

**THE VICTORIAN MIND-SET AND THE INTERACTION OF SEXES
IN SOME MAJOR NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT**

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This is to certify that the dissertation, captioned "The Victorian Mind-set and the Interaction of Sexes in Some Major Novels of George Eliot", submitted by Prashant Kumar Misra in fulfilment of eight credits out of the total requirement of twentyfour credits for the Degree of Master of Philosophy(M.Phil.) of the University, is his original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

This dissertation takes me back to my erstwhile teacher, Mr D.K. Sinha. It was he who shaped my responses to questions, literary and aesthetic, and who introduced me to the nuances of research for the first time. I can barely find words to express my gratitude to him at this juncture in my life.

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE VICTORIAN MIND-SET AND GEORGE ELIOT'S CREDO

It may be taken as axiomatic that 'In all societies, the arrangement between the sexes is an uneasy one involving tensions, separation, and segregation' whether it operates in 'obvious ways' or does 'penetrate to the level of the subconscious so that males and females who associate intimately ... can nevertheless inhabit separate phenomenal worlds and stumble around in quite different libidinal territories.'¹ What shape does this arrangement take becomes particularly relevant and interesting in the context of George Eliot's novels which display, as Pauline Nestor notes with some regret, 'tendencies to define female characters in relation to men rather than each other.'²

Nestor's observation can hardly be accepted wholesale. More than one critic has remarked on the comparisons and contrasts which inform George Eliot's novels. And women characters are defined by being compared to and contrasted with each other in her works. Who can forget Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrel coming close to each other in a moment of crisis when the entire world seems to have forsaken the latter. Or the effect Dorothea Brooke has on Rosamond Vincy. Dorothea, in fact, 'used to despise women a little

¹ Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell, "The Beauty System", in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, ed., The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality(New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p.206.

² Female Friendship and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.167.

for not shaping their lives more and doing better things,³ but 'once she is herself forced to experience the constraints imposed by her gender, her sympathy for other women expands until it even encompasses someone who appears to be a successful rival.'⁴ Nestor herself observes:

Eliot's view of the nature of women is deeply ambivalent, recognizing at once the positive, sustaining role and the divisive, destructive element in women's various and inevitable interactions - as community members, participating in the same rites of womanhood, sexual rivals, spinsters and wives, mothers and daughters.⁵

One may, however, also find what Nestor calls 'deeply ambivalent', a balanced and realistic outlook which habitually takes both sides of the coin into account. Like E.M. Forster, one can say, she refuses to play 'the old game of antagonistic principles' and therefore disappoints those who are looking for 'sheer coercive power.'⁶

Nevertheless, Nestor's observation serves to underscore the emphasis which the interaction of sexes gets in

³ George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871-2), ed. W.J. Harvey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), Bk.6, Ch.54. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.517.

⁵ op.cit.

⁶ Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (1944; rev. edn., London: Hogarth, 1967), pp.15-6.

the novels of George Eliot. On George Eliot's own admission:

Assuredly if there be any one subject on which I feel no levity it is that of marriage and the relation of the sexes...⁷

A recognition of the importance of man-woman relationship in George Eliot's novels almost automatically necessitates an examination of the Victorian mind-set, of the mental outlook she shared and faced, followed or challenged. It is not so only because ^{of} the circumloquacity or downright reticence with which one habitually associates the Victorian age in context of matters sexual but also because of George Eliot's position as a woman writer. Besides, 'she is the moralist of the Victorian revolution'⁸ as such.

To Seaman, 'The word "Victorian"', like all such terms, is misleading. Victorianism neither began in 1837 nor ended in 1901.' To him, 'The Victorian age cannot thus be thought of as wholly contained within the sixty-four years of the Queen's reign, since men's ideas and attitudes, once acquired, and their institutions, once established, change more slowly than history books sometimes suggest.'⁹ Nonetheless, Seaman

⁷ Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (1968; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1985), p.189.

⁸ G.M. Young, Portrait of an Age: Victorian Age (1936; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.3.

⁹ L.C.B. Seaman, Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837-1901 (London: Methuen, 1973), pp.4-5.

and hosts of others have written about the Victorian England, nay, even Victorian Europe and Victorian world, and found characteristics to distinguish the age. For however imperfect the approach, there does not appear to be a better one available. Let us then assume that something like a distinct Victorian mind-set may be isolated relevant to our needs and purposes.

George Eliot came on the literary scene after a number of women writers had already distinguished themselves towards the close of the eighteenth-century or the early nineteenth-century - Fanny Burney, Mrs Radcliffe, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Porter, Lady Morgan, Mrs Inchbald, Mary Shelley, Mrs Opie etc. To Hugh Walker, 'The development of prose-fiction called into existence a class of female writers, which gained stability from the growth of a more liberal public opinion with regard to the position and functions of women.'¹⁰

Public opinion might have become relatively liberal, but still a woman writer had to contend with many limitations and prejudices just because she was a woman. Admittedly, George Eliot's attitude to ^{her} name was complex, but one of the reasons why she chose the pen-name was also to

¹⁰ Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era (date of original publication not available; first Indian rpt. Delhi: S.Chand & Co., 1955), p.501.

ensure that her novels were considered purely on merit, irrespective of the sex of the author. For:

No sooner does a woman show that she has genius or effective talent, than she receives the tribute of being moderately praised and severely criticized. By a peculiar thermometric adjustment, when a woman's talent is at zero, journalistic approbation is at the boiling pitch; when she attains mediocrity, it is already at no more than summer heat; and if ever she reaches excellence, critical enthusiasm drops to the freezing point.¹¹

Charlotte Brontë's

This was evident in the case of Jane Eyre. Thus explaining the necessity of the pen-name, George Henry Lewes reported to Blackwood:

When Jane Eyre [sic] was finally known to be a woman's book, the tone noticeably changed. Not that I believe in the possibility of anything adventitious permanently hurting a good book, but there is something temporary in the success of a novel, and one may as well secure all adventitious aids.¹²

George Eliot was not in favour of the effacement of the feminine self though she asked women to substitute the hard

¹¹ George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856), in Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, ed. Victorian Criticism of the Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.179.

