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George Eliot and the Victorian Woman

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GEORGE ELIOT AND THE VICTORIAN WOMAN

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Vicki L. Kirkland
May 1978
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GEORGE ELIOT AND THE VICTORIAN WOMAN

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After an examination of the typical Victorian woman was made from available authoritative sources, it was found that George Eliot deviated from this standard and presented several views of the anti-Victorian woman in her novels. While the Victorian woman was pious, content with her role in life, poorly educated, dependent on the man in her life for answers to all problems, frail, feminine, attractive, and frivolous, Eliot, on the other hand, contradicted these characteristics at almost every point. She refused to write the sort of entertaining stories the Victorian reader demanded, and, furthermore, she viewed the Victorian home realistically.

Eliot was discontented with the standards controlling women's role in life. Women were frustrated by inadequate opportunities for participating in the intellectual ferment of the time; but by her own persistent application, Eliot had been contaminated by the contagion of her critical age. It is the spread of this contagion through three of her female characters that is traced here and its degree of domination is noted. Eliot's negative relationship to the typical
conception of what the Victorian woman was like is illustrated through her portrayal of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda*, and Mrs. Transome in *Felix Holt, The Radical*. 
Introduction

If one were to make a composite evaluation of the Victorian woman from available authoritative sources, he would find her to be pious, content with her role in life, poorly educated, dependent on the men in her life for answers to all problems, frail, feminine, attractive, and frivolous. In turn, were one to attempt to relate George Eliot to all of these characteristics, he would find that she contradicts them at almost every point, only her poor health could be related to the list. A student and an intellectual accepted on even terms by great thinkers of the day, she strongly contradicted the Victorian belief in "the essential inferiority of the female mind." In opposition to the belief that woman's place was in the home, Eliot served as sub-editor of the radical Westminster Review and played an active part in the essentially masculine literary life of London.

Some of her departures from the Victorian ideal were only partial ones, however. She rejected the theology of Christianity but retained its spirit. Her common law marriage to G. H. Lewes shocked her contemporaries but resulted in a genuine marital relationship
in which, as Lionel Stevenson states, she became "in everything but a legal sense a wife to Lewes and a mother to his boys." 

Like her life her work too differed from that of her contemporaries. Stevenson pays a high tribute to this mere Victorian woman; "It is significant that in 1859, English fiction arrived at artistic and intellectual maturity with the first novels of George Eliot and George Meredith.

Joan Bennett notes that "unlike many of her contemporaries she was not distracted from the contemplation of her subject by the wish to provide the sort of entertainment the reader demanded." Therefore, Dorothea could be disillusioned with Casaubon, Mrs. Transome discontented after her son's maturity, and Gwendolyn distraught by her husband's illegitimate family.

In Eliot's world the Victorian home is viewed realistically. Although Eliot had rejected traditional Christianity, she retained a rigid code for personal behavior but faced constantly by the intellectual excitement permeating the entire Victorian scene, she felt discontent with the standards controlling women's role in life. Women were frustrated by inadequate opportunities for participating in the intellectual
ferment of her time. But by her own persistent
intellectual application Eliot had been contaminated
by the contagion of her critical age.

In this thesis I have tried to trace the spread
of this contagion through three of her characters and
notice degree of dominion therein. For purposes of
authenticity I have consulted critics of both the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries and pertinent
Victorian periodicals and have referred whenever pos-
sible to primary sources of criticism. After arriving
at a substantial conception of what the Victorian
woman was like I have attempted to show Eliot's
relationship, which was mainly negative, to it. Finally
I have attempted to show what happens when Eliot's own
Victorianism comes into conflict with the real Victorian
woman in the presentation of three of her female
characters.
Chapter One

Dorothea

K. A. McKenzie says Middlemarch "marks an epic in the history of fiction in so far as its incidences are taken from the inner life as the action is developed by the direct influence of mind on mind and character on character . . . but chiefly as giving a background of perfect realistic truth to a profoundly imaginative psychological study." Dorothea Brooke, whom Lewes regarded as most like Eliot of all her characters, was a new kind of heroine in the nineteenth century and one of the most provocative psychological studies in the novel. Using "fewer and plainer words than have ever served to express deep feeling before," she prefers simple attire to the more fanciful fashions of her time, to the point of austerity as frequently as not. In no sense is she inclined toward frivolity; conversely, she has great seriousness of intent which runs counter to what society expected a female to endeavor during her era: "with her enthusiastic vision, practical interest in housing, a head for plans and a pencil ready to draw them, Dorothea is ahead of her time." Like Eliot's
other female characters she is "looking to knowledge above all for strength and exhibiting a most touching faith in the pair of Latin and Greek to solve the riddle of the universe ..." but because there is such disparity between her mental capabilities and the opportunity society offers for developing these capabilities, she experiences frustration from the beginning of the novel to the end.

Accustomed to novels in which the hero and heroine were permitted to fall in love, Victorian readers were surprised that the novelty in Middlemarch lay in Lydgate's preferring Rosamond, the novel's truly Victorian female representation: "Lydgate's attitude towards women was quite blindly traditional, he did not like Dorothea's style of woman. He gave adornment the first place among wifely functions. ..." Unlike Harriet Bulstrode, Dorothea does not show "dutious, merciful constancy" as a wife: "Dorothea, it is true learns to pity her husband, but in the end she totally rejects his demands on her." She decides to look about her for other interests instead of devoting her remaining life to deciphering Casaubon's useless reams of notes.

A Victorian journalist feared the effect of this discontented Dorothea on the young ladies of his time;
And we must say that if our young ladies . . . take to be Dorotheas with a vow to dress differently from other women and to regulate their own conduct on the system of a general disapproval of the state of things into which they are born the world will be a less comfortable world without being a better one . . . "13

Eliot introduces her heroine with a prelude calling attention to the differences among women indicating, thereby, that Dorothea is not to be regarded as of the common lot, but as a modern Saint Theresa, "foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sohs after an unattained goodness tremble oft and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed."14 The tone of the novel is established by a quotation from Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy: "Since I can do not good because a woman,/ Reach constantly at something that is near it" (I, p. 4). The frustration Dorothea experiences "because a woman" runs throughout the novel but because of her naivete she fails to recognize the cause of the frustration.

That women differ from each other cannot be doubted, Eliot points out:

Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one
level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with sufficient certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse. Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind. (I, p. 2-3)

Such a cygnet is Dorothea, and like the cygnet among ducklings she recognizes that she is different from her peers, but she experiences frustration instead of fulfillment from being unable to utilize this difference. Although she could not be called a scholar by any extension of the term, "Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's Pensees and of Jeremy Taylor by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solicitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam" (I, p. 6). Hence, her plain dress. She is different from other young ladies of her age, and philosophical inclination too, which endangers her chances for marriage:

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 these aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it. Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection."
(I, p. 6-7)

Like many of Eliot's female characters Dorothea is not content with her womanly role. She feels impatient with her uncle's management of his estate, but such feelings could prove dangerous in her society in that they narrow still further her chances for marriage (I, p. 8). Men, since they were regarded as superior, could take no chances on a woman who felt she could have ideas of her own: "Women were expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on" (I, p. 9). Dorothea's ideas of marriage differ from those of her peers because she can imagine herself accepting Hooker or John Milton or other great men possessing various eccentricities. To her "the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" (I, p. 10).

Neighbors blamed Mr. Brooke's not having a suitable older lady around to guide his niece's thoughts and
actions for such aberrations of Dorothea, but he persists in permitting her to act as feminine head of his household (I, p. 11-12). With her peculiar bent toward veneration of great men it is to be expected that she should look forward with eagerness to a Grange dinner at which Sir James Chettam and the Reverend Mr. Edward Casaubon are to be asked.

The latter has been "noted in the country as a man of profound learning" and "understood for many years to be engaged on a great work concerning religious history" (I, p. 11). He has been singled out as "a man of wealth enough to give lustre to his piety, and having views of his own which were to be more clearly ascertained on the publication of his book. His very name carried an impressiveness hardly to be measured without a precise chronology of scholarship" (I, p. 11). His appearance is cold and somewhat forbidding which causes Dorothea's friends to wonder at his attraction for her since to a careful observer "If Miss Brooke ever attained perfect meekness, it would not be for lack of inward fire" (I, p. 16).

