of her which longs for more than the life of a helpless, obedient, unthinking female:

Maggie...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. (MF, 264)

And it is this tension between social acceptability and a search for personal identity outside the narrow boundaries of the conventional female role which is the pattern of Maggie's life as it unfolds in The Mill on the Floss.
These two desires are of course not inherently antagonistic, but in Maggie's case they become so. Though her mother relegates her to second place—"If Mrs. Tulliver had a strong feeling, it was fondness for her boy" (MF, 48)—and the aunts will always have to be reckoned with, her father's love and her strong attachment to the Mill itself could bring her a good deal of satisfaction even in the more passive feminine part she would have to play to please them. But there is another member of the family to be considered—Tom. And to be accepted by Tom means complete and utter submission to his masculine will. Maggie must not act or think for herself; she must only be. The only identity Maggie will have with Tom is what he wants her to be.

"You're always setting yourself up above me and everyone else, and I've wanted to tell you about it several times. You ought not to have spoken as you did to my uncles and aunts—you should leave it to me to take care of my mother and you and not put yourself forward. You think you know better than anyone, but you're almost always wrong. I can judge much better than you can." (MF, 263)

Thus what might have been a reasonable option for Maggie becomes an act of extreme submission. There is no compromise as far as her relationship with Tom is concerned. Only by denying her own individuality, by capitulating completely to Tom's male dominance, can Maggie gain his approval. If she wishes to express herself at all, outside of the common definition of ladylike perfection, she comes into direct confrontation with him. And defying Tom is like defying the whole social system. He is the authority figure.
in her life. He is always right, his actions are always approved; of the two of them it is clearly he, the male, who has the power. The situation is further complicated in that there is no one on Maggie's "side" to assure her that she is not some kind of monster, that her desire for self-expression is not unnatural. Her father may be affectionate and indulgent, but he still knows what a woman's place is. Whenever Maggie acts out, however innocuously, any feeling of satisfaction is almost immediately replaced by feelings of guilt. She has not done something merely "mischievious;" she has somehow attacked the rightful order of the world. It is from this perspective that we form our initial sense of the novel's conflict. Maggie's rebellion against Tom is not simply wilfulness but a healthy expression of self. Equally her compulsion to constantly seek his forgiveness is a sign not of true humility but of neurotic guilt.

In the very last paragraph of the novel, as Maggie and Tom go to their deaths, Eliot describes how the two have finally been reunited in the love for each other which began early in their childhood. We have been told on many previous occasions in the novel of this deep brother-sister love, but we never really see it demonstrated, at least not from Tom. He loves Maggie only when he needs her:

In his secret heart he yearned to have Maggie with him, and was almost ready to dote on her exasperating acts of forgetfulness, though, when he was at home, he always represented it as a great favour on his part to let Maggie trot by his side on his pleasure excursions. (MF, 169)
And as for Maggie it seems as if there is more fear in her love for Tom than pure affection.

Maggie saw a cloud on his brow when he came home which checked her joy at his coming so much sooner than she had expected, and she dared hardly speak to him as he stood silently throwing the small gravel-stones into the mill-dam. (MF, 70)

This is not to deny the validity or importance of those first strong attachments we make, especially between brother and sister, which Eliot always felt were so meaningful:

That pic-nic of the young ones to Strathtryrum was very pretty, and a good enough subject for a poem. I hope that the brother and sister love each other very dearly; life might be so enriched if that relation were made the most of, as one of the highest forms of friendship. A good while ago I made a poem, in the form of eleven sonnets after the Shakspeare type, on the childhood of a brother and sister—little descriptive bits on the mutual influences in their small lives. This was always one of my best loved subjects.13

However, one cannot help but question how much, in Maggie and Tom's case, we are really convinced of this love, and consequently how necessary we then feel that Maggie's reconciliation with Tom is to her salvation. The last scenes of The Mill seem to be saying that the latter is utterly dependent on the former, but I want to show that Maggie's final reunion with Tom is for all the wrong reasons, given the strong impressions of her need for independence from Tom created by the rest of the novel. In going to Tom, Maggie is suddenly accepting all the restrictions on female behaviour that she has fought so long and hard to resist. It is guilt and fear, not love, which one feels is the moving force behind the last actions of the novel.
(iv)

That in Tom Maggie has to cope not only with the insensitivity of a brother but with the cruelties of the patriarchal system, is clear from the story of their childhood. When Maggie forgets to feed his rabbits, Tom turns on her with totally unnecessary venom:

Tom stopped immediately in his walk and turned towards Maggie. "You forgot to feed 'em, then, and Harry forgot?" he said, his colour heightening for a moment, but soon subsiding. "I'll pitch into Harry--I'll have him turned away. And I don't love you, Maggie. You shan't go fishing with me tomorrow. I told you to go and see the rabbits every day."...."you're a naughty girl," said Tom severely, "and I'm sorry I bought you the fish-line. I don't love you."

"O, Tom, it's very cruel," sobbed Maggie. "I'd forgive you if YOU forgot anything--I wouldn't mind what you did--I'd forgive you and love you."

"Yes, you're silly--but I never DO forget things--I don't." (MF, 51)

Even over the silly incident of the apricot pastry Tom punishes Maggie for her victory in a fair contest. According to Tom a girl's only value is to confirm his own sense of power:

Tom condescended to admire her Lucy's houses as well as his own, the more readily because she had asked him to teach her. (MF, 106)

Maggie must learn to accept her secondary status:

Tom, indeed, was of the opinion that Maggie was a silly little thing; all girls were silly--they couldn't throw a stone so as to hit anything, couldn't do anything with a pocket-knife, and were frightened at frogs. Still he was very fond of his sister and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong. (MF, 56)

Tom's experience, however, is not all effortless superio-
rity. Eliot does something very interesting with Tom; she puts him in the "female" position and lets him have some of Maggie's knowledge of the world. The pressures of school life, where Tom is no longer master but student (and an inferior one at that), reduce his usual self confidence so much that he became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life before. He had a large share of pride which had hitherto found itself very comfortable in the world, despising Old Goggles and reposing in the sense of unquestioned rights, but now this same pride met with nothing but bruises and crushes. (MF, 165)

The author's gentle mocking tone suggests that this might be a good thing for Tom and one can only agree that some sense of a woman's general sense of inferiority might temper some of his masculine aggressiveness and increase his tolerance for Maggie's need to express herself,

his pride got into an uneasy condition which quite nullified his boyish self-satisfaction and gave him something of the girl's susceptibility... Tom, as I said, had never been so much like a girl in his life before. (MF, 166)

Unfortunately, Tom just suffers: he does not learn that what is an unpleasant episode for him is the story of Maggie's life. In fact, Tom's "feminine" experience only drives him to re-assert his mastery over Maggie,

"You help me, you silly little thing!" said Tom in such high spirits at this announcement that he quite enjoyed the idea of confounding Maggie by showing her a page of Euclid. "I should like to see you doing one of my lessons! Why, I learn Latin too! Girls never learn such things. They're too silly." (MF, 169)

Because Tom's domination is so severely limiting to this
ebullient little girl it is difficult, as I have suggested above, not to see her rebellion as both necessary and healthy. But whether Eliot does is another question. For the most part Eliot seems to be clearly sympathetic to Maggie, recounting her various misadventures and frustrations with warmth and affection. Yet at the same time a muted note of criticism often creeps in suggesting that much in Maggie's behaviour is selfish or egoistic,

Maggie soon thought she had been hours in the attic and it must be tea-time, and they were all having their tea and not thinking of her. Well, then, she would stay up there and starve herself--hide herself behind the tub, and stay there all night, and then they would all be frightened, and Tom would be sorry. Thus Maggie thought in the pride of her heart...(MF, 53)

Maggie felt an unexpected pang. She had thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her mother and aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty--that was out of the question--she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl. (MF, 83)

Maggie...prepared herself to prove her capability of helping him in Euclid. She began to read with full confidence in her own powers, but presently, becoming quite bewildered, her face flushed with irritation. It was unavoidable--she must confess her incompetency, and she was not fond of humiliation. (MF, 172)

Certainly on a theoretical level one must admit that Eliot has a point. Though Maggie never displays the cruelty that marks Tom's response to the same problem of "feminine" frustration, too often Maggie's search for "something more" is not real or honest. She acts in resentment or frustration,
not only gaining nothing for herself but sometimes hurting others in the bargain. One can and does sympathize entirely with her resentment of Lucy who "always did what she was desired to do" \((\text{MF, 113})\) with "not a hair out o'place" \((\text{MF, 26})\) and who was held up to Maggie as a model of ultra-femininity; but pushing Lucy into the mud has only negative results for both of them. Equally, though Maggie experiences "a sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain" \((\text{MF, 82})\) when she chops off her bothersome hair, that feeling of power is short-lived in the face of the "chorus of reproach and derision" \((\text{MF, 87})\) from her mother and aunts. And finally, hammering nails into her doll fetish is like childhood temper tantrums, hardly a positive way of declaring one's individual identity.

Accusations of wilfulness and pride are then true enough. But to put it bluntly, considering what else we know about Maggie, do we really care? In Dorothea's case (as the next chapter will point out) the situation is a little different. Although we are close to her, we are also involved with the other characters in her life (we sympathize with Casaubon in a way that is never possible with Tom) and so clearly understand how dangerous her egoism can be. But with \textit{The Mill on the Floss}, even though Eliot said that "Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie,"\(^{14}\) it is Maggie's novel. And what we come to value most about Maggie is her involvement in a kind of archetypal battle against the strictures and repression of a woman's life under a patriarchal system.
When she resists the pressures put on her to conform to a certain image simply because that is what a woman is supposed to be or do, we are entirely in sympathy with her. Thus if her actions are sometimes egoistic or selfish, the reader's impulse is not to criticize but to understand. The conditions that shape her life as a young girl lead her often to lash out blindly rather than to act constructively. The continual rejection from her aunts, her mother and especially Tom robs her of self-confidence and often leads to irrational oversensitivity. She is also helplessly ignorant. Her family does not feel it is necessary to educate a mere girl:

"And allays at her book! But it's bad," Mr. Tulliver added, sadly, checking this blameable exultation, "a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt. (MF, 31)

And Maggie's own unguided attempts to educate herself only increase her disabilities:

...in travelling over her small mind you would have found the most unexpected ignorance as well as unexpected knowledge...her thoughts generally were the oddest mixture of clear-eyed acumen and blind dreams. (MF, 135)

The education provided for boys was hardly enlightening but Maggie does not have any intellectual stimulation which might help her get some perspective on what her position as a female means. Even if we know that her rebellion is doomed (considering her ignorance and the impenetrable brick wall of patriarchal values with which she continually collides) we are still more concerned with the struggle itself than the egoism or selfishness that it may cause.
To say that we are not bothered by Maggie's egoism, and thus that the last chapter resolves the wrong problem, is obviously to make a very sweeping statement about all those incidents in *The Mill on the Floss* which I have not yet considered. It may be true that in the story of Maggie's childhood we see the novel in terms of a conflict between the powerful forces of patriarchy and the rights of a woman to the development of her full potential, but it is still necessary to show that we continue to be led to interpret and judge Maggie's action in this way as she becomes older and faces dilemmas more serious than whether or not she wants her hair curled. What is the meaning of the choices that she must make in her relationships with Philip Wakem, Lucy Deane and Stephen Guest? Are there complicating factors introduced in the second half which might lead us to a different interpretation of Maggie's conflict with Tom and so justify and make more probable the ending of the novel?

Mr. Tulliver's failure at law marks the end of both Maggie and Tom's childhood. The family roles have suddenly been reversed. The parents are now helpless children and Tom and Maggie must take on the adult responsibilities of the household. For Maggie there is one added factor. When they were children her father was something of a buffer between her and Tom. If her brother despised her intelligence or had no understanding of the frustrations that resulted
from many of her misadventures, she could still find affection and security with her father. But with him rendered practically infantile by a serious stroke, she is left alone with Tom. It is a crucial point in their relationship. He can either accept her as an equal, in which case they might work together to restore both the family name and fortune, or he can again insist on his masculine superiority and thus bring into their adult lives the same conflict that marked their childhood.

The choice Tom makes is clear from his reaction to Maggie's behaviour at the first family council held after Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy. He will make all the decision; he alone will bear the burden of the family's misfortunes. Maggie is to find satisfaction in sitting with her mother and earning what she can through plain sewing. It is the old male/female story again, and Eliot shows her understanding of and sympathy with Maggie's position of frustrating inactivity:

So it has been since the days of Hecuba and of Hector, Tamer of horses; inside the gates, the women with streaming hair and uplifted hands offering prayers, watching the world's combat from afar, filling their long empty days with memories and fears; outside, the men, in fierce struggle with things divine and human, quenching memory in the stronger light of purpose, losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the hurrying ardour of action. (ME, 342)

Maggie's natural energy, her desire to do something has as its only outlet rage at her aunts and uncles—which of course Tom sees only as another example of his sister's
wilfulness and desire to undermine his absolute authority. Even her facetious suggestion that, if she could, she might teach Tom bookkeeping is sneered at, "You teach! Yes, I daresay. That's always the tone you take," said Tom" (MF, 263). Tom's admittedly difficult situation as the new "head of the family" leads him only to reassert his childhood mastery over Maggie. It is the schoolroom situation all over again. Tom feels helpless and insecure. Instead of turning to Maggie for help or even emotional support he reaffirms his sense of self by transferring his own feelings of inadequacy to her:

Poor Tom! He had just come from being lectured and made to feel his inferiority: the reaction of his strong, self-asserting nature must take place somehow, and here was a case in which he could justly show himself dominant. Maggie's cheek flushed and her lip quivered with conflicting resentment and affection. (MF, 263)

Maggie's turning to religious renunciation shortly after this incident is not very surprising given her history. On the one hand it is a way for her to appease Tom by punishing herself but it can also be seen as another expression of her independence. All outward action has been completely frustrated by her own ignorance or rejected by others as improper to her womanly place. In religious fervour Maggie, like many other frustrated young women (and like Dorothea in Middlemarch) finds some identity for herself. Giving up everything at least makes her somebody, marks her as a special person. However, it is this very self-interest which Eliot finds distressing:
She threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act. (MF, 325)

But I would suggest that what Eliot calls a fault—the intensity which she criticizes—is in truth the factor which makes Maggie's religious phase bearable to the reader.

This last statement most certainly requires further explanation and I think Bernard J. Paris' recent article, "The Inner Conflicts of Maggie Tulliver: A Horneyan Analysis" may prove useful. Here Paris explains how, in his book Experiments in Life he had tried to show that the end of the novel was appropriate because "in terms of the novel's own analysis of motives" it did adequately answer the questions which Maggie's experience raised. But he has since reviewed that position and found it inadequate. He now feels that there is a distinction to be made between how we are supposed to interpret Maggie's action and how we actually do understand her pattern of behaviour:

George Eliot's characterization of Maggie is brilliant; and, given brilliant characterization, we must say that, in one sense, the author has understood the character perfectly. George Eliot's intuitive grasp and mimetic presentation of Maggie's psychology are flawless; her attitudes, values and analyses are considerably less trustworthy. There is often a disparity between the novel's representation of Maggie and the novel's interpretation of Maggie. In the past I have been so busy showing Maggie's function in the novel's overall thematic structure that I have failed to see how much of Maggie escapes such analysis, how little she can be understood as a character in this way. In order to understand the character that George
Eliot has actually presented (rather than the one she thinks she has presented) it is necessary to employ not thematic, but psychological analysis.

I disagree with Paris' particular "psychological analysis" of Maggie (he still talks about her in terms of "unnatural" female aggressiveness) but his point about the character that George Eliot "thinks" she is presenting, in contrast to the one she does, is vitally important.

The first place where the contradiction he describes becomes a problem is in this period of Maggie's "renunciation." Until now the novel seems to be clearly a conflict between Maggie's courageous desire for self-determination and the refusal of a patriarchal society (represented by Tom) to allow that freedom to a female. But when Eliot criticizes the selfishness of her renunciation (which of course implies that she would approve of selfless renunciation) she seems to be invoking an entirely different set of values. Suddenly it seems Maggie is the "sinner," that it is her own egoism, and not at all Tom's cruelty, which is the cause of her misery.

It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of her universe, and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires—of taking her stand out of herself and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole. (ME, 323)

Statements such as the above, of which there are several in this part of the novel, are very clear indications of how Eliot interprets Maggie's situation and where she thinks
her salvation lies. But I would suggest that we read these passages very differently. Given the sense of the novel we have had up to this point, Maggie's desire to renounce all worldly pleasure sounds like an expression of neurotic guilt at having defied the authority of Tom. If one were reading backwards from the end of the novel her self-condemnation would make at least some thematic sense. But as her story has been related so far, one cannot help thinking that were she to achieve that ultimate state of selflessness, where she perceived her own life as "an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole," it would not be a gaining of inner harmony but rather a capitulation to the passive feminine role that Tom insists she play. That is why I say we perceive the selfish element of her religious fervour as something positive. It means that her desire for some individual identity is not yet dead. It is the first of those situations in her adult life where we feel Maggie's egoism is more praiseworthy than blameable.

It is to the problems presented by this incident of Maggie's religious conversion that we will return in order to understand Eliot's choice of the novel's conclusion. The point here is that this is the only episode until the last book of The Mill that does present any serious problems of interpretation. We are now approaching the situations with Philip, Lucy and Stephen, and like that of the earlier events of her childhood, the meaning of these is very clear. We are back to a well-defined conflict between Maggie and Tom,
back to a struggle between the most elementary issues of feminism and the practices of a patriarchal system.

(vi)

Maggie's "Romola phase" does not last very long because Philip Wakem's re-entrance in the novel at the height of her religious renunciation provides another, more appealing outlet for the desire for self-determination which is still alive in Maggie. Thus we can view her decision to meet secretly with Philip in the Red Deeps not as simple wilfulness but as an attempt, though again a futile one, to establish somehow an identity for herself outside the female stereotypes of saint or domestic drudge. On the one hand, Philip has a great deal to offer her. Though from the novel's description of provincial education we may suspect that his learning is neither broad nor deep, he can still give Maggie "books, converse, affection--she might hear tidings of the world from which her mind had not yet lost its sense of exile" (MF, 360). And what is more, from Maggie's point of view Philip can give her the brotherly love which Tom refuses, "What happiness have I ever had so great as being with you--since I was a little girl--the days Tom was good to me" (MF, 372). At least temporarily Maggie can bring her two worlds together.

However, it is clear that the escape to the Red Deeps is not a real one; even forgetting for a moment the conflict with her family that it must necessitate, this relationship
with Philip offers her very little true freedom and will only, like her other adventures in self-realization frustrate her even more. Her attitude to Philip is as romantic as her fanciful dream that "she would go to some great man--Walter Scott, perhaps--and tell him how wretched and how clever she was, and he would surely do something for her" (MF, 320). She immediately places Philip above herself in the position of mentor: "And you would teach me everything--wouldn't you? Greek and everything?" (MF, 212). "Your mind is a sort of world to me: you can tell me all I want to know" (MF, 372—a foretaste here of Dorothea, Esther Lyon, Gwendolen). And Philip's response falls into the same pattern. For him, their meetings mean far more than simple, good companionship. While Maggie earnestly talks of aesthetics, religion, novels and painting, Philip searches her face for signs of love. In her emotional and intellectual deprivation he sees an advantage for himself.

...he clutched passionately the possibility that she might love him: perhaps the feeling would grow if she could come to associate him with that watchful tenderness which her nature would be so keenly alive to. If any woman could love him, surely Maggie was that woman: there was such a wealth of love in her, and there was no one to claim it all. Then—the pity of it, that a mind like hers should be withering in its very youth, like a young forest tree, for want of the light and space it was formed to flourish in! (MF, 241)

In an odd sense, Maggie and Philip are too similar for either of them to be of much real help to the other. They are both caught up in the "feminine" predicament of rejection:
"I'm fit to speak to something better than you—
you poor spritied imp!" said Tom, lighting up im-
mediately at Philip's fire. "You know I won't hit
you because you're no better than a girl. But I'm
an honest man's son and your father's a rogue—
everybody says so! (MF, 201)

Consequently, like Maggie, Philip suffers from a "womanish"
over-sensitivity.

The slight spurt of peevish susceptibility which
had escaped him in their first interview was a
symptom of a perpetually recurring mental ailment—
half of it nervous irritability, half of it the
heart-bitterness produced by the sense of his
deformity. In these fits of susceptibility every
glance seemed to him to be charged either with of-
fensive pity or with ill-repressed disgust—at the
very least it was an indifferent glance, and Philip
felt indifference as a child of the south feels the
chill air of a northern spring. (MF, 194)

Far from providing an escape for her, Philip increases Maggie's
isolation. He is not leading her toward anything. He merely
wants to make her an alien, like himself.

Maggie's situation at this point is of course compli-
cated by a more easily recognizable moral dilemma. In meeting
Philip, the son of the man on whom her father has sworn re-
venge, she will bring very real distress to her family—
"cause new misery to those who had the primary natural claim
on her" (MF, 365). The attraction of her father's love and
her domestic ties are very strong and understandable. If the
choice were simply between her father's affection and her
relationship with Philip we might clearly say that Maggie
made the wrong choice, for as I have shown, her afternoons in
the Red Deeps will not bring her close to the kind of freedom
she seeks—no closer than, for instance, did her childhood
adventure with the gypsies. Yet in the shadows of her affection for her father (and as we shall see later in her ties to Lucy and Philip) 'lurks' the presence of Tom, who has "his terrible clutch on her conscience and her deepest dread" (MF, 380). Choosing Tom over Philip may mean the recognition from him that she has always wanted, but it also means complete submission to his masculine authority and resignation to the feminine role that Tom finds acceptable. As Tom puts it in a later interview when Maggie asks permission to see Philip at Lucy Deane's,

I wished my sister to be a lady, and I would always have taken care of you, as my father desired, until you were well married...you might have sense enough to see that a brother who goes out into the world and mixes with men necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. (MF, 429)

Thus, under the circumstances, Maggie's decision to continue her meetings with Philip constitutes the healthier choice. Her options are acceptance of the feminine stereotype or the continuation of her search for some kind of identity beyond that restrictive pattern of behaviour; this is made clear by Tom's interpretation of her actions:

"Well," said Tom, with cold scorn, "If your feelings are so much better than mine, let me see you show them in some other way than by conduct that's likely to disgrace us all--than by ridiculous flights into one extreme and then into another. Pray, how have you shown your love that you talk of, either to me or my father? By disobeying and deceiving us. I have a different way of showing my affection."

"Because you are a man, Tom, and have power and can do something in the world."

"Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can." (MF, 383)
Maggie ultimately will "submit to those that can" but at this point her need for self-assertion, "a self-assertion that respects the rights of others, but insists upon one's own rights as well," as Bernard Paris puts it, is very much alive. For the first time, and also the last, she really separates herself from Tom's value system:

So I will submit to what I acknowledge and feel to be right. I will submit even to what is unreasonable from my father, but I will not submit to it from you. (MF, 383)

Maggie's determination, after her father's death to be independent of Tom of course has no chance of success. She cannot make her fortune in the business world as Tom has; nor can she languish in Europe like Philip. The only option open to a young woman is governessing. But the dreary world of teaching and poverty only further dulls her sensibilities. When she arrives at Lucy Deane's for a short holiday Maggie's "highly-strung, hungry nature--just come away from a third-rate schoolroom, with all its jarring sounds and petty round of tasks" (MF, 420--a response which Eliot does not criticize) is bound to respond to the first seeming escape that presents itself.

Escape in this instance is Stephen Guest. Though we can agree with critics who claim that he is not worthy of Maggie, to so limit the judgment of Stephen's role is to fail to understand Maggie's history up to this point. Her
desire for self-assertion is still very real but it has had few opportunities for development. Nor has Maggie been able to acquire any of that "prudence and self-command" (MP, 307) which might temper her passions and enthusiasms into rational judgment. What we may see as purely sexual attraction to Stephen seems to Maggie a way out of all her difficulties. Stephen's love seems to give her a sense of self that she has never experienced before.

There were admiring eyes always awaiting her now; she was no longer an unheeded person, liable to be chid, from whom attention was continually claimed, and on whom no one felt bound to confer any. (MF, 43)

Unlike her feeling for Philip, her attraction to Stephen is not mixed up with pity or self-identification. But unfortunately, Maggie confuses masculine adoration for true respect. Stephen has no particular understanding of Maggie beyond the realization that she is a rather unusual young woman. That increases his desire, not to help Maggie or to sympathize with her, but to put it bluntly, to master her:

To see such a creature subdued by love for one would be a lot worth having. (MF, 448)

Again, as with her secret relationship with Philip, this rather second-rate option for freedom is balanced by very sincere ties to Lucy and Philip from whom, like her father, she will be alienated by choosing to follow her own immediate desires. And, as noted earlier, if the choice were this simple the right action would be clear. But once more it is Tom who is the complicating factor. Though off-stage during most of this action, he is certainly hovering in the wings. When
Maggie visits him at Bob Jakin's; her simultaneous fear of Tom and need for his approval are reinforced.

Maggie had hardly finished speaking in that chill, defiant manner before she repented and felt the dread of alienation from her brother. (MF, 428)

Again he makes clear her situation in relation to him. To be accepted by Tom means total submission—renunciation of any right to self-determination outside of the female stereotype—"I wished my sister to be a lady." If we understand her choice in these terms, between self-defeat and even the most illusory feeling of recognition, running away with Stephen contains at least a germ of healthy self-assertion.

In fact, eloping with Stephen is the most defiant step Maggie has ever taken. This is no adventure to Dunlow Common to take refuge with the gypsies, no short walk to the Red Deeps to snatch a few hours with Philip. Floating down the Floss with Stephen marks the severance of the ties which bind her to all she knows—to Lucy, Philip, her mother, the memory of her father and her home. But most of all it is separation from Tom, not by mere defiant words this time, but through concrete action. And she cannot do it. Though her feelings for Philip and Lucy pull her strongly, it is her fear of Tom, her dread of defying the social conventions he represents, that finally settles the matter for her.