¹² Haight, Biography, p.268.

drudgery of real practice for feminine fantasy of self indulgence.¹³ She firmly believed that women writers had a 'precious speciality, lying quite apart from masculine aptitudes and experience.'¹⁴ But she did not like the 'extremely false impression that to write at all is a proof of superiority in women.'¹⁵ But to be treated cavalierly or condescendingly because of being a woman writer was something quite intolerable. The smokescreen provided by the pseudonym blew up soon, however, and contrary to Lewes's hope that they 'can't now unsay their admiration', the editor of the Athenaeum, William Hepworth Dixon, at once seized the opportunity for a vicious attack- '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.'¹⁶

In her excellent work, Elaine Showalter has given us an analysis of the prejudices a woman writer had to countenance in the course of her career. First of all, they were,

¹³ Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977) Subsequent references to this book within this chapter have been included in the text.

¹⁴ George Eliot, "Silly Novels...", p.180.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.179.

¹⁶ Haight, Biography, p.290.

obviously not always wrongly, considered to be imitators of men. G.H. Lewes in his essay "The Lady Novelists"(1852) wrote - 'To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform.'(Showalter, p.3) To J.S. Mill, women could have 'a literature of their own' only if they lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writings. Since this was not possible, women, he argued, would always be imitators and never innovators.(Showalter, p.3) And Mill was one of the sympathetic commentators.

Secondly, writing was a vocation and 'Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself.'(Showalter, p.21) The woman was the 'angel of the house'; what more could she ask for?:

... this was the question any Victorian woman with the will to write would have had to ask herself: what did God intend her to do with her life? When did obedience to her father and husband end, and the responsibility of self-fulfillment become paramount? The problem of obedience and resistance that women had to solve in their lives before they could begin to write crops up in their novels as the heroine's moral crisis.

(Showalter, p.24)

Then the very 'training of Victorian girls in repression, concealment and self-censorship was deeply inhibiting, especially for those who wanted to write.' The women writers had always to be consciously on guard against 'coarseness' - 'the term Victorian readers used to rebuke unconventional language in women's literature.'(Showalter, p.25)

The portrayal of matters sexual was considered simply beyond them. 'In "The False Morality of Lady Novelists", W.R. Greg argued that woman's sexual innocence would prevent her ever writing a great novel.' He wrote:

Many of the saddest and deepest truths in the strange science of sexual affection are to her mysteriously and mercifully veiled and can only be purchased at such a fearful cost that we cannot wish it otherwise. The inevitable consequence however is that in treating of that science she labours under all the disadvantages of partial study and superficial insight. She is describing a country of which she knows only the more frequent and the safer roads, with a few of the sweeter scenes and the prettier by-paths and more picturesque detours which be not far from the broad and beaten thoroughfares; while the rockier and loftier mountains, and more rugged tracts, the more sombre valleys, and the darker and more dangerous chasms, are never trodden by her feet, and scarcely ever dreamed of by her fancy.

(Showalter, pp.26-7)

One has only to recall the complex portrayal of Arthur Donnithorne's and Hetty Sorrel's inner psyche before and after Hetty's seduction, the treatment of Maggie Tulliver's various 'temptations', and the presentation of Dorothea-Casaubon and Lydgate-Rosamond marriages to realize how mistaken critics like W.R. Greg were.

Despite the various handicaps from which women suffered, really and supposedly, however, suddenly there were more women writers on the fictional horizon than ever and to many

it seemed like an invasion so much so that to the above W.R. Greg it seemed, in 1859, that 'the supply of the fiction market has fallen mainly into their hands.' (Showalter, p.37) If this account is not factual but, as Showalter argues (p.40), perceptual, then it serves to emphasize that women writers even if to their contemporaries in the nineteenth century they were 'women first, artists second' (Showalter, p.73), could no longer be ignored. So much so that 'Through the 1850s and 1860s there was a great increase in theoretical and specific criticism of women novelists. Hardly a journal failed to publish an essay on women's literature; hardly a critic failed to express himself upon its innate and potential qualities.' (Showalter, p.74) But this hardly meant a cessation of double standard and hostilities. The women writers were even accused of 'being engaged' in a kind of aggressive conspiracy to rob men of their markets, steal their subject matter, and snatch away their young lady readers' and were seen to dominate 'because of superior numbers rather than superior abilities.' (Showalter, p.75)

It was almost taken for granted that women produced inferior works. The only thing left was to assign reasons. To phrenologists, it was because of brain structure of women, an idea to which even George Eliot succumbed. (Showalter, pp.77-8) Then, of course, women had limited experience. And, as 'angelic beings', they were not supposed to feel passion, anger, ambition, or honour and therefore did not have much to express anyway. And if they had experiences, they must

keep them to themselves, or share them with intimate women friends, but never, never with men. (Showalter, pp.79-82)

All this accounted for most of the real and imagined weaknesses of women novelists. And, in fact, if they were still considered fit to write novels, it was only because the novel itself was considered trivial as, ironically, even G.H. Lewes argued in his pre-George Eliot essay, "The Lady Novelists":

The domestic experience which form the bulk of woman's knowledge finds an appropriate form in novels; while the very nature of fiction calls for that predominance of Sentiment which we have already attributed to the feminine mind. Love is the staple of fiction, for it 'forms the story of a woman's life'. The joys and sorrows of affection, the incidents of domestic life, assume typical forms in the novel. Hence we may be prepared to find women succeeding better in finesse of detail, in pathos and sentiment, while men generally succeed better in the construction of plots and the delineation of character.