Unlike what was expected of young ladies of her day, Dorothea enters freely into the discussion at the dinner table when Casaubon is present to speak concerning beneficial effects of scientific farming,
but her uncle is quick to apologize for her interruption: "Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know . . ." (I, p. 20). He has not been aware of Dorothea's embarrassment at his own insipid musings throughout the evening, "scrappy slovenliness" as Eliot calls it, in the presence of one so learned as Mr. Casaubon, "the most interesting man she had ever seen . . ." (I, p. 21). Without doubt she has become a disciple of this erudite personage "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" (I, p. 21).

The rather frequent vulgarity of Eliot's own speech which Cross tried so assiduously to obscure in editing her letters reveals itself in similarly vulgar word choice as Dorothea heatedly refers to Celia's having called Casaubon sallow: "I suppose you admire a man with the complexion of a cochon de lait" (I, p. 24). Young ladies of the time were not expected to make such references as this to a suckling pig and it shocked Celia, another of Eliot's perfect portrayals of Victorian woman. Her comment would sound strange if one accepted without question her Puritanical appearance, but for the reader, more readily
recognizing her inner fire than her outward consciously acquired aura of piety, her expression sounds perfectly in keeping with her personality, which is rather like an extension of her creator's.

Similar to Dr. Brabant's attractiveness for Marianne Evans, too, is that of Casaubon for Dorothea. This unimaginative pedant finds an eager disciple in the gullible Dorothea as he confides what he believes to be a noble ambition to her:

To show . . . that all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible, nay, luminous with the reflected light of correspondences. (I, p. 30)

Such senseless jargon from the pseudo-scholar delights the naive Dorothea to the extent that she finds other men dull by comparison. He offers a possibility for the intellectual stimulation for which she has so long yearned:

Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies'-school literature: here was a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety; here was a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint. (I, p. 30)
Dorothea is so excited by an avowal of interest from this insidiously fifty-year-old Casaubon that she finds it necessary to assuage her reaction by a brisk walk afterwards.

Understandably people in Tipton are unable to comprehend her interest in Casaubon:

But perhaps no persons then living . . . would have had a sympathetic understanding for the dreams of a girl whose notions about marriage took their colour entirely from an exalted enthusiasm about the ends of life, an enthusiasm which was lit chiefly by its own fire, and included neither the niceties of the trousseau, the pattern of plate, not even the honours and sweet joys of the blooming matron. (I, p. 35)

A typical girl of Dorothea's time would have been contented with village charities, church affairs, religious reading and embroidery but "from such contentment poor Dorothea was shut out" (I, p. 36).

Her religious intensity and desire for knowledge couple unhappily with her natural youthful passion for life to produce a general discontent with the lot of a woman in Tipton. Her reaction to the protective male attitude toward women is shrouded somewhat in her hastily formed opinion about the Maltese puppy Chettam brings her: "I believe all the petting that is given them does not make them happy. They are too helpless:
their lives are too frail. The animals about us have souls something like our own. ... those creatures are parasitic" (I, p. 39).

Dorothea is well aware that she must choose a husband soon because "for the woman ... marriage is the only conceivable career. Consequently, she chooses a mate in the hope of finding through him her opportunity to serve humanity; she hopes to find a husband with gifts of character and intelligence superior to her own." She thinks Casaubon will prove to be this kind of a husband for although he is indulging his own selfish interests in attracting her she is not aware of it since he talks with her as other men have not: "This accomplished man condescended to think of a young girl, and take the pains to talk to her, not with absurd compliment, but with an appeal to her understanding, and sometimes with instructive correction" (I, pp. 42-43). Interestingly, she is attracted to him in spite of his not approving of what he regards as her lavish plans for the cottages (I, p. 43).

The fiery temper which Dorothea can display upon the slightest provocation belies her occasional fanatical manifestation of religious impulse, unless one recognizes that the two spring from a common emotional source. And Celia's announcement that Chettam
has approved the beloved cottage plan only because he hopes to marry their originator brings anything but a mild reaction:

She was disposed . . . to accuse the intolerable narrowness and the purblind conscience of the society around her; and Celia was no longer the eternal cherub, but a thorn in her spirit, a pink and white nullifidian, worse than any discouraging presence in the "Pilgrim's Progress." (I, p. 49)

Mr. Brooke tries to discourage her marrying Casaubon who is twenty-seven years her senior, but Dorothea dismisses his concern lightly. Her uncle is reconciled, however, because he recognizes her distinct difference from other girls: "'Well you are not fond of show, a great establishment, balls, dinners, that kind of thing. . . . you have not the same tastes as every young lady . . .'" (I, p. 55). Neither he nor Dorothea understands the psychological implications of her need for the antiquated dull Casaubon. Had she more knowledge of life, she would have felt anxiety at Casaubon's mention of his "affection hitherto unwasted" (I, p. 58). But she has no such knowledge and is merely overwhelmed by a proposal from this learned man: "All Dorothea's passion was transfused through a mind struggling towards an ideal life; the radiance of her
transfigured girlhood fell on the first object that came within its level" (I, p. 59).

As for Chettam's loss, Mrs. Cadwallader assures him it is for the better since Miss Brooke is a "girl who would have been requiring you to see the stars by daylight" (I, p. 80). Disgusted with Dorothea's foolish choice which Mrs. Cadwallader attributes to her undesirable tendency toward Methodism, the older woman wishes the young one "joy of her hair shirt" (I, p. 84).

Appearance of the hair shirt occurs almost simultaneously with the wedding ceremony. Simultaneously in fact, if one accepts David Daiches' statement referring to Casaubon's sexual impotence: "The suggestion of sexual impotence to match Dorothea's sexual ignorance is irresistible. It is all very delicately done and no doubt the Victorian reader failed to see in the relationship between the two the matching of impotence and sublimation." 16 Perhaps the average Victorian reader overlooked the implication, but that it was a conscious implication is certain. Eliot had read extensively in psychology and medical books in addition to experiencing a full life herself, so the implication is stronger than mere conjecture would suggest. Surely the novelist's words contain
more than implicit suggestions when she pictures the
Casaubon who is disappointed during his days of
courtship but recognizes that.

He had deliberately incurred the hindrance,
having made up his mind that it was now time
for him to adorn his life with the graces
of female companionship, to irradiate the
gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over
the intervals of studious labor with the play
of female fancy, and to secure in this, his
culminating age, the solace of female
tendance for his declining years. Hence
he is determined to abandon himself to the
stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised
to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it
was. . . . Mr. Casaubon found that sprinkling
was the utmost approach to a plunge which
his stream would afford him; and he concluded
that the poets had much exaggerated the force
of masculine passion. (I, p. 87)

Anyone trying to discover a normal man in one who finds
his emotional response during courtship a "shallow rill"
is likely to be disappointed. Although Eliot uses
third person omniscience, her selectivity of Casaubon's
consciousness permits placing extremely long sentences
at the beginning of the quotation indicating, thereby,
his pedantic quality, the opposite of warmth and affection.
The implication of impotence thus tends to become
so strong as to be almost explicit; nor is it lessened
when Casaubon suggests that Celia should accompany them
to Rome during their wedding trip. He wants to
study some manuscripts in the Vatican, and Dorothea
may, therefore, like companionship. Irritated, Dorothea refuses the suggestion, but she is not aware of the cause of her irritation. For her last dinner party at the Grange before the wedding she dresses quite simply causing Mr. Chichely to object: "... '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'" (I, p. 127).

Neither Dorothea's dress nor her manner would mark her as a coquette, certainly, of which Lydgate is well aware. For him her "youthful bloom, with her approaching marriage to that faded scholar, and her interest in matters socially useful, give her the piquancy of an unusual combination" (I, pp. 133-134).