Maggie's breaking point (and Eliot's too, in terms of the consistency of her main character) comes with the nightmare that awakes her after the first night on the boat. The dream is a perfect representation of Maggie's conflict as it has
been described above. It is not Lucy and Philip who are the main figures in the dream, but Tom "who rowed past without looking at her" (MF, 516); and with him, accepted by him, is Lucy in the epitome of the female role—the Virgin. However believable her arguments with Stephen may be after this point, we feel that it is the image of Tom's anger and the desire for his forgiveness which draws her back to St. Ogg's. The tension has finally been broken; Maggie has been defeated and all that is left is to convince Tom that he has won.

(viii)

In keeping with the pattern of her dream, Maggie first goes on her return from the trip with Stephen not to Lucy or Philip but to Tom, and she goes with the hope that he will punish her:

She almost desired to endure the severity of Tom's reproof, to submit in patient silence to that harsh disapproving judgment against which she had so often rebelled; it seemed no more than just to her now—who was weaker than she was? She craved that outward help to her better purpose which would come from complete, submissive confession—from being in the presence of one whose looks and words would be a reflection of her own conscience. (MF, 528)

If Eliot meant by Maggie's "own conscience" the neurotic guilt which has been built up in her by her failure or refusal to conform to Tom's image of what she should be, the ending of the novel might possibly work. The Mill on the Floss could then be read as a story that talks not of the "wrong-
ness" but of the impossibility of rebellion and Maggie's history and final renunciation would be in perfect keeping with each other. Furthermore, from Maggie's experience we would discover something about the supposedly inherent female qualities of submission and passivity—that they are not at all inherent, but a posture often acquired out of fear of male ostracism.

Although with a slightly different emphasis, Bernard Paris suggests that the last chapters can be read in such a way to make them work with the rest of the novel. For him the main pattern of the novel is Maggie's neurotic search for recognition. The recrimination that Maggie heaps upon herself during the period of "waiting" at St. Ogg's is clearly masochistic and her rescue of Tom is a final attempt to justify herself in his eyes, and find glory through suffering. But I think to interpret the last book this way, or in the manner I suggest in the preceding paragraph means we have to read so much between the lines we might as well be dealing with another novel. In the incident of Maggie's renunciation there was some ambiguity, but there can be no question of Eliot's intentions in the last chapters. She clearly means us to think Maggie has done the "right" thing. This is a happy ending and there is no distinction discoverable between the author's and the character's feelings. By returning to St. Ogg's, by willingly submitting to, and in fact embracing, misery and social ostracism, Maggie has
finally conquered that wilfulness which marred her previous period of "renunciation." She has discovered that it was her own destructive egoism which brought her into conflict with Tom. Now, purged of that selfishness, she can return to him ready to accept joyfully the duties of "sisterhood." The fortunate arrival of the flood gives her that opportunity:

Along with the sense of danger and possible rescue for those long-remembered beings at the old home, there was an undefined sense of reconciliation with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? (MF, 566)

And the example of the sister who chose to lose her life in trying to save that of her brother's will live on like the legend of the Virgin of the Floss who "sat in the prow, shedding a light around as of the moon in its brightness so that the rowers in the gathering darkness took heart and pulled anew" (MF, 141).

The problem of course is that Eliot has told the story of Maggie Tulliver in such a way that the last chapters can only make us think that the novel has completely lost its direction. Her return to St. Ogg's and her ultimate sacrifice for Tom do not appear to be an example of abandonment of self but of defeat of self. Eliot may have meant to talk about Maggie in terms of her personhood but what she did was to talk about her in terms of her "womanhood." Maggie's choice is supposed to be between selfish rebelliousness and
recognition of her ties and consequent duties to her family and community. But in every instance we discover it to be between healthy self-determination and submission to the most extreme of feminine roles. The variable, as I have tried to show, is Tom. Maggie's relationship to him is clearly conditioned by more than simple family bonds. He represents not only the ties of affection but society's refusal to allow women the right of self-discovery. And Maggie is drawn towards him not merely out of sisterly love, but also out of her fear of defying that male-oriented system of values. It is completely understandable that she should be drawn towards the socially approved role he offers; that she capitulates so completely, with the full approval of her creator, is not. George Eliot suddenly pulls an about-face. She presents a struggle which she refuses (or is afraid) to see to its end. I am not suggesting that Maggie should have run away with Stephen nor that she should have made any unrealistic speeches about feminine rights. But the urge for self-definition was too strong in Maggie, and too much of a theme in the novel, to be dealt with at the end in terms of egoism versus altruism. To the questions raised by Maggie's struggle against patriarchy, Eliot answers that she has found happiness and peace in submission to Tom. This makes the last book of the novel a mockery of its beginning.

George Eliot falls back into her "all self-sacrifice is good" theory but forgets the qualification she herself put on
that statement made in commenting on Rochester's loyalty to his mad wife—"but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass."¹⁸ Though Maggie's relationship to Philip and Lucy cannot be ignored, is that a cause noble enough to justify such complete submission to Tom's diabolical law, that "anything is more endurable than to change our established formulae about women...to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings to be treated, one and all, with justice and sober reverence?"¹⁹

(ix)

There are many possible reasons for Eliot's complete loss of her grip on the novel in "The Final Rescue." I have already discussed at length her almost blind adherence to the Feuerbachian ideals of renunciation and resignation. But there is also her own contradictory feelings about the position of women as outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Eliot may understand how a woman's life is limited by the rule of male supremacy. But she does not at the same time realize that the image of woman as self-sacrificing martyr with which she leaves us is just another, more subtle, aspect of patriarchy. Thus for her there is no seeming contradiction between Maggie's situation as a female revealed in her childhood and her final submission to Tom.
Eliot's attitudes to the family are also worth considering. To her, any threat to the stability of family life was deplorable. When the story of Byron's affair with his half-sister was made public she pleaded that news of such incidents, even if true, be suppressed,

As to the Byron subject, nothing can outweigh to my mind the heavy social injury of familiarizing young minds with the desecration of family ties. The discussion of the subject in newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets, is simply odious to me, and I think it a pestilence likely to leave very ugly marks. One trembles to think how easily that moral wealth may be lost which it has been the work of ages to produce, in the refinement and differencing of the affectionate relations.20

Again and again throughout The Mill she talks about the importance of those bonds of mutual duty and love formed between father and son, mother and daughter, brother and sister. But she does not seem to recognize what she herself makes so clear, that it is often the family unit which is the most powerful factor in determining woman's place. As Lawyer Wakem says, "We do not ask what a woman does, we ask who she belongs to" (MF, 466). Maggie's mother was a Dodson. Now she is a Tulliver, and must submit to her husband's wishes. Maggie is a sister and a daughter and she must be nothing else.

The importance of the family to Eliot lies in its role as an institution in which people can learn much about their duties and responsibilities to others. But she does not see that from family relationships we learn not only the positive but also the negative lessons of the larger world.
Here men can more easily assert their mastery and women have no choice but to accept their role of submission.

To bring in biographical information to support a critical argument is always questionable, but there is such an obvious parallel between Maggie's and Marian Evans' experience that I think some reference to the author's personal life might be helpful in explaining the weakness of the last chapters of *The Mill on the Floss*. In the young lives of both the fictional and the real girl one finds an overall similarity. Both have a strong emotional attachment to an affectionate father, both go through a period of religious renunciation and, most important, both come into conflict with a strong-willed brother. On one occasion Marian reports to Mrs. and Mrs. Bray how Isaac flew into a violent passion over her decision to leave home, and stated that she should never "apply to him for anything whatever." As young women, both Maggie and Marian become involved with men whose situations were complicated by the presence of another woman. Both Maggie and Marian risk social ostracism to be with the men they loved. The similarity extends to the manner of their departure with their lovers: Marian and George boarding the steamer *Ravensbourne* and gliding down the Thames, Stephen and Maggie on a similar vessel heading down the Floss towards Mudport. And both couples spend the whole night on deck. This is, however, where the similarity ends. Marian stayed with George; Maggie returned to face the consequences of her action.
Although Marian Evans may have stood her ground she was often terribly depressed, as I pointed out in the introduction, by the common-law nature of her relationship with Lewes, and she felt strongly the public condemnation of her action. She knew that she had followed her own strict moral code, since no one else had been adversely affected by her union with Lewes, but her guilt was still tremendous. In *The Mill on the Floss* she tells very much the story of Marian Evans' life with the significant exception of her own "happy" ending. True, the fictional situation is somewhat complicated in that Maggie's elopement with Stephen is of direct consequence to Lucy and Philip (though, as Joan Bennett points out, "she cannot go back and save Lucy and Philip from the misery of knowing that they are not loved"). But I think the consequence we see the novel most directly concerned with is the social one, represented by Tom's anger. And by having Maggie return to Tom we can perhaps say that George Eliot vicariously absolves Marian Evans of the guilt that she feels over her relationship with Lewes. Tom is very much her brother Isaac Evans, who broke all association with her when she decided to live with Lewes. By means of the final reunion of Tom and Maggie she can fulfill her wish for reunion with her own brother, which came only many years later when she was officially and respectably married. In all the restrained tones of Tom Tulliver, Isaac formally accepted her relationship to him,
My dear Sister, I have much pleasure in availing myself of the present opportunity to break the long silence which has existed between us.²³

In her answer one cannot help hearing the wistful voice of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Our long silence has never broken the affection for you which began when we were little ones.²⁴

Whether out of guilt or not, it is always to this Victorian image of "the angel in the house" that Eliot returns. This never destroys a novel, except perhaps *Romola*, but it always diminishes its force. *The Mill on the Floss* is not by any means ruined by the last chapters, but it certainly is weakened. In *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* the damage is significantly less but still recognizable. Dorothea, Rosamond and Gwendolen all suffer from Eliot's inability to see their struggles to a satisfying conclusion. In each case, the novel could show the need for, and the possibility of, radical change in Victorian ideas about women. Instead, each turns into a Ruskinian lecture on the need for women to accept the definition of themselves provided by the patriarchal value system.
NOTES


6 Haight, Letters, III, 269 [George Henry Lewes to John Blackwood, Wandsworth, 5 March 1860]

7 Ibid., 269-70. [George Henry Lewes to Mme. Eugene Bodichon, Wandsworth, 6 March 1860]

8 Ibid., 270, n. 1.

9 Ibid., 278 [George Eliot to John Blackwood, Wandsworth, 22 March 1860]


15 Here Paris adds the following footnote: "When I speak of George Eliot in this essay, I am referring not to the author as a person existing outside of the work, but to the "implied author," the "official scribe," the author's "second self." For a discussion of these terms, see Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961), pp. 70-75. Stated in Booth's terms, my argument here is that the implied author of The Mill on the Floss is not in harmony with himself: there is a disparity between George Eliot as analyst and judge and George Eliot as imitator of character and action."


17 Ibid., p. 183.

18 Haight, Biography, p. 65.


21 Haight, Letters, II, 75. [George Eliot to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray and Sara Hennell, London, 31 December 1852]


24 Ibid., 287. [George Eliot to Isaac Pearson Evans, Milan, 26 May 1880]
III

Middlemarch

(1)

In terms of George Eliot's treatment of women, Middlemarch is not her most exciting novel. The Mill on the Floss and Daniel Deronda both explore the inner landscape of womanhood with greater intensity and accuracy. Dorothea's rather genteel battle against Middlemarch values does not have nearly the power of Maggie's long and tragic struggle with Tom, and for a detailed examination of the bitch character Rosamond can hardly compare to Gwendolen. But if Middlemarch does not attain the heights of the other two novels in its dramatization of the female situation, it is a far more even and satisfying piece of work. There are no fairy-tale floods or rhapsodic paens to Zionism to upset the balance of this study of provincial life. It is by no means a flawless novel, however, and in many ways the essential weakness of The Mill--its inconsistent characterization of a female figure--is also present in Middlemarch.

There is nothing particularly original in suggesting that one of the weak points of Middlemarch is Eliot's tendency to idealize Dorothea (as opposed to her satirization of Dorothea's tendency to idealize herself) and Dorothea's
relationship with Will Ladislaw. But no critic seems to have worked out a relationship between that part of the characterization which fails and that which is highly successful. In fact, Eliot succeeds and fails with Dorothea in the same way as she does with Maggie in *The Mill* although to a much lesser degree. We have seen that Maggie has vitality as a character largely because she is established early in the novel as a woman struggling against the limits of a patriarchal system. Dorothea is not watched as closely or examined as minutely as Maggie, but the basis of our acquaintance with, and attraction to her is much the same. Dorothea is asking essential questions about her relationship as a woman to the society around her. However naively, even in some cases stupidly, she is, like Maggie, trying to establish an individual identity for herself in a world which Eliot takes careful pains to show does not welcome women as other than dutiful daughters, faithful wives or loving mothers. But as with Maggie, Eliot cannot always maintain this feminist perspective. Too often the woman who is seriously confronting the prejudiced values of a male-dominated society is replaced by the complacent Victorian vision of the ideal woman as self-sacrificing saint or ministering angel. Thus one of the main problems with *Middlemarch* as this chapter will try to demonstrate is the whole St. Theresa theme which by its "rather breathless, uncontrolled, even embarrassing emotional quality"\(^1\) often
weakens the stronger more realistic character analysis which is established.

That there are at least some "problems" worth considering about the characterization of Dorothea ought to be readily accepted. That the same kind of criticism should be made of the characterization of Rosamond may raise more argument. However, it is just because Eliot makes Rosamond more than the commonplace figure of the familiar temptress or evil woman that the character does to some extent fail. Eliot cannot stay with and develop her new three-dimensional and sympathetic vision of the traditional bitch character that she begins to achieve with her interpretation of Rosamond. By the end of Middlemarch the sense of Rosamond that was previously hinted at—that she herself was at least partially a victim—is gone, leaving only the flat picture of the manipulative, cold-hearted woman who has "flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains."²

(ii)

The third female figure who must be considered in any discussion of the young women of Middlemarch is Mary Garth. There certainly does not seem to be any problem with inconsistency of characterization here. Mary never seems to fall into stereotype; she is not, nor does she at any time become either the "bitch" or the meekly obedient "good woman." She is affectionate, but still directly critical of those she loves and is not afraid of objecting openly to Fred's
materialistic ambitions. Having great regard for family ties, and willing to make almost any sacrifice for those at home, at the same time she leaves no doubt about her dislike of going out as a teacher. Finally, Mary is witty and speaks her mind directly without being either catty or apologetic. Eliot makes Mary an intelligent, responsible and interesting adult and creates a credible and satisfactory portrait of a woman. The question then is why, if Eliot can be so consistently successful with one character, does she falter in her depiction of the other two?

I would suggest that part of the answer is that Eliot does not place Mary Garth as completely in the "woman's situation" as she does either Dorothea or Rosamond. Mary Garth is not a stereotyped picture of a woman, but neither is she presented as one who is trapped in or struggling against the repressive strictures of patriarchy. Thus with Mary, Eliot does not come up against the problems presented by Dorothea and Rosamond; with them she must adjust her "revolutionary" analysis of a woman's position to the demands of the Feuerbachian creed of "submission" and her own growing political conservatism and doubts about the "woman question." By positing a combination of circumstances—Mary's physical plainness, her unusually healthy family situation, and the necessity of her working, which means she must to some extent experience the world as a man does—Mary is not nearly so much in conflict with the usual societal
pressures put on a woman. Although given her family's financial insecurity Mary might seem to be in a less fortunate position than the other two, a comparison of their "situations" shows that it is Dorothea and Rosamond for whom circumstances are and have been most frustrating in their development towards adulthood. Eliot makes it very clear how much, due to the prevalent social attitudes towards women, their emotional, intellectual and moral development has been retarded.

It is perhaps a minor point, but in introducing all these young women, Eliot does underline that while Dorothea and Rosamond are each in their own way ideals of feminine beauty, Mary Garth "on the contrary had the aspect of an ordinary sinner; she was brown, her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low." Although as Eliot points out in the next phrase, "it would not be true to declare in satisfactory antithesis, that she [Mary] had all the virtues" (MM, 83) at least she does not have that distorted view of herself or the world which many beautiful women, because of the way others treat them, cannot avoid.

In Rosamond's case it is her beauty which is the determining factor in how other people, particularly men, regard her;

Only a few children in Middlemarch looked blond by the side of Rosamond, and the slim figure displayed by her riding-habit had delicate undulations. In fact, most men, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called her an angel. (MM, 83)
Consequently, because her beauty has such high social value, Rosamond herself does not have to look inwardly, at least consciously, and examine her own motives and actions—"What she liked to do was to her the right thing" (MM, 427). Lydgate of course only reinforces this attitude. He has no use for plain women, regarding them "as he did the other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science" (MM, 70), and simply assumes with a beautiful woman like Rosamond that her character will be in perfect accordance with her physical appearance,

Miss Vincy...had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman—polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence. (MM, 121)

By referring to this attitude of Lydgate's as one of his "spots of commonness," Eliot is indirectly suggesting that the attitudes of men are partially responsible for making so many women like Rosamond such vain and self-centred creatures. As long as a woman's worth is exclusively associated with her physical beauty, she will remain in most cases morally undeveloped.

Unlike Rosamond, Dorothea is to some extent conscious of her beauty as a burden. With her wealth, it puts her so completely in the role of the very marriageable young woman that others, like her uncle and sister Celia, will not take her intellectual ambitions seriously. She is of course rather melodramatic and, as Eliot is quick to point out,
silly in her determination to ignore the "solicitudes of feminine fashion" (MM, 6), to refuse any of her mother's jewels and to give up the sensuous pleasure of riding. But all these attempts to scourge herself show that Dorothea does understand that as a beautiful woman her freedom to act in any other way than the prescribed manner for young ladies is severely limited. Eliot is amusedly critical of Dorothea's excessive self-denial—"if Miss Brooke ever attained perfect meekness, it would not be for lack of inward fire" (MM, 10)—but on another level she obviously participates in her heroine's frustration and calls attention to the absurdity of a society which denies to a beautiful woman the use of her intellect. With perfect mimicry she lets the reader know what the average Middlemarch male thinks of Dorothea's "mind:"

And how should Dorothea not marry?—a girl so handsome and with such prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer....Such a wife might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle horses; a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship. Women were expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on. Sane people did what their neighbours did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them. (MM, 7)

It is not only her plainness which distinguishes Mary from Rosamond and Dorothea. As Mrs. Farebrother says at
one point to Mary,

young women...don't feel the stress of action as men do, though perhaps I ought to make you an exception there. (MM, 379)

Mary has had to work, and thus to grapple with the world on a level of which Dorothea and Rosamond can scarcely conceive. One can hardly suggest that her work has been either satisfying or rewarding. In her role as housekeeper to Peter Featherstone she was constantly humiliated, and as for the life of a teacher or governess that (as Jane Fairfax suggests in *Emma*) is not much different from slavery. But Mary's vision of reality, like Jane Fairfax's, is bound to be much clearer than that of the other two women who, like Emma Woodhouse, are cloistered in the very limited world of feminine experience.

Dorothea seeks work, but she lives in "the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid" (MM, 202), and is not forced into action as Mary is by her family's economic situation. The factor that class plays in determining to what extent a woman will be forced into the traditional female roles is particularly interesting in Rosamond's case. A great part of the pride of the Victorian bourgeoisie was its women's idleness—-their existence as creatures of complete leisure. At the same time, there was instilled in every daughter the ambition to capture a man who would raise her still further in rank. As Mary Wollstonecraft put it:
In the middle rank of life... men, in their youth are prepared for professions, and marriage is not considered as the grand feature in their lives; whilst women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties. It is not business, extensive plans, or any of the excursive flights of ambition, that engross their attention; no, their thoughts are not employed in rearing such noble structures. To rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously; and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted. A man, when he enters any profession, has his eye steadily fixed on some future advantage (and the mind gains great strength by having all its efforts directed to one point) and, full of his business, pleasure is considered as mere relaxation; whilst women seek for pleasure as the main purpose of existence. In fact, from the education which they receive from society, the love of pleasure may be said to govern them all.

Thus a Rosamond's "work" was cut out for her,

For Rosamond... was industrious, and now more than ever she was active in sketching her landscapes and market-carts and portraits of friends, in practising her music and in being from morning till night her own standard of a perfect lady. (MM, 124)

And Eliot understands that although Rosamond participates willingly in this corruption of female intelligence she is still a victim of ideas about the proper place and interests of women:

For Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date. (MM, 198)

Perhaps the most important distinction between Mary and the other two women is that she has in her mother a mo-
del who illustrates how a female can operate in a world of male values but still retain her individuality and personal dignity. Though Mrs. Garth may mouth the conventional opinions about the proper role of woman who "in her opinion was framed to be entirely subordinate" it is not a doctrine which she practices to any great extent:

On ninety-nine points Mrs. Garth decided, but on the hundredth she was often aware that she would have to perform the singularly difficult task of carrying out her own principle and to make herself subordinate. (MM, 411)

That is not to suggest that Mrs. Garth is any kind of Amazon in disguise, but simply that she has a strong and healthy sense of her own individuality. Of course, the ability to exercise this freedom is largely dependent on her husband who recognizes his wife as another human being and not as a hired secretary (MM, 205), nurse (MM, 231), or item of domestic decoration:

She [Mrs. Garth] went and stood behind him, putting her hand on his shoulder, while they read the letter together. (MM, 294)

Mary thus experiences in her family a life of male-female equality which frees her from the frustrations that both Dorothea and (indirectly) Rosamond experience as among the major determinants of reality. Mary's family background gives her a sense of security and healthy self-respect which neither of the other two women possesses.

Dorothea and Rosamond of course have no such suitable female models, let alone male helpmates, who might give
them a different vision of reality. Rosamond's mother, though a pleasant woman, is much more like Mrs. Tulliver than Mrs. Garth. The strongest impression Mrs. Vincy leaves is of her "pink strings always flying," her devoted love for her son, and her desire that Rosamond derive the best value from her good looks,

It is a thousand pities you haven't patience to go and see your uncle more, so proud of you as he is, and wanted you to live with him. There's no knowing what he might have done for you as well as for Fred. God knows, I'm fond of having you at home with me, but I can part with my children for their good." (MM, 75)

As far as Mrs. Vincy is concerned Mrs. Garth is the last person who might serve as a feminine model, for that lady was "a woman who had had to work for her bread" (MM, 170).

As for Dorothea, her mother is dead, and though she loves Celia greatly, she cannot expect much guidance from a younger sister whose ambitions do not go further than marriage and blissful motherhood. As for Mr. Brooke, he feels that his duty as a surrogate father lies in continually reminding Dorothea that she must learn to submit to her proper feminine place:

Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know. (MM, 12)

I cannot let young ladies meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty. (MM, 14)

The only intelligent woman with whom Dorothea has any contact is Mrs. Cadwallader who has turned all the energies of her powerful mind, "a mind, active as phosphorus, biting
everything that came near into the form that suited it" (MM, 45), into frivolous match-making.

Although Middlemarch may be small in area it includes many worlds and these three women obviously experience their womanhood in very different ways. Mary, as a part of her family, has had to fight for economic survival, but she has never had to struggle within a male-dominated world to establish a basic sense of identity for herself in the way that both Dorothea and Rosamond must. Thus in Mary's world, in the world of the Garths and the Farebrothers, Eliot never really has to deal with any serious questions about the role of women. But the necessary factor is that kind of world—one more ideal than real—where sexual stereotyping is not so pervasive, where there is a near equality between men and women. When Eliot moves to another world, the clearly patriarchal (and more realistic) one in which Dorothea and Rosamond must move, then difficulties arise. Brilliantly portraying the ways that these two are trapped by the oppressive rules of patriarchy, she poses a number of questions about societal attitudes and institutions that in the end she herself cannot answer, or perhaps refuses to answer. This is why the characterizations, at certain places in the novel, falter. At the point of resolution Eliot abandons her complex vision of both women for the static images of femininity that Victorian morality provides. The questions that Rosamond's experience raise are ignored; she
is just one of those "evil women." And as for Dorothea, her perfect goodness and self-sacrificing altruism is surely the answer to any problem between the sexes that might exist.

Although the story of Mary Garth is satisfactory and complete, it is really not much more than that. As suggested above, there is a note of idealism about the whole Garth world. They are just a little bit too good, too happy, and too sensible for their part of the book to be truly moving, and consequently, the tensions of the Fred/Mary passages are considerably lower than those in the Dorothea/Casaubon or Rosamond/Lydgate passages of the novel. Mary and the Garth family may be supposed to establish, as David Daiches suggests, the moral "criteria to which most other actions are referred" but Mary has never had to fight a thorough-going battle with the patriarchal values of Middle-march. Thus, despite the overly sentimental treatment Eliot often gives Dorothea, and the blind vengeance she occasionally directs at Rosamond, it is still these two women rather than Mary who hold our attention. With all the seeming "normalcy" of Mary Garth, it is in the exploration of Rosamond and Dorothea's conflict over their identities as women that Eliot comes closest to the realism which is her greatest strength as an artist. Far closer to the truth of a woman's situation than the story of Mary Garth, whose circumstances allow and even encourage her growth into responsible adult-
hood, is the two beauties' struggle with the social pressures of patriarchy which retard any development of an individual identity.

(iii)

In *Thinking About Women* Mary Ellman suggests that there is enough evidence in *Middlemarch* to show that Eliot sees many of Rosamond's actions as positive, if badly misdirected attempts to attack the male value system.