(Showalter, pp.86-7)

In keeping with this kind of outlook, the game played with the anonymous or pseudonymous books was to apply the set literary stereotypes and thereby determine the sex of the author and then to judge the work accordingly. This practice continued despite many mistakes made in the process. And the discovery that the author behind the pseudonym was a woman, especially if the novel was a powerful one, as happened in the case of Jane Eyre (1847) and Adam Bede (1859), only dismayed the critics and reviewers. (Showalter, pp.91-2)

It was, then, in such an atmosphere that George Eliot wrote—an atmosphere that even when not openly and outright hostile was almost never benevolently disposed towards a woman writer, more so when that woman happened to be talented rather than 'silly'. One needs to know all this in order properly to appreciate George Eliot's achievements, for:

Her novels are the profoundest examination of the nineteenth-century individual in relation to his or her environment and, in their consistent working out of her religious humanism in action, the greatest fictional embodiment of any philosophical position in the language.¹⁷

In fact, in George Eliot's novels:

... the problem is further complicated, since the parts may themselves be wholes. In all her work, the individual remains tightly bound to the working of external circumstances; the community responds to the larger movements of English history; and the various lines of plot converge. But this does not prevent selves, communities, or sub-plots, from retaining an autonomy, an internal coherence of their own. In coming to George Eliot from Dickens to Bronte, one must be struck by the independence that offsets interdependence.¹⁸

George Eliot qualified for a place in F.R. Leavis's The Great Tradition (1948) as one of those who 'not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and

¹⁷ David Skilton, Defoe to the Victorians: Two Centuries of the English Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp.152-3.

¹⁸ Karen Chase, Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot (New York and London: Methuen, 1984), pp.164-5.

readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life.¹⁹ Leavis, of course, was not thinking in terms of gender. But his observations are no less apt in this context also.

First of all, 'Defying the contemporary view that extensive mental cultivation and self-assertion were unsuitable for women, Eliot moved in a sphere in which one of her sex was something of an anomaly.'²⁰ Her life and career as a writer was a challenge for most of the pre-conceived notions regarding gender. So much so that critics had to 'modify' their views or assert and redefine their prejudices. (Showalter, p.90) And how could it be otherwise when 'the classic role of women' had been to be 'denied the status of artist because they are supposed somehow to become work of art themselves':

Predictably, then, for quite some time Eliot saw herself not as a creator of literature, but only as an editor and translator whose skills in expression were to be subordinate to the meaning of another's words.²¹

¹⁹ (rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.10.

²⁰ Shirley Foster, Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p.185.

²¹ Gilbert and Gubar, op.cit., p.450.

But the force of her genius demanded recognition. To recognize her as a woman of great achievements seemed difficult:

It became less easy as George Eliot's career progressed to see her simply as a reconciliation or opposition of known poles, 'a man's intellect and a woman's heart,' which was the first attempt to domesticate her writing or exculpate her behaviour.²²

Gillian Beer sees a solution to the above problem in her subtle analysis of the sybilline status accorded to George Eliot by her contemporaries as in the celebrated record by F.W.H. Myres of a conversation with George Eliot at Cambridge in 1873:

I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men, - the words God, Immortality, Duty, - pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law. I listened, and night fell; her grave, majestic countenance turned towards me like a Sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates. And when we stood at length and parted, amid that columnar circuit of the forest-trees, beneath the last twilight of starless

²² Gillian Beer, George Eliot (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p.26.

skies, I seemed to be gazing, like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty hall, - on a sanctuary with no presences to hallow it, and heaven left lonely of a God.²³

In such descriptions of George Eliot, Gillian Beer traces a solution to the dilemma that arose out of the refusal to recognize the novelist's greatness as a woman writer and the impossibility of explaining her away simply as one with 'a man's intellect and a woman's heart'. Since the orthodox stereotypes would not do:

So another solution was chosen. She was 'a sibyl': woman as prophet, amazingly learned, exceptional, peripheral, powerful but inactive.²⁴

This view is also endorsed by Gilbert and Gubar.²⁵ Gillian Beer suggests that George Eliot herself accepted this label of 'prophetess' because 'The role emphasized disengagement. It exempted her from being a part of the world of genetic descent(it freed her from the actuality and the metaphor of motherhood). It gave a more than social meaning to the activity of generalization, while avoiding religious claims.' Not only this:

The metaphor of 'sibyl' had another function. It emphasized that she was exceptional, both anomalous

²³ Quoted in Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold(1949; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.204.

²⁴ Beer, op.cit., p.26.

²⁵ op.cit., p.479.

and distinguished. This aspect was, perhaps unconsciously, welcome to the admiring men by whom she was surrounded. Her case did not make it necessary to rethink the situation of all women. She could become genius or freak rather than a representative of the capacities of other equal, less-known women.²⁶

Even if one harbours some reservations regarding the above line of argument, one cannot reject that 'Her writing, by being written, casts doubt on characteristics according to gender or social place.'²⁷

When women started writing fiction, they 'tended to concentrate on depicting their own sex ... What women shared was basically the need to respond both to woman's position in society and to the special role allotted the female writer, based on that position.'²⁸ This response involved a protest against society's treatment of women, or acceptance of an advisory role with didactic treatment of the heroine's progress, or escape from both conformity and protest through a fantasy that transformed the feminine position.²⁹

²⁶ Beer, *op.cit.*, pp.26-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²⁸ Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.107.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

But George Eliot was not satisfied with this limited role. Instead, she 'veered between commitment to and withdrawal from a specifically female orientation.'³⁰ She was wary of taking too radical a stand on feminist issues, or the 'woman question' as such, partly because she recognized that her active support might do more harm than good because of her boldness in living with Lewes, but also partly because of her conviction that 'woman does not yet deserve a much better lot than man gives her.'³¹ Though she treats spinsters with more sympathy than was granted by most of her predecessors and contemporaries, single women do not get to prominence in her novels though some single men make their presence felt rather strongly, even the misogynist teacher of Adam Bede.

What gets treated centrally in her novels is the interaction of sexes in its different forms and dimensions. And, in most of her novels:

... the movement of the heroine from self-absorption to objectivity has its genesis in her suddenly altered perspective upon a male protagonist, a perspective which leads her to self-examination and thence to self-knowledge and greater understanding of those among whom she lives.³²

³⁰ Foster, op. cit., p.189.

³¹ G.S. Haight, ed. The George Eliot Letters (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), vol.II, p.86.

³² John Halperin, The Language of Meditation: Four Studies in Nineteenth Century Fiction (Elms Court: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 1973), p.52.