As has been pointed out previously however, she is too different to suit his tastes:

She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven. (I, p. 136)

As Dorothea appropriately stands near a statue of Ariadne in Rome she too has been abandoned in a sense by Casaubon who searches diligently for manuscripts at the Vatican while she is left to her own resources.
A friend of Will Ladislaw, Adolf Naumann, perceives at a glance that she is a study in "sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion" (1, p. 276). Would that his observation had been less accurate. Dorothea is immersed in ugly reality as he watches her, for she has discovered during the short time of marriage that her idol has feet of clay:

How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither. (1, p. 284)

W. J. Harvey sees distinct irony in Dorothea's immersion in the very situation she sought to escape through marriage:

It is one of the novel's ironies that Dorothea seeks to escape a labyrinth of petty courses by marrying Casaubon, who is consistently characterized by images of labyrinths, tombs, gloomy rooms and other claustrophobic metaphors.17

The claustrophobic imagery surrounding Casaubon suggests the cause of much of Dorothea's frustration because in spite of her desire to acquire knowledge she wants to love someone, but the object of her choice
constricted by impotence remained for too long outside
the pale of sensuality:

With all her yearning to know what was afar
from her and to be widely benignant, she
had ardour enough for what was near, to
have kissed Mr. Casaubon's coat-sleeve, or
to have caressed his shoe-latchet, if he
would have made any other sign of acceptance
than pronouncing her, with his unfailing
propriety, to be a most affectionate and
truly feminine nature, indicating at the
same time by politely reaching a chair for
her that he regarded these manifestations
as rather crude and startling. (I, p. 288)

Dorothea's plans to accomplish great things in
this marriage are frustrated shortly after her arrival
at Lowick Manor following the miserable trip to Rome:
"The duties of her married life, contemplated as so
great beforehand, seemed to be shrinking with the fur-
niture and the white vapour-walled landscape" (I,
p. 395). She finds herself in a kind of "moral
imprisonment:" "Marriage, which was to bring guidance
into worthy and imperative occupation, . . . had not
even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of
unchecked tenderness" (I, p. 396). Soon Casaubon goes
so far as to consent to let his wife copy needed infor-
mation for him or read aloud to him in the library, and
being with him so much permits her to discern his moods
more readily. When he refuses to permit Ladislaw with
his "desultory vivacity" to visit them, she is infuriated giving vent to her fury in words unlike those of a submissive wife: "Why do you attribute to me a wish for anything that would annoy you? You speak to me as if I were seomthing you had to contend against. Wait at least till I appear to consult my own pleasure apart from yours" (I, pp. 408-409).

W. J. Harvey sees Dorothea as "in some sense more of a real person when she is married to Casaubon. . . ." Whether she is more real is perhaps debatable but that she has had unpleasant experiences since her marriage is certain. Since the marriage, for instance, Casaubon has listened to what she has had to say, but immediately afterwards he regularly negates her statements on the basis of their being clearly outmoded or totally incorrect.

In contrast, before knowing Ladislaw Dorothea "had never found much room in other minds for what she cared most to say" (II, p. 30). To Ladislaw she is a human being and since she has known him only since her marriage this may account for her having become more real. Knowing frustration with which she has become uncomfortably familiar has contributed, unquestionably also, toward making her more human. Her audacious spirit has not abated completely with marriage, however,
since she dares to provoke Casaubon's anger by attempting to usurp his male perogative of authority by suggesting that Ladislaw be given part of the money Casaubon has granted her in his will (II, p. 50). Extending the audacity outside the bounds of marriage she attempts to dissuade her uncle from his political position. While she is visiting him she enjoys a freedom denied her since marriage, that of expressing her own opinions. She tries to explain to Mr. Brooke why she has professed a dislike for art in talking with him in the past:

I used to come from the village with all the dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in the drawing-room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false, while we don't mind how hard the truth is for the neighbors outside our walls. I think we have no right to come forward and urge wider changes for good, until we have tried to alter the evils which lie under our own hands. (II, p. 71)

The reader cannot doubt Dorothea's sincerity when he reads such impassioned words, and he sees immediately that she possesses untapped resources for accomplishing social good. Casaubon does not doubt her innate capability for goodness because he knows her to be as virtuous and lovely as any young woman he could have found as a wife, but she is nonetheless "a young lady
turned out to be something more troublesome than he had conceived" (II, p. 115). He thinks she has changed from a trusting young lady into a critical wife which proves trying for one so strongly given to self-distrust as he. There is something about Dorothea that prohibits men describing her that makes them aware simply of her presence when they are with her as Will tells Rosamond: "Mrs. Casaubon is too unlike other women for them to be compared with her" (II, p. 137). Such uniqueness fails to save her from frustration during her marriage because she can never please Casaubon: "She was always trying to be what her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she was" (II, p. 136).

After she has seen her husband's work for what it actually is—a key to nothing, certainly not to all mythologies as Casaubon planned it to be—she is reticent to agree to editing his work after his death: "Was it right, even to soothe his grief—would it be possible, even if she promised—to work as in a treadmill fruitlessly" (II, p. 203). She had wished to help him in his work when she married him, but mere fruitless labor seemed a waste of living to her now that she recognizes the insignificance of the work. Fortunately, Casaubon's sudden death makes a final decision
unnecessary. Nonetheless Casaubon's cold authoritarian hand is stretched from the grave since he attached a codicil to his will to retract all property from Dorothea if she marries Will Ladislaw (II, p. 219). This action provided that needed impetus for her not attempting to organize the vast accumulation of trivia which he had hoped to be the key to all mythologies. Had the hand stayed where it belonged she would have made the effort, but Casaubon's lack of faith in her loyalty overpowered her (II, pp. 224-225). Dorothea had certainly given him no reason for the jealousy, but Paris suggests it was not sexual: "He knew that Will held him and his work in low esteem, and he was afraid of a future marriage between Dorothea and Will or even of a close acquaintanceship because it might interfere with his plan for having Dorothea complete his book."19

Dorothea's vivacity reasserts itself after Casaubon's death and she soon resumes her interest and plans for the poor. The clever Caleb Garth is delighted with her interest in improving living conditions for them and the land generally, and he comments enthusiastically to his wife that Mrs. Casaubon has a business sense which is most unusual for a woman (II, p. 305). Dorothea's business sense receives ample
exercise as she manages her own affairs after Casaubon's death. She considers taking Bulstrode's place in supporting the hospital (III, p. 9). Like Garth, Lydgate places her above other women because of her intense loyalty to Casaubon in spite of what must have been subconscious repulsion to his unworthiness as a scholar. Lydgate has been impressed too with her intensity by "her passionate cry to be taught what would best comfort that man for whose sake it seemed as if she must quell every impulse in her except the yearning of faithfulness and compassion" (II, p. 365). Her sense of justice is excercised when she refuses to remain a calm observer of Lydgate's misery after he is implicated innocently in Bulstrode's affairs. She acts against the advice of her uncle and Chettam as she rises to Lydgate's defense: "Let us find out the truth and clear him" (III, p. 81). In response to Mr. Firebrother's comment that character can become diseased, she offers a sound argument: "Then it may be rescued and healed, ... people glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbors" (III, p. 85).

Unlike the typical Victorian woman Dorothea is not hesitant in speaking before men when she feels the cause justifies such speech. Chettam is quick to
remind her that "a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know the world better than she does. . ." (III, pp. 85-86), but he fails to check her enthusiasm for helping Lydgate. Never one to abide by popular feeling concerning the appropriateness of woman's being in the background rather than the foreground of activity, Dorothea seizes the opportunity to help Lydgate by taking Bulstode's place in supporting the hospital.

She feels concerned because of the economic differences between her life and that of others:

In her luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, her thought was going out over the lot of others, and her emotions were imprisoned. The idea of some active good within her reach, "haunted her like a passion," and another's need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless. (III, p. 122)

The feeling extends throughout Dorothea's life and makes her unlike most people in her altruism. She wants to help others with her money: "... what I should most rejoice at would be to have something good to do with my money: I should like it to make other people's lives better to them" (III, p. 128). This genuine feeling is shown in her generosity towards
those needing it causing Lydgate, who has needed it, to note her dissimilarity to other women again: "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" (III, p. 134). The same comment, incidentally, was frequently made of Eliot's male friends.

Character has always caused concern among family and friends because they have never known what she may do next. She married Casaubon against their will, but Sir James Chettam feels certain that she will not consider Will Ladislaw as a suitor since the man's background had been revealed as Bulstrode's character was dissected for public judgement. As a result the people of Lowick, Tipton, and Freshitt speak of "Young Ladislaw the grandson of a thieving Jew pawnbroker" (III, p. 140) which should assure anyone of Dorothea's future lack of interest in him.