The novelist deplores Rosamond's responses and yet takes a small bitter pleasure in her mulish self-sufficiency.5

Ellman falls into the trap of many popular feminist critics who insist on imputing to any female novelist a radical feminist consciousness. Eliot is no Ibsen nor is Rosamond a potential Nora Helmer. But what one does find in the story of Rosamond is that a significant part of her character is revealed as we are led to see how much she is trapped in a certain destructive behaviour pattern because of her position as a female.

That Eliot intends us to see Rosamond as at least partially a product of her environment is obvious from our first introduction to her at the end of a long discussion about changing social conditions,

In fact, much the same sort of movement and mixture went on in old England as we find in older Herodotus, who also, in telling what had been, thought it well to take a woman's lot for his starting-point...(*MM*, 71)

Bourgeois attitudes towards marriage, Rosamond's unusually
perfect beauty, and her lack of a positive female model have been mentioned above as factors which to some extent have influenced Rosamond's development. The point Eliot most directly dwells upon, however, is Rosamond's education. The abysmal training available for young women is a favourite subject of both Eliot's personal letters and her fiction, and in *Middlemarch* almost the first piece of information that we have about Rosamond is that she "was a sylph caught young and educated at Mrs. Lemon's" (*MM*, 118). "Caught" is the operative term. Regardless of what the child's own instincts may be, this young beauty must be moulded into the image of the perfect young lady--"polished, refined, docile" (*MM*, 212). And at Mrs. Lemon's, "the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female" (*MM*, 71) Rosamond is no doubt literally as well as virtually "finished." An institution which, as Eliot notes in mock-solemnity, stakes its reputation on being able to provide those little "extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage" will rarely attach much importance to the ethical or intellectual capacities of a young woman. Rosamond's moral consciousness remains at the infantine level of the elaborate but empty social personality which she has acquired at Mrs. Lemon's. Again Mary Wollstonecraft can be looked to for a description of the corruption that is often bred in young ladies of Rosamond's type.
It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness; "Fine by defect, and amiable weak!" And, made by this amiable weakness entirely dependent, excepting what they gain by illicit sway, neglecting the duties that reason alone points out, and shrinking from trials calculated to strengthen their minds, they only exert themselves to give their defects a graceful covering, which may serve to heighten their charms in the eyes of the voluptuary, though it sink them below the scale of moral excellence?

As well as being "caught young," part of Rosamond's tragedy is that she has been too good a student; with the "executant's instinct" she has learned to act out the feminine role to almost ridiculous perfection. If Rosamond had been a little less clever herself, or preferably if young women were left alone to develop in a manner similar to "the raw country girls" (MM, 118) who "betray themselves unawares, and whose behaviour is awkwardly driven by their impulses instead of being steered by wary grace and propriety," Eliot suggests that both her and Lydgate's histories could have been much different.

This "placing" of Rosamond in the social milieu, the attempt to show that she is not simply the born bitch, but that her character and behaviour have been partially determined by Victorian attitudes towards women means very little unless Eliot carries it through in her closer analysis of Rosamond as an individual. F.R. Leavis does not believe this happens:
If one judges that there is less of sympathy in George Eliot's presentment of Rosamond that in her presentment of any other of her major characters (except Grandcourt in Daniel Deronda) one goes on immediately to note that Rosamond gives sympathy little lodgement. It is tribute enough to George Eliot to say that the destructive and demoralizing power of Rosamond's triviality wouldn't have seemed so appalling to us if there had been any animus in the presentment. We are, from time to time, made to feel from within the circumference of Rosamond's egoism—though we can't of course at any time be confined to it, and, there being no potential nobility here, it is implicitly judged that this case can hardly, by any triumph of compassion, be felt as tragic.7

Although we may not discover any "potential nobility" in Rosamond, Leavis certainly underestimates the effect of being "from time to time, made to feel from within the circumference of Rosamond's egoism." Very early in our acquaintance with Rosamond we enter her consciousness and discover the peculiar kind of schizophrenia that she lives with. In the scene with Mary at Stone Court we are made aware of

the two nymphs—the one in the glass, and the one out of it, who looked at each other with eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings an ingenious beholder could put into them, and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite. (MM, 83)

The interaction of these two selves—the public and the private—is quite often a part of Eliot's method of describing Rosamond:

(Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique; she even acted her own character and so well, that she did not know it
to be precisely her own. \(\text{\cite{MM, 87}}\)

Certainly small feet and perfectly turned shoulders aid the impression of refined manners, and the right thing said seems quite astonishingly right when it is accompanied with exquisite curves of lip and eyelid. And Rosamond could say the right thing; for she was clever with that sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous. Happily she never attempted to joke, and this perhaps was the most decisive mark of her cleverness. \(\text{\cite{MM, 117}}\)

Rosamond, with the executant’s instinct, had seized his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble music with the precision of an echo. It was almost startling, heard for the first time. \(\text{\cite{MM, 119}}\)

If we do not get any of Leavis' nobility, there is at least a pathetic quality to Rosamond's distorted personality that one cannot avoid being affected by.

The crucial question, however, is the nature of that second self, the self that watches, that is aware of having to act out to perfection the role of the perfect lady. Certainly much of it is pure ego, and one could quote extensively to substantiate this. However, on several occasions Eliot does go further than that rather simplistic analysis. Beginning with our very first meeting with Rosamond where Eliot mentions her boredom, the suggestion is often made that the intensity of Rosamond's egoism, her extreme self-centredness, comes from the lack of variety in the outlets available to young women of any energy or cleverness. Since the horizon of a Rosamond's world is marriage, all her leisure time (of which she has a great deal) is spent in mental or physical activity directed towards that goal;
Rosamond, whose basis for her structure had the usual airy slightness, was of remarkably detailed and realistic imagination when the foundation had been once presupposed; and before they had ridden a mile she was far on in the costume and introductions of her wedded life. (MM, 88)

It had not occurred to Lydgate that he had been a subject of eager meditation to Rosamond, who had neither any reason for throwing her marriage into distance perspective, nor any pathological studies to divert her mind from that ruminating habit, that inward repetition of looks, words and phrases, which makes a large part in the lives of most girls. (MM, 123)

Furthermore, because the only role Rosamond has available to her is the social one of the perfect young lady, any expression of self she makes must be acted out through that docile, passive character. Perhaps that is why some of Rosamond's actions appear to be so especially ugly. Her anger or frustration is never (cannot ever be) expressed directly but is always cloaked in seeming passivity and imperturbation.

However, it is not necessary here to speculate; there is enough in the text itself to show that Eliot has gone beyond the simplistic analysis of Rosamond and given us something more. Among the most striking images of Rosamond are those when Eliot catches her in "moments of naturalism." The first comes at the point of her engagement to Lydgate when we see her as vulnerable:

But as he raised his eyes now he saw a certain helpless quivering which touched him quite newly, and made him look at Rosamond with a questioning flash. At this moment she was as natural as she had ever been when she was five years old. (MM, 222)
And near the end of the novel, when Ladislaw turns on her, we see that she can be sensitive to the feelings of others:

all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before. What another nature felt in opposition to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness. (MM, 571)

And finally when she is confronted by Dorothea it is clear that Rosamond does have the potential of breaking through the illusions that have so blinded her to the workings of the real world:

It was a newer crisis in Rosamond's experience than even Dorothea could imagine; she was under the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others...it made her soul totter... with a sense that she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her. (MM, 583)

It is this added depth, this attempt to find some cause for Rosamond's egoism other than the evil of the feminine nature itself which makes Rosamond more than the familiar bitch woman stereotype.

Even if Eliot had not allowed for this kind of sympathetic interpretation of Rosamond herself, it would have been easily seen from Eliot's attitude towards Lydgate that Rosamond should not be seen as the totally "evil" character she is sometimes taken for. Eliot's documentation of Lydgate's male chauvinism is superb from the moment of our first introduction to him, when we learn that "the distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not
penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture or women" (MM, lll), until one evening before his marriage when he muses on his future with Rosamond:

...Ideal happiness (of the kind known in the Arabian Nights, in which you are invited to step from the labour and discord of the street into a paradise where everything is given to you and nothing claimed) seemed to be an affair of a few weeks waiting. (MM, 257)

It is integral to our understanding of Lydgate that we see him as one of that company of men (and this is his touch of "commonness") whose attitude towards women support the proliferation of Rosamond-like creatures. As long as he, a man of good looks, good birth and good prospects, feels sure "that if he ever married his wife would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music" (MM, 121), Mrs. Lemon will continue to turn out polished, refined and highly frustrated young women like Rosamond. During the weeks of their flirtation Lydgate only reinforces Rosamond's belief in all the romantic myths of woman's ability to enslave men. He tells her that "an accomplished woman almost always knows more than we men" (MM, 118) and declares that he is "her captive."

Rosamond of course does not understand that these are merely the conventional endearments of courtship and that Lydgate simply assumes that he, not she, will be the powerful partner in the marriage:

Lydgate thought...he had found perfect womanhood--felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an
accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's breadth beyond—docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit. (MM, 258)

After seeing how other people—especially men—have helped build up Rosamond's distorted sense of her own personal power we are prepared at least to understand why later she so obstinately defies Lydgate.

(iv)

Until the time of Lydgate's financial troubles the treatment of Rosamond and Lydgate is fairly well balanced. Largely a "noble" figure, he is nevertheless still criticized by Eliot for his aristocratic snobbishness, his unfortunate pragmatism over the Farebrother matter, and in particular his attitude towards women "whom he regards as a means of elegant recreation and at most also objects of continuing protective tenderness." Similarly, Rosamond's basic role in the novel is that of the blind and destructive egoist, but as I have demonstrated above, she is not presented without sympathy. From the moment of their engagement however, when Eliot introduces the image of the "chained" Lydgate, that careful balance is thrown off,

her blush had departed and she assented coldly, without adding an unnecessary word, some trivial chain-work which she had in her hands enabling her to avoid looking at Lydgate higher than his chin...Rosamond, made nervous by her struggle
between mortification and the wish not to betray it, dropped her chain as if startled and rose too, mechanically. Lydgate instantaneously stooped to pick up the chain. (MM, 222)

As Lydgate leaves the house, "an engaged man whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself" (MM, 223) all sympathy goes out towards him and from being a complex living character Rosamond changes into a one-dimensional, stereotyped bitch.

The easiest way to discuss Eliot's failure to maintain a complex analysis of Rosamond's character is to examine our overall sense of Rosamond in the second part of the novel, after she has married Lydgate. We are not involved with Rosamond any more; she is no longer "one of us." We simply watch her as she goes about performing her slightly horrendous acts: revoking Lydgate's order to rent the house, writing to Sir Godwin, sending out the dinner invitations. When we do get "inside" Rosamond in the second half of the novel it is rarely with any attempt to understand, let alone sympathize. Eliot's descriptions of Rosamond's inner thoughts are usually given in a voice which very much sets us apart and tends to make us unquestioningly accept her as the unregenerate evil woman. In fact, one might even suggest that Eliot, during the period of the Lydges' money troubles, does treat Rosamond with just that "animus" which Leavis says she avoids. As the passages quoted below demonstrate, there is no attempt seriously to scrutinize Rosamond's po-
sition—to show us how desperately frustrated and frightened
she might be by the turn her marriage has taken.

She still said nothing; but under that quietude
was hidden an intense effect: she was in such en­
tire disgust with her husband that she wished
she had never seen him. Sir Godwin's rudeness
towards her and utter want of feeling ranged him
with Dover and all other creditors—disagreeable
people who only thought of themselves, and did not
mind how annoying they were to her. Even her
father was unkind, and might have done more for
them. In fact there was but one person in Rosamond's
world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and
that was the graceful creature with blond plaits
and with little hands crossed before her, who had
never expressed herself unbecomingly, and had al­
ways acted for the best—the best naturally being
what she best liked. (MM, 487)

There was silence. Lydgate thought, "If she has
any trust in me—any notion of what I am she ought
to speak now and say that she does not believe I
have deserved disgrace."

But Rosamond on her side went on moving her fin­
gers languidly. Whatever was to be said on the
subject she expected to come from Tertius. What
did she know? And if he were innocent of any
wrong, why did he not do something to clear him­
self? (MM, 555)

However, once again it is Eliot's attitude to Lydgate
in the second part of the novel that most reveals how she
would have us think of Rosamond. Almost always we are with
Lydgate from the inside and made to feel with him as he
suffers.

Lydgate's discontent was much harder to bear: it
was the sense that there was a grand existence
in thought and effective action lying around him,
while his self was being narrowed into the mis­
rable isolation of egoistic fears, and vulgar
anxieties for events that might allay such fears.
(MM, 473)

Although on occasion attention might be directed to Rosamond's
feelings, it is often patronizing and any sympathy is negated by the immediate transfer of interest to Lydgate's greater misery and nobler nature:

Rosamond obeyed him, and he took her on his knee, but in her secret soul she was utterly aloof from him. The poor thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate was part of that world. But he held her waist with one hand and laid the other gently on both of hers; for this rather abrupt man had much tenderness in his manners towards women, seeming to have always present in his imagination the weakness of their frames and the delicate poise of their health both in body and mind. (MM, 474)

The implications of this last statement reveal Eliot's inconsistency in her treatment of Lydgate's attitude to women. Though in the first parts of the novel she is very critical of his lack of respect for women, she seems to feel "the chivalrous kindness which helped to make him morally lovable" (MM, 112) is adequate compensation. It is this attitude which seems to take precedence in her later analysis of Lydgate and Rosamond's marital conflict. To Eliot, Lydgate's error is not so much that he demanded submission from Rosamond but that he was too blind to see that she would not obey his wishes. The fact that he is "mastered" carries the implication that by rights he should be master:

...It would assuredly have been a vain boast in him to say that he was her master. (MM, 488)

"I shall set up a surgery," he said, "I really think I made a mistaken effort in that respect. And if Rosamond will not mind, I shall take an apprentice. I don't like these things, but if one carries them out faithfully they are not really lowering. I have had a severe galling to begin with; that will make the small rubs
seem easy.

Poor Lydgate! the "if Rosamond will not mind," which had fallen from him involuntarily as part of his thought, was a significant mark of the yoke he bore. (MM, 524)

That the man should be master in marriage is not a feeling which really squares with her previous criticisms of Lydgate. His attitudes towards marriage and the roles of men and women have supposedly matured during his time of conflict:

he was beginning now to imagine how two creatures who loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common, might laugh over their shabby furniture, and their calculations how far they could afford butter and eggs. (MM, 514)

But all his actions belie any conception of equality in marriage. For him a wife is still someone who provides a kind of mindless sanctuary for male intelligence:

That evening Lydgate was a little comforted by observing that Rosamond was more lively than she had usually been of late, and even seemed interested in doing what would please him without being asked...

He was so much cheered that he began to search for an account of experiments which he had long ago meant to look up, and had neglected out of that creeping self-despair which comes in the train of petty anxieties. He felt again some of the old delightful absorption in far-reaching inquiry, while Rosamond played the quiet music which was as helpful to his meditation as the splash of an oar on the evening lake. (MM, 479)

It is difficult to believe that there is any substantial difference between this Lydgate and the Lydgate who several months previously had told Farebrother that

marriage must be the best thing for a man who wants to work steadily. He has everything at home then—no teasing with personal speculations—he can get calmness and freedom. (MM, 256)
There is none of the understanding which Eliot allowed room for earlier—the realization that this kind of attitude towards women may account for much of their frustration and consequent egoism. In fact, by the inclusion of the incident, when, before their money troubles really begin Rosamond defies Lydgate over the matter of horseriding with Sir Godwin's son and brings on a miscarriage, Eliot seems to suggest the root of the couple's conflict is in Rosamond's denial of her womanhood or true femininity.

There are occasions when Eliot appears to recover the sense of how the position of women may be affecting someone like Rosamond,

When he left her to go out again, he told himself that it was ten times harder for her than for him: he had a life away from home, and constant appeals to his activity on behalf of others. (MM, 489)

But what could have been a crucial part of our understanding (not forgiving) of Rosamond's behaviour is not carried any further. The comment comes at the end of a chapter when Lydgate is leaving the house after one of their arguments and the next chapter opens with attention firmly directed at Lydgate once again.

In addition to the passage quoted above, there are also the crucial scenes near the end of the novel between Ladislaw and Rosamond, and Dorothea and Rosamond, when something finally breaks through the layers of Rosamond's egoism, when her schizophrenic state is shattered and she is alone with her "bewildered consciousness" (MM, 572). That there is
something to "break through to," that Rosamond is something besides pure ego, is most important. It reinforces the sense which Eliot showed in her attitude towards Rosamond before her marriage—that she was more complicated a character than the usual bitch stereotype. But Rosamond does not change. The epilogue makes it clear that Rosamond was and always will be the evil woman who "flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains." In this way, Eliot's materialism becomes a kind of fatal determinism. The real brilliance of her characterization of Rosamond—what lifts her above stereotype—is Eliot's appreciation that individual character is partially determined by social conditions. But the corollary, that a change in social environment could bring about a change in character, seems to be ignored.

The above discussion is not intended as an apology or defence of Rosamond. It would be ridiculous to suggest that she is not an egoist or that her actions are not highly destructive. Rosamond is ignorant, vain, self-centred. However, that does not mean we regard her without sympathy. By placing her squarely in Middlemarch society, with its bourgeois notions of femininity, and by allowing us to enter Rosamond's consciousness to see how this has affected both her view of herself and the world, Eliot gives us room, not to forgive Rosamond, but at least to begin to understand her. Although Eliot does not go very far in her initial portrayal of Rosamond (not nearly as far as she will go in
a later novel with Gwendolen Harleth) her failure to maintain even that level of understanding indicates an important break in the perspective of the novel.

(v)

There are several reasons, in addition to the breakdown of Eliot's materialist world view, which may account for her inconsistency in dealing with Rosamond. The first is purely structural. In the broad scheme of the novel Rosamond is not so much a character in herself as a foil for both Dorothea and Lydgate; she acts first as an evil opposite against which we are to see the merits of Dorothea more clearly, and second as a catalyst for the revelation of Lydgate's "spots of commonness" and his consequent fall from nobility. Thus when these two are in the midst of their "crises" Rosamond must remain a fairly stable character; that is, her actions must be predictable, black and white, conventional, so that our interest and sympathy will not be deflected from Lydgate and Dorothea. If Eliot had fulfilled the potential complexity of Rosamond as a character the careful balance of the novel could have been upset. As we will see later, this is exactly what happens with Gwendolen in Daniel Deronda.

Eliot's personal intellectual ambiguity about the proper place of women in society may be a second reason for her failure to carry through the analysis of Rosamond. On the one hand, Eliot had a very sincere fellow feeling for women
trapped within the artificial limitations imposed on their sex. But on the other she was attracted to the self-sacrificing, altruistic goddess-like aspect of the Victorian feminine mystique. The attraction to the latter is understandable, given her Feuerbachian philosophy. The picture of the passive, other-oriented female coincides perfectly with her ideals of resignation of personal will. The problem is that by being so enamoured of the "good woman" she has very little sympathy for the "bad woman," Rosamond. Too often Eliot can see her only as the opposite of Dorothea, and not as a woman in substantially the same "female" dilemma.

In [John Stuart] Mill one encounters the realism of sexual politics, in Ruskin its romance and the benign aspect of its myth. Much of the other portion of Victorian sexual myth is included in Ruskin by implication, for his virtuous matron relies for her very existence on that spectral figure of the temptress, her complement in the period's dichotomous literary fantasy--just as in life, the two classes of women, wife and whore, account for the socio-sexual division under the double standard.9

It is revealing that as a model to Rosamond, Eliot continually holds up Dorothea at her most self-sacrificing rather than the more sensible, down-to-earth Mary Garth. At their first meeting, Eliot's description of their physical appearances establishes clearly her irresistible attraction to the image of Dorothea as goddess,

the grace and dignity were in her limbs and neck; and about her simply parted hair and candid eyes the large round poke which was then in the fate of women, seemed no more odd as a head-dress than
the gold trencher we call a halo. (MM, 316)

Her consequent antagonism to Rosamond is evident from the next few lines:

her small hands duly set off with rings, and that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity. (MM, 316)

Here we see how Eliot's failure to make Rosamond a three-dimensional character may be related to the aesthetic weakness of the novel recognized by most critics—the irritating aura of sentimentality and idealism which interferes with the portrayal of Dorothea. Had Rosamond been a little less demonic, perhaps Dorothea would not have had to be so angelic.

(vi)

The consideration of the structural relationship between Rosamond and Dorothea lands us back in the middle of the discussion of Eliot's inconsistent treatment of Dorothea, outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The nature and meaning of that inconsistency—the falling away from realism into idealism and sentiment—is as I suggested, the problem inherent in the Saint Theresa theme, first introduced in the "Prelude." Though there is a tinge of humour in the first paragraph with the image of the two young children seeking martyrdom "until domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles and turned them back from their great resolve" (MM, 3) the rest of the
"Prelude" seems to be entirely serious. We read that this will be the story not of a saint but of one who could have been a saint save for the lack of a "coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (MM, 3). But the bulk of the novel denies this impression completely. The Dorothea to whom we are introduced does not strike us as "saintly" at all, despite her own attempts to create that impression. She is certainly a beautiful woman, intelligent and enthusiastic, but neither her physical appearance nor her mental ability strike us as having any ethereal quality. She is not a swan among the ducklings, but simply one of the more fortunate ducklings. The strongest images in the first chapter portray a healthy, blooming young girl enjoying a very worldly horse-back ride and applying her mind to practical problems of architecture. Of course we quickly discover that Dorothea's situation is complex and that she is going through a critical period in her own development, but I do not think we ever feel that the conflict in which she is involved allows any but a purely secular interpretation. Dorothea's is not the story of a saint searching for her calling but of a woman trying to find a place for herself in a world which refuses to admit that females may have aspirations beyond the joys of home and hearth.

Part of the excitement of the characterization of Rosamond is in discovering how much she has been affected
by the popular notions of femininity. This is even more so the case with Dorothea. The first chapters of Book I are laced with comments about, references to, and descriptions of, a society which is totally dominated by male values. It does not take much of Mr. Brooke's silly anti-feminism,

There is a lightness about the feminine mind—
a touch and go—music, the fine arts, that kind of thing—they should study those up to a certain point, women should; but in a light way, you know. A woman should be able to sit down and play you or sing you a good old English tune.

or Sir James' blustering assumptions of male superiority,

A man's mind—what there is of it—has always the advantage of being masculine—as the smallest birch-tree is of a higher kind than the most soaring palm—and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality

or many descriptions of the Middlemarchian ideal in feminine behaviour

Yes but not my style of woman; I like a woman who lays herself out a little more to please us. There should be a little filigree about a woman—something of the coquette. A man likes a sort of challenge. The more of a dead set she makes at you the better

To make it clear that the basis for understanding Dorothea is to see her as an intelligent, vibrant woman caught within the limitations of a patriarchal society. True, in Dorothea's case it is a silly patriarchy that she has to confront. But Eliot's humorous presentation of Mr. Brooke or Sir James is never intended to lessen our sympathy with Dorothea's frustrations. In this case she uses humour to
reveal how ludicrous many of the usual assumptions of male superiority are. However, Eliot often directs her satire at Dorothea and I will discuss the purpose and effect of this later in the chapter.

Although Rosamond has certainly been affected by a patriarchal environment, she herself remains largely unconscious of its powerful influence. She has only the cleverness to adapt herself completely to the popular values—not the intelligence to see how stultifying and destructive to personal development they may be. Dorothea, on the other hand, feels directly the pressures to conform to a certain "feminine" stereotype. While Rosamond simply remains trapped, Dorothea struggles to find more meaning and a wider scope for action than is usually permitted a woman:

For a long time she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do?—she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse. With some endowment of conceit, she might have thought that a Christian young lady of fortune should find her ideal of life in village charities, patronage of the humbler clergy, the perusal of 'Female Scripture Characters,' unfolding the private experience of Sara under the Old Dispensation and Dorcas under the New, and the care of her soul over her embroidery in her own boudoir...From such contentment poor Dorothea was shut out. (MM, 20-1)

However--and this is very important in understanding Dorothea--the limited nature of her woman's experience will determine how she tries to establish an individual identity. Dorothea
may desire a life of her own, concerned with more than "the solicitudes of feminine fashion", but she is both naive and ignorant, "after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education" (MM, 63). It is not surprising that instead of discovering some role to play in the real world (she simply does not have the mental freedom to see herself as a doctor or business person as Lydgate of Caleb Garth can) Dorothea finds her way out in a kind of religious enthusiasm. Like many other frustrated young women she satisfies her ambitions in imagining herself in the role of saint or martyr,

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it. (MM, 6)

Leaving aside for the moment that last phrase, suggesting Eliot's own attraction to the female martyr ideal (which is, after all, only the reverse side of the feminine mystique of which Rosamond's vicious coquettishness is the obverse) the problem with Dorothea's altruism is that it is first a way of satisfying her own needs and only secondarily directed towards serving others. Thus when she finds out Sir James' double motive in supporting her cottage-building she abandons not only the unfortunate baronet but also the cottages themselves and the peasants for whom they were intended. Although Eliot's criticism of Dorothea,
in this instance and others, is always gentle and often humorous, the development of this egoistic side of her search for self will still be one of the main concerns of the novel.

Although Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon may be concerned on one level with the conflict between a woman's desire for personal self-fulfillment.

It was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband that she wished to know Latin and Greek. Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly...she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband; she wished, poor child, to be wise herself. (MM, 47)

and a man's refusal to recognize that right,

the great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own. (MM, 37)

at this stage of Dorothea's development Eliot is more concerned that Dorothea must recognize and deal with her own egoism. Dorothea has entered marriage with the most romantic ideals of service and devotion:

Dorothea said to herself that Mr. Casaubon was the most interesting man she had ever seen, not excepting Monsieur Liret, the Vaudois clergyman who had given conferences on the history of the Waldenses. To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth--what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder! (MM, 13)

She now must learn the real meaning of the vow to "cherish" someone in sickness and in health:
She was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers; she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his heartbeats but only felt that her own was beating violently. (MM, 148-9)

Thus when Dorothea submits to Casaubon's demands, outrageous as they may be, it is clear as it never was in the similar situation between Maggie and Tom in *The Mill on the Floss* that Dorothea is not capitulating to the patriarchal system, but is rather simply accepting the responsibilities that one human being has towards another.