Love and marriage in her novels, however, are not significant simply for the 'emotional fulfilment in women's lives' as a 'self-contained theme' but as 'both a key to and a touchstone for modes of human behaviour' transcending distinctions of gender and 'presenting men and women as equal units in a more general pattern of interconnectedness.'³³

A detailed examination of George Eliot's treatment of the conditions of marriage will be made in the fourth chapter of this study. It must be mentioned here, however, that despite a desire to treat men and women as equal units in matrimony, an important difference shows through:

For the man a career is open which promises the fulfilment of his ideal, though he is hedged about by the time and place in which he enters on that career. Marriage is irrelevant to it, except in so far as it will limit his economic freedom and, on this account, he intends to avoid or at least postpone it. For the woman on the contrary, 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.³⁴

The above passage describing the constricting conditions of Dorothea may be extended to cover Hetty Sorrel and Rosamond Vincy. Only, the latter want husbands with gifts of ranks and means.

³³ Foster, op.cit., pp.192-3.

³⁴ Joan Bennet, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art, (1948; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.165.

Carlyle complained that the Victorian novels 'made love and marriage seem the main business of life', but how could it be otherwise 'in a society which extolled the family and regarded marriage as the "one great profession".'³⁵ Thus from Anthony Trollope we have the unequivocal assertion that the lessons of fiction should 'appertain chiefly to the intercourse between young men and young women,' and an emphasis on 'love plot' as one of the five essential elements of the Victorian novel.³⁶

In her treatment of man-woman relationship, however, George Eliot had to confront another problem. Almost no male author was questioned about the authenticity of his portrayal of women. But it was difficult for critics to grant the same to a woman writer in her portrayal of men. To Leslie Stephen, for instance, though George Eliot's 'women are drawn from the inside', 'her most successful men are substantially women in disguise.'³⁷ It is not a charge to be dismissed lightly and the next chapter will discuss it in detail. But what seems to irritate critics like Leslie Stephen is that George Eliot's writings refuse to subscribe to and endorse in toto the existing role models, rather deflate them by pointing to their inadequacies and detrimental effects on both men and women.

³⁵ Patricia Otto Klaus, "Novel and Victorian Women", in Barbara Kanner, ed. The Women of England: From Anglo Saxon Times to the Present (London: Mansell, 1979), p.300.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Leslie Stephen, George Eliot (1902; rpt. Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1968), p.204.

Ideally, it would be desirable to make an extensive assessment of the interaction of sexes in George Eliot's fiction by taking into account all her novels. But the limitations of time and space have permitted the analysis of only three of them, viz. Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch. The three novels have been selected with a view to representing the major achievements of her early and later phases. Other of her novels may be referred to now and then, but the study will seek to concentrate largely on these three. And that too with full awareness that the ever continuing process of signification grants literary works a parity with ever changing, ever growing living creatures. And:

Very close and diligent looking at living creatures, even through the best microscope, will leave room for new and contradictory discoveries.³⁸

³⁸George Eliot, Felix Holt: The Radical (1866; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), Chap. xxii.

II. THE ROLE MODELS : SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES

Marian, or Mary Ann, Evans, the reviewer, belletrist, journalist and translator, turned George Eliot, i.e. became an 'honorary man'¹, to produce fiction. No one has been able to put one's finger conclusively on a monocausal, final, conclusive explanation for this need for a male pseudonym. One reason, however, as noted in the previous chapter, was to escape being judged according to the pre-conceived role-models of gender, a touchstone against which it was peculiarly the lot of a woman writer to be measured. True, many women had written before her as women and won recognition. Some had written anonymously but few had chosen a man's name. Amandine Lucile Aurore Dudevant had become the celebrated George Sand and Charlotte Bronte had chosen the somewhat androgynous Currer Bell, only to tell a woman's story in first person. But then few women were in danger of being judged as the formidable translator of Strauss and Feuerbach. And none had flouted the social code by forming a union with a man already married with children. Her publisher was not worried without cause - 'The dropping of the incognito is the most serious part of the business and will, I feel satisfied, affect the circulation in families of any future work.'² Moreover, as Showalter has shown:

... each generation of women writers has found itself,

¹ Rosalind Miles, The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p.35.

² Gordon S. Haight, ed. The George Eliot Letters (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), vol.iii, p.221.

in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex.³

Talking of George Eliot's generation, she says:

One of the many indications that this generation saw the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women is the appearance of the male pseudonym. Like Eve's fig leaf, the male pseudonym signals the loss of innocence.⁴

The problem, she notes, was that:

Education - the will to write - nonetheless ^{required} a genuine transcendence of female identity. Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself.⁵

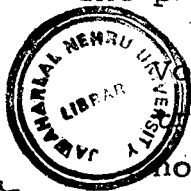
That George Eliot was fully aware of these wider socio-cultural implications has been already discussed, notably with reference to her observation, quoted in the previous chapter, that while 'silly' lady novelists were being praised beyond anything they deserved, 'No sooner does a woman show that she has genius of effective talent, than she receives the tribute of being moderately praised and severely criticized.'⁶ No wonder, then, that for her early fiction, notably

³ Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.11-2.

⁴ Ibid, p.19.

⁵ Ibid, p.21.

⁶ George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856) in Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, ed. Victorian Criticism of the Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.179.



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Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, George Eliot's narrator chose a male persona and then progressed to an unsexed 'we' in her later novels.

In fact, the contemporary Victorian opinion left little scope for grand achievements by women writers. If they could write novels, wrote the sympathetic George Henry Lewes, it was, we have noted, only because the novel was the 'appropriate form' for the expression of 'the domestic experience which form the bulk of woman's knowledge.' Besides, the novel called for 'that predominance of Sentiment which we have already attributed to the feminine mind.' And, women could write the novel because 'Love is the staple of fiction' and it "forms the story of a woman's life."⁷ Yet, if they embarked on to the career of novel-writing, they were not supposed to achieve much:

For the sympathies and powers of the man embrace those of the woman, and though many of his sentiments and feelings are less delicate and intense, they are of the same nature, - and besides, those of a woman are habitually laid bare to him in life, even in their most secluded manifestations. But there is much in a man, consisting less in particular feelings than in their modes of operation, that a woman through her sympathies can never touch, and to depict which she is driven to the results of an experience for which her habits and opportunities little fit her. If in a book the complete and faithful portrait of a woman is drawn, and a vital

⁷ G.H. Lewes, "The Lady Novelists"(1852) in Showalter, op.cit., pp.86-7.

character unfolded through all its profound mysteries and evanescent manifestations, the work may still be that of a man; but if a man's character be so drawn, it is all but conclusive against its having a woman for its author.⁸

Which brings us to the point where we left in the last chapter. Men had the best of both worlds. They could portray women more objectively and to draw men satisfactorily was their forte, nay their birthright, according to the contemporary perceptions of the Victorian age.