Her action is again miscalculated. Dorothea is aware of the animus with which Ladislaw's part in the story is retold, "but her silence shrouded her resistant emotion into a more thorough glow; and this misfortune in Will's lot which, it seemed, others were wishing to fling at his back as an opprobrium only gave something more of enthusiasm to her clinging thought"
(III, p. 140). In response to her uncle's wish for her to find a suitable husband to manage her money comes Dorothea's characteristic remark: "I should like to manage it myself, if I knew what to do with it..." (III, p. 141), but this "dangerous part of the family machinery" (III, p. 203) as Celia calls her unpredictable sister plans to marry Will against the advice of both family and friends. Chettam regards her action as degrading and the Rector sees her as foolish: "Mrs. Casaubon may be acting imprudently: she is giving up a fortune for the sake of a man, and we men have so poor an opinion of each other that we can hardly call a woman wise who does that" (III, p. 206). Mrs. Cadwallader thinks the situation represents mere caprice on Dorothea's part because of Casaubon's unpleasantness:

Mr. Casaubon had prepared all this as beautifully as possible. He made himself disagreeable—or it pleased God to make him so—and then he dared her to contradict him. It's the way to make any trumpery tempting, to ticket it at a high price in that way. (III, p. 207)

The action is just what Celia expects from the ever-changing Dorothea: ". . . you always were wrong . . . ." (III, p. 212).
Laurence Lerner agreeing with the review in the March 7, 1873, *Times* that the novel was not feminist propaganda says Eliot had difficulty knowing what to do with her heroine at this point in the story. The conclusion obviously does little to convince the reader of Dorothea's discontent with marriage *per se*, but she "could neither write novels nor edit the *Westminster Review* nor help in the founding of Gerton College." For those who object to her marriage to someone regarded generally as her inferior, Paris states that she changes during the novel. To imagine her as being terribly unfulfilled in her marriage to Ladislaw is to see her as a static character who is the same at the end as she was at the beginning. Her second marriage may disappoint our hopes but it should in no way violate our expectations if we have understood Dorothea's psychological development and unalterable limitations imposed upon her by her social medium. Eliot offers the best possible interpretation of her by stating that her life with Ladislaw was a fulfilled one, since unlike her Victorian peers she could not live without emotional response: "No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the
doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself" (III, p. 233). Succeeding generations in Middlemarch felt Dorothea could not have been a "nice woman," that if she had been she would not have married either of the two men. Eliot again recognized the actions for what they were and what they represented:

Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. (III, p. 236)
Chapter Two

Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn Harleth in Daniel Deronda ranks among Eliot's most complex psychological creations, and she is surely among the greatest fictitious egoists of all times. Gerald Bullett sees her as a classical figure because of her egoism: "Gwendolyn is a tragic in the Aristotelian mode. She herself in blind hubristic folly works her undoing." Because of her egoism, too, she reflects a personality alien to the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Any male in her life must, of necessity, be second to her in every respect. When she meets one who is also a supreme egoist it follows logically that she will find marriage with him unbearable, that she may desire to murder him eventually because he refuses to consider her first in every instance. That we are to read of a girl of an extraordinary type is apparent as we begin the novel for on the first page Eliot pictures one with almost magical ability to attract attention. Daniel Deronda is captivated by the provocative figure Gwendolyn presents:
Was the good or evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? 2

Her face "might possibly be looked at without admiration, but could hardly be passed with indifference" (p. 3). As Gwendolyn gathers the coins toward her which she has won at roulette, Deronda becomes aware of her "survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation" (p. 4). Before his appearance, she has been winning, and although she has lost this time because of riveting her attention on him, she had previously entertained a vision of "being followed by a cortege who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury. Such things had been known of male gamblers; why should not a woman have a like supremacy" (p. 4). Although her friend and chaperone advises her to save her winnings the imprudent Gwendolyn says she cares little for them and loves only the excitement of the game.

Guests at the gambling casino are struck by her unusual appearance in her sea-green robe and silver ornaments: "A striking girl—that Miss Harleth—unlike
others" (p. 6). The color of her clothes enhances the snake-like appearance Eliot attributes to her with a "nez retroussé," "long narrow eyes," and the general "ensemble du serpent" (p. 6). She is certain to attract the lizard-like Grandcourt later.

Originally it had been Gwendolyn's search for passion that led her to gambling, but after receiving a letter from home announcing the family's straightened financial circumstances, she feels she may help alleviate the situation with a little success in gambling:

With ten louis at her disposal and a return of her former luck, which seemed probable, what could she do better than go on playing for a few days? If her friends at home disapproved of the way in which she got the money, as they certainly would, still the money would be there. (p. 10)

Not caring that women of her time did not travel alone, she feels that she can raise money by selling her necklace and leave for Brussels by train for home since her mother has requested her immediate return. She is not a novice in traveling alone. Unlike her peers, Gwendolyn has moved about considerably:

Roving from one foreign watering-place or Parisian apartment to another, always feeling new antipathies to new suites of hired furniture, and meeting new people under conditions which made her appear of little importance; and the variation of having
passed two years at a showy school, where on all occasions of 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. (p. 16)

Rarely, has Gwendolyn shown any tendency toward docility. Once when her sister's canary with its "shrill singing which had again and again jarringly interrupted her own" (p. 17), she strangled it and bought a white mouse to take its place. That she prefers an easy life to a difficult one is obvious:

Gwendolyn's nature was not remorseless, but she liked to make her penances easy, and now that she was twenty and more, some of her native force had turned into self-control by which she guarded herself from penitential humiliation. There was more show of fire and will in her than ever, but there was more calculation underneath it. (p. 17)

Not only is Gwendolyn unlike others outside her home, but she also differs markedly from her sisters and mother: "Imagine a young race-horse in the paddock among untrimmed ponies and patient hacks" (p. 18). Because of obvious superiority she is not content to accept just anything life may offer her: "I am determined to be happy--at least not to go on muddling away my life as other people do, being and doing nothing
remarkable. I have made up my mind not to let other people interfere with me as they have done" (p. 21).
There is a distant trace of a masculine, rather than a feminine, characteristic which accompanies this feeling of superiority. It is in evidence in her reply when she is asked if she would enjoy archery:
"There is nothing I enjoy more than taking aim--and hitting" (p. 26).

This egoism must be constantly maintained. Unlike the Victorian ideal, Gwendolyn is without the ambition to find a suitable husband:

. . . her thoughts never dwelt on marriage as the fulfillment of her ambition . . . ; . . . to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition, was on the whole a vexatious necessity. Her observation of matrimony had inclined her to think it rather a dreary state, in which a woman could not do what she liked, had more children than were desirable, was consequently dull, and became irrevocably immersed in humdrum. . . . A peerage will not quite do instead of leadership to the man who meant to lead; and this delicate-limbed sylph of twenty meant to lead. . . . She meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy. (p. 30)

In short, Gwendolyn intends to "conquer circumstance by her exceptional cleverness" (p. 31). She is totally unpredictable and tends to instill uneasiness
in both the old and the young about her. Eliot compares the attention she receives with that of men who possess a "strong determination to have what was pleasant, with a total fearlessness in making themselves disagreeable or dangerous when they did not get it" (p. 33). Those with whom Gwendolyn comes into contact always give in to her instead of experiencing the unpleasant scene which would result were she not to get her way. She has the contemptible knack of affecting naivete about a subject under discussion and later turning the information the speaker has been confiding to her to his disadvantage. Too late the innocent victim recognizes her talent for affectation. She is regularly invited to social gatherings, however, because of the pleasant appearance she makes.

Her singing in no way exhibits the tremulousness expected from an untrained female performer of her time: "Gwendolyn was not nervous: what she undertook to do she did without trembling and singing was an enjoyment to her" (p. 38). Herr Klesmer is quick to comment concerning her obvious lack of training, and unlike a well-bred girl of any age Gwendolyn is rude to the older Mrs. Arrowpoint when the woman asks her to sing again in spite of the adverse criticism.
Gwendolyn parodies Klesmer's criticism so that Mrs. Arrowpoint's request appears to reflect her own poor taste for music. The older woman soon draws an accurate deduction about Gwendolyn: "Decidedly... this girl is double and satirical. I shall be on my guard against her" (p. 41). Gwendolyn finds it difficult to remain at any task long enough to perfect her work. This is particularly apparent in her neglect of her sister Alice's instruction after she has told her mother she will see to it to cut expenses (p. 43); thereby enabling herself to have a riding horse.