(vii)

Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon could easily have been a repetition of the Tom and Maggie story. But several important factors change the perspective from which we interpret this male-female association. First, Casaubon is treated with much more depth than Tom; there is nothing in *The Mill on the Floss* to compare with Eliot's famous prelude to her analysis of Casaubon's situation,

but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? (MM, 205)

We rarely see much more in Tom than aggressive insensitivity to Maggie but we enter far enough into Casaubon's mind to understand that his male chauvinism is clearly the result of massive insecurity about his own powers, both intellectual and sexual:

Suspicion and jealousy of Will Ladislaw's intentions, suspicion and jealousy of Dorothea's im-
pressions, were constantly at their weaving work. It would be quite unjust to him to suppose that he could have entered into any coarse misinterpretation of Dorothea; his own habits of mind and conduct quite as much as the open elevation of her nature, saved him from any such mistake. What he was jealous of was her opinion, the sway that might be given to her ardent mind in its judgments and the future possibilities to which these might lead her. As to Will, though until his last defiant letter he had nothing definite which he would choose formally to allege against him, he felt himself warranted in believing that he was capable of any design which could fascinate a rebellious temper and an undisciplined impulsiveness. (MM, 307)

Thus Dorothea can respond to Casaubon's personality at a more complex level than Maggie can with Tom. It is also because of this in-depth portrait of Casaubon that we can accept more easily Eliot's criticism of Dorothea's egoism. In The Mill it was difficult to feel that Maggie's egoism was anything but a healthy reaction to her unrelieved oppression at the hands of Tom.

On a more basic level, there is a great difference in tone between the two stories. Eliot presents Dorothea's situation far less melodramatically than she did Maggie's. There is none of Maggie's rather nauseating

I have received the Cross, I have received it from thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me. (MF, 563)

Dorothea makes her choice to submit to Casaubon with full knowledge that she is saying "'yes' to her own doom:"

She saw clearly enough the whole situation yet she was fettered; she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers. If that were weakness, Dorothea was weak. (MM, 353)
It is clear, as it was not in *The Mill on the Floss*, that Dorothea truly submits to the ties of affection and sympathy. She is not, like Maggie being forced by both the male character and Eliot into the role of female martyr.

Neither the law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this—only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage. (MM, 353)

If Dorothea had been saying "yes", to her own doom" for the rest of her life it would have been difficult not to interpret her submission to Casaubon as Eliot's approval of the traditional ideal of feminine martyrdom. But fortunately for both Dorothea and the novel, Casaubon dies before she can tell him of her decision. And so, just at the point where Maggie's story ends, Dorothea's life begins again.

(viii)

During the eighteen months of her marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea has to come to terms with her egoism, but the problem of the other side of her search for self-identity, the need for some greater meaning in her life than is usually allowed to women, still remains to be resolved. When she discovers the terms of Casaubon's will, Dorothea feels released from the total self-suppression which he had demanded of her:

Bound by a pledge given from the depths of her pity, she would have been capable of undertaking a toil which her judgment whispered was vain for all uses except that consecration of faithfulness
which is a supreme use. But now her judgment, instead of being controlled by duteous devotion, was made active by the embittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. (MM, 362)

She is now more mature, having learned something of the reality of a woman's life,

I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up. (MM, 397)

But she is once more anxious for a life of action and purpose,

Dorothea's native strength of will was no longer all converted into resolute submission. (MM, 391)

Here, however, Dorothea runs up against exactly the same barriers to her freedom she encountered before her marriage. In the second phase of her story we are back to the context and the themes that so controlled the first chapters of Book I. There is still nothing for Dorothea to do; she has to face a life of "motiveless ease" (MM, 394) where she plays drastically limited roles. One is the adoring aunt to her nephew Arthur:

After three months Freshitt had become rather oppressive, to sit like a model for Saint Catherine looking rapturously at Celia's baby would not do for many hours in the day, and to remain in that momentous babe's presence with persistent disregard was a course that could not have been tolerated in a childless sister...to an aunt who does not recognize her infant nephew as Bouddha, and has nothing to do for him but to admire, his behaviour is apt to appear monotonous, and the interest of watching him exhaustible. (MM, 390)

Another is the widow in search of a husband, and Mrs. Cadwal-
ladder is more than willing to give her assistance.

It will be well for her to marry again as soon as it is proper, if one could get her among the right people. Of course the Chettams would not wish it. But I see clearly a husband is the best thing to keep her in order. If we were not so poor I would invite Lord Triton. He will be marquis some day, and there is no denying that she would make a good marchioness; she looks handsomer than ever in her mourning. (MM, 392)

Sir James would not allow her even this freedom, and in his sentimental way he prefers to imagine her as pure and untouched:

To his secret feeling, there was something repulsive in a woman's second marriage, and no match would prevent him from seeing it a sort of desecration for Dorothea. He was aware that the world would regard such a sentiment as preposterous, especially in relation to a woman of one-and-twenty; the practice of "the world" being to treat of a young widow's second marriage as certain and probably near, and to smile with meaning if the widow acts accordingly. But if Dorothea did choose to espouse her solitude, he felt that the resolution would well become her. (MM, 401-2)

Eliot's solution for Dorothea is Will Ladislaw and a second marriage. Although this creates definite theoretical and aesthetic problems in the novel, I cannot agree with the thoughtless judgment tossed off by Kate Millett in Sexual Politics:

Dorothea's predicament in Middlemarch is an eloquent plea that a fine mind be allowed an occupation; but it goes no further than petition. She marries Will Ladislaw and can expect no more of life than the discovery of a good companion whom she can serve as secretary. 10

Such a criticism does not take into account Dorothea's history. If she does not gain full emancipation by marrying
Will, she gains at least a measure of personal fulfilment she could not have had otherwise. Had she remained single her life would have been even more frustrating. She is still too ignorant and the world of Middlemarch too narrow for her to accomplish anything on her own. She has only the vaguest and most romantic ideas of what she might do:

I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land and drain it and make a little colony, where everybody should work and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend. (MM, 401)

And she will certainly not find much support in a small country town were, as Celia puts it

of course men know best about everything, except what women know better...about babies and things. (MM, 539)

Certainly, a confirmed feminist would not find the marriage ideal. In fact, it is in a sense the relationship with Casaubon in miniature. Dorothea still insists on seeing Will as mentor, as someone greater and wiser than herself. She is attracted to him because she fancies him as somewhat of a rebel, an idealist to whom she can devote her energies,

the wrongs which she felt that Will had received from her husband, and the external conditions which to others were grounds for slighting him, only gave the more tenacity to her affection and admiring judgment. (MM, 566)

But there are important differences between her marriage to Casaubon and Will which make the latter more acceptable. If Will has always been somewhat of a rebel, so has Dorothea; it gives them a kind of equality that she never had with
Casaubon. Furthermore there is in this relationship with Will an outlet for Dorothea's repressed sexuality. Though in Kate Millet's terms sexual fulfillment may have less value than self-realization through meaningful work, it is for Dorothea at least more than the complete self-sacrifice on which Eliot insists for Maggie Tulliver.

The marriage is disturbing, however, mostly because Eliot in fact seems to be saying that therein lies the complete answer to the difficulties of Dorothea's and a woman's situation. She suggests in the Finale that

many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. (MM, 611)

But the comment is ascribed to others and not herself. And in the statement following the above quotation, she adroitly avoids the responsibility of answering the questions she herself posed at the beginning of the novel:

But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done—not even Sir James Chettham, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislaw. (MM, 611)

No doubt there is little else that Dorothea could have done, but that very fact implies a severe criticism of Middlemarchian ideas about women which Eliot has refused to carry to a conclusion. In the first edition of the novel Eliot did draw attention to this very point,

Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch
that such mistakes could not have happened if
the society into which she was born had not
smiled on propositions of marriage from a
sickly man to a girl less than half his own age--
on modes of education which make a woman's
knowledge another name for motley ignorance--
on rules of conduct which are in flat contradic-
tion with its own loudly-asserted beliefs.

But in the edition of 1874 this passage was deleted. Barbara
Hardy says that by this change "any suggestion of a feminist
moral is controlled and extended by the complex plot, which
puts Dorothea in her place as an example less of a feminine
problem than of the frustrations of the human condition." 11
But I think, especially in Dorothea's case the distinction
between the human and the feminine situation is a misleading
one. Granted there are many aspects to Dorothea's story,
but at least one of them is her situation as a woman and
the terms in which it is framed do demand a feminist solu-
tion. But Barbara Hardy's statement ignores the impact of
both the first few chapters of Middlemarch and the situation
in which Dorothea finds herself after Casaubon's death. To
Dorothea's poignant plea of "What can I do?" Eliot is not
giving an answer to the human condition but the anti-femi-
nist answer to the "woman situation"—love, marriage and
motherhood. True, Dorothea goes through some agony before
she can have Will Ladislaw but I would suggest that the
antagonism of her family towards him and the shock of seeing
Will with Rosamond are no more significant in their effect
than the usual obstacles the familiar romantic heroine has
to overcome before she can "get her man" and live happily
ever after.

Though the above may be a rather simplistic interpreta-
tion of the meaning of Dorothea and Will's relationship, it is only reinforced by the tone with which Eliot treats their romance. And romance it is. The meetings between the two future lovers are filled with tedious sentimentality. Dorothea is forever gushing,

"Oh my life is very simple," said Dorothea, her lips curling with an exquisite smile, which irradiated her melancholy. "I am always at Lo-
wick."

"That is a dreadful imprisonment," said Will, impetuously.

"No, don't think that," said Dorothea. "I have no longings." He did not speak, but she replied to some change in his expression. "I mean, for myself. Except that I should like not to have so much more than my share without doing anything for others. But I have a belief of my own and it comforts me."

"What is that?" said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

"That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and mak-
ing the struggle with darkness narrower." (MM, 28?)

For his part, Will is in a constant state of worshipful adoration:

she was not coldly clever and directly satirical, but adorably simple and full of feeling. She was an angel beguiled. It would be a unique delight to wait and watch for the melodious fragments in which her heart and soul came forth so directly and ingenuously. (MM, 155)

And through it all the author looks indulgently on:

Their young delight in speaking to each other, and saying what no one else would care to hear, was forever ended and become a treasure of the past. For this very reason she dwelt on it
without inward check. That unique happiness too was dead, and in its shadowed silent chamber she might vent the passionate grief which she herself wondered at...She did not know that it was Love who had come to her briefly, as in a dream before awakening, with the hues of morning on his wings—that it was Love to whom she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless rigour of irresistible day. (MM, 399)

Even the implied sexuality of the affair is not very satisfactory. It is hard to believe that Dorothea's needs will be fulfilled in a marriage where the partners are more often referred to as children rather than as responsible adults seeking a mature relationship:

They were looking at each other like two fond children who were talking confidentially of birds (MM, 287)

Will followed her, seizing her hand with a spasmodic movement; and so they stood, with their hands clasped, like two children, looking out on the storm...(MM, 593)

This second quotation, taken from the couple's engagement scene, may be a direct reference to the two children imaged in the "Prelude", but does this satisfactorily answer the doubts we may have about this marriage as the answer to Dorothea's frustrations? She may still be naive, but surely the experience of her first marriage has matured her enough that we regard her as a woman and not a mere girl. If the representation of her and Will as children were satiric or ironic there would be no difficulty, but neither of the scenes quoted above has any such overtones. On the contrary, the author-onlooker presents these incidents with a misty-eyed indulgence that completely ignores or avoids the
realities of marriage. If Dorothea could be criticized in the first chapters of the novel for idealizing marriage, the fault is now Eliot's. And I think this is one of the clues to the novel's weakness. The characteristics of Dorothea which Eliot begins by satirizing—her naivety and desire for martyrdom—are the very ones she ends by idealizing.

The most distressing aspect of this marriage as a resolution to Dorothea's struggle for self-identity is the attitude to Dorothea demonstrated by both Will and Eliot herself. Will does not see Dorothea as simply an intelligent woman; he insists she is some kind of goddess. From the first, Ladislaw places Dorothea on a pedestal and worships her:

Dorothea, he said to himself, was forever enthroned in his soul: no other woman could sit higher than her footstool. (MM, 344)

Though Eliot often views Ladislaw ironically, "a kind of Shelley you know" (MM, 263), she usually concurs completely in his image of Dorothea as a rarified unearthly creature and like him, insists on ascribing religious greatness to her:

It was beautiful to see how Dorothea's eyes turned with wifely anxiety and beseeching to Mr. Casaubon; she would have lost some of her halo if she had been without that duteous preoccupation. (MM, 162)

Sometimes when Dorothea was in company, there seemed to be as complete an air of repose about her as if she had been a picture of Santa Barbara looking out from her tower into the clear air. (MM, 65)
Such overly romantic descriptions are easily criticized on the grounds of sentiment alone. However, the more important problem is that they are seriously intended as precisely illustrative of one of the supposed themes of the novel—the Saint Theresa image introduced in "The Prelude." But regardless of what Eliot's intention may be, the Saint Theresa theme simply does not work and is more than anything else an irritating note that keeps cropping up as the action progresses. For those goddess-like images are in direct contradiction to the bleak but highly realistic picture of Dorothea constructed as the novel progresses—the intelligent, enthusiastic, yet typical woman trying to make some sense out of the patriarchal world in which she is trapped. Eliot insists on giving greatness to Dorothea when it has been the main force of the novel to demand her equality. Take, for instance, Will's attitude towards Dorothea:

Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her; nature having intended greatness for men. (MM, 285)

Or again, comments like Lydgate's:

This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her. She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her. (MM, 563)
These words put Dorothea not "beside" but "above" the males. In passages such as the above the novel loses touch with the veracity of the Dorothea portrait by changing her role from Woman to Madonna. It becomes distressingly clear that Eliot meant to criticize only the egoistic side of Dorothea's desire for martyrdom; of the martyrdom itself, as an ideal of feminine behaviour, she fully approves.

Eliot's lapses into idealism and sentiment in her portrayal of Dorothea are the more obvious because earlier in the novel these same aspects of Dorothea have been presented in a humorous or satirical manner. Although, as David Daiches suggests, it is sometimes not clear whether Eliot is being ironic or compassionate (he cites as an example "the different inflections with which the word 'poor' is used in its frequent association with the main characters") there is no doubt that in the early chapters of Dorothea's history we are meant to view her various religious posturings with some amusement. This use of humour does not mean that we lose interest in Dorothea or that the motives behind her actions are any less valid, but we are shown how far from her real needs is her desire for religious martyrdom. As I have shown above and earlier in this chapter, despite the suggestions of the "Prelude," we see Dorothea not as an extraordinary person, but as an intelligent woman frustrated by the limits of a patriarchal society. To us, what she "needs" is a life of action in the real world, not a place
in the heavenly choir. Her naive ideas about the glorious duties of marriage, her constant desire to "give up" things and her rather grandiose schemes for the betterment of mankind have the kind of humour in them that an adult often feels at remembering his or her own adolescent fantasies. The element of egoism, Dorothea's desire for some personal recognition through her "good works," also of course forms part of our laughter. The problem is Eliot's failure to see her irony as pointing up anything but this element of egoism. Eliot does not realize the full breadth of her own humour. With or without that egoism many of Dorothea's attitudes would still be, if not silly, at least unbelievable. For instance, in the first chapter, during the division of her mother's jewels, we are surely meant to smile a little at Dorothea's entrapment in her own belief in the necessity of renouncing all worldly pleasure:

"Yes! I will keep these--this ring and bracelet," said Dorothea. Then, letting her hand fall on the table, she said in another tone--"Yet what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them!" She paused again, and Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce the ornaments, as in consistence she ought to do. (MM, 10)

Yet near the end of the novel, after Dorothea has spent her famous night on the cold, hard floor of her bedroom scourging herself over her selfish desire to have Will Ladislaw's love, Eliot does not seem to recognize how ludicrous Dorothea becomes in Tantripp's expostulation on the manner in which her mistress has passed the night:
"Why, madam, you've never been in bed this blessed night," burst out Tantripp, looking first at the bed and then at Dorothea's face, which in spite of bathing had the pale cheeks and pink eyelids of a mater dolorosa. "You'll kill yourself, you will. Anybody might think now you had a right to give yourself a little comfort." (MM, 578)

Dorothea's beautific rejoinder is given in full seriousness. If there is any joke here at all, Tantripp and her materialistic concern about aches and pains are meant to be the butt of it—not the saintly Dorothea. But frankly, I think we find it the other way around, and would consider it one of the funniest scenes in the novel were it not that at this particular moment Dorothea is supposed to have reached true maturity in her suffering over Will.

These parallel scenes of humour and gushing idealism occur over and over in the novel. I have mentioned previously the references to Dorothea and Will as children. At the beginning of the novel they are both children and references to her naivety and his romanticism are amusing, revealing the maturity each must develop. But the same comments, presented seriously at the end of the novel, are only distressing. These two people should not be amusing any longer, but they are—they are laughable. Will's charming impetuosity is wearing a bit thin by this point and Dorothea's wide-eyed innocence makes her a mere caricature of the Victorian image of pure and guileless womanhood. Many of Eliot's descriptions of Dorothea's physical appearance fall into the same pattern. Having been told of Naumann's
boyish romanticism we tend to think that it is some of that idealism which makes him describe Dorothea in religious terms:

Here stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom. But she should be dressed as a nun; I think she looks almost what you call a Quaker; I would dress her as a nun in my picture. (MM, 140)

But there is no satire intended when Eliot herself describes Dorothea in almost the same words,

she was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. (MM, 140)

It is these religious references to Dorothea, the sense established particularly after Casaubon's death that Dorothea is not an ordinary woman but "better than anyone" (MM, 586), which weaken the force of the novel. Her desire for martyrdom, which we were led to interpret as a reaction to her frustration at her inability to find any identity for herself in a male-dominated world, is now being presented as the answer to all her problems. And if Arnold Kettle is right when he says that one of the crucial "ideas" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the "growing consciousness of women of the necessity of their emancipation (by which is not meant mere formal emancipation, parliamentary votes, etc.) and the inability of class society to admit such freedom," and that "it is from the examination of such situations that the artist makes contact
with the stuff and movement of life, then the conception of Dorothea as even a potential saint, which puts her "above" or "outside of" a social or political interpretation of her situation marks a serious failure in both the power and meaning of the novel.

(ix)

In her novels George Eliot always seems to start with the problem of egoism. When she looks in her female characters for the cause of egoism she most often finds that it is intimately related to their position in a repressive male-dominated society—whether the character is a Rosamond who is trained into selfish coquetry or a Dorothea, who in attempting to make a meaningful life for herself, is often blinded to the needs of others. But whatever the case, one cannot help feeling that in working out solutions for her female characters Eliot has also made some commitment to reconsider the traditional concepts of the rights and needs of women as people. This, however, does not happen. The problems of her women characters demand a complete reordering of society with which Eliot cannot really come to terms. In her anxiety to restore stability to the disrupted world she sees so clearly, Eliot (and many other Victorians) takes what can only now be called the easy way out. She calls for resignation, self-sacrifice and passivity—qualities which may be an adequate solution to the destructive side of their egoism but which scarcely provide a satisfactory
answer to Dorothea's attempt, and Rosamond's very observable need, to break out of the highly restricted patterns of accepted feminine behaviour.
NOTES


6  Mary Wollstonecraft, "Observations", p. 16.


8  Daiches, p. 27.


10  Ibid., p. 139.


12  Daiches, p. 8.

13  Kettle, p. 71.
IV

Daniel Deronda

(i)

It would make a neat little critical package to say that in her last novel George Eliot finally achieves complete success in dealing with a woman character—that the theoretical and artistic problems of Maggie in The Mill on the Floss and those of Dorothea and Rosamond in Middlemarch are resolved in the story of Gwendolen Harleth. On a first reading of Daniel Deronda we are tempted to reach this conclusion. Through suffering Gwendolen transcends the selfishness which had been so destructive to herself and others:

she was experiencing some of that peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self, and from taking the ordinary good of existence and especially kindness, even from a dog, as a gift above expectation.

But she does not in the process appear to become either saint or martyr. This time, perhaps, Eliot has kept one of her own basic assumptions about all female egoism in clear view throughout the novel: that its cause is, at least partially, woman's repression in patriarchal society. In the open-ended conclusion to Gwendolen's story Eliot seems to suggest that the old answers for women—marriage, motherhood and charity work—are simply inadequate. As Barbara Hardy puts it:
Gwendolen is not like Maggie Tulliver, whose problems are solved by death, or like the preceding heroines, Esther Lyon in *Felix Holt* or Dorothea in *Middlemarch* whose problems are solved by marriage. She stands alone at the end of the novel, facing the question-mark of the future....Gwendolen is not only alone, propped up neither by death nor marriage, but has to start on a new set of expectations. She has found that what seemed like a possible happy-ever-after was in fact a new and painful beginning in which many of the things she had learnt would be lost, retested and rediscovered. We are left with a new refusal to simplify the nature of moral development, as well as with a new kind of ending to a novel. It is an ending which leaves us with a true sense of life's difficulties and their full complexity and toughness.²

"A new refusal to simplify the nature of moral development"—does this mean that in *Daniel Deronda* we are finally dealing with a female character who must face the world as an adult without any easy answers, who is not arbitrarily manipulated into one of the traditional roles of her sex? Has Eliot finally resolved the contradiction which has flawed the presentation of her other women characters—where so often brilliant analysis of the effects of male supremacy has turned into worship of the Victorian vision of the ideal woman.

Almost as soon as one answer "yes" to these questions, the suspicions" begin to crop up. Along with Gwendolen—a new, complex and exciting portrait of a woman—Eliot has created the painfully sterotypical and highly sentimentalized figure of Mirah. Equally distressing are the virtuous and smug Meyrick women, constantly and uncomplainingly sacrificing for the rather silly and dilettantish Hans and revering everything Daniel Deronda says or does. And what about
Deronda himself? Can this idealized and highly unrepresentative male really act as the agent through whom Gwendolen will work out her suspicion and hatred of men? Do not the meetings between the two have a continually irritating and unfinished quality compared to the immediacy of Gwendolen's needs—is not Deronda's counselling vague? And lastly, Eliot's treatment of the Alcharisi, Deronda's mother, is both confusing and ambiguous. The Alcharisi's story is almost identical to that of Armgart in the long poem of the same name. In both cases Eliot seems at once sympathetic and condemnatory towards these women characters. She reveals with great sympathy the frustrations which have forced both to revolt against the repressive demands of a patriarchal father or lover and to attempt an independent career for themselves. Yet she insists that this kind of "egoistic" rebellion must be punished. Armgart rather melodramatically loses her voice and the Alcharisi begins to suffer from equally unbelievable "apparitions in the darkness" (DD, 693).

The treatment of Mirah, the Meyrick family, the Alcharisi, and Deronda's relationship with Gwendolen all point to a very traditional attitude toward women and the relationship between men and women. This in itself does not necessarily weaken a novel (or poem, or play) as a piece of art. The problem occurs when that traditional view of women directly contradicts a stronger and more aesthetically satisfying radical analysis. And, as in all her other no-
vels, this is the case with *Daniel Deronda*. Compared to Gwendolen, the other women characters are flat, uninteresting and rather distasteful in their perfect goodness and purity. Even this would not matter if, as F.R. Leavis suggests, we could separate one part of the novel from the other and concentrate on the immediate story of Gwendolen Harleth. This is certainly an appealing solution, but alas, it is impossible. Regardless of how inferior the portraits of Mirah and her ilk may be, the attitude informing that kind of characterization of woman subtly controls the rest of the novel and ultimately determines the direction of Gwendolen's process of growth. As I hope to show, Barbara Hardy is not altogether correct in her analysis; *Daniel Deronda* does not contain "a new refusal to simplify the nature of moral development." In the final analysis, the problems that Gwendolen presents are ignored and like her fictional sisters she is effectively abandoned by her creator.

(ii)

The contention that Eliot turns to traditional ideas about women in working out a solution for Gwendolen has meaning only if Eliot has established that Gwendolen's position as a female is a significant factor in understanding both her character and actions. Up to this point I have merely stated, not proven, that this is the case. A close
examination is required of the first two brilliant books, "The Spoiled Child" and "Meeting Streams" to determine the frame of reference within which we come to know Gwendolen and its effect on our expectations of where the novel should go.

In Chapter Three we saw how with Rosamond, Eliot begins to go beneath the surface of a type of female character whose personality is usually accounted for by some facile reference to the "evil" side of the feminine nature. By characterizing Rosamond in a clearly defined social system which places little value on women except as decorative objects, and by entering into Rosamond's consciousness of herself, Eliot shows how Rosamond's egoism has the same kind of complexity, though to a much lesser degree, as Maggie's or Dorothea's. In Daniel Deronda Eliot goes much further. As Jerome Thale comments:

For George Eliot—and very nearly for English fiction—Gwendolen Harleth is a new type, the bitch taken seriously. And in the nineteenth century even more than in our own time it was extremely difficult for the artist to formulate and render a satisfactory set of attitudes towards such a character. In Middlemarch George Eliot was learning how to triumph over her affection for her character; she succeeded most fully in Lydgate, for with Dorothea there is a certain amount of sympathy that the art has not digested. She was learning also in Middlemarch how to triumph over aversion, and she did so in the portraits of Rosamond and Bulstrode. Certainly the presentation of Gwendolen has nothing of the harsh and actinic quality of Hetty's in Adam Bede. 3

The "seriousness" to which Thale points marks the difference
between Eliot's handling of Rosamond and Gwendolen. In Rosamond there is a tentative and unfinished investigation of the bitch character. With Gwendolen, Eliot undertakes a full exploration of the circumstances which combine to create this particular kind of woman.