'In such an atmosphere, to be a woman novelist was itself a challenge to the existing role-models for sexes. For, 'Even though novel writing was "acceptable", and did not involve a loss of social status for the middle-class woman,, the "lady novelist" aroused a great deal of comment.'⁹ Ironically, this followed the eighteenth-century when male authors posed as women to get their novels published. Apparently, as soon as the novel became respectable, doubts began to be cast on women's ability to produce them.

Does woman essentially perceive everything differently from man? Many of our contemporary feminists say, yes. In their opinion, women simply cannot help it marginalized

⁸ "Hearts in Mortmain and Cornelian", Prospective Review vi(1850): 496-7, in Showalter, op.cit., p.148.

⁹ Patricia Otto Klaus, "Novel and Victorian Women", in Barbara Kanner, ed. The Women of England: From Anglo Saxon Times to the Present(London: Mansell, 1979), p.302.

as they are, outside the process of history. If they have any place in civilization, it is only in terms of 'dual, hierarchized oppositions. Superior/Inferior.'¹⁰ And they are always identified with the 'inferior'. Women therefore, says Irigaray, inevitably turn inwards but 'woman's auto-eroticism is very different from man's. He needs an instrument in order to touch himself: his hand, woman's genitals, language — And this self-stimulation requires a minimum of activity. But a woman touches herself by and within herself directly, without mediation, and before any distinction between activity and passivity is possible....'¹¹ And, to Kristeva - 'Women who write are brought, at their own pace and in their own way, to see sexual differentiation as interior to the praxis of every subject.'¹² Women, therefore, either 'valorize phallic dominance, associated with the privileged father-daughter relationship' and it leads to 'virilization of woman' or women 'flee everything considered "phallic" to find refuge in the valorization of a silent underwater body, thus abdicating any entry into history.'¹³ Women, says Kristeva:

... generally write in order to tell their own

¹⁰ Helene Cixous, "La jeune nee" (The newly born woman) (1975) in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtiviron, New French Feminists: An Anthology (1981; rpt. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p.91.

¹¹ Luce Irigaray, "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un" (This sex which is not one) (1977) in *ibid*, p.100.

¹² Julia Kristeva, "Oscillation du 'pouvoir' au 'rufus'" (Oscillation between power and denial), an interview by Xaviere Gauthier in Tel quel, Summer 1974 in *ibid*, p.166.

¹³ *Ibid*.

family story (father, mother and/or their substitutes). When a woman novelist does not reproduce a real family of her own, she creates an imaginary story through which she constitutes an identity: narcissism is safe, the ego becomes eclipsed after freeing itself, purging itself of reminiscences. Freud's statement 'the hysteric suffers from reminiscence' sums up the large majority of novels produced by women.

In women's writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land; is it seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body? ... Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak.¹⁴

Many other feminists, however, do not like to grant total validity to such views. True, they, too, would find it difficult to agree with a feminist who asks, 'Has literature a sex?' and then answers for them all - 'With dignity, I, and most of my sisters, we would answer: No.'¹⁵ Rather, I think, the following view would be more acceptable to most of them:

Women are, in fact, caught in a very real contradiction. Throughout the course of history, they have been mute, and it is doubtless by virtue of this mutism that men have been able to speak and write. As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Christiane Rochefort, "Are Women Writers Still Monster?" (1975) in Marks and de Courtivron, op.cit., p.186.

¹⁶ Xavière Gauthier, "Existe-t-il une écriture de femme?" (Is there such a thing as women's writing?) (1974), in Ibid, pp.162-3.

While agreeing with all this, some feminists find in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva a self-defeating biological determinism. Gillian Beer states it succinctly:

The metaphors of womb and milk that Kristeva and Cixous employ, though full of comfort and recognition, risk being read as biological determinism. They ~~may~~ may function to fix the idea of the woman writing as essentially reproductive. So, while respecting difference, we should be wary of the imprimatur of our generative organs as a sufficient description of creativity. Writing as a woman must mean writing as human. George Eliot's writing emphasizes universals.¹⁷

True, George Eliot sought to write as 'human' emphasizing 'universals'. But could she fully achieve it, especially when this goal was part of a conscious bid to escape the constraints imposed by her gender? In fact, ^{whether} ~~if~~ there is a universal, human discourse is a moot question. One, of course, would not like to endorse the disparaging anonymous review quoted earlier, but the fact remains that in George Eliot's time:

The sex of the author had a great effect on the literature they wrote: men and women had different experiences, different opportunities, and saw the Victorian world through different eyes. Even though a man might create women characters, he still revealed how he thought women felt and what he himself felt about women. It is here that the two views are valuable: from male authors we see Victorian society

¹⁷ Gillian Beer, George Eliot (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p.16.

as men saw it; from female authors, as women saw it.¹⁸

Even if this sounds somewhat essentialist in tone in that men and women must see everything differently simply because of their gender, it is better and more acceptable than granting male authors superiority over women authors simply because they are men - a view which is hardly less essentialist. And the fact remains that the Victorian society had sharply divided male and female worlds. Moreover:

Feminine novelists responded to these innuendos of inferiority, as to others, not by protest but by vigorous demonstration of their domestic felicity. They worked hard to present their writing as an extension of their feminine role, an activity that did not detract from their womanhood, but in some sense augmented it.¹⁹

Be that as it may, the fact remains that despite the use of a male pseudonym and despite the use of a male voice as narrator in her early fiction, it was as a woman that George Eliot saw her contemporary world, a woman who was also a rebel in her life. It would therefore be interesting to note what attitude she adopts vis-a-vis the role models for the sexes.

That women portrayed by male authors were deemed to be more satisfactory than those by women themselves would not

¹⁸ Klaus, op.cit., p.311.