She has inordinate fears of several types. When the family moves to their new home the children discover a secret panel which opens to reveal a painted dead face, a note of foreshadowing of the later dead face of Grandcourt in the Mediterranean, and the effect on Gwendolyn is shocking since her ideal is to be "daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers, both moral and physical..." (p. 52). And she is particularly ashamed of her fears, which include extreme fear of the dark. The family has always taken her sleeping in her mother's room as a matter of course. Her ideal and daily practice, therefore, proved desperate and Gwendolyn is even afraid to be
alone: "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" (p. 53). Her family thinks her extreme timidity and terror are indications of "sensitiveness" or perhaps the "excitability of her nature" (p. 53).

Gwendolyn gives the appearance of enticing men which would cause one to conclude that she would also welcome physical manifestations of their interest, but her reaction to such expressions is the opposite of what is expected. But when her cousin Rex gives the slightest indication of physical attraction to her she objects "with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to" (p. 59). That she enjoys another type of excitement ordinarily regarded as unseemly for a lady, however, is shown by her impulsive response to the hunting scene:

... Gwendolyn felt no check on the animal stimulus that came from the stir and tongue of the hounds, the pawing of the horses, the varying voices of men, the movement hither and thither of vivid colour on the background of green and gray stillness. ... (p. 59)
As one would expect of a girl so stimulated by following the hounds, Gwendolyn has little respect for what is thought to be normal for young ladies. For instance, she cannot understand how girls can fall in love because men are so ridiculous (p. 66). Then, too, girls' avocations are those for which she has no interest whatsoever. She refuses to help her cousin Anna in the schools or to help in Sunday School (p. 67). Her uncle thinks she is merely a high spirit with "a little too much fire in her for her present life with her mother and sisters" (p. 67). But the fire fails to show itself when Rex professes love for her since she is "passionately averse to this volunteered love" (p. 70). To her mother she declares that she will never be able to love anybody (p. 70). For someone as much in love with herself as Gwendolyn this is believable.

Her attitude toward meeting Mr. Mallinger Grandcourt, "presumptive heir to the baronetcy" (p. 78) and new resident at Diplow Hall, is that of the coquette: "My arrow will pierce him before he has time for thought. He will declare himself my slave--I shall send him round the world to bring me back the wedding-ring of a happy woman..." (p. 81). What
she does not realize is that for the first time in her life she is to know someone who will refuse to acquiesce constantly to her slightest whim. The situation of slavery is hers rather than his.

Unable to discern the basic psychological factors involved in Grandcourt's complex personality, Gwendolyn finds his coldness in manner pleasing: "... 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" (p. 96). Fear of offending Grandcourt begins with their first meeting (p. 105). Never has Gwendolyn's reaction been like this with other men and this experienced Grandcourt is quick to evaluate her reaction to him. He is, therefore, hesitant to give her "the opportunity of accepting him" (p. 112). One of his chief delights lies in parrying with the invisible, particularly when another person is waiting anxiously for the results of the match.

Grandcourt has more than a slight touch of sadistic inclination. Had the luckless Gwendolyn been able to observe his inconsiderate treatment of his dogs (p. 108), she would have remained reticent about accepting him. Attention is meagrely apportioned by
Grandcourt according to a lack of rather than abundance of need for affection. Therefore, Fetch is thrust outside when she puts her head affectionately on her master's lap while a smaller dog which has not sought attention is petted slightly.

When Gwendolyn refers to herself petulantly as possibly both cruel and obstinate (p. 117), she is not aware that she is talking to an experienced master of both characteristics. Had she been more like other women he had known, Grandcourt would not have found her so interesting, but her uniqueness and her evasion of answering him positively add piquancy to the conquest: "It is all coquetting. . . ; the next time I beckon she will come down" (p. 118). That she will "come down" is not what Gwendolyn is expecting for "Gwendolyn wished to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself, with a spouse by her side who would fold his arms and give her his countenance without looking ridiculous" (pp. 118-119). She feels Grandcourt is the most likely man she knows to meet her qualifications for a husband: " . . . the dignities, the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do, which had now come close to her, and within her choice to secure or to lose, took hold of her nature
as if it had been the strong odour of what she had only imagined and longed for before" (p. 118).

Eliot assures the reader of the similarity between the two by her use of animal imagery in describing them. Just as Gwendolyn has been pictured as serpentine, the man she places above others is portrayed as a "handsome lizard:"

Grandcourt after all was formidable—a handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species, not of the lively, darting kind. But Gwendolyn knew hardly anything about lizards, and ignorance gives one a large range of probabilities. This splendid specimen was probably gentle, suitable as a boudoir pet: what may not a lizard be, if you know nothing to the contrary? (p. 119)

Had he not been forewarned of the coldness of the two, the reader could easily infer from Eliot's analogy that their psychological traits take opposite paths. But the novelist later refers to Grandcourt's likeness to an alligator so one can infer that this is the category in which she is placing him rather than that of the smaller reptile, and there is much difference between the formidability of a lizard and an alligator.

Through her imagery, therefore, Eliot has shown that Gwendolyn's innocence and Grandcourt's sophistication cannot help but result in dissonance. There
is still another similarity between the two. Although Gwendolyn is noted for her willfulness, that of Grandcourt makes hers appear feeble by contrast. After he has ascertained from a conversation during a picnic at Green Arbor that Gwendolyn is interested in marrying him, he allows his habitual languor to set in, for he is seemingly "starting away from a decision." "Starting away" however, was not the right expression for the languor of intention that came over Grandcourt. Like a fit of diseased numbness when an end seemed within easy reach, it desisted then when all expectation was to the contrary, but came another gratification of mere will sublimely independent of definite motive.

Lydia Glasher, the mother of Grandcourt's four children, makes it a point to tell Gwendolyn that it is she who should marry Grandcourt so her son can be his father's legal heir. The news of the illegitimate family shocks the conventional, albeit innocent, Gwendolyn. She is repulsed by the thought. Feeling marriage to be out of the question now, Gwendolyn considers taking musical instruction from the candid Herr Klesmer. By public performance, she could manage to "achieve substantiality for herself and know gratified ambition without bondage" (p. 222). "Egoistic disappointment and irritation" (p. 232) follow
Klesmer's negative evaluation of her capabilities, but she recognizes that it is impossible for her to sing publicly with the success she had anticipated. Nor can she become submissive enough to accept the other solution to her family's reduced financial circumstances--becoming a governess for the children of Bishop Mompert.

When Grandcourt renews his suit with the knowledge that Gwendolyn knows of his illegitimate family, Gwendolyn has become somewhat reconciled to the bitter news imparted by Mrs. Glasher. She is not aware, however, of the juxtaposition of her and Grandcourt's mutual desire to master the other:

... his strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature--this piquant combination of maidenliness and mischief: that she knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance; and he was believing that he should triumph. And she--ah, piteous equality in the need to dominate!--she was overcome like the thirsty one who is drawn towards the seeming water in the desert, overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man's homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to the oppressive lot. (p. 267)

She realizes only too well that her alternative to marrying him is serving as governess for the Mompert children, but she fortifies herself by professing that
the reason for the marriage is the desire to secure her mother’s financial future. This lack of love, in fact, and particularly her marrying him after learning of his illegitimate family tend to increase her appeal, since mastering reluctance can be very stimulating:

"He meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man" (p. 282). Gwendolyn's desire for mastery, on the other hand, is related to her resentment of men's accepted superiority. The resentment is pronounced when Deronda tells her men need women to be better than they, "but suppose we need that men should be better than we are . . ." (p. 297).

Surely Gwendolyn vies for honors as Eliot's most frustrated and discontented character. She receives no contentment whatsoever with marriage unless it would be that of marital security:

After every new shock of humiliation she tried to adjust herself and seize her old supports—proud concealment, trust in new excitements that would make life go by without much thinking: trust in some deed of reparation to nullify her self-blame and shield her from a vague, ever-visiting dread of some horrible calamity; trust in the hardening effect of use and wont that would make her indifferent to her miseries.