Between the two crucial scenes of the first part of the novel—after Gwendolen first encounters Grandcourt at the archery contest and before she is singled out by him at the ball—Eliot pauses for a moment to let us listen to the conversation of some of the male members of Gwendolen's social circle:

It was the rule of these occasions for the ladies and gentlemen to dine apart, so that the dinner might make a time of comparative ease and rest for both. Indeed the gentlemen had a set of archery stores about the epicurism of the ladies, who had somehow been reported to show a revoltingly masculine judgment in venison, even asking for the fat—a proof of the frightful rate at which corruption might go on in women, but for severe social restraint. And every year the amiable Lord Brackenshaw, who was something of a gourmet, mentioned Byron's opinion that a woman should never be seen eating,—introducing it with a confidential—'The fact is' as if he were for the first time admitting his concurrence in that sentiment of the refined poet. (DD, 150)

Although this incident is treated humourously it reinforces the strong impression given throughout the novel of the degree to which a woman's acceptability is determined by male ideas of femininity (and equally the degree to which male vanity is fed by the assumption that women will act exactly as men want them to). This is a factor which affects Gwendolen particularly. Her precarious economic position—
not secure enough to assure independence nor poor enough to
necessitate obsequiousness—forces her to participate in
the vicious Victorian mating game where survival means doing
everything one can to gain male approval,

1st gent: What should woman be? Sir consult the taste
Of marriageable men. This planet's store
In iron, cotton, wood or chemicals—
All matter rendered to our plastic skill,
Is wrought in shapes responsive to demand
The market's pulse makes index high or low
By rule sublime. Our daughters must be wives
And to be wives must be what men will choose
Men's taste is woman's text....(DD, 132)

Gwendolen's situation is further complicated in that she
is clearly the focus for her whole family's hopes and dreams
of greater financial security and higher social prestige. This
is the attitude of her uncle Gascoigne, who in doing what he
feels is best for his wife's relations, regards Gwendolen as
more a marketable commodity than a human being:

This girl is really worth some expense: you don't
often see her equal. She ought to make a first-rate marriage, and I should not be doing my duty
if I spared my trouble in helping her forward.
(DD, 66)

By her description of men like the Rector—and on a much
more menacing level, Grandcourt and Lush—Eliot shows how
deeply ingrained is the idea of woman as object.

Of course Gwendolen does not consciously think of herself
in this way. She may accept the ultimate necessity of mar-
riage—"that she was to married some time or other she would
have felt obliged to admit" (DD, 68)—but she does not, con-
sciously at least, think of herself as a victim of a parti-
cular social system. On the contrary, Gwendolen naively be-
lies she holds all the power in male/female relationships:

"Is it difficult to make Miss Harleth understand her power?" Here Grandcourt had turned to Mrs. Davilow who smiling gently at her daughter, said—

"I think she does not generally strike people as slow to understand."

"Mamma," said Gwendolen, in a deprecating tone, "I am adorably stupid, and want everything explained to me—when the meaning is pleasant."

"If you are stupid, I admit that stupidity is adorable," returned Grandcourt, after the usual pause, and without change of tone. But clearly he knew what to say. (DD, 155)

What is interesting in this exchange is the difference in our understanding and Gwendolen's of Grandcourt's comment about her "power" over him. What he tosses off as merely one of the necessary preludes to courtship, she revels in as literal truth:

Gwendolen had no sense that these men were dark enigmas to her, or that she needed any help in drawing conclusions about them—Mr. Grandcourt at least. (DD, 159)

At this point in her life Gwendolen operates only on the level of appearances. She does not yet understand that the flattery and apparent power given to women is often mere chivalrous compensation for the domination to which they must eventually submit. In this light then, her egoism, like Rosamond's, is not really surprising.

But Gwendolen is not stupid and she should—perhaps like Catherine Arrowpoint—be able to see beneath the surface of such social games to the reality of her own situation. However, she has been given almost no assistance, and it would be a great deal to expect of one individual that
alone she would be able to overcome the effects of an environment where "it must be remembered that no one had disputed her power or her general superiority." (DD, 70). It is almost useless to argue what Gwendolen should be or should have done when again and again one sees that her natural intelligence and enthusiasm have been given no healthy direction.

As for formal education, Gwendolen like Rosamond has gone to one of the "showy" girls' schools where any natural vanity is only encouraged:

That on all occasions for display she had been put foremost had only deepened her sense that so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous. (DD, 52)

Academic study for girls is thought of as a kind of necessary social polish, and what little of it Gwendolen receives hardly prepares her for an adult life:

As to her 'education,' she would have admitted that it had left her under no disadvantages. In the schoolroom her quick mind had taken readily that strong starch of unexplained rules and disconnected facts which saves ignorance from any painful sense of limpness; and what remained of all things knowable, she was conscious of being sufficiently acquainted with through novels, plays and poems... who can wonder if Gwendolen felt ready to manage her own destiny? (DD, 70)

Far from being an advantage Gwendolen's cleverness is only a detriment in this situation. She has absorbed all too completely the shallow teachings of a Miss Lemon's and her understanding of the "real" world remains at a highly egocentric, infantine level.

At the beginning of the novel, Gwendolen is know-
ledgeable enough; she does not have or manages not to display, the inexprience of the girl of twenty. If she exaggerates her own knowledge and competence, she is quick enough to keep from being caught. But her notions of evil in the world and others are imperfect—at once sophisticated and girlish. Least of all can she see evil in herself, or even see herself in the wrong. As she goes through much of the world she finds that it scarcely squares with a clever and high-spirited young girl's idea of it.

Gwendolen could perhaps have been saved from the disastrous effects of such a formal education had she found a conscientious moral guide elsewhere. In Middlemarch Rosamond's parents are only vague figures in the background, but in Daniel Deronda we are from the first aware that Gwendolen's uncle and her mother, who might have exerted a positive influence on her, fail miserably in meeting their parental obligations and instead only encourage Gwendolen's vanity and selfishness. The Rector has already been mentioned. As a surrogate father to Gwendolen he merely makes it more difficult for her to overcome the barriers leading to responsible adulthood. The Rector is not an evil man by any recognizable social standards; in fact to contemporary Victorian observers he would appear to be quite ordinary.

It would be a little hard to blame the Rector of Pennicote that in the course of looking at things from every point of view he looked at Gwendolen as a girl likely to make a brilliant marriage. Why should he be expected to differ from his contemporaries in this matter, and wish his niece a worse end of her charming maidenhood than they would approve as the best possible? It is rather to be set down to his credit that his feelings on the subject were entirely good-natured. And in considering the relation of means to ends, it
would have been mere folly to have been guided by the exceptional and idyllic... Mr. Gascoigne's calculations were of the kind called rational. (DD, 67-8)

Yet as Eliot reveals in this passage of damning praise it is his very normalcy which is so appalling. He sees clearly that Gwendolen lacks any moral substance, but far from educating her, his actions on her behalf usually only reinforce her egoism. For example, he intends to chastise Gwendolen for her behaviour at the fox-hunt, but when he learns that Lord Brackenshaw admired her daring, he cannot risk any criticism that might lower her marketability,

the prudential Rector did feel himself in a slight difficulty, for at that moment he was particularly sensible that it was his niece's serious interest to be well-regarded by the Brackenshaw's and their opinion as to her following the hounds really touched the essence of his objection. (DD, 107)

On another occasion, at the ball after the archery contest, he again approves of Gwendolen's calculated cunning in refusing to dance,

the ladies who waltzed, naturally thought that Miss Harleth only wanted to make herself particular; but her uncle when he overheard her refusal supported her by saying—

"Gwendolen has usually good reasons." He thought she was certainly more distinguished in not waltzing and he wished her to be distinguished. (DD, 152)

Gascoigne's materialistic attitude towards Gwendolen is most obvious in the stance he takes towards his niece's relationship with Grandcourt. He genuinely cares for her welfare but he has no conception of what her individual needs and desires might be. He lumps her together with all marriage-
able women and assumes that a successful match is the only requirement. And "success" is so much the key that he will turn a blind eye to Grandcourt's rumoured indiscretions instead of risking the loss of the status and security this suitor can offer both Gwendolen and her family:

This match with Grandcourt presented itself to him as a sort of public affair; perhaps there were ways in which it might even strengthen the establishment...Grandcourt, the almost certain baronet, the probable peer, was to be ranged with public personages, and was to be accepted on broad general grounds national and ecclesiastical...of the future husband personally Mr. Gascoigne was disposed to think the best. Gossip is a sort of smoke that comes from the dirty tobacco-pipe of those who diffuse it; it proves nothing but the bad taste of the smoker...there was every reason to believe that a woman of well-regulated mind would be happy with Grandcourt. (HD, 176-7)

But despite his own "political" machinations Gascoigne is sincerely shocked when Gwendolen expresses the same kind of pragmatic view towards her marriage:

"I am not foolish. I know that I must be married some time—before it is too late. And I don't see how I could do better than marry Mr. Grandcourt. I mean to accept him if possible."

But the Rector was a little startled by so bare a version of his own meaning from those young lips. He wished that in her mind his advice should be taken in an infusion of sentiments proper to a girl, and such as are presupposed in the advice of a clergyman, although he may not consider them always appropriate to be put forward. He wished his niece parks, carriage, a title—but he wished her not to be cynical—to be, on the contrary religiously dutiful, and have warm domestic affections. (HD, 180)

He simply does not understand that a young woman who is encouraged to see marriage as a way of raising her social status or ensuring her economic security will hardly at the same time
have very mature ideas about love or responsibility.

Her mother has been little more help to Gwendolen. She does sense the destructive power of Gwendolen's egoism:

Mrs. Davilow, who, even if she had not wished her darling to have the horse, would not have dared to by lukewarm in trying to get it for her. (DD, 65)

But her attempts to teach her daughter any sense of duty are weak and easily abandoned:

One night under an attack of pain she found that the specific regularly placed by her bedside had been forgotten, and begged Gwendolen to get out of bed and reach it for her. That healthy young lady snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch, objected to step out in the cold, and lying perfectly still, grumbled a refusal. Mrs. Davilow went without the medicine and never reproached her daughter. (DD, 53)

Mrs. Davilow's actions towards Gwendolen usually only reaffirm her daughter's sense of her own supremacy. The only solution Mrs. Davilow can provide is the old cure-all for women—marriage. And regardless of her own misgivings about Gwendolen's chances of fulfillment, along with her brother-in-law, she also assures Gwendolen of the fitness of a marriage with Grandcourt,

Is he a man she would be happy with?—was a question which inevitably arose in the mother's mind. "Well perhaps as happy as she would be with anyone else—or as most other women are"—was the answer with which she tried to quiet herself. (DD, 167)

In all of these situations—at school, at home with her uncle and mother—the fact of Gwendolen's perfect beauty only draws her more inexorably into the trap of female egotism. If a woman is beautiful, usually little else is required from her than that she effectively display herself
at all times. If, like Gwendolen she is clever enough, she can give her beauty a certain personality as when she "gets herself up as a sort of serpent" (DD, 40). But the development of "character" is regarded as, and in fact is, unnecessary; her physical appearance alone guarantees success in plying the woman's trade. However, this reasoning almost guarantees her moral corruption. Unless counteracted by positive family influences or an enlightened education (both of which are conspicuously absent in Gwendolen's life) or some exceptional gift of social criticism, she is quickly and thoroughly initiated into a social world which accedes (or seems to accede) to her every whim simply because she is a beautiful and stylish woman. Though she cannot be held entirely blameless, it is not difficult to understand why Gwendolen would be so vain and put such great stock in her own beauty. After all, she is only following the example of the rest of the world when she meditates on her own image in the mirror and sees her beauty as giving her power over others:

Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forwards and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. How could she believe in sorrow? If it attacked her, she felt the force to crush it, to defy it, or run away from it, as she had done already. Anything seemed more possible than that she could go on bearing miseries, great or small. (DD, 47)

Until she encounters Klesmer and Deronda, no one has ever taken Gwendolen at anything but, literally, "face value."
The two men demand a great deal from her—that she peel off the layers of egoism to take an accurate reading of her own self. In order to do this, and so to begin the struggle for self-realization, Gwendolen will somehow have to deal with those huge obstructing social forces which can do so much toward determining certain types of female character. Her bitch-character egoism, which must go, is largely rooted in social conditions and relations. Either she will have to meet head-on the facts of her position as a woman—her economic impotence, the barriers to education, the culturally determined roles—and struggle for her own freedom within that understanding; or the whole problem can be avoided. Gwendolen can simply be moved out of one female role, the bitch, into another, the good woman. If Gwendolen's education takes the latter course there is a consequent failure of both ideology and artistry. It is the large impression of the first two books of Daniel Deronda to prepare us for something very different.

(iii)

Although she paints a very clear backdrop of Victorian social conditions, against which one can understand Gwendolen's development (or non-development), Eliot makes the reader more than an observer. As she did with Rosamond, Eliot goes "inside" her character and explores Gwendolen's own consciousness of her self. We share for example Gwendolen's feelings of frustration with the limitations of the female role that
she plays. In a conversation with Grandcourt she tries to understand her own behaviour:

We women can't go in search of adventures—to find out the North West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow or where gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous. (DD, 171)

Unfortunately, Gwendolen has no solution to offer other than the possibility of women going on "adventures" like men, or as in her own case becoming a rather risquee debutante. Gwendolen does not have a particularly fine mind, or any great creative talent, but whatever she may have in the way of possibilities is clearly limited by "the strictly feminine furniture" (DD, 69) with which her mind has always been cluttered. Like Rosamond, Gwendolen's natural cleverness, eagerness and enthusiasm is concentrated entirely on the shallow games of feminine coquetry:

She rejoiced to feel herself exceptional but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality and general rebellion while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion. (DD, 83)

Gwendolen may think she is something other than the dull flower that simply lives "to look as pretty as she can," but she is in exactly the same position, her intellect have never had the opportunity to develop beyond an intense concentration on her own beauty and its effect on other people.
Because Gwendolen is so self-involved, she has little knowledge of, let alone concern for, others. She regards her family as convenient agents for the fulfillment of her own desires. Part of this selfishness stems from their having rarely made any demands on Gwendolen. Not only have they let her rule, they have positively encouraged the sense of her own supremacy,

Having always been the pet and pride of the household waited on by mother, sisters, governess, and maids as if she had been a princess in exile, she naturally found it difficult to think her own pleasure less important than others made it. (DD, 53)

As the members of her own family are objects rather than persons to Gwendolen, so is anyone else who is a part of her world—particularly men. The irony here is supreme, although scarcely unusual. Women who are trained to attract men as a kind of business venture usually end up seeing them as objects for capture rather than as human beings. In Rosamond's view of men "it was not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious business in the world" (MM, 123). So it is with Gwendolen. Both women are incapable of developing any real affection for men because they are never allowed to see them apart from their own personal ambitions.

But Gwendolen is slightly different from Rosamond. Not only does she have very little real regard for men; she is positively afraid of them. And it is at this level, seeing Gwendolen's inability to relate to men as fear rather than
hatred, that Eliot triumphs as a realist. She "takes the bitch seriously." With great delicacy she shows how Gwendolen suspects the social dance that she herself performs so well. Though she seeks and accepts the homage of men, she is at the same time vaguely aware of another darker side of male/female relationships which is the root of her sexual frigidity. What she has seen and understood of marriage so far has only convinced her that it is an institution where a woman trades in freedom for slavery.

...the mother even said to herself, "It would not signify about her being in love, if she would only accept the right person." For whatever marriage had been for herself, how could she the less desire it for her daughter? The difference her own misfortune made was, that she never dared to dwell much to Gwendolen on the desirableness of marriage, dreading an answer something like that of the future Madame Roland, when her gentle mother, urging the acceptance of a suitor, said, "Tu seras heureuses, ma chere." "Oui, maman, comme toi." (DD, 126)

So Gwendolen is determined neither to give nor to receive affection:

she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her. (DD, 157)

In the last phrase of the above quotation Eliot seems to be coming very close to the interpretations of frigidity suggested by Kate Millett in Sexual Politics, where she discusses the Victorian woman:

Under the demands of a socially coercive or exploitative sexuality such as patriarchy had instituted where sexual activity implied submission to male will, "chastity," frigidity or some form of resistance to sexuality took on something of the character
of a "political" response to the conditions of sexual politics. While chastity or even the negative attitudes toward coitus which accompany frigidity, operated as patriarchal and psychological "stratagems" to limit or prohibit woman's pleasure in sexuality, they could also be transformed into protective feminine "stratagems" in a refusal to capitulate to patriarchal force: physical, economic or social. 5

For Gwendolen any serious male advances appear as a threat to what little independence she has. Since she cannot distinguish between honest affection and a man's desire to master her the unfortunate result is that coldness in a suitor appeals to her:

Gwendolen thought that a man of extremely calm, cold manners might be less disagreeable as a husband than other men, and not likely to interfere with his wife's preferences. (DD, 147)

It is this kind of brilliant insight, especially in the murky area of Victorian ideas about female sexuality, that makes the portrait of Gwendolen so new and exciting. The bitch here is clearly not just a cold-blooded vicious man-hating home-breaker, but a woman moulded by social attitudes and institutions and driven by fears and frustrations to become what she is.

There is more to Gwendolen's inner consciousness than her fear of men. The greatest revelation in the first two books of Daniel Deronda is the complexity of Gwendolen's personality. The kind of schizophrenia that Eliot began to develop in her characterization of Rosamond is with Gwendolen fully realized. Though Gwendolen may appear on the surface vain, blindly egotistical and even cruel, Eliot states explicitly
that Gwendolen has another self—or more properly selves—which must be considered in forming a judgment of her character. For example, during the weeks of her courtship with Grandcourt she finds a part of her does not accept the most acceptable Henleigh Grandcourt but insists on questioning and resisting, almost as if she subconsciously senses that the coldness which attracts her to him is really a disguise for a kind of evil power:

the subjection to a possible self, a self not to be absolutely predicted about, caused her some astonishment and terror; her favourite key of life—doing as she liked—seemed to fail her, and she could not foresee what at a given moment she might like to do. (DD, 173)

This same "other" self has also been revealed over the incident with Rex. Gwendolen likes to think of herself as independent and fearless. But not very far beneath this carefree surface her sexual frigidity and her inability to form intimate relationships with other people terrifies her:

she [Mrs. Davilow] pressed her cheek against Gwendolen's head, and then tried to draw it upward. Gwendolen gave way, and letting her head rest against her mother, cried out sobbingly, "Oh, Mamma, what can become of my life? there is nothing worth living for!"..."I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them." (DD, 115)

At the Arrowpont's dinner party another self appears in response to Klesmer's playing:

Gwendolen, in spite of her wounded egoism, had fulness of nature enough to feel the power of this playing, and it gradually turned her inward sob of mortification into an excitement which lifted her for the moment into a desperate indifference about her own doing. (DD, 80)
Given this glimpse of Gwendolen it is impossible to dismiss her as either insensitive or hopelessly egoistic. In a later encounter with Klesmer the sense of Gwendolen's egoism as only the outer and not the inner definition of her personality is reinforced:

When he had taken up his hat and was going to make his bow, Gwendolen's better self, conscious of an ingratitude which the clear seeing Klesmer must have penetrated, made a desperate effort to find its way above the stifling layers of egoistic disappointment and irritation. (DD, 306)

However the schizophrenic nature of Gwendolen's character is perhaps most powerfully revealed in the two incidents with the death's head, where we see how suddenly and totally Gwendolen's public self can give way to a self which, though frightening to her, is an acknowledgement by the author of her basic humanity.

Everyone was startled, but all eyes in the act of turning towards the opened panel were recalled by a piecing cry from Gwendolen, who stood without change of attitude but with a change of expression that was terrifying in its terror. She looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered: her pallid lips were parted; her eyes, usually narrowed under their long lashes, were dilated and fixed. (DD, 91)

Related to this fear of death is Gwendolen's terror of solitude, of suddenly being confronted with a sense of the world for which neither her background nor her education has prepared her:

She was ashamed and frightened...when, for example she was walking without companionship and there came some rapid change in the light. Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her,
in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself... but always when someone joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile. (DD, 95)

This careful interior examination of Gwendolen, which reveals how much more there is to her than just pure ego, corroborates that measure of environmental determinism indicated by Eliot's description of Gwendolen's social position as a woman. (iv)

What Eliot does in the first two books of Daniel Deronda by her exterior and interior analysis of Gwendolen is to change radically our pattern of response to a particular female type. And this is important, for as much as Gwendolen is an individual, she is still a recognizable type. By giving us a new understanding of that type Eliot has opened up a whole different dimension of human experience to which only the man or woman completely ignorant of the workings of sexual politics can remain blind.

While the reader may be in complete sympathy with Gwendolen as a victim of the institutions and attitudes of patriarchy, it is questionable whether Eliot herself is. Even though she creates the conditions for that sympathy, she does not seem to understand how much it controls our reactions to the novel. In a letter to Barbara Bodichon she complains of the "laudation of readers who cut the book up into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen." Moreover Eliot's correspondence with Blackwood makes it apparent that her
real affection and concern was for the Jewish part of the novel. But that of course is the basic problem with *Daniel Deronda*. Eliot is so concerned with presenting Judaism in a positive light that she is unable to achieve any aesthetic distance from the characters involved in that theme. With Mirah (Deronda's case is the same, but he will be discussed more fully later) she discards complexity and realism for exaggeration and idolatry. Mirah is a wearisome and usually incredible catalogue of Victorian womanly virtues ("her voice, her accent, her looks—all the sweet purity...clothed her as with a consecrating garment" : DD, 247). Pristine, worshipful, complaint, passive, loving and innocent she lacks all depth. If she has ever come into conflict with the demands of a patriarchy (as with her father's insistence that she marry the count) we are assured that she possessed enough innate goodness to resist such assaults on her character,

'It will hardly be denied that even in this frail and corrupted world, we sometimes meet persons who, in their very mien and aspect, as well as in their whole habit of life, manifest such a signature and stamp of virtue, as to make our judgment of them a matter of intuition rather than the result of continued examination.' (DD, 248)

But however dull and uninspiring we find Mirah to be, the important thing is that she is there and that Eliot completely approves of the model of womanhood that she represents—"impossible to see a creature freer at once from embarrassment and boldness" (DD, 266). The question then is, given her attraction to this simplistic characterization of woman, how can she at the same time maintain her complex and radical
The answer is that she cannot or that she does not. As much as the first two books of *Daniel Deronda* may reveal the bitch character as a product of a complex set of social attitudes and institutions, there is another voice in "The Spoiled Child" and "Meeting Streams" which corresponds to her one-dimensional view of Mirah. If Mirah is perfectly good, then Gwendolen is perfectly bad. We are not to see Gwendolen as a victim of patriarchy but rather as one who has denied her true womanhood. Gwendolen's salvation will come not in a reordering of social values but in learning the lessons of femininity that Mirah exemplifies.

This side of Eliot's response to Gwendolen is in fact apparent in the very first paragraph of the novel.

> Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than that of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (*DD*, 35)

"Undisturbed charm" is the key here. The phrase is sexually loaded and represents perfectly what Victorian society, and Eliot would require from women—meekness, obedience and conformity. That these qualities are to be developed in response to masculine needs is clearly underlined by the fact that the questioner here is Deronda, a man who totally exemplifies the nineteenth century's chivalrous and sentimental attitude towards women. Gwendolen, he decides, is "evil"
because she is not properly feminine. There is a "dynamic quality" to her glance which does not accord with perfect womanly repose. Ironically Gwendolen's dynamism is what Eliot goes on to explore and reveal, not as "evil," but as a reflection of Gwendolen's struggle, whether conscious or not, with the forces that go to determine a woman's life. But the note of feminine evil has been struck and will be played again in the first books of the novel.

For example, Eliot shows clearly how women come to realize that their sole business as women is to attract men, and that the economic impulse towards personal relationships often results in their emotional and sexual frigidity, but she still cannot resist the old myth of the sexual temptress.

"A striking girl—that Miss Harleth—unlike others."
"Yes, she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual."
"Oh, she must always be doing something extraordinary. She is that kind of girl, I fancy. Do you think her pretty, Mr. Vandernoot?"
"Very. A man might risk hanging for her—I mean, a fool might."
"You like a nez retroussé then, and long narrow eyes?"
"When they go with such an ensemble."
"The ensemble du serpent?"
"If you will. Woman was tempted by a serpent; why not man?" (DD, 40-1)

There is no attempt here (either in the dialogue itself or in the tone with which it is presented) to see below the surface of Gwendolen's behaviour. She is only what she appears to others to be—the insatiable seductress who will lead the innocent male to destruction. Eliot indicates no awareness
of what, her own art will later demonstrate—that Gwendolen's
dangerous and destructive coquettishness is not innate but rather
a technique that she has been encouraged (by men like her
Uncle Gascoigne) to adopt in order to capture and hold male
attention.

The same negative attitude to Gwendolen is apparent
during the affair with Rex Gascoigne. He has all the author's
sympathy:

...for in his handsome face there was nothing corres­
ponding to the undefinable stinging quality—as it
were a trace of demon ancestry—which made some
beholders hesitate in their admiration of Gwendolen.
(DD, 99)

Gwendolen is reduced to the blank stereotype of the evil woman.
She is selfish, capable of "stinging," and therefore refuses
to accept her proper feminine role; she ruthlessly plays havoc
with the delicate male affections of "sweet-natured Rex"
(DD, 100).