¹⁹ Showalter, op.cit., p.85.

have surprised George Eliot. After all, as one of the epigraphs for Daniel Deronda says:

What woman should be? Sir, consult the taste
 Of marriageable men. This planet's store
 In iron, cotton, wool, 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 test. You mark the phrase?
 'Tis good, I think? —the sense well winged and poised
 With t's and s's.

In other words, as Simone de Beauvoir said through her famous epigram, one is not born a woman, one becomes one.²⁰ And one becomes the woman the patriarchal society wants one to be. True, 'Few English women writers openly advocated the use of fiction as a revenge against a patriarchal society,²¹ but a revolt against rigid, conventional sexual stereotypes is clearly visible:

'I didn't finish the book,' said Maggie. 'As soon as I came to the blond-haired young lady reading in the park, I shut it up, and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. I should

²⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. from French, H.M. Parshley (1949; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

²¹ Showalter, op.cit., p.16.

begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca, and Flora MacIvor, and Minna and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones.²²

This may be why:

Just as George Eliot is akin to Trollope in what may be termed her 'meliorist' conception of character, so is she also in her attitude to feminine beauty.²³

In fact, she is often positively severe vis-a-vis feminine beauty, be this because of 'personal irritation' or because of 'the more general, puritan suspicion of beauty as the Devil's bait.'²⁴ An illustration of this is her description of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede:

There are various orders of beauty, causing men to make fools of themselves in various styles, from the desperate to the sheepish; but there is one order of beauty which seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women. It is a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and engage in mischief - a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws

²² George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (1860; rpt. London and Melbourne: Dent, Everyman, 1985), BK.v, Ch.iv. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be included in text.

²³ Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, trans. from Italian, Angus Davidson (1956; paperback rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.355.

²⁴ Ibid, p.356.

you. Hetty Sorrel's was that sort of beauty.²⁵

and:

Hetty's was a spring-tide beauty; it was the beauty of young frisking things, round-limbed, gambolling, circumventing you by a false air of innocence - the innocence of a young star-browed calf, for example, that being inclined for a promenade out of bounds, leads you a severe steeplechase over hedge and ditch, and only comes to a stand in the middle of a bog.

(Ibid)

What condemns Hetty to this pejorative animalistic state with 'the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal' (Adam Bede, Bk.5, Ch.37) is that while she is all consciousness insofar as her beauty is concerned - 'Hetty was quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her' (Ibid, Bk.1, Ch.8) - this very awareness seems to kill her soul, to make her devoid of fellow feeling:

... perhaps water-nixies, and such lovely things without souls, have these little round holes in their ears by nature, ready to hang jewels in. And Hetty must be one of them: it is too painful to think that she is a woman, with a woman's destiny before her - a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish.

(Ibid, Bk.3, Ch.22)

²⁵ George Eliot, Adam Bede (1859; rpt. New York and Scarborough, Ontario: Signet Classic, 1981), Bk.1, Ch.7. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

We have an analogous treatment of Rosamond Vincy in Middlemarch- 'The shallowness of a waternixie's soul may have a charm until she becomes didactic.' (Bk.7,Ch.64) She too is compared to a cat:

But she remained simply serious, turned her long neck a little, and put up her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits - a habitual gesture with her as pretty as any movements of a kitten's paw.

(Ibid., Bk.2,Ch.16)

Ironically, even Maggie Tulliver turns so bewitchingly beautiful, though minus coquetry and self-consciousness, that she is taken notice of and this paves the way for 'the great temptation':

But if Maggie had been the queen of coquettes she could hardly have invented a means of giving greater piquancy to her beauty in Stephen's eyes: I am not sure that the quiet admission of plain sewing and poverty would have done alone, but assisted by her beauty, they made Maggie more unlike other women even than she had seemed at first.

(The Mill on the Floss, Bk.6,Ch.2)

George Eliot seems to encapsulate the reason for her antipathy to feminine beauty when she says in Adam Bede:

The noblest nature sees the most of this impersonal expression in beauty ..., and for this reason, the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes. Whence; I fear, the tragedy of human life is likely to continue for a long time to come, in spite of mental philosophers who are ready with the best receipts for avoiding all mistakes of the kind.

(Bk.4,Ch.33)

Among the women approved is Mary Garth in Middlemarch, an ideal, virtuous girl who in terms of looks is only 'ordinary but not disagreeable.' (Bk.4,Ch.40) And what impresses one in Dorothea Brooke is more her dignity than beauty.

Two important divisions seem to operate in George Eliot's portrayal of her women characters.²⁶ One belongs to the women who seek to defy or separate themselves from traditional womanly functions. They may be gently restored to the normality of female experience or may undergo harsh chastisements as in the case of Hetty Sorrel. Then there are those women who mistake the nature of matrimonial alliance, like Dorothea who reduces husband-wife relationship to that between teacher and taught, or positively abuse the matrimonial pieties. The error stemming from self-delusion or misplaced idealism is redeemed by a process of spiritual regeneration but wilfulness aimed at self-gratification endures deeper suffering.

For George Eliot 'complete union' and perfection lay only in the 'mutual subjection of the soul between a man and woman.'²⁷ In her fiction also, the portraits of single women remain few and marginal. However, it seems difficult to endorse Pauline Nestor's accusation that George Eliot employs repeatedly 'the stereotyped generalities applied

²⁶ Shirley Foster, Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p.198.

²⁷ Haight, ed. Letters, vol.iv, p.468.

to spinsters.'²⁸ The description of Miss Winifred Farebrother in Middlemarch as 'nipped and subdued as single women are apt to be who spend their lives in uninterrupted subjection to their elders'(Bk.2,Ch.17) seems more realistic and sympathetic than pejorative. And it is she who is given the onerous and important job of bringing Dorothea and Ladislav together. She is throughout treated humorously, not sarcastically. Likewise, it is not George Eliot who seems to see the Rector, Mr Irwine, burdened by 'two hopeless-maiden sisters', one 'sickly', the other 'spoken of without adjective', who are 'old maids for the prosaic reason, that they never received an eligible offer; it rather seems to be a detached presentation of the society's outlook, of what 'any person of family within ten miles of Broxton could have testified'.(Adam Bede,Bk.1,Ch.5) The irony is quite explicit when George Eliot speaks of Mrs Irwine in these terms- 'Splendid old ladies, who take a long time to dress in the morning, have often light sympathy with sickly daughters.'(Ibid) What comes to the reader is rather the pathos of the spinsters' condition. And one likes Mr Irwine the more because of his sympathy to them, something which Nestor also notes when she says- 'Mr Irwine adopts a maternal tenderness towards his sisters, compensating for his mother's hardness.'²⁹

Once again, Nestor finds it objectionable that women

²⁸ Pauline Nestor, Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.173.