(p. 377)
No longer does she possess the ability to master for she has married the master's master: "... she had found a will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor which goes on pinching or crushing without alarm at thunder" (p. 378). Grandcourt has learned her weakness: her feeling of guilt about usurping his illegitimate family's place. And, he exploits it in asserting his own will:

He judged that he had not married a simpleton unable to perceive the impossibility of escape, or to see alternative evils: he had married a girl who had spirit and pride enough not to make a fool of herself by forfeiting all the advantages of a position which had attracted her; and that if she wanted pregnant hints to help her in making up her mind properly he would take care not to withhold them. (p. 379)

Too late Gwendolyn has learned of his treatment of his dogs and horses:

He delights in making the dogs and horses quail: that is half his pleasure in calling them his... It will come to be so with me; and I shall quail. What else is there for me? I will not say to the world, "Pity me." (p. 381)

Her egoism thus strengthens her determination and provides necessary psychological sustenance. Refusing to conform to standards of decorum she seeks an emotional
outlet through talks with Deronda whenever opportunity presents itself.

Grandcourt objects to her singling out Deronda for special attention at public functions, however, and asks her to abstain from anything so "damnably vulgar" (p. 499). To remember her position as his wife is his wish. She is the recipient of his ire as he specifies her actions unbecoming to a lady: "Nothing makes a lady more of a gawky than looking out after people and showing tempers in public. A woman ought to have fine manners. Else it's intolerable to appear with her" (p. 525).

Like the typical nineteenth century woman, Gwendolyn is a victim of English law safeguarding a husband's rights of property. To guarantee the security of his physical relationship with Gwendolyn, Grandcourt has provided in his will that his natural son will be heir unless she has had a son (p. 539). If she had not provided the heir she was to receive Gadsmere, once described by him as "a dog-hutch of a place in a black country" (p. 497), the home of Mrs. Glasher and the children. Gwendolyn, therefore, is just as trapped legally as any woman of the century.

Taken by Grandcourt on a Mediterranean cruise after he found her only visiting Deronda one day,
Gwendolyne experiences more frustration than she has known since her marriage. She is afraid of what she may do because of her long pent up impulses and has become obsessed with the fear of being wicked:

It was sometimes after a white-lipped, fierce-eyed temptation with murdering fingers had made its demon-visit that these best moments of inward crying and clinging for rescue would come to her, and she would lie with wide-open eyes in which the rising tears seemed a blessing, and the thought, "I will not mind if I can keep from getting wicked," seemed an answer to the indefinite prayer. (p. 604)

With the cruise and the resulting opportunity to put an end to her misery, her desire for Grandcourt's death assumed predominance over all other thoughts and she tells Deronda after the desired death has occurred:

I felt a hatred in me that was always working like an evil spirit—contriving things. Everything I could do to free myself came into my mind; and it got worse—all things got worse. That was why I asked you to come to me in town. I thought then I would tell you the worst about myself. I tried. But I could not tell everything. And he came in. (p. 618)

She tells Deronda that while she was at the Abbey she thought of murdering Grandcourt:
There it was—something my fingers longed for among the beautiful toys in the cabinet in my boudoir—small and sharp like a long willow leaf in a silver sheath. . . . I was continually haunted with it, and how I should use it. I fancied myself putting it under my pillow. But I never did. I never looked at it again. I dared not unlock the drawer: it had a key all to itself; and not long ago, when we were in the yacht, I dropped the key into the deep water. It was my wish to drop it and deliver myself. After that I began to think how I could open the drawer without the key: and when I found we were to stay at Genoa, it came into my mind that I could get it opened privately at the hotel. (p. 620)

Thus the Gwendolyn, so fearful of becoming wicked, had arrived at the pinnacle of temptation: to defy not only the standards of decorum but those long established by Mosaic code. She has regressed rapidly from "bright, rash girlhood" into a depth of remorse from which Deronda, nor anyone else, will rescue her half so rapidly (p. 622). Within a year the "brilliant, self-confident Gwendolyn Harleth of the Archery Meeting" has changed into "crushed penitent impelled to confess her unworthiness where it would have been her happiness to be held worthy. . . ." (pp. 631-632).

Eliot's only other character to fall to such a depth is Mrs. Transome, and her age contributes strongly to the extent of her remorse. Like Dorothea, Gwendolyn is a product of the society which assumed women would
always be recipients of nothing but protectiveness from the men in their lives. But unlike Dorothea, she is left bereft after Grandcourt's death. She is just as helpless then as she was before insofar as taking control of her life is concerned. Because of her extreme egoism she has divorced herself from the world and now must find her way back into it. Since she belongs to the group of women who are by natural endowment stronger than the typical Victorian woman, one feels she will be capable of adjustment. Her fears remain but perhaps not so intensely as before:

Gwendolyn's fear had been so powerful because it had been a reaction from a repressed wish she had been frightened of destructive powers in herself when her hatred of Grandcourt takes shape. What frightened her is its intensity for it has become a focus for those destructive impulses that are now called into consciousness. Her final terrible discovery in the boat was that her old fear and her new hatred were the same.3

Since the man she has hated is gone, Gwendolyn wants to erase all traces of him and is ready to practice a new humility. When Sir Hugh Mallinger hears she will be contented with the disgrace of acquiring only Gadsmere and two thousand a year while Grandcourt's illegitimate son will receive the remaining estate, he maintains: "Then she is not much like the rest of her
sex. . .." (p. 642). Deronda understands her calm acceptance of the will and even her desire to refuse the meagre portion assigned to her:

You think that you have forfeited all claim as a wife. You shrink from taking what was his. You want to keep yourself pure from profiting by his death. Your feeling even urges you to some self-punishment—some scourging of the self that disobeyed your better will—the will that struggled against temptation." (p. 689)

He urges her to regard the experience as a part of maturation (p. 691), as a possibility for development of character. Gwendolyn's relationship to Deronda has a psychological basis: "She identified him with the struggling regenerative process in her which had begun with his action. Is it any wonder that she saw her own necessity reflected in his feeling?" (p. 693). Eliot implies that she thinks he will want to marry her, but her precarious world collapses when Deronda announces he is to marry Mira. He has been the source of all the spiritual strength she has used to support herself in the miserable role of Grandcourt's wife. Barbara Hardy says:

Gwendolyn is left alone and for her the loneliness seems to be the only appropriate state. It is rather like the storm from Lear; we are conscious of the tragic reversal of power, warmth, ceremony, and love.
For Gwendolyn the final loneliness is not only an extension of suffering when she feels she is all ready suffered and recovered, but a suggestion that her tragic nature is still incomplete. It is expressed in terms of her egoism, in terms of her innocence in the world of action and great courses..., and in terms of her superstitious fear which has been kept in our minds throughout the book.4

Her suffering is similar to that of many of Eliot's married women, particularly Mrs. Transome and Dorothea. Even though they maintain a public face showing contentment with what they experience at home, the reader is permitted a private glance into their inner thoughts and he discovers they are nothing but frustrated and discontent with the status quo. Many Victorian women must have felt similarly. Mrs. Transome, Dorothea, and Gwendolyn give the appearance of ordinary people; but through revealing their countless complexities of character, Eliot permits us to see them as extraordinary, as existing outside the confines of Victorianism, and as being anything but representative of the Victorian ideal.
Chapter Three

Mrs. Transome

While most novelists idealized marriage during the nineteenth century, "George Eliot was fully aware that, however absorbing marriage might be for most women, there was always a few to whom the domesticities and endless small change of marriage might seem the meaner things after a time."¹ With her presentation in Felix Holt, The Radical of a woman completely dissatisfied with her marriage, "George Eliot was as usual in the advance guard in her opinions."² Mrs. Transome is not only dissatisfied with her husband and married life generally, but she has attempted to find release from the frustration accompanying the discontent in an extra-marital relationship. There are many who felt discomfort from Eliot's flagrant airing of such personal problems as those of her complex character: "The Transome story . . . was disliked by many: by those who disliked the 'disagreeable' strain in George Eliot, who considered her too outspoken, even cynical, in her treatment of human relations."³ Some were blinded to the excellence of
the story by the moral problems involved.\textsuperscript{4} Blackwood admitted he was "uneasy as to what Mrs. Transome had done."\textsuperscript{5} What she did strayed so far from acceptable Victorian behavior that it shocked many readers: "... premarital continence for men (it was, of course, de rigeur for women) was an ideal which was widely held..."\textsuperscript{6} Gerald Bullett tells us that "our grandfathers were informed by the Aetheneum that this book's unsavory motif places it out of competition..."\textsuperscript{7} but the modern reader is intrigued by the complexity of Mrs. Transome's personality.