"Can you manage to feel only what pleases you?" said he.
"Of course not; that comes from what other people
do. But if the world were pleasanter, one would
only feel what was pleasant. Girls' lives are so
stupid; they never do what they like."
"I thought that was more the case of men. They
are forced to do hard things, and are often dread­
fully bored, and knocked to pieces too. And then,
if we love a girl very dearly, we want to do as she
likes, so after all you have your own way."
"I don't believe it. I never saw a married woman
who had her own way."
"What should you like to do?" said Rex, quite
guillessly and in real anxiety.
"Oh, I don't know—go to the North Pole, or ride
steeplechases, or go to be a queen in the East like
Lady Hester Stanhope," said Gwendolen flightily.
Her words were born on her lips, but she would have
been at a loss to give an answer of deeper origin.
"You don't mean you would never be married."
"No; I didn't say that. Only when I married, I should not do as other women do."
"You might do just as you liked if you married a man who loved you more dearly than anything else in the world," said Rex. (DD, 101)

But it does not work, at least not in the way it is supposed to. Undoubtedly we are supposed to favour Rex in this exchange (he is the innocent, the "guileless" one, the "poor youth") but we hear Gwendolen's impatience and frustration most clearly. As Eliot's version of the ideal man, Rex is a failure; he is vague, overly sentimental, lifeless when compared to Gwendolen. Gwendolen cannot come up with any more constructive goal than "to go to the North Pole," but we know enough of a woman's frustrations to know that Rex does not give an acceptable answer either. His statement that men "are forced to do hard things and are often dreadfully bored" while literally true, appears in this instance to be merely a glib way of avoiding the question of the rights, let alone the needs, of women to a choice of life styles whether they be hard or boring or not. Furthermore his "love conquers all" attitude to marriage is ridiculously naive and ignores entirely the legal and economic position of the married woman in Victorian England.

Even though Rex's words are not particularly effective it is clear Eliot intends us to feel that if only Gwendolen would accept Rex's philosophy about the proper role of women all her problems would be solved.

Thinking of them in these moments one is tempted
to the futile sort of wishing—if only things could have been a little otherwise then, so as to have been greatly otherwise after!—if only these two beautiful young creatures could have pledged themselves to each other then and there, and never through life have swerved from that pledge! for some of the goodness which Rex believed in was there.

(DD, 99)

However, even without Rex, Eliot's obvious preference for the sweet compliant homebody Anna Gascoigne over Gwendolen—"my Anna, is worth two of her, with all her beauty and talent" (DD, 111)—would be enough to indicate wherein she sees Gwendolen's salvation. Anna's life may be limited,

he [Rex] returned Anna's affection as fully as could be expected of a brother whose pleasures apart from hers were more than the sum total of hers. (DD, 87)

But Eliot still approves uncritically of keeping women in the role of wife, mother or daughter.

This impression is reinforced by a passage at the end of the chapter where Gwendolen first encounters Grandcourt:

What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea or Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections. (DD, 160)

This statement repeats one of the oldest ideas in the world about women—that it is their chief role to succour and nurture, to stand by worshipfully while men fight out life's great moral battles. It is, to say the least, a surprising statement, in light of the apparent direction of Gwendolen's story in the first part of Daniel Deronda where she appears headed for something other than the usual history of female
characters. Certainly she must learn warmth towards others, certainly her "affections" must be developed, and ideally she might find great satisfaction in some healthy male-female relationship. But what about the larger questions that Gwendolen's situation in the novel have posed? Does such a statement consider the economics of marriage, which makes a woman servant more often than helpmate? Does it consider an educational system which breeds vanity and egoism in beautiful women? Does it consider the patriarchal control over women which makes true affection almost impossible? And where, finally, are the men who could make the role Eliot suggests for Gwendolen a fulfilling one? If Rex is unbelievable, Deronda is not much more so. The men in the novel who are convincingly portrayed—Grandcourt, Lush, Gascoigne, Sir Hugo—could at their very best hardly help Gwendolen to develop a high degree of self-respect or social responsibility. Yet again, as in the scene with Rex, Eliot is undoubtedly serious. Placed where the passage is at a crucial point in the action of the novel, we can only believe that the author's own answer for Gwendolen would be similar to John Ruskin's reply to the threat of contemporary feminism:

Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest wherever war is just, whenever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things,
their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise; she enters into no contest but infal­libly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man...guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence.............

..........................This, then, I believe to be,—will you not admit it to be,—the woman's true place and power? But do not you see that, to fulfil this, she must—as far as one can use such terms of a human creature—be incapable of error? So far as she rules, all must be right, or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation; wise, not that she may set herself above her hus­band, but that she may never fall from his side; wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and love­less pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely appli­cable, modesty of service—the true changefulness of woman. 7

Eliot has gone too far and succeeded too well in her attempt to "take the bitch seriously" to step back and either describe or judge Gwendolen according to the narrow standards usually applied to female behaviour. But this is exactly what she does. Instead of following to its logical conclusion her enlightened analysis of Gwendolen, she pulls from those first books the thin voice of traditional opinion and allows it to control the rest of the novel. Despite her brilliant exposure of the limiting effects of patriarchy on woman's self-development, she ignores that factor in her programme for Gwendolen's growth from egoism to knowledge and appreciation of others. What the novel demands ia Gwendolen's serious confrontation of the system of social attitudes towards women which have made her what she is. What the novel gives is
corollary, to the other side of the feminine mystique. Gwen­
dolen's education, as I hope to demonstrate, depends entirely
on recognition of herself as the prime agent of all her ac­
tions and consequent acceptance of a guilt which to some ex­
tent ought to be placed on the society which has moulded her
character. What she learns then is not healthy self-criticism
but neurotic masochism. There is nothing wrong with the world,
only with her. She has been "bad" (the bitch) and she must
become "better" (the good woman). It is the kind of easy
personal or individual solution which avoids entirely the
larger question of how much a person, and especially a woman,
is the product of her or his environment.

Because Eliot fails to carry through her initial radical
analysis of Gwendolen's situation, the political and artistic
power of her story is reduced. The aesthetic failure is dis­
cussed later in this chapter but on a political level one can
turn to Marx's argument, mentioned in the introduction to this
thesis, with Feuerbach's discussion of the causes of self­
alienation in religion,

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious
self-alienation, the duplication of the world into
a religious, imaginary world and a real one. His
work consists in the dissolution of the religious
world into its secular basis. He overlooks the
fact that after completing this work, the chief
thing still remains to be done. For the fact that
the secular foundation detaches itself from itself
and establishes itself in the clouds as an inde­
pendent realm is really only to be explained by
the self cleavage and self-contradictoriness of
this secular basis. The latter must itself, there­
fore, first be understood in its contradiction
and then, by removal of contradiction be revolu­
tionized in practice. Eliot's failure is even more serious than Feuerbach's because she goes a step farther than him by describing clearly the "contradictoriness of this secular basis," but then stops short where real action is required and will not attempt any "revolution of practice." Gwendolen's solution, for Eliot, lies not in learning to understand and grapple with reality but in rising above the problems of Victorian social life by individual moral energy. The implied suggestion in the earlier books, that the Gwendolens can only really change when society changes, is abandoned. Now society is undynamic and salvation becomes a personal affair. Because it neglects the dialectics of social struggle, the "individual" solution which Eliot offers for Gwendolen is at least partly spurious.

That is not to say Daniel Deronda would be a successful novel if all the male characters confessed to their chauvinism and the women ran off and became molecular biologists. Certainly the novel does not possess that kind of possibility. But it does have the possibility that Gwendolen will come to understand the world as her creator does, that instead of blindly acting and reacting, Gwendolen will come to understand some of the social dynamics that Eliot has made so obvious. The gap between author and subject in the first books is never bridged and the whole question of how much society has determined Gwendolen's egoism is left hanging while the terms of reference shift completely. In the second half of the novel
Eliot has stopped describing the world dynamically and is accepting it as given. Thus there is no real victory for Gwendolen—or for the type of woman she represents—only for the patriarchal values of a sexist society.

Several critics have pointed out how similar the method of Gwendolen's regeneration is to the techniques used in modern psychiatric analysis. This is very true. But exactly the criticisms that are now being levelled against the treatment of women in analysis can also be applied to Gwendolen's situation. What a woman is too often taught by her psychiatrist (usually male and not necessarily Freudian) is not objective self-criticism; she learns instead to apply to her own self the standards of female behaviour set by society.

Woman is nurturance...anatomy decrees the life of a woman...when women grow up without dread of biological functions and without subversion by feminist doctrine and therefore enter upon motherhood with a sense of fulfillment and altruistic sentiment, we shall attain the goal of a good life and a secure world in which to live.

Consequently a woman like Gwendolen comes to understand that her own misery and the misery she has caused others stems from her failure to accept her feminine identity, exactly the fault that Eliot, in those irritating parts of Book I and II, has suggested. The solution of course lies in Gwendolen's becoming more "womanly." But this merely removes Gwendolen from one female role (the bitch) directly into another. This other, the good woman syndrome, is certainly more freeing and more socially productive than the frustrating role of the
bitch but it is still based in the same pervasive oppression of a woman's natural growth and does not adequately fulfill the promise of a new attitude to women toward which Eliot seemed initially to be progressing.

As Walter Houghton points out in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* the ideal of the good woman was an essential element of Victorian social philosophy. As untouched virgin or nurturing mother, she was the source of moral goodness to protect society from the new threats to stability presented by the commercial and imperialistic spirit, the growing doubts about orthodox Christianity and the undeniable increase in prostitution. Eliot and many of the other Victorian intellectuals were afraid to look for the roots of this growing social chaos—because it would mean an entire revolution of social relations and institutions; instead, they tried to shore up the system against collapse by promoting the image of the good woman, "the angel in the house," as society's saving grace:

"Mr. Deronda, you must enlighten my ignorance. I want to know why you thought it wrong for me to gamble. Is it because I am a woman?"
"Not altogether; but I regretted it the more because you were a woman," said Deronda, ..........
"But why should you regret it more because I am a woman?"
"Perhaps because we need that you should be better than we are." (DD, 383-4)

Although Eliot clearly saw how hurtful the oppression of women was to personal self-development, she could not abandon the traditional views of a woman's role: thus the double tone
of the first two books of Daniel Deronda and the final victory of the old values. Houghton's conclusion to his chapter entitled "Love" sums up the reason why many otherwise progressive Victorians found themselves taking a conservative view on the position of women:

To reflect for a moment on the preceding discussion is to realize with special force how much and how curiously the dynamics of an age affect the human mind. That Victorian ideas about religion or politics or education should have been closely related to the environment is only what we should expect. But offhand, we might not have supposed that such personal and elemental feelings as those about love and women would have been so strongly influenced by the hard competitive world of business or by the pressure of intellection and doubt. The Industrial Revolution creates the large, impersonal city and makes considerable wealth a requirement as well as a sanction for marriage. These factors contribute to an alarming increase of prostitution; a fact which, in turn, contributes to a strong protective movement in morals (a code of purity, censorship, and prudery) and an effort to idealize love and women, including the mother, in the cause of purer conduct. And that is only one pattern, and an oversimplified one. It is equally true that the Industrial Revolution created a psychological and amoral atmosphere for which an idealized home with its high priestess offered a compensating sense of humanity and moral direction. And still, to all that must be added the parallel impulse to exalt the feminine nature and find a "divinity" in love which sprang from the needs of the baffled intellect. Our most personal attitudes are deeply affected by elements in the environment which seem to have no connection with them at all.12

(v)

The real meaning of Gwendolen's final salvation is foreshadowed in the attitude Eliot takes towards her in Book III, which covers the events of the few days between Gwendolen's return from Lebronn and her acceptance of Grandcourt's
proposal. Although Eliot again makes hideously real the conditions which force Gwendolen to make the decisions she does, the tone is rarely sympathetic; we seem almost now to be dealing with two Eliot's--the artist who still draws us sympathetically into the circumference of Gwendolen's experience, and the commentator who continually implies that a "good" woman would be able to resist the temptation to marry Grand-court, much as the irreproachable Mirah did when faced with the same situation (the story of which, significantly, comes immediately before this part of Gwendolen's story). The point is that the woman who did resist in this situation would have to be a saint, someone unaffected by, or who had "risen above", social conditioning and economic necessity, as well as someone who willingly took it upon herself to bear the burden of all the sins of the rest of society. But that is what the dispassionate commentator seems to expect of Gwendolen. The realism which made the first two books so compelling is undermined in "Maiden's Choosing" by a basic refusal to accept the power social circumstances have over the individual. Eliot idealizes poverty, refusing to admit that it more often destroys than builds character; she sentimentalizes over governessing in a way that would only bring sneers from a Jane Eyre, a Jane Fairfax or even a Mary Garth; and finally, in the case of Gwendolen's "promise" to Lydia Glasher, she creates for Gwendolen a moral problem which though apparently significant is actually meaningless given that Gwendolen has in fact
no choice but to marry Henleigh Grandcourt.

When Gwendolen returns from Lebronn she faces an increasingly untenable situation. But where Eliot would previously have been sympathetic or at least analytical, she is now flippant and critical.

To be dropped solitary at an ugly, irrelevant-looking spot with a sense of no income on the mind, might well prompt a man to discouraging speculation on the origin of things and the reason of a world where a subtle thinker found himself so badly off. How much more might such trials tell on a young lady equipped for society with a fastidious taste, an Indian shawl over her arm, some twenty cubic feet of trunks by her side, and a mortal dislike to the new consciousness of poverty which was stimulating her imagination of disagreeables? (DD, 269-70)

The distinction made between men and woman in this situation is perhaps worth considering. Gwendolen has been trained to have higher expectations from the world than a man. But for the same reason, because of her sex, when any catastrophe strikes she can do nothing about the failure of those expectations to be fulfilled (forgetting for the moment that perhaps no one should have such expectations). This raises an interesting problem with regard to Eliot's idea of the proper course of action for Gwendolen. A constant play on the words "submit" and "resist" occurs in the next few chapters and obviously in Eliot's eyes Gwendolen is at fault for her failure to submit to her new-found poverty and to leave the management of affairs to her uncle:

At first, Gwendolen remained silent, paling with anger—justifiable anger, in her opinion. Then she said with haughtiness—

"That is impossible. Something else than that
ought to have been thought of. My uncle ought not to allow that. I will not submit to it." (DD, 273)

Tom Tulliver went out to recoup the family fortunes, and that was considered manly. The suspicion begins to grow that the real reason for the prescription of submission is that it is the "womanly" thing to do. However, despite her mother's dictum (and here Mrs. Davilow I think speaks for Eliot) that "We must resign ourselves to the will of Providence, my child," (DD, 274) Gwendolen is determined to resist, to do what she can about their situation. One cannot help admiring her spirit, despite her "practical ignorance, continually exhibited" (DD, 276). This ignorance is one of the consequences of a young girl's totally inadequate preparation for life, by virtue of which Gwendolen's attempts to act for herself are doomed, and her refusal of Grandcourt's proposal is made impossible.

Gwendolen's "fault" of course is that she "resists" for the wrong reasons—for selfish reasons—to avoid her own poverty and sense of social humiliation. This is true enough, but Gwendolen's whole history has led her to have other expectations from the world; this Eliot seems to remove from consideration. The words of her mother's letter announcing the family's financial ruin are particularly revealing of the attitude towards herself which Gwendolen has absorbed,

I always feel it impossible that you can have been meant for poverty. (DD, 44)

Further we must remember that Gwendolen's decision to marry Grandcourt is the last choice she would wish to make but circumstances close in on her so tightly that it becomes
practically unavoidable,

While Gwendolen certainly remains responsible for her choices, it is Victorian England that nourishes her in the expectations which only a Grandcourt can fulfil and creates the situation in which her refusal of him is almost impossible.13

Besides Gwendolen's own ambitions which have been inculcated by the society in which she lives, there are also the demands which her family place on her. As well as being the household pet, Gwendolen, ironically enough, has also always been looked to as the strength of the family. Consequently her mother and her sisters expect Gwendolen to do something to relieve their situation. Her welcome home is revealing:

Behind, of course, were the sad faces of the four superfluous girls, each, poor thing—like those other many thousand sisters of us all—having her peculiar world which was of no importance to any one else, but all of them feeling Gwendolen's presence to be somehow a relenting of misfortune: where Gwendolen was, something interesting would happen; even her hurried submission to their kisses, and 'Now go away, girls,' carried the sort of comfort which all weakness finds in decision and authoritativness. (DD, 271)

Gwendolen reacts as strongly to her mother's tearfulness as she does to her own misery; regardless of her own obvious inabilities she is sincere enough in her determination to save not only herself but her family as well:

"Never mind, mama dear," said Gwendolen, tenderly pressing her handkerchief against the tears that were rolling down Mrs. Davilow's cheeks. "Never mind, I don't mind. I will do something. I will be something. Things will come right. It seemed worse because I was away. Come now! You must be glad because I am here." (DD, 271)

However, Gwendolen's attempts to rescue her family from poverty are as determined by her background as any of her
other actions. Her notions of going on the stage, while pathetic in their ignorance and egoism, are impossible to realize because of the manner in which a young English lady's talents are developed. As Klesmer succinctly puts it:

"You are a beautiful young lady—you have been brought up in ease—you have done what you would—you have not said to yourself, 'I must know this exactly,' 'I must understand this exactly,' 'I must do this exactly' in uttering these three terrible musts, Klesmer lifted up three long fingers in succession. "In sum, you have not been called upon to be anything but a charming young lady, whom it is an impoliteness to find fault with."

And it is interesting to note where Klesmer feels her real future lies:

The gods have a curse for him who willingly tells another the wrong road. And if I misled one who is so young, so beautiful—who, I trust, will find her happiness along the right road, I should regard myself as a —Bosewicht. (DD, 297)

Klesmer is obviously not referring to Grandcourt; nevertheless Gwendolen is pushed increasingly toward the unavoidable realization that her only solution lies in marriage—the single career for which she has any training at all.

Gwendolen's other choice is of course to take up the position of governess to Mrs. Mompert's children. That Eliot feels this is the course Gwendolen should take is clear from her reference to the "supreme worth of the teacher's vocation" (DD, 317). Yet, at the same time the effect of all the previous chapters has been to show why, because of her background, this is an impossible alternative:

George Eliot has led us to see that becoming a governess is a horrible fate for Gwendolen, even
though it need not be so for a different person—which is a consequence of the homage that the novel exacts for Gwendolen from us. So we are with Gwendolen in feeling her choice to be a very difficult one, in which moral and material questions are finely balanced and inextricably linked.14

Yet even given Gwendolen's egoism it is difficult to believe that her repulsion to governessing is purely selfish. Any student of the period knows that governessing was very rarely rewarding work:

...paid companion, infant nurse, governess, schoolteacher. As they are arranged, each is but another name for servant. Each involves starvation wages which only a lifetime of saving could ever convert to ransom...Furthermore, these occupations involve "living-in" and a twenty-four hour surveillance tantamount to imprisonment.12

We can only agree with Gwendolen when she "saw the life before her [at the Bishop's] as an entrance into a penitentiary" (DD, 315). It is Eliot, rather than Gwendolen, who does not seem to be facing up to reality.

Although her tone is not nearly so understanding in this section of the novel Eliot still gives the reader the opportunity to sympathize with Gwendolen's difficult situation:

...and poor Gwendolen had never dissociated happiness from personal pre-eminence and eclat. That where these threatened to forsake her, she should take life to be hardly worth the having, cannot make her so unlike the rest of us, men or women, that we should cast her out of compassion; our moments of temptations to a mean opinion of things in general being usually dependent on some susceptibility about ourselves and some dulness to subjects which everyone else would consider important. Surely a young creature is pitiable who has the labyrinth of life before her and no clue—towards whom distrust in herself and her good fortune has come as a sudden shock, like a rent across the path she was treading so carelessly. (DD, 317)
The voice of the objective and traditional moralist however rings even louder and more clearly. The sentences immediately preceding the above quotation are clearly spoken in judgment of Gwendolen's actions and Eliot's antagonism to the "selfish woman" is obvious:

No religious view of trouble helped her; her troubles had in her opinion all been caused by other people's disagreeable or wicked conduct; and there was really nothing pleasant to be counted on in the world; that was her feeling; everything else she had heard said about trouble was mere phrase-making not attractive enough for her to have caught it up and repeated it. As to the sweetness of labour and fulfilled claims; the interest of inward and outward activity; the impersonal delights of life as a perpetual discovery; the dues of courage, fortitude, industry, which it is mere baseness not to pay towards the common burden; the supreme worth of the teacher's vocation;--these, even if they had been eloquently preached to her, could have been no more than faintly apprehended doctrines; the fact which wrought upon her was her invariable observation that for a lady to become a governess--to 'take a situation'--was to descend in life and to be treated at best with a compassionate patronage. (DD, 317)

Certainly these are noble, if somewhat rhetorical, sentiments as to the duties and rewards of responsible adulthood. But given the sexism to which any woman in Gwendolen's position is exposed, the words ring hollow at this point in the novel. It is difficult to believe in the "supreme worth of the teacher" when one is talking about governessing; courage, fortitude and industry are qualities which a woman is allowed to exercise only in the prescribed confines of the home, and the "perpetual discovery" of life is usually limited to the rewards of bearing endless children. A woman's labour is rarely "sweet", and "fulfilling claims" means confining oneself to the role of
dutiful wife or daughter. Eliot's image of the possibilities for Gwendolen's life only have meaning in an ideal society where women are allowed full access to all human activities. If, however, Gwendolen is to be "educated" to participate in the real world, then the politics of sex, which have so pervaded the novel until now, cannot go unchallenged.

In the midst of Gwendolen's experiences in Book III, Eliot interjects the story of Catherine Arrowpoint's decision to defy her family and marry Klesmer. Although a comparison between Gwendolen and Mirah was intended earlier in the book it does not succeed very well because the latter simply does not "live" as a character. But with Gwendolen and Catherine the intended comparison does seem to work at first. Gwendolen supposedly rebels against her situation because of a selfish refusal to accept poverty and a lowered social status; on the other hand Catherine's rebellion is allegedly a positive one leading to greater personal fulfillment and an acceptance of exactly that which Gwendolen cannot face—poverty and social ostracism. Superficially the implied criticism of Gwendolen is effective until one really compares the freedom of action of the two characters. Catherine has simply not suffered under the same pressures as Gwendolen and consequently is not burdened with her egoism and vanity. Catherine is very plain and through either good luck or parental snobbishness has a superior education to Gwendolen's. Though her great fortune, like Gwendolen's lack of wealth,
should make her an economic pawn, that has not been the case. Because of her plainness she knows that men are attracted by her money, not her looks. As Klesmer reminds her:

But you once said it was your doom to suspect every man who courted you of being an adventurer, and what made you angriest was men's imputing to you the folly of believing that they courted you for your own sake. (DD, 287)

Thus she has a less self-centred and consequently more realistic world view than Gwendolen.

As each of Gwendolen's "plans" fail, and the inevitability of her own life as a governess and her mother's as an inhabitant of Sawyer's Cottage closes in, Grandcourt's proposal of marriage becomes irresistible. This is not because of the man himself, but because of the material relief he will bring to her and her family. Grandcourt knows this for he frames his proposal in economic rather than romantic terms,

"You will tell me now, I hope, that Mrs. Davilow's loss of fortune will not trouble you further. You will trust me to prevent it from weighing upon her. You will give me the claim to provide against that."..........................

.............................................................

"You accept what will make such things a matter of course?" said Grandcourt, without any new eagerness. "You consent to become my wife?" (DD, 347)

The great complication is of course Lydia Glasher; in Eliot's mind this is Gwendolen's unforgivable sin. By marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen will be disinheriting Grandcourt's natural child and sealing Mrs. Glasher's own fate as a social outcast. Certainly Gwendolen can be held to blame for making
the choice she does, but it is not an uncommon one for women and is dependent on many questions other than the purely moral one. In a world where women are totally dependent upon men for economic security and social status or for that matter fulfillment of any of their desires, they are naturally terribly competitive. Lydia Glasher is in such a precarious position that to survive she must act vengefully and utterly without sympathy towards Gwendolen. Though he is the cause of her misery, Grandcourt remains untouchable and Gwendolen has to bear his punishment,

...and it was natural enough for Mrs. Glasher to enter with eagerness into Lush's plan of hindering that new danger by setting up a barrier in the mind of the girl who was being sought as a bride. She entered into it with an eagerness which had passion in it as well as purpose, some of the stored-up venom delivering itself in that way. (DD, 388)

But Gwendolen equally must ensure her own survival and this forces her to sin against Lydia Glasher. It is Gwendolen's responsibility that she accepts Grandcourt with full knowledge of Mrs. Glasher but it is due to social institutions that the grotesque spectacle of Grandcourt playing the two women off against each other should even occur in the first place. Gwendolen, as much as Mrs. Glasher, is fighting for a woman's survival in a man's world; her decision to marry Grandcourt, while regrettable, is more than understandable. Though Eliot provides the material for such an interpretation of Gwendolen's position, especially through her brilliant exposure of Grandcourt's attitude towards the two
women, she fails to sympathize with Gwendolen and instead insists that she accept full personal guilt,

...that she was doing something wrong—that a punishment might be hanging over her—that the woman to whom she had given her promise and broken it was thinking of her in bitterness and misery with a just reproach... (DD, 401)

The specific problem she creates for Gwendolen is of course her "promise" to Lydia not to marry Grandcourt. Not only was this promise made in other circumstances when Gwendolen had a measure of economic security which allowed her some choice in whom she married but as a moral dilemma it is a kind of red herring. Gwendolen's real problem is one which the moralists rarely consider—what a woman must do to survive in a man's world. It is not Gwendolen's breaking of a promise which is immoral but the situation which makes that necessary.