²⁹ Ibid, p.182.

like Mrs Poyser and Mrs Garth are presented as contented with patriarchy. For Mrs Poyser, despite having the spirit of three men, contentedly takes her place when the whole family assembles on winter evenings in patriarchal fashion and Mrs Garth rules on ninety-nine points but follows the womanly principle of subordination on the hundredth.³⁰ But, truly speaking, the first instance seems to be a realistic portrayal of a habitual obedience to convention while the second is definitely ironical in import. What does womanly subordination on one count, which too is calculated and wilful rather than a product of coercion or force, matter when on ninety-nine counts the same woman manages to have her say?

Another of Nestor's objections is to 'the partiality Eliot's mothers often demonstrate towards their male children', especially those male children who are also more masculine.³¹ For example, Mrs Irwine is quite hard on her daughters, but dotes on her son. Mrs Bede favours Adam more than 'gentle' Seth. And Mrs Tulliver always favours Tom over Maggie except for once, after Maggie's return from her 'elopement', when Tom refuses to accept her. But it is difficult to maintain that George Eliot endorses all this just because she presents these instances in her novels. Especially, by the time she comes to The Mill on the Floss, her attitude on this score seems to be well-formulated.

³⁰ Ibid, p.174-5.

³¹ Ibid, p.179.

Mr Tulliver is as loving and sympathetic to 'the little wench' Maggie as can be. Yet it is he who regrets that 'she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid ... It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep - she'll fetch none the bigger price for that.' (Bk.1,Ch.2) And:

'She understands what one's talking about so as never was. And you should hear her read - straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand. And allays at her book! But it's bad - it's bad,' Mr Tulliver added, sadly, checking this blamable exultation; 'a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt....

(Bk.1,Ch.3)

And the mother's regret is that the girl has 'a brown skin as makes her look like a mulateer' and that 'her hair won't curl' (Bk.1,Ch.2) which leads to Maggie's first significant rebellion when she impulsively cuts off her hair as a mark of protest and then finds herself only more miserable after that.

True, George Eliot manages to make prophetic Mr Tulliver's apprehensions of trouble and Mrs Tulliver's fear that 'she'll tumble in some day' (Bk.1,Ch.2) in the river Floss. But what she identifies with is clearly the pathos of Maggie's situation when she is admonished for showing her original and argumentative mind:

'Go, go!' said Mr Tulliver, peremptorily, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable at these free remarks on the personal appearance of a being powerful enough to create lawyers; 'shut up the book, and let's hear no

more o' such talk. It is as I thought - the child 'ull learn more mischief nor good wi' the books. Go, go and see after your mother.'

Maggie shut up the book at once, with a sense of disgrace, but not being inclined to see after her mother, she compromised the matter by going into a dark corner behind her father's chair ...

(Bk.1, Ch.3)

This is followed by Tom's going to school. And:

Women writers were deprived of education because of their sex, not because of their class. For the middle-class Victorian girl, the departure of a brother for school was a painful awakening to her inferior status; the scene echoes in English fiction from George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860) to Sarah Grand's The Beth Book (1897)³²

True, George Eliot, concerned as she is with human condition rather than woman's condition alone, shows graphically the handicaps of Tom's education. But then, as Showalter has noted:

One of the outstanding characteristics of the feminine novelists, their envy of classical education, is apparent in Catherine Crowe's The Story of Lily Dawson (1852): 'It is true, there is little real culture among men; there are few strong-thinkers and fewer honest ones; but they have still some advantages. If their education has been bad, it has at least been a trifle better than ours. Six hours a day at Latin and Greek are better than six hours a day at worsted work and embroidery.'³³

In fact, George Eliot manages to convey that if Tom cannot

³² Showalter, op.cit., p.41.

³³ Ibid.

make much of his education, it is ^{not only} because the system is bad but also because his mental cast is not for classical education. Whereas Maggie with her imaginative sympathy could surely have made more of a classical education. This becomes clear when she offers Tom her help in his studies but Tom promptly repudiates it:

'Why, I learn Latin too! Girls never learn such things. They're too silly.'

'I know what Latin is very well,' said Maggie, confidently. 'Latin's a language. There are Latin words in the Dictionary. There's bonus, a gift.'

'Now, you're just wrong there, Miss Maggie!' said Tom, secretly astonished. 'You think you're very wise! But "bonus" means "good", as it happens - bonus, bona, bonum.'

'Well, that's no reason why it shouldn't mean "gift",' said Maggie, stoutly. 'It may mean several things - almost every word does. There's "lawn" - it means the grassplot, as well as the stuff pocket-handkerchiefs are made of.'

(Bk.2,Ch.1)

Maggie, even as a child, seeks to grow out of stereotypes:

'I think all women are crosser than men,' said Maggie. 'Aunt Glegg's a great deal crosser than Uncle Glegg, and mother scolds me more than father does.'

'Well, you'll be a woman some day,' said Tom, 'so you needn't talk.'

'But I shall be a clever woman,' said Maggie, with a toss.

(Ibid)

But she is soon put into her 'proper place' as such by Mr Stelling, Tom's teacher, who speaks for the society. Girls,

he says:

'... can pick up a little of everything, I daresay,' said Mr Stelling. 'They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow.'

Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie behind Mr Stelling's chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called 'quick' all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom.