Her lack of traditionally accepted feminine characteristics causes one to want to probe beneath the surface of her hard exterior. Bennett sees her love for her son, Harold, as a saving force in her personality, but that love is short-lived: "The reader first becomes aware of Mrs. Transome as a woman who is cruel, bitter, and proud. She has no pity for her senile husband, her love for Jermyn is dead and the whole force of her passionate nature is concentrated on her and Jermyn's son, known as Harold Transome."\textsuperscript{8} Because Mrs. Transome makes a "fatally self-indulgent choice" before the opening of the novel and during the story "reaps the bitter fruit of the choice by which
her whole nature has been hardened, " one would have to look far to find more bitterness in either a real person or a fictitious one. It is an obvious fact that "Mrs. Transome has emerged from her wrong choice cold, embittered, and unloved." At no time in the novel does she exhibit warmth, in fact, unless it would be in the relationship with her waiting woman Denner.

Eliot was careful to establish the exact atmosphere for this emotionally tense woman by describing an English populace discontented with existing conditions:

The breath of the manufacturing town, which made a cloudy day and a red gloom by night on the horizon, diffused itself over all the surrounding country, filling the air with eager unrest. Here was a population not convinced that old England was as good as possible; here were multitudinous men and women aware that their religion was not exactly the religion of their rulers, who might therefore be better than they were, and who, if better, might alter many things which now made the world perhaps more painful than it need be, and certainly more sinful.

Unlike her contemporaries chiefly in her complexity of personality and strength of spirit, Mrs. Transome "was master, had come of a high family, and had a spirit— you might see it in her eye and the way
she sat her horse" (p. 7). Although she gives the appearance of dignity and mastery, Mrs. Transome has another self which experiences constant frustration and misery. Eliot refers to the sorrow that frequently enters human life lying, thereafter, seemingly dormant, but nevertheless always persistently asserting itself to the subconsciousness of man: "... there is much pain that is quite noiseless... committed to no sound except that of low moans in the night, seen in no writing except that made on the face by the slow months of surpressed anguish and early morning tears" (p. 8). Such is the type of pain experienced by Mrs. Transome. She finds it impossible to submit docilely to the unfortunate lot fate has assigned her.

Early in the novel she looks forward to the arrival of her favorite son Harold with high expectation:

Could it be that now--when her hair was gray, when sight had become one of the day's fatigues, when her young accomplishments seemed almost ludicrous, like the tone of her first harpsi-chord and the words of the songs long browned with age--she was going to reap an assured joy? to feel that the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result, since a kind Providence had sanctioned them?--to be no longer tacitly pitied by her neighbors for her lack of money, her imbecile husband, her
graceless eldest-born, and the loneliness of her life; but to have at her side a rich, clever, possibly a tender, son?
(p. 12)

This son whom she had awaited so eagerly greets her coolly after his absence of fifteen years and introduces her to a grandson with skin considerably darker than that of his English father. Disappointingly, too, the son's appearance has grown less like that of his mother and noticeably more like that of his natural father, who is not the imbecile husband to whom Mrs. Transome is bound by law. Although she was not a woman who cries, tears of disappointment flow over her face as she realizes her desire has been in vain. Harold has arrived, but already it looks as if no alleviation of her situation is forthcoming: "Mrs. Transome had not the feminine tendency to seek influence through pathos; she had been used to rule in virtue of acknowledged superiority" (p. 14).

Like her reading preferences for dangerous French authors, Mrs. Transome's choice in other things is not what one would expect from an older woman: "... many sinful things were highly agreeable to her, and many things which she did not doubt to be good and true were dull and meaningless" (p. 25). Life would
therefore have little meaning for this "clever sinner" were she to be "gently thrust aside as a harmless elderly woman" (p. 14).

That she is to be assigned such a role, nonetheless, is inevitable because of Harold's overbearing personality. Like the protective Victorian male he feels he must provide for his mother's physical needs; and like his prototype, in the process he refuses to consider her emotional needs. In no sense is he aware that her assumed management of the estate since his absence has served as an emotional outlet for her long pent-up feelings. She is merely thrust aside as he assumes control. Nor does he regard her reaction of significance when he announces to his mother of Tory stock that he is a radical. With every new fact he adds to the list about himself, Mrs. Transome recognizes that she must expect something undesirable. That his consideration of her feelings is negligible is obvious when Harold declares he does not plan to marry because he detests interfering English women (pp. 16-17). During his announcements his mother has exercised restraint, but when he tells her she must be like a Grandmama and sit on satin cushions, the restraint is exhausted: "You must excuse me from the satin cushions. That is a part of
the old woman's duty I am not prepared for. I am used to be the chief bailiff, and to sit in the saddle two or three hours every day. There are two farms on our hands besides the Home Farm" (p. 17).

Realization that this son is to offer no happiness is shattering to Mrs. Transome's conception of her future prospects:

It had come to pass now--this meeting with the son who had been the object of so much longing; whom she had longed for before he was born, for whom she had sinned, from whom she had wrecked herself with pain at their parting, and whose coming again had been the one great hope of her years. (p. 18)

Limitless hope had accompanied Harold's birth and childhood: "She had thought that the possession of this child would give unity to her life, and make some gladness through the changing years that would grow as fruit out of these early maternal caresses" (p. 19).

In contrast to her yearning for Harold was her dislike of her own son: the son resulting from her marital union and even the twentieth century reader cannot help but wince as he reads of her having wished the child would die:

The mother's early raptures had lasted but a short time, and even while they lasted
there had grown up in the midst of them a
hungry desire, like a black poisonous
plant feeding at the sunlight,—the desire
that her first, rickety, ugly, imbecile
child should die, and leave room for her
darling, of whom she could be proud.
(p. 19)

But the favorite child early exhibited ugly personality
traits which should have forewarned the mother had she
not been blinded by love for him:

All the while the round-limbed pet had been
growing into a strong youth, who liked many
things better than his mother's caresses,
and who had a much keener consciousness of
his independent existence than of his
relation to her: the lizard's egg, that
white rounded passive prettiness, had become
a brown, darting, determined lizard. (p. 20)

In spite of his many limitations, however, it had
been this lizard-like Harold who had made her life
bearable. Her eldest son Durfey was an imbecile and
had led a despicable life of vice. Interestingly the
result of supposed married bliss offered an ugly
contrast to that of the extra-marital relationship.
To fill the void created by dissatisfaction and the
frustration associated with it, Mrs. Transome had
built up a way of surviving:

She had begun to live merely in small
immediate cares and occupations, and like
all eager-minded women who advance in life
without any activity of tenderness or any
large sympathy, she had her "ways" which must not be crossed, and had learned to fill up the great void of life with giving small orders to tenants, insisting on medicines for infirm cottagers, winning small triumphs in bargains and personal economies, and parrying ill-natured remarks of Lady Debarry's by lancet-edged epigrams. (p. 21)

One of her desires, at least, has been fulfilled, the death of the desolate Durfey. The estate can now go to the favored Harold, but with Harold's return had come the unpleasant realization that he is completely indifferent to the feelings of others; that he expects his mother to assume the despicable role of protected woman, of which the circumstances of life had long before robbed her, and for which she is, therefore, ill-equipped. The world has been almost an unbearable place for Mrs. Transome:

Crosses, mortifications, money-cares, conscious blame worthiness, had changed the aspect of the world for her; there was anxiety in the morning sunlight; there was unkind triumph or disapproving pity in the glances of greeting neighbors; there was advancing age, and a contracting prospect in the changing seasons as they came and went. (p. 26)

Were it not for her majestic appearance people would call her a "tyrannical, griping harridan, with a tongue like a razor" (p. 27). Because her joy in life lies chiefly in seeing others subservient to her,
. . . she liked every little sign of power her lot had left her. She liked that a tenant should stand bareheaded below her as she sat on horseback. She liked to insist that work done without her orders should be undone from beginning to end. She liked to be curtsied and bowed to by all the congregation as she walked up the little barn of a church. She liked to change a laborer's medicine fetched from the doctor, and substitute a prescription of her own. (p. 27)

Having been the recipient of so much subservience for so long a time makes recognition of Harold's lack of feeling for her, in fact preference of Mr. Transome to her, a difficult situation with which to become reconciled. The preference shown for Mr. Transome by the dark-haired great grandson increases her feeling of being unloved. To show his dislike the child chooses to bite his grandmother's arm so that the pain is intense and he appears to time the bite, too, so that it coincides with a visit from Lady and Sir Maximus Debarry (p. 84).