(vi)

Living under Grandcourt's awful power, combined with her guilt at having betrayed Lydia Glasher, leads Gwendolen to suffer horribly. And suffering is of course the first step to understanding. But what exactly does Gwendolen come to understand? Because Eliot has previously described her circumstances so accurately—so completely defined the conditions under which a woman develops—the reader is bound to expect Gwendolen's education through suffering to include to some degree, as well as the knowledge of her own faults, a recognition of the circumstances which have led to them.
But this is not the case. For example, Eliot herself is aware of Grandcourt's amoral exercise of his masculine power:

his soul was garrisoned against presentiments and fears; he had the courage and confidence that belong to domination, and he was at that moment feeling perfectly satisfied that he held his wife with bit and bridle. By the time they had been married a year she would cease to be restive. (DD, 744)

But she does not for one moment allow Gwendolen the relief of knowing that her marital misery is not completely self-induced. On the contrary, Gwendolen's "education" consists entirely in accepting complete responsibility for all her actions. While self-criticism and humility can have great regenerative power, personal abasement can become neurotic especially when the individual is made to see herself as separate from the social milieu in which she has acted.

The irony here is most interesting. Eliot, of all novelists, particularly insists that her characters recognize reality; at the same time, they recognize it uncritically, and instead of letting them explore the contradictions of social relations, she encourages the idea that individuals can develop the moral force to rise above social evils. Such a situation of course is particularly critical for women, because it is just such a call for development of their supposedly innate moral goodness which most securely binds them to their oppressive situation. The corollary to the rule that women must always be good and unselfish is that they must submit without complaint to
the prevailing social structure which has determined their secondary status.

Gwendolen's guide through her period of suffering is Daniel Deronda, and any close examination of his counsel to her reveals that Eliot has substituted for a radical analysis of social relations—specifically the nature of sexual politics (the possibility for which was suggested by the early books of the novel)—the traditional theory of individual salvation and the old stereotype of woman as agent of moral goodness. In all their meetings together Deronda never explores with Gwendolen the particulars of her situation. From the very beginning he encourages her to shoulder all blame. His attitude is clear in their first conversation after her marriage where, even in a light-hearted exchange, he directs her to look entirely inward for the cause of her unhappiness:

"I think what we call the dulness of things is a disease in ourselves. Else how could anyone find an intense interest in life? And many do."

"Ah, I see! The fault I find in the world is my own fault," said Gwendolen, smiling at him. Then after a moment, looking up at the ivory again, she said, "Do you never find fault with the world or with others?"

"Oh yes. When I am in a grumbling mood."

(CD, 464)

Certainly Gwendolen must examine her own selfishness but Deronda never takes her beyond that point; in fact during the rest of their scenes together both he and she almost revel in her personal guilt. Gwendolen is continually referring everything to herself and asking what she can do.
I wanted to ask you something. You said I was ignorant. That is true. And what can I do but ask you? (DD, 672)

"You have saved me from worse," said Gwendolen, in a sobbing voice. "I should have been worse, if it had not been for you. If you had not been good, I should have been more wicked than I am." (DD, 767)

"I asked you to come because I want you to tell me what I ought to do," she began, at once. "Don't be afraid of telling me what is right, because it seems hard. I have made up my mind to do it." (DD, 753)

Deronda participates fully in her self-condemnation and always encourages her to accept her suffering uncritically as a kind of due punishment for her own selfishness:

Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worst self—that thorn-pressure which must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because of the Worse... There were no words of comfort that did not carry some sacrilege. If he had opened his lips to speak, he could only have echoed, "It can never be altered--it remains unaltered, to alter other things." (DD, 762)

That is the bitterest of all—to wear the yoke of our own wrong-doing. But if you submitted to that, as men submit to maiming or a lifelong incurable disease?--and made the unalterable wrong a reason for more effort towards a good that may do something to counterbalance the evil? One who has committed irremediable errors may be scourged by that consciousness into a higher course than is common." (DD, 506)

Gwendolen, through Deronda's influence, is completely "scourged" by the consciousness of her own evil, but at what cost to her individual self-development? The "higher course" that Deronda has in mind is obviously nothing more than the adoption of the role of the ideal Victorian woman. Thus her original sin becomes the ancient one of "unfemininity."
Deronda's musings on the changes in Gwendolen since her marriage give the clue to the direction in which her education is supposed to lead:

But in seeing Gwendolen at Diplow, Deronda had discerned in her more than he had expected of that tender appealing charm which we call womanly. Was there any new change since then? (DD, 626)

We are back to that "undisturbed charm" of the first paragraph of the novel. The changes to come all force Gwendolen further and further into the role of ideal woman as portrayed by Mirah. The vision of Mirah pervades this second half of the novel and it is often to her image that Deronda refers when he encounters Gwendolen. Perhaps the most telling instance is his reaction towards Gwendolen at Mirah's recital:

Pray excuse Deronda that in this moment he felt a transient renewal of his first repulsion from Gwendolen, as if she and her beauty and her failings were to blame for the undervaluing of Mirah as a woman. (DD, 619)

It is obvious here that Eliot has abandoned any critical analysis of Gwendolen and opted for Gwendolen as the representative of feminine evil who can turn a good man like Deronda against the true ideal of womanly perfection. And it is clearer still that in Eliot's mind Gwendolen's "education" will only be complete when she has become like Mirah.

However it is Gwendolen's, not Eliot's attitude to Mirah, that we are most in sympathy with. Gwendolen is right in her feeling that Mirah is somehow too good to be true:
I have no sympathy with women who are always doing right. I don't believe in their great sufferings. (DD, 494)

But Eliot is blind to Mirah's weakness both as a character and as a model for female behaviour. Yet in the dialogue that follows Deronda makes it clear how appealing Mirah is as a woman:

"You admire Miss Lapidoth because you think her blameless, perfect. And you know you would despise a woman who had done something you thought very wrong."

"That would depend entirely on her own view of what she had done," said Deronda.

"You would be satisfied if she were very wretched, I suppose?" said Gwendolen, impetuously.

"No, not satisfied--full of sorrow for her...I did not mean to say that the finer nature is not more adorable; I meant that those who would be comparatively uninteresting beforehand may become worthier of sympathy when they do something that awakens in them a keen remorse." (DD, 494)

This speech of Deronda's raises several points. Deronda is again pushing Gwendolen to accept, in fact embrace, guilt. But now there is a new twist--he is suggesting that suffering will make her more attractive and further implying the possible development of a romantic relationship between the two of them. In part this certainly seems to suggest the stereotype of the martyr-like good woman. Even ignoring this (perhaps the point is not strongly made here) Deronda's attitude very much changes the nature of their relationship. The participants in the dialogue have changed from two people to a man and a woman and the dynamics of sexual politics immediately become operative. R.T. Jones expresses this sense most explicitly,
It is not easy to explain, if it needs explaining, why one feels that a man could not speak to Gwendolen quite like that. A woman much older than Gwendolen, perhaps could: perhaps this is a way of expressing a suspicion that George Eliot herself is speaking here—using Deronda’s voice to say what she would have liked to say to Gwendolen. Coming from a man, the curiously generalizing speech contrives to be, at the same time, offensively distant and embarrassingly intimate. (No doubt the novelist intended it to be finely balanced between the two.) Another way of putting it might be to say that a man could not decently adopt that tone in speaking to a woman unless he meant to marry her.

It can hardly be denied, in fact, especially in their later conversations, that Deronda’s advising makes Gwendolen dependent on him to an extent that George Eliot shows no sign of realizing; if he had meant to gain power over her, he could hardly have set about it more effectively. If this is true, we may ask what Gwendolen might learn in such a relationship. For Gwendolen to grow out of her egoism she must understand the world in a new way, not just from a confined “female” view. But the situation with Deronda is rooted in sexual politics and so Gwendolen’s whole pattern of response is limited. She is now talking to a man who might make love to her at some future time. Will she be able to appraise his advice objectively or will she be anxious to please him, regardless of what her own real interests might be?

But even if one can fault the “sexual” nature of their relationship for failing to allow Gwendolen a purely objective education, it might be held that through Deronda she does learn to relate in a positive way towards men and that this is compensation enough. To a certain extent this
is true; by the end of the novel Gwendolen certainly seems to have overcome the physical revulsion towards men which marked her earlier experience with Rex Gascoigne. It is also obvious, however, from the nature of Gwendolen's relationship to Deronda, that she learns to "love" by learning to submit to the superior male. Eliot is certainly critical of Gwendolen's utter dependence on Deronda:

she did not imagine him otherwise than always within her reach, her supreme need of him blinding her to the separateness of his life, the whole scene of which she filled with his relation to her. (DD, 867)

But she still approves of the general tone of their relationship marked by passive submission on the woman's part and chivalric generosity on the man's. He is the open-hearted noble male; she the penitent suffering female.

Grandcourt had deliberately gone out and turned back to satisfy a suspicion. What he saw was Gwendolen's face of anguish framed black like a nun's, and Deronda standing three yards from her with a look of sorrow such as he might have bent on the last struggle of a beloved object. (DD, 673)

Again, by looking at the Jewish part of the novel (specifically Mirah and Deronda's love relationship) one can confirm this sense of the direction in which Eliot is pushing Gwendolen. Mirah unquestioningly accepts the traditional woman's role:

"Excuse me, Mirah, but does it seem quite right to you that the women should sit behind rails in a gallery apart?"
"Yes, I never thought of anything else," said Mirah, with mild surprise. (DD, 410)

She abhors her musical career and sees real freedom in giving
herself over completely to the roles of dutiful sister and loving wife. Deronda is of course the perfect Ruskinian model of the chivalrous gentleman. He does not merely love Mirah, he worships her:

> And whatever reverence could be shown to woman, he was bent on showing to this girl. (DD, 267)

> A man of refined pride shrinks from making a lover's approaches to a woman whose wealth or rank might make them appear presumptuous or low-motived; but Deronda was finding a more delicate difficulty in a position which, superficially taken was the reverse of that—though to an ardent reverential love, the loved woman has always a kind of wealth and rank which makes a man keenly susceptible about the aspect of his addresses. (DD, 822)

The weakness of this kind of solution for Gwendolen is apparent when we consider most of the other men in the novel. Deronda and Rex Gascoigne are not men as they are, but men as Eliot would like them to be. And because they are not real, they of course fail as effective literary characters or as a realistic vision of the male attitudes Gwendolen will encounter in her "new" life. But Grandcourt, Lush, Sir Hugo and Reverend Gascoigne are very successful male characters at least partially because, in them, Eliot brilliantly exposes the working of the patriarchal mind. However, Gwendolen is not made to deal in her education with these men and the power they have over her and other women. Although Deronda may despise Grandcourt as a man, he never once discusses with Gwendolen the specific circumstances of her marriage. His view again is that of the modern analyst. If
there is a problem it is Gwendolen's. It is not the man who must change but the woman. Although he never says so explicitly he quite clearly creates the impression that Gwendolen should stay with Grandcourt and submit to the life to which her egoism has led her:

Her imagination exaggerated every tyrannical impulse he was capable of. "I will insist on being separated from him"—was her first darting determination; then, I will leave him, whether he consents or not.

And always among the images that drove her back to submission was Deronda...And what would he say if he knew everything? Probably that she ought to bear what she had brought on herself, unless she were sure that she could make herself a better woman by taking any other course. (DD, 665-6)

This matter of rebellion against Grandcourt is an interesting one. Eliot would approve Gwendolen's leaving him only if it is "constructive rebellion" (DD, 667) which is well enough except that constructive rebellion is only under the condition that "she were sure she could make herself a better woman" by doing so. Here again the parallel vision of Mirah rises into view, as the prototype of that better kind of woman. But equally at this point we are reminded of another woman, Mrs. Glasher—an image with closer correspondence to social reality. Gwendolen can sense very well what a woman's life is outside of marriage. It is even highly doubtful whether Eliot could have her extricate herself from Grandcourt's clutches:

As the head of the proprietary family, the husband was the sole "owner" of wife and children,
empowered to deprive the mother of her offspring, who were his legal possessions, should it please him to do so upon divorcing or deserting her. A father, like a slaver, could order the law to reclaim his chattel—property relatives, when he liked. Wives might be detained against their will; English wives who refused to return to their homes were subject to imprisonment. Even if she could leave Grandcourt, her life away from him would be of the kind that only a saint could bear. But Eliot again ignores social realities and would have us interpret Gwendolen's fear of leaving Grandcourt as another aspect of her egoism:

Can we wonder at the practical submission which hid her constructive rebellion? The combination is common enough, so we know from the number of persons who make us aware of it in their own case by a clamorous unwearied statement of the reasons against their submitting to a situation which, on inquiry, we discover to be the least disagreeable within their reach. (DD, 667)

The patronizing, holier-than-thou tone of this passage is a little difficult to listen to seriously, considering what we know of Gwendolen's situation. To please Eliot, it seems a woman in Gwendolen's situation would have to don sackcloth and ashes and scourge herself in the streets of London, or more probably, like Mirah, wander about with her little crust of bread and wait for some Deronda-angel to save her. It is not surprising then that those "murderous impulses" grow within Gwendolen. Deronda's facile solution that "she should keep her fear as a safeguard" has simply not dealt with a woman's reality of living with a man who does not allow her even the freedom of her own thoughts.
The rewards of submission in these circumstances are as mysterious to us as they are to Gwendolen.

Grandcourt does die, however, and Gwendolen is at least saved from having to submit herself to his rule, as was Dorothea by Casaubon's well-timed demise. But it is important to remember that in both cases Eliot would have had her female characters submit. In this kind of situation we see how her theory of resignation has a different kind of meaning when applied to women. Men resign themselves to the "eternally" problematic situations of life—the knowledge of their own shortcomings and the necessity of cooperating and working with the human community. The women in George Eliot's novels resign themselves and learn to submit, not to the "human situation," but to a specific man-made social system called patriarchy. It is a distinction between the situations of men and women often overlooked and which Margaret Fuller describes in Woman in the Nineteenth Century:

It may be said that Man does not have his fair play either; his energies are repressed and distorted by the interposition of artificial obstacles. Ay, but he himself has put them there; they have grown out of his own imperfections. If there is a misfortune in Woman's lot, it is in obstacles being interposed by men which do not mark her state; and, if they express her past ignorance, do not her present needs.17

There are of course men like Lydgate who must learn to submit to women like Rosamond. But one should note that for him, as a man, Eliot accepts as unavoidable the anger which accompanies his submission. Gwendolen's great fault, however,
is just this kind of anger and frustration; her pride does remain and thus her period of suffering, according to the novelist, is incomplete.

Eliot's failure to carry through her earlier political social analysis of Gwendolen's situation as a woman contributes to the artistic weakness of the second half of the novel. Although Gwendolen herself as a character never fails--because the tension of her situation is maintained until practically the last chapter--the scenes with Deronda do. The weakness of the Jewish parts of the novel, filled with sentimentalism, exaggerated idealism and overblown rhetoric, spill over into the encounters that Deronda has with Gwendolen. These scenes fail artistically because they bring the real moving force of the novel, the consciousness of Gwendolen as a woman trapped in a patriarchal society, to a dead halt. Each time she meets Deronda, Gwendolen is in great and very real anguish; the immediacy of her need is brilliantly apparent. Yet Deronda's response is never nearly equal to the situation. In answer to her cries for an explanation of her particular circumstances, Deronda gives only static rhetorical speeches,

I take what you said of music for a small example--it answers for all larger things--you will not cultivate it for the sake of a private joy in it. What sort of earth or heaven would hold any spiritual wealth in it for souls pauperised by inaction? If one firmament has no stimulus for our attention and awe, I don't see how four would have it. We should stamp every possible world with the flatness of our own inanity--which is necessarily impious, without faith or fellowship.
The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities. The few may find themselves in it simply by an elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge. (DD, 507-8)

If such speeches sound like over-worked Sunday school maxims out of context, they are even worse given the specific situation in the novel. His words mean nothing when contrasted to the chilling scenes of her life with Grandcourt which are interspersed among these religious lectures.

Each of Gwendolen's scenes with Deronda is identical and interchangeable. Gwendolen's needs are never really dealt with. Perhaps the most irritating of all are their conversations following Grandcourt's drowning. Deronda has never entered into her situation enough to understand the conflict which is tearing her apart; he listens to her story as would a professor of ethics intrigued by a moral conundrum rather than as a truly concerned help-mate:

Gwendolen's confession, for the very reason that her conscience made her dwell on the determining power of her evil thoughts, convinced him the more that there had been throughout a counterbalancing struggle of her better will. It seemed almost certain that her murderous thought had had no outward effect—that, quite apart from it, the death was inevitable. Still, a question as to the outward effectiveness of a criminal desire dominant enough to impel even a momentary act, cannot alter our judgment of the desire; and Deronda shrank from putting that question forward in the first instance; he held it likely that Gwendolen's remorse aggravated her inward guilt, and that she gave the character of decisive action to what had been an inappreciably instantaneous glance of desire. (DD, 761-2)
It is this lack of sympathy or empathy with a woman's life which weakens the power of Deronda's scenes with the Alcharisi which come immediately before his conversation with Gwendolen after Grandcourt's death. Eliot is clearly, almost painfully aware of the kind of pressures which close in on a woman like the Alcharisi:

"No," said the Princess, shaking her head, and folding her arms with an air of decision. "You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out—"this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed receipt."

That was what my father wanted. He wished I had been a son; he cared for me as a makeshift link.

But Eliot cannot give her freedom:

And there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be 'unsexed.' We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness which makes what we mean by the feminine character, than we can afford to part with the human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman—which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history.

Thus the Alcharisi like Gwendolen, must be driven by guilt:

It was my nature to resist and say, 'I have a right to resist.' Well, I say so still when I have any strength in me. You have heard me say it, and I don't withdraw it. But when my strength goes, some other right forces itself upon me like an iron in an inexorable hand; and even when I am at ease it is beginning to make ghosts upon the daylight.

She will not be released from her misery until she admits
she has failed to live out her proper roles as wife, mother and daughter and instead followed the selfish and anti-social desire to participate as a man does in the world. Although Eliot says that the Alcharisi's sin was in rebelling against her father after she had promised to obey, that answer avoids (like the matter of Gwendolen's broken promise to Lydia Glasher) the very question that has been raised about the rights of women to self-development. Her father was so adamant in his determination that she become the traditional Jewish wife and mother than only by deception could she ever hope for any personal freedom. Thus is the Alcharisi, like Gwendolen, forced into the traditional woman's role through the alleged necessity of submission to the needs of others regardless of contingent circumstances. A hopeless tautology is thereby created. Any rebellion which may challenge the existing pattern of social relations is unacceptable. But as long as the social pressures continue to force women into prescribed roles then any attempt to break out must be rebellion.

Gwendolen's story does not end in Florence with Grandcourt's death. There is more suffering in store for her: the final separation from Deronda. While on one level this is the essential last step in Gwendolen's growth out of egoism, on another level it is an abandonment of Gwendolen and her particular kind of situation. Gwendolen cannot have Deronda, not only because she must sever her complete
dependence on him, but because she is not good enough for him. Gwendolen cannot compare to the perfect woman, Mirah. And because Eliot holds up Mirah as an ideal to whom we must compare Gwendolen, the latter's future is not left as open as critics such as Barbara Hardy would suggest. It is clear that Gwendolen must work towards becoming the kind of woman Mirah is. Because Mirah obviously represents such a "female ideal," Gwendolen's education process becomes not so much an open-ended search for true and impersonal adulthood as the development of her "proper" womanhood. As with Mirah, Gwendolen's true fulfillment will come through submission to a male figure. Thus the overt hints that Gwendolen is now "ready" to marry Rex Gascoigne suggest:

Who has been quite free from egoistic escapes of the imagination picturing desirable consequences on his own future in the presence of another's misfortune; sorrow, or death? The expected promotion or legacy is the common type of a temptation which makes speech and even prayer a severe avoidance of the most insistent thought, and sometimes raises an inward shame, a self-distaste, that is worse than any other form of unpleasant companionship. In Rex's nature the shame was immediate, and overspread like an ugly light all the hurrying images of what might come, which thrust themselves in with the idea that Gwendolen was again free—overspread them, perhaps, the more persistently because every phantasm of a hope was quickly nullified by a more substantial obstacle. Before the vision of 'Gwendolen free' rose the impassable vision of 'Gwendolen rich, exalted, courted;' and if in the former time, when both their lives were fresh, she had turned from his love with repugnance, what ground was there for supposing that her heart would be more open to him in the future? (DD, ???)

I have found out that Rex never goes to Offendene, and has never seen the duchess since she came back;
and Miss Gascoigne let fall something... which proved to me that Rex was once hovering about his fair cousin close enough to get singed. I don't know what was her part in the affair. Perhaps the duke came in and carried her off. That is always the way when an exceptionally worthy young man forms an attachment. I understand now why Gascoigne talks of making the law his mistress and remaining a bachelor. But these are green resolves. Since the duke did not get himself drowned for your sake, it may turn out to be for my friend Rex's sake. Who knows? (DD, 871)

But neither this solution of marriage, nor Gwendolen's own statement that "I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born" (DD, 882) is enough given the force with which her woman's situation has been painted. That woman's tension in Gwendolen's life is what makes her one of the most compelling female characters in literature and she must be dealt with more completely than by being prepared for marriage, motherhood and good works. In the same way it is the lack of that tension in Mirah's life (even though Eliot tries to create it in the situation with her father) which makes her such a dead character. She is too perfect, she does not have to grapple with the social values that Gwendolen does. She is another one of Eliot's female saints.

On a theoretical level one cannot object to the kind of submission and resignation that Eliot wants to teach. Adult maturity does mean accepting the reality of other people, and the necessity of adjusting one's own desires to the goals of the social community as a whole. But there is another level of submission which in the novels of George
Eliot we cannot help but regret--the forced submission of women to the inhuman system of patriarchy. There is little intelligent consciousness by Gwendolen of her position as a female. Eliot, however, understood her situation, and made us feel it; she furthermore encouraged us to expect that Gwendolen too would come to know the terms on which a woman is allowed to participate in society. But in the solution she provides for Gwendolen, Eliot ignores the social consciousness which has determined the tone and consequent reader response to the first two books of the novel. She removes Gwendolen from the real world and places her in an unreal one peopled by chivalrous gentlemen and female saints. In the first part of *Daniel Deronda* Gwendolen was a woman in the process of "becoming" a person. By the end of the novel there is no more to be found than the ideal woman of Ruskin's Queen's Garden.
NOTES


2 Ibid., "Introduction", pp. 28-29.


4 Ibid., p. 132.

5 Haight, Letters, VI, 290. George Eliot to Mme. Eugene Bodichon, London, 2 October 1876


and Thale, The Novels of George Eliot, p. 128.


12 Ibid., p. 393.


15 Ibid., p. 110.

16 Millett, Sexual Politics, p. 67.


Felix Holt the Radical, Adam Bede,
Silas Marner and Romola

(i)

After Maggie, Dorothea, Rosamond and Gwendolen there is really only one other female character in George Eliot's fiction worth serious consideration—Mrs. Transome in Felix Holt the Radical. Though her part is relatively small (she is present in far fewer scenes than Esther, Harold Transome or Felix Holt) her figure and personality dominate the book. Felix is not so much a character as a mouthpiece for George Eliot's chief political tenet: "the amelioration of man's lot will not follow directly upon improved political machinery."¹ Esther Lyon's "progress is too painless and her end too complacent"² for her story to command much attention, and Harold Transome, though vividly drawn, cuts a too-familiar figure as the handsome well-bred but morally corrupt young aristocrat. But in Mrs. Transome we have something strikingly original; in her portrait there is a depth of understanding and psychological realism missing in the rest of the novel. She resembles Mrs. Glasher and the Alcharisi in Daniel Deronda but in the earlier novel the aspect of feminine consciousness which they exemplify is fully fleshed out. Mrs. Transome is one of those rare in-depth portraits of an older woman. Unlike most of the mothers
and mothers-in-law of English literature she is not treated with amusement or passed over lightly. She is seen in the light of woman's experience, and the usual characteristics of feminine middle age—bitterness, discontent, irritability and frustration—are presented with compassion and sympathy.