(Ibid)

Maggie, no doubt, is sent to school too. But the very reticence with which her school-days are treated is an eloquent comment on the kind of education she must have received. And do not we see Dorothea Brook, in Middlemarch, circumscribed by 'a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse' (Bk.1, Ch.3) seeking a classical education because 'Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly.' (Bk.1, Ch.7)

Showalter puts it succinctly:

The classical education was the intellectual dividing line between men and women: intelligent women aspired to study Greek and Latin with a touching faith that such knowledge would open the world of male power and wisdom to them.³⁴

And George Eliot communicates this without any equivocation. So much so that while on her own admission she could not

³⁴ op.cit., p.42.

empathize with Rosamond Vincy, this did not blind her to the fact that the limitations of Rosamond's education were crucial in making her what she was. Rosamond is 'clever with that sort of cleverness which catches every tone.' (Middlemarch, Bk.2,Ch.16) 'Mrs Lemon's favourite pupil,' we are told, '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.' (Ibid, Bk.3,Ch.27)

To Pauline Nestor, 'Eliot's view of women is deeply ambivalent.'³⁵ But then, as George Eliot herself says in the Prelude to Middlemarch:

... 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 scientific 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.

That George Eliot recognizes that 'Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond' but then sees it as never finding 'the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind' is less due to ambivalence than due to a realistic appraisal of the

³⁵ op.cit., p.181.

prevailing conditions. She refuses to sentimentalize the issue or, as Gillian Beer notes, 'George Eliot thought it important not to idealize women as they currently exist' because 'we should not be too ready to claim superiority for the enslaved lest it appear that slavery produces moral advantage.'³⁶ In George Eliot's own words:

Unfortunately, many over-zealous champions of women assert their actual equality with men - nay, even their moral superiority to men - as a ground for their release from oppressive laws and restrictions. They lose strength immensely by this false position. If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we should have an argument for the continuance of bondage.³⁷

It cannot be denied that no woman in her fiction is allowed the radicalness of George Eliot's own life. This may be because the travails of her life were too traumatic for her to dwell on, or because she considered her own case too exceptional to be made representative. One may even trace in her 'judgmental' attitude towards 'those of her heroines who seek, as she did, to escape from the frustrations of domesticity and family responsibility', 'an element of self-chastisement.'³⁸ Be it as it may, the fact remains

³⁶ Beer, op.cit., p.17.

³⁷ George Eliot, "The Woman Question: Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft"(1855) in R.A. Draper, ed. George Eliot: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner, Casebook Series(1977; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1986), p.46.

³⁸ Foster, op.cit., p.198.

that despite what is claimed as her orthodoxy, reticence, or ambivalence, George Eliot through her novels manages to raise questions in her reader's mind regarding the conventional stereotypes for women even while showing that in her age, 'the evangelical faith in duty and renunciation, was a woman's ethic.'³⁹

George Eliot's male characters do not exist merely to flank the heroine as we find in Jane Austen. 'Writing of men with the same sympathetic completeness as of women is an effortless representation of women's scope and authority in George Eliot's writing.'⁴⁰ And this is no mean feat in an age when, as we noted earlier, the very ability of women authors to draw male characters was doubted and the authoresses also, on their own admission, had troubles on this score.⁴¹

George Eliot presents her heroes as mentors who come to the heroine's rescue in the most desperate of situations:

The process of rescue by the hero is appropriately designed in each case. The hero is not only the male who is superior in education though with the same

³⁹ G.M. Young, Portrait of an Age: Victorian Age (1936; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.3.

⁴⁰ Beer, op.cit., p.18

⁴¹ Showalter, op.cit., pp.133-6.

problems of feeling, but the lover with a particular understanding of the heroine's predicament, and often with an implausibly detached moral view of it.⁴²

In keeping with her credo that it is self-defeating to assert actual equality for women with men when the facts are contrary, even when she sees man-woman relationship as complementary, she does not see the two units as fundamentally equal. For to see them as equal when they are not would be to evade the cold facts. This can be seen in the following exchange between Tom and Maggie in The Mill on the Floss:

'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.'

(Bk.4, Ch.5)

Tom, being a man, can, despite the handicaps of his education, pay off his father's debt and this meets the author's approval because, in effect and in itself, it is a positive accomplishment. Nor is George Eliot censorious of Tom or society because of his upward movement. But she clearly demonstrates that Tom would be a better person, were he not a prisoner of the traditional male stereotype. This comes

⁴² Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form(1959; rpt. with corrections, 1963. London: Athlone, 1985), p.53.

through in the very careful contrast she builds up in the text in between the thought-process of Maggie and that of Tom right from their childhood. Maggie's dream as a child is- 'When he grows up, I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together.' (Bk.1,Ch.4) Tom, on the other hand, has his own version of the same dream. He would 'make' her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong.' (Bk.1,Ch.5)

This is so because in his opinion 'Maggie was a silly little thing; all girls were silly ...' (Ibid) His distaste for Philip Wakem is also rooted in the fact that to Tom his deformity has made him almost everything the girls are - 'You know I won't hit you, because you're no better than a girl.' (Bk.2,Ch.4) Right in the childhood the responses are conditioned and by adulthood pass into habit and subconscious. Thus Tom seeks to separate Philip and Maggie without being aware of any deeper motives:

He did not know how much of an old boyish repulsion and of mere personal pride and animosity was concerned in the bitter severity of the words by which he meant to do the duty of a son and a brother.

(Bk.5,Ch.5)

In Middlemarch, what evokes our pity for Casaubon is the author's keen insight into his being a prisoner of his masculine ego. What at first looks like mere hypocrisy and insensitivity is anatomized as a typical masculine clamping up in face of defeat:

Poor Mr Casaubon was distrustful of everybody's feeling towards him, especially as a husband. To let any one suppose that he was jealous would be to admit their

(suspected) view of his disadvantages; to let them know he did not find marriage particularly blissful would imply his conversion to their (probably) earlier disapproval. It would be as bad as letting Carp, and Brasenose generally, know how backward he was in organizing the matter for his 'Key to all Mythologies'. All through his life Mr Casaubon had been trying not to admit even to himself the inward sores of self-doubt and jealousy. And on the most delicate of all personal subjects, the habit of proud suspicious reticence told doubly.

(Bk.4,Ch.37)

Lydgate behaves