The man who received Mrs. Transome's closest regard many years previous to the opening of the novel is one not easily liked. Harold's uncle Lingon the Rector indicates his dislike for Matthew Jermyn, "a fat-handed, glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief; one of your educated low-bred fellows;
a foundling who got his Latin for nothing at Christ's Hospital; one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen, and thinks they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture" (p. 29). Although Harold felt no dislike for the man when he was a boy, upon his return he cannot stand him and, in fact, plans to use him in any way possible. He had always been aware that his elders regarded Jermyn as no gentleman, as someone beneath them, so it is only natural for him to do the same (p. 31).

As Mrs. Transome breakfasts with Harold and Jermyn she recognizes that although her life is closely bound to the two of them, neither feels any concern for her at all (p. 33). Harold intensifies her feeling by rejecting her political views during the discussion as though characteristic of insignificant women: "It doesn't signify what they think—they are not called upon to judge or to act" (p. 34). When Jermyn later attempts to discover whether she thinks Harold is good to her, she is afraid of giving some outward manifestation of the degradation she feels inside so she answers with much bitterness that he has been as "good as men are disposed to be to women, giving them cushions and carriages, and recommending them to enjoy themselves, and then expecting them to
be contented under contempt and neglect" (p. 103). She feeds resentment with Jermyn's efforts to tell her he has done his best with the estate and everything else concerning her: "Every sentence was as pleasant to her as if it had been cut in her bared arm" (p. 104). She is too well aware that her own privation has been considerably greater because of his "dishonest selfishness" (p. 104).

The bitterest thing for her to recognize is that all the love surrounding Harold's conception and birth was hers only. Since women were not expected to possess much knowledge, Harold is surprised by his mother's intelligent questions when he tells her of Tommy Transome's death and the ensuing danger of the estate's going to the only Bycliffe heir. In fact her general legal knowledge amazes him (p. 305).

Harold is not aware of how deeply his mother hates and rebels against men's tyranny over women; nor is he aware of Mrs. Transome's conversation with Denner during which she wishes Esther Lyon, an interesting portrayal of the Victorian ideal and providing an excellent contrast for the rebellious Mrs. Transome, would marry Harold so that she could gain mastery over him, adding the bitter note that:
A woman's love is always freezing into fear. She wants everything, she is secure of nothing. This girl has a fine spirit—plenty of fire and pride and wit. Men like such captives, as they like horses that champ the bit and paw the ground: they feel more triumph in their mastery. What is the use of woman's will?—if she tries, she doesn't get it, and she ceases to be loved. God was cruel when he made women.

(pp. 330-331)

Cruel too was Mrs. Transome years ago when she encouraged Jermyn to cause Bycliffe to be imprisoned to ensure the estate for Harold. As Jermyn recalls her words, she said: "A clever lawyer can do anything if he has the will; if it's impossible, he will make it possible. And the property is sure to be Harold's some day" (p. 353). Jermyn adds to her feeling of bitterness by reminding her that she can help him by telling Harold of his true parentage, but her response is the one expected after hearing of his youthful "sacrifices": "But you made your sacrifices when they seemed pleasant to you; when you told me they were your happiness; when you told me that it was I who stooped, and I who bestowed favors" (p. 354).

He apparently grew tired of the younger Mrs. Transome but he had nonetheless continued through the succeeding years to live as a financial parasite on her vast holdings enriching himself and his growing
family while constantly deprecating the value of her estate and her self-esteem. As much as she detests being a woman and suffering from the inevitable consequences it seems preferable during this conversation to being a man:

I would not lose the misery of being a woman, now I see what can be the baseness of a man. One must be a man--first to tell a woman that her love has made her your debtor, and then ask her to pay you by breaking the last poor threads between her and her son. (p. 355)

Mrs. Transome's acquisition of some very necessary knowledge of the facts of life has been slow and painful. Nemesis has reaped a bountiful harvest because of the woman's naturally passionate nature, and the retribution has maimed her chance for earthly happiness.

Like Dorothea Brooke and Gwendolyn Harleth, she has found the promise of marital bliss too highly seasoned with gall to be palatable. Gifted with natural tendencies toward leadership and a keen intellect she has recognized through unhappy experiences that being born a woman means obscuring such tendencies. Too, she has learned that to secure a peaceful co-existence with men she must be ever alert to their fluctuating preferences and inclination,
ever bending to adjust her own desires to suit their slightest whims. That she will profit from such hard earned knowledge is doubtful because of her age and her own naturally too strongly resenting will. Like Gwendolyn she wallows in the mire of despair, flailing about helplessly because of her resisting nature. Like Gwendolyn she can see no release from her feeling of remorse and resents bitterly having been placed in such adverse circumstances. Then too like Gwendolyn, her own nonconforming nature has caused the conditions which resulted in inevitable despair in a conventional world.
Conclusion

Eliot, who called herself an ameliorist, felt that man was evolving toward a better state, but that he was imperfect in his present one. She dared, therefore, to present her female characters with imperfections, with frustrations which resulted from their desire to lead constructive lives in conflict with the countless inhibitive forces forced upon them by a society refusing to recognize their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs. As she states in Adam Bede, her attempt in presenting characters generally was "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind." Aware of the impossibility of recording with perfect accuracy she continues "The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused, but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is as if I were in the witness box narrating my experience on oath."¹ Her reputation as a realist is secure and need not be argued, but her treatment of her heroines is certainly one measure of her realism. The heroines of most nineteenth century
novels flourish in typically Victorian settings. Dickens' heroines, for example, conform perfectly to the standards required by the Victorian ideal. Agnes Wickfield, Little Nell, or Esther Summerson, although delightful characters in themselves, must be recognized as sentimental creations. Many of Jane Austen's heroines are witty and intelligent, but they achieve success through a proper happy marriage at the end of the novel. Charlotte Bronte's heroines are passionate and rebellious, but Jane Eyre's sweeping triumph over men and society is ultimately unrealistic, and Shirley Kildare after playing a male role through much of Shirley finds happiness in comfortable domestication at the end of the novel. In contrast, Eliot's women are faced with realistic situations. They rarely conform to standards demanded by the Victorian ideal, but for all that they are victims of it. They struggle to assert their individuality and to live full lives, but in the process they are either partially or wholly defeated. Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon was largely motivated by her desire for intellectual satisfaction denied her in a normal marriage. Mrs. Transome is a lonely, tragic woman as a result of her transgression from the accepted code of behavior, and Gwendolyn's attempt to escape the limitations imposed by society
results in marriage to Grandcourt. Subdued and nearly
destroyed, she finds no solution to her difficulty.
It is the tension resulting from the conflict between
a sensuous force controlled by a spiritual passion
and what the heroines themselves recognize as society's
demands regarding proper conduct that helps to make
the heroines such memorable characters. Like Eliot,
they are consistently pulled in two directions: the
traditional to which they have been well-conditioned
by their environment, and the modern, the unconven-
tional and therefore strongly anti-Victorian, to
which their highly vibrant natures instinctively draw
them. They are not typically Victorian as has often
been asserted, instead they are nonconformists like
Eliot. In that lies their triumph and defeat as
well as their complexity.
NOTES

Chapter One


3 Ibid., p. 348.


7 McKenzie, p. 85.


9 Ibid., p. 62.


15 Bennett, p. 165.

16 Daiches, p. 21.


18 Ibid., p. 160.


20 Lerner, p. 266.

21 Paris, p. 192.

Chapter Two


3 Lerner, p. 56.


Chapter Three

1 Thomson, p. 109.

2 Ibid., p. 110.

3 Holstrom and Lerner, p. 74.

4 Ibid., p. 76.


7 Bullett, p. 61.

8 Bennett, p. xi.

9 Ibid., p. 157.

10 Ibid., p. 157.


Conclusion

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