Certainly Mrs. Transome is a proud, selfish and ambitious woman, but the sense of her that most strongly pervades the novel is not her love of power but her utter lack of power. And it is definitely a woman's lack of power that we come to know. Mrs. Transome has been betrayed by all the common expectations of a woman's life. Her education, like Gwen-dolen's, promised ease and superiority and prepared her for none of the hardship and humiliation that was to be her lot:

Mrs. Transome had been in her bloom before this century began, and in the long painful years since then, what she had once regarded as her knowledge and accomplishments had become as valueless as old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal. Crosses, mortifications, money-cares, conscious blameworthiness, had changed the aspect of the world for her: there was anxiety in the morning sunlight; there was un-kind triumph or disapproving pity in the glances of greeting neighbours; there was advancing age, and a contracting prospect in the changing seasons as they came and went.²

She gave her love, the "motive that gives a sublime rhythm to a woman's life" (FH, 429) to a man who enjoyed its pleasure but refused to share with her the responsibility of its illicit nature. Like Mrs. Glasher, Mrs. Transome has discovered it is the woman, not the man, who pays for
their mutual "sin." And as for the rewards of maternity, Mrs. Transome has invested all her hopes and dreams in Harold only to have him regard her as a handsome but ignorant and useless old woman:

After sharing the common dream that when a beautiful man child was born to her, her cup of happiness would be full, she had travelled through long years apart from that child to find herself at last in the presence of a son of whom she was afraid, who was utterly unmanageable by her, and to whose sentiments in any given case she possessed no key... If Harold had shown the least care to have her stay in the room with him—if he had really cared for her opinion—if he had been what she had dreamed he would be in the eyes of those people who had made her world—if all the past could be dissolved, and leave no solid trace of itself—mighty ifs that were all impossible—she would have tasted some joy. (FH, 114)

Mrs. Transome's bitterness, like Maggie's anger, Rosamond's obstinacy and Gwendolen's insensitivity clearly has its roots not so much in blind selfishness as in an understandable response to the interpersonal relations of a patriarchal society. Her hatred of men, while appalling in its fierceness, is very difficult to condemn when one considers the treatment she suffers from both her son and her former lover. To Jermyn she is merely a cast-off; what was once between them is something he "more and more forgets" (FH, 116). Yet he is not above taking advantage of society's opinion that their indiscretion is her fault, and for over twenty years he has used the secret of "her weakness" to build up his own financial security. Harold's attitude towards his mother is neither Mr. Brooke's brand of silly anti-feminism or Daniel
Deronda's suffocating chivalry: like Tom Tulliver and Henleigh Grandcourt he simply does not admit that women belong to the same species as men:

Western women were not to his taste: they showed a transition from the feebly animal to the thinking being, which was simply troublesome. Harold preferred a slow-witted large-eyed woman, silent and affectionate, with a load of black hair weighing much more heavily than her brains. (FH, 31)

To Harold the very fact of his mother's sex means that she can have no opinions of any value or any talents beyond those of a good hostess:

A woman ought to be a Tory, and graceful, and handsome, like you. I should hate a woman who took up my opinions and talked for me. I'm an Oriental you know... (FH, 110)

The fact that she had been active in the management of the estate--had ridden about it continually, had busied herself with accounts, had been head bailiff of the vacant farms, and had yet allowed things to go wrong--was set down by him simply to the general futility of women's attempts to transact men's business. He did not want to say anything to annoy her; he was only determined to let her understand, as quietly as possible that she had better cease all interference. (FH, 109)

For Mrs. Transome the years of domination by Jermyn, her son's total insensitivity to her needs, and her own inactivity (forced on her by Harold's refusal to allow her any part in the management of the estate) have all combined to produce inside her a slowly ticking bomb. Every scene in which she is present is infused with the dramatic power of that anger and resentment. The contrast between Harold's calm assumption of male superiority and her smouldering fury is brilliant to the point of being unbearable. When she is
alone with Denner, there is some relaxation of tension (for Mrs. Transome, not the reader) as she expresses to another woman what the men in her life will never understand. Finally in her last meeting with Jermyn the strain is broken and in a great moment of release she refuses at last to submit to his demands:

"I will never tell him!" said Mrs. Transome, starting up, her whole frame thrilled with a passion that seemed almost to make her young again. Her hands hung beside her clenched tightly, her eyes and lips lost the helpless repressed bitterness of discontent, and seemed suddenly fed with energy. (FH, 369)

However, there is no real resolution to Mrs. Transome's situation. Her character does not really change or develop. The disappointment that she experiences in her son's return only increases her bitterness. By the end of the novel she has no more understanding of the world than she did at the beginning:

She had no ultimate analysis of things that went beyond blood and family--the Herons of Fenshore or the Badgers of Hillbury. She had never seen behind the canvas with which her life was hung. In the dim background there was the burning mount and the tables of the law; in the foreground there was Lady Debarry privately gossiping about her, and Lady Wyvern finally deciding not to send her invitations to dinner. (FH, 350)

If nothing "happens" to Mrs. Transome, why is she in the novel at all? Surely she cannot be merely an isolated portrait of a fascinating personality. I would suggest that the importance of Mrs. Transome's story is to be found, not in her own experiences, but in the contrast between her life
and that of the other important female character of the book, Esther Lyon. And at this point we come across almost exactly the same circumstance that weakens the story of Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*. Esther, like Mirah, is ultimately the "good woman" against whom we are supposed to measure Mrs. Transome.

The Esther we are introduced to is supposedly selfish, vain, trite and coquettish. In this respect, however, she has not nearly the credibility of Gwendolen or Rosamond. Her egoism has no particular complexity; nor does it run very deep. In fact, it is shattered in a matter of moments by our hero Felix Holt. Esther's metamorphosis from self-interest to self-sacrifice is one of the most rapid about-faces in English literature. In a matter of days she overcomes her repulsion to her father's eccentricities, abandons her elitist view of Little Treby society and completely reorders the ambitions of her life. The problem is that she effects this amazing transformation not out of any inner promptings but out of what can only be called her sexual attraction to Felix Holt. It calls to mind the situation of Lady Chatterly; we can picture the outspoken, yet noble and overpoweringly masculine Felix Holt in the part of the gardener. He loathes Esther's finicky femininity, notions of romance and dreams of indulgent luxury, and is not at all attracted by the wit or charm of which she is so proud. Pleasing Felix Holt means exchanging her principles and set of values
for his. This is exactly what Esther goes about doing. As for Felix, though he criticizes Esther's vanity, he is attracted to nothing in Esther but her beauty. He only wishes that her character should be as perfect as her face.

"You are very beautiful."

She started and looked round at him, to see whether his face would give some help to the interpretation of this novel speech. He was looking up at her quite calmly, very much as a reverential Protestant might look at a picture of the Virgin, with a devoutness suggested by the type rather than by the image. Esther's vanity was not in the least gratified; she felt that, somehow or other, Felix was going to reproach her.

"I wonder," he went on, still looking at her, "whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life. (FH, 247)

It is speeches like the above that rather reduce our interest in Esther Lyon's story. She is involved in no conflict which can widen our understanding of feminine experience. On the contrary, she is learning, with the author's full participation and approval, only to accommodate herself to the laws of male supremacy. The choice she must eventually make between Harold Transome and Felix Holt seems only to be between two brands of male chauvinism—one rather pedestrian and the other tediously self-righteous.

She herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome; there were even points in him for which she felt a touch, not of angry, but of playful scorn; whereas with Felix she had always a sense of dependence and possible illumination. In those large, grave, candid grey eyes of his, love seemed something that belonged to the high enthusiasm of life, such as
might now be forever shut out from her. (FH, 374)

In returning to Felix Holt it is difficult to believe that she is getting a much better bargain than the one Harold Transome offers. With Harold her situation, if horrifying, would at least have been credible. With Felix it is simply nauseating. The reality, that she has given herself completely to a man who demands the absolute subjection of women, is ignored. Instead of an honest appraisal of women's position in society we are bombarded with the myths of woman's "ennobling ardour" and special moral influence:

When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences: she is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience. Her inspired ignorance gives a sublimity to actions so incongruously simple, that otherwise they would make men smile. Some of that ardour which has flashed out and illuminated all poetry and history was burning today in the bosom of sweet Esther Lyon. In this, at least her woman's lot was perfect: that the man she loved was her hero; that her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current. (FH, 413)

What makes such speeches most distressing is that we are clearly intended to apply these values to the life of Mrs. Transome. It is the example of that woman's bitter unhappiness which has been the deciding factor in Esther's decision to refuse Harold Transome:

The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her
towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love. (FH, 434)

The implication is, of course, that at one time Mrs. Transome too had a choice, that like Esther she could have found happiness if she had accepted the true womanly role of submission. Like Esther she ought to have admitted, "I am weak--my husband must be greater and nobler than I am" (FH, 438).

It is by this obvious parallel to Esther's life that the portrait of Mrs. Transome is robbed of most of its apparent significance. We have been wrong to think her a victim of a patriarchal society. Clearly her misery is something she has brought on herself. She could have been a "good" woman like Esther but she chose not to be:

She [Esther] heard the doors close behind him, and felt free to be miserable. She cried bitterly. If she might have married Felix Holt, she could have been a good woman. She felt no trust that she could ever be good without him. (FH, 291)

She [Mrs. Transome] would have given a great deal at this moment if her feeble husband had not always lived in dread of her temper and her tyranny, so that he might have been fond of her now. She felt herself loveless. (FH, 311)

And so we are back to the problem that faces us at the end of the other Eliot novels discussed. We are led to interpret a woman's frustrations as a conscious or unconscious struggle against firmly entrenched male values. But at the point of resolution these terms of reference are suddenly and dramatically changed. We are taken out of the so-
cial milieu, realism disappears, and we are left with the choice of seeing the heroine as a minstering angel or an evil temptress.

(ii)

This ambiguous treatment of the female personality does not arise in either *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* or *Romola* because none of the female characters is ever lifted far enough above stereotype for there to be any question of a departure from realism. Though Hetty's solitary wandering is truly pathetic, that is the only instance in her story where she is treated with any large or generous sympathy. Otherwise she is simply a distractingly beautiful but vain and selfish young girl who has deceived the virtuous Adam Bede and tempted the weak Arthur Donnithorne. There is no attempt to understand how much Hetty herself may be a victim. Both her class and her sex, as Kate Millet points out, will often encourage in a young country girl unfortunately pragmatic attitudes towards romantic and sexual relationships:

The young middle-class woman could be frightened into social and sexual conformity with the spectres of governessing, factory work, or prostitution. And the less favoured female is left only to dream of becoming a "lady," the single improvement to her situation she is permitted to conceive of, the hope of acquiring social and economic status through attracting the sexual patronization of the male. When the only known "freedom" is a gilded voluptuousness attainable through the largess of someone who owns and controls everything there is little incentive to struggle for per-
sonal fulfillment or liberation.\footnote{4}

Furthermore the constantly flattering attention paid to Hetty because of her extraordinary beauty gives her a sense of apparent power. As far as she can know, her dream of "becoming a lady" does have some basis in reality. Unless at the same time Hetty can be expected to have a very acute analysis of both the class and the patriarchal systems, it is difficult to censure her as Eliot does. Hetty is always more pitiful than vicious.

However, as in the case of Rosamond and Lydgate after their marriage, it is the man and not the woman for whom Eliot is most concerned. Poor noble Adam Bede has committed no crime save to allow himself to be trapped by Hetty's cunning charm, and even Arthur Donnithorne cannot be faulted for the affectionately masculine fault of believing that a woman is only what she appears to be:

Before you despise Adam as deficient in penetration, pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman—if you ever could, without hard head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the one supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you. No: people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it.

Arthur Donnithorne, too, had the same sort of notion about Hetty, so far as he had thought of her nature at all. He felt sure she was a dear, affectionate, good little thing.\footnote{5}

Thus it is Hetty and not either of the men in the novel who must be punished. She publicly confesses to sin and submits to transportation and finally death. Adam suffers, but only
so that he can discover the difference between the "good"
and the "evil" side of womanhood. As for Arthur Donnithorne,
it is difficult to work up much sympathy for a young aristo-
ocrat separated for a few years from his right to rule.

Dinah, George Eliot's idealized recollection of a Metho-
dist aunt is the lily to Hetty's rose. And if the portrait
of Hetty is not very complex, that of Dinah is even less so.
She is a tedious inventory of all the womanly virtues; in
marrying Adam Bede she only attains a higher degree of per-
fection by giving up her preaching career for the joys of
domestic life. Her oft-quoted feminist aphorisms are just
that—aphorisms which bear no relation to the rest of the
novel.

Silas Marner, though a minor masterpiece in many res-
pacts, does not show any originality in the treatment of
women. It has exactly the stereotyped attitude to female
character present in Adam Bede. Molly Faren, the first Mrs.
Godfrey Cass, is the sensuously evil (and what is more,
drunken) woman whom Cass has let drag him away from the
path of goodness and virtue. Only the sweetly pure Miss
Nancy Lammeter can save him from the moral corruption that
will otherwise be his lot,

For four years he had thought of Nancy Lammeter,
and wooed her with tacit patient worship, as the
woman who made him think of the future with joy;
she would be his wife, and would make home lovely
to him, as his father's home had never been; and
it would be easy, when she was always near, to
shake off those foolish habits that were no
pleasures, but only a feverish way of annulling vacancy. Godfrey's was an essentially domestic nature, bred up in a home where the hearth had no smiles and where the daily habits were not chastised by the presence of household order; his easy disposition made him fall in unresistingly with the family courses, but the need of some tender permanent affection, the longing for some influence that would make the good he preferred easy to pursue, caused the neatness, purity and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter household, sunned by the smile of Nancy, to seem like those fresh, bright hours of the morning, when temptations go to sleep, and leave the ear open to the voice of the good angel, inviting to industry, sobriety, and peace. And yet the hope of this paradise had not been enough to save him from a course which shut him out of it forever. Instead of keeping fast hold of the strong silken rope by which Nancy would have drawn him safe to the green banks, where it was easy to step firmly, he had let himself be dragged back into mud and slime, in which it was useless to struggle.

Romola is no more than a very ethereal Nancy Lammeter.

She was constantly appealing to Tito, and he was informing her, yet he felt himself strangely in subjection to Romola with that majestic simplicity of hers: he felt for the first time, without defining it to himself, that loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid of old to a great nature-goddess, who was not all-knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge.

At the beginning of the novel there seems to be some interesting conflict between Romola and her patriarchal father. But it is quickly resolved. Romola has only an objective interest in her education insofar as it will help her to serve her father more perfectly. Her true needs we are told very early are to be found in the fulfillment of her womanly gifts of affection and pity.
At that moment the doubtful attractiveness of Romola's face, in which pride and passion seemed to be quivering in the balance with native refinement and intelligence, was transfigured to the most loveable womanliness by mingled pity and affection: it was evident that the deepest fount of feeling within her had not yet wrought its way to the less changeful features, and only found its outlet through her eyes. (Rom, 48)

Tito Melema's treatment of her during their marriage (in his utter amorality he is much like Henleigh Grandcourt and if anything makes the novel worth reading it is the brilliance of this characterization) hardly allows her to exercise these womanly qualities and at last she does leave him; but it is hardly with the intention of discovering an independent life. Romola's long water journey is Maggie's trip down the flooded Floss taken one step further. Instead of dying, Romola awakes to find heaven on earth even though it is in the form of a plague. We leave her as the perfect goddess-like woman—a Saint Theresa who has found her destiny:

Every day the Padre and Jacopo and the small flock of surviving villagers paid their visit to this cottage to see the blessed Lady, and to bring her of their best as an offering--honey, fresh cakes, eggs, and polenta. It was a sight they could none of them forget, a sight they all told of in their old age—how the sweet and sainted lady with her fair face her golden hair, and her brown eyes that had a blessing in them, lay weary with her labours after she had been sent over the sea to help them in their extremity, and how the queer little black Benedetto used to crawl about the straw by her side and want everything that was brought to her, and she always gave him a bit of what she took and told them if they loved her they must be good to Benedetto.

Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea, but they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beauti-
ful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish. (Rom, 544)

As well as this kind of suffocating sentimentality, the tediously minute detailing of fifteenth-century Florentine life and the lack of depth or complexity in most of the characters make Romola a very bad novel. It is interesting, however, that Eliot herself felt Romola to be her greatest achievement. To her publisher John Blackwood she wrote that "there is not a book of mine about which I more thoroughly feel that I could swear by every sentence as having been written with my best blood." Again one is reminded of The Mill on the Floss and her total involvement with the last chapters of the book. In neither novel does she see that the vision of woman as saint or goddess diminishes the power of her writing. In fact when Sara Hennell criticized the novel saying that "Romola is pure idealism...she must be worshipped as a saint...and therefore I feel, that in Romola you have painted a goddess, and not a woman"9 Eliot the more vigorously defended her heroine:

You are right in saying that Romola is ideal-- I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me.10

Perhaps in this comment is the key to so much of the irritation that one has with Eliot's idealistic conception of woman. If her own books "scourge" George Eliot one can only imagine what their effect was on the contemporary female Victorian reader. It is the old patriarchal play upon
a woman's guilt. Once the idea of woman as saint or angel
is introduced, anything less than perfection is suspect.
If the image the individual woman has to measure herself
against is a goddess, she can only feel that she has failed
to fulfil her true femininity. But more important, once
woman is "divine" one can no longer talk about her equality
with men, for a truly good woman should not be concerned
about such selfish and earthly difficulties.
NOTES


VI
Conclusion

(i)

It seems almost petty to concentrate mainly on the weaknesses of a great writer like George Eliot. But in fact I think by looking at these weak points we can perhaps get a new perspective on her strengths. Some of Eliot's women characters like Hetty or Dinah, Mirah or Esther Lyon do fail completely but more interesting are the cases in which the presentation of a woman character fails only partially, where the sentiment, the idealism, the reliance on stereotype comes only after what has seemed to be a whole new appreciation of feminine experience.

Benjamin Jowett once described George Eliot as being "quite clear of materialism, women's rights, idealism etc." He was badly mistaken on all three counts. I will leave her idealism for the moment, but her Feuerbachian materialism coupled with a clear consciousness of the position of women in a patriarchal society are the chief concepts, through the use of which one can understand why certain of her portraits of women are so compelling. George Eliot may not have been an active feminist but she knew well that women, like men, longed for some means of participating in the life of the world; she further knew how nearly impossible
that achievement was, given their piecemeal education, economic impotence and the societal pressure on them to conform to the image of the passive, ignorant and helpless coquette. Much of her fictional writing expresses that knowledge and the tension that is consciously or unconsciously a part of most women's lives. In many cases it is established as the key to understanding character. There are few other women in fiction as powerful as Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Rosamond Vincy, Mrs. Transome or Gwendolen Harleth. All these women, even Rosamond and Gwendolen, are in almost continual conflict with the culture that demands that they must conform to a certain ideal of femininity. And I would suggest that we are attracted to them, fascinated by them, not because of their beauty or their charm or their romantic entanglements but because of their energy, the force of will that makes them want to be more than Victorian maidens or matrons and which of course also makes them suffer in a way which, though uncommon in fiction is most recognizable in reality.

It is, however, just this energy or force of will which Eliot cannot really handle in the characters she had created. On the one hand, her own "religion of humanity" demanded for its success the resignation of any personal desire that might come into conflict with the values of the community in which the individual finds herself. Although on a political level one might not agree with this
as a solution to social problems, the theory is in itself legitimate, and should not interfere with the art of the novel. And it does not when applied to the male characters, although it rarely is with the exception of Lydgate. When applied to female characters, however, simple resignation is not the only demand. Given the context which has been clearly established—i.e., that the women characters are engaged in some struggle against a repressive patriarchal system—the resignation asked for is really capitulation to the male system of values. Eliot roots the frustrations of her women characters in one set of values but then gives the solution in another. The fight for female independence is not lost; it is simply dropped.

However, not only the "religion of humanity" causes Eliot to turn her back on her women characters. One also has to look to the ambiguity, discussed at length in the introduction to this thesis, she felt about the role of woman. Even with her almost frighteningly clear understanding of woman's position in society, Eliot still clung to the idea of woman as primarily mother, wife, nurturer and force for moral goodness. As a result, she must continually adjust her women characters to fit one of those roles.

Thus I think one can understand the weakness of many of her novels. She continually fails to carry through the initial understanding she give the reader of her women characters. Maggie longs for some personal identity other
than the strictly "feminine" one her brother or mother would ascribe to her. This is primarily how we are made to understand her character and actions. But after portraying the trip down the river with Stephen, Eliot abandons this vision of Maggie. By the time Maggie returns to St. Ogg's, the real woman has become a cardboard saint; an exciting novel has fallen to the level of a Harlequin romance. The promise of the characterization is unfulfilled. Not that Maggie should have run off with Stephen or become an ardent feminist; it is far more likely she would simply have to realize that her life as a woman would always be filled with the same kind of tension. We expect that Maggie will come to understand about her situation what we feel the author herself already knows.

With Dorothea the quest for something more, which is what makes Dorothea, is quietly dropped. Certainly her marriage to Will, with its escape from Middlemarch and overtones of sexual satisfaction is a step forward. There is none of the hopeless melodrama of The Mill. But the question that Dorothea asked of herself and raises for all other women, "What can I do?" is never answered save by vague references to her goddess-like perfection. If what Dorothea is "to do" is "to be" the ideal woman, then the novel certainly falls short of its initial promise.

Perhaps Eliot's greatest achievement in dealing with women characters is that she is one of the few novelists to
attempt to "take the bitch seriously." Although there is little doubt that Eliot herself abhorred women such as Rosamond, Gwendolen and Mrs. Transome, she manages in her art to control her own feelings enough to show that these women are as much victims of a repressive patriarchal society as are the more attractive characters such as Dorothea and Maggie. By continually following her own rule, "that there is no private life which is not determined by a wider public one," she makes it implicitly clear that society, not some intrinsic evil in the feminine character, is responsible for the bitch personality. In an age which granted women no rights, little freedom and no privileges, she shows how a Rosamond or a Gwendolen, anxious to assert her own individuality, was often forced to corrupt herself through the use of the only powers available to her—feminine coquetry, personal beauty, the arts of seduction, etc.

However, much in the same way that she could not maintain her revolutionary analysis of a woman's situation (because in fact it would demand a revolution) for characters like Maggie and Dorothea, neither could Eliot carry through her sympathetic understanding of the bitch personality. She makes a good beginning with Rosamond, letting us see how much of her character and actions have been moulded by an inadequate education, poor parental guidance and the popular images of attractive femininity. But precisely where she begins to indulge in romantic idealism
about Dorothea, Eliot turns her back on Rosamond, declaring her to be the impossible, unregenerate bitch-woman. Although the novel is weakened by this reversion to traditional myths about the feminine character it of course does not fail as drastically as *The Mill*. There is, as I have pointed out, some ambiguity about the conclusion of Dorothea's story and Rosamond is not treated with such great sympathy that the final analysis of her character destroys the novel.

The case of Gwendolen Harleth is rather different: whether intended by the author or not, Gwendolen is not a secondary character like Rosamond, and the bulk as well as the best parts of *Daniel Deronda* are given over to establishing a sympathetic analysis of this bitch character. For many critics, Eliot has maintained this analysis of Gwendolen and she alone of all Eliot's women characters has grown to real adulthood rather than been manipulated into some sentimental ideal of "true womanhood." However, a close examination of the whole novel reveals that, as with all of her other women characters, here too Eliot finally opts for the traditional view of woman. Although Eliot has made it clear in the earlier part of the book that society must take much of the blame for creating a woman like Gwendolen, she herself is allowed no such insight. She learns only that she has been selfish and evil, that the destruction she has precipitated is entirely her own fault, and that to be saved
she must learn true feminine passivity and self-sacrifice. Although this reversal in attitude does not in itself weaken the novel (although many of the scenes between Gwendolen and Deronda lack the brilliance of the earlier parts of the novel) it is an obvious reflection of the undeniable source of weakness. The gross over-sentimentality of the Jewish parts of the novel spill over into the Gwendolen story and illuminate its real direction. It is Mirah whom Eliot clearly admires and holds up to Gwendolen as an example. The subsequent examination of the process of Gwendolen's "education" shows Eliot means Gwendolen to become, like Mirah, a model of self-sacrificing womanhood. Eliot has guided Gwendolen out of one feminine stereotype—the bitch—only to put her into another—the good woman.

I began this conclusion by quoting Benjamin Jowett's comment that George Eliot was quite clear of materialism, women's rights and idealism. What I think one discovers by studying her treatment of women is that, far from being "clear" of these theories, her writing is permeated with the ideas they represent. If she had been concerned only with the first two there would perhaps not be the problems with her women characters that there are. But her materialism and her profound (whether conscious or unconscious) understanding of the position of women everywhere comes into conflict with a kind of abstract idealism, to which she
clings. Whether her particular idealism about women is a subconscious guilt reaction to her own irregular marriage, whether it is a firmly worked out philosophical position, or whether it is simply the woman-worship common to many Victorian intellectuals does not matter. It is there and consistently weakens both the ideological and aesthetic value of much of her work.

(ii)

Although this thesis deals with the way certain feminist ideas are handled in the novels of George Eliot I do not regard it as a piece of "feminist criticism." There has been much talk recently of a feminist approach to literature but what that could or should be I have not yet discovered. For instance, Kate Millett's Sexual Politics while highly entertaining and often informative, offers only a sophisticated method of slander, not judgement. The comment one still most often hears from a feminist confronted with a sexist book is: "It is well-written, but I still don't like what it says."

My approach to George Eliot was part of a personal curiosity to find out if there were any women characters in literature whose "quest" or "conflict" was involved with anything besides a search for "the right man." Are there any female Stephen Dedalus's or Alfred Prufrocks or King Lears? When I first read George Eliot I thought I had found something very near to that in her female characters. My
enthusiasm was unqualified. Yet when forced to read the novels closely I came across questions which I could not ignore. What has happened to Dorothea's quest for work? How can Maggie's reunion with Tom be justified? What is Gwendolen going to do now? Reading George Eliot's letters, her biography, and her essays only confirmed these contradictions.

I was confronted with the problem I mentioned above. Are these merely parts of the novels or attitudes of George Eliot's which I don't like, or are they in themselves weak or second-rate pieces of writing? The answer is two-fold. First, in themselves the scenes of Maggie's return to St. Ogg's, Dorothea's romance with Ladislaw, and Gwendolen's dependence on Deronda do not have the mark of a great artist. They are over-written, filled with indulgent sentimentality or self-righteous moralizing. The dialogue is stiff--far more biblical than Victorian--and any conflict the character may be faced with is too abstruse to be meaningful. But more than this, these are scenes of very stereotyped female behaviour. The recognition of female stereotypes as stereotypes, it seems to me, is relatively recent: until the 20th century it was simply accepted that women were either very bad or very good. And if this was the only vision of female character that Eliot had presented, if it was a problem at all, it would probably be only of passing interest. But what makes stereotyping a very serious fault
in these cases is that such images are in total opposition to the earlier presentation of the same women characters. The scenes are faulty in themselves but worse still, their presence in otherwise brilliant novels reduces complexity to artifice, realism to idealism and hard-edged irony to facile sentiment.

Thus I have concentrated on the weak parts of the novel not out of some personal indignation but because to avoid them, as most critics have, inhibits a thorough understanding of the brilliance of what has gone before. To investigate the spots where each novel breaks down is also to point up where it really works. And among the great achievements of George Eliot's fiction is the creation of women who behave in other than stereotyped female patterns we have come to expect. That she cannot carry through this approach is regrettable but it certainly does not mean that one therefore discards the novels. The pictures of Maggie drowning, Dorothea marrying and Gwendolen preparing to marry may not ever offer much to the understanding, but what precedes each of these "resignations"—the struggles against or entrapments in the system of patriarchal values—will stand for a long time as examples of great and important fiction.
NOTES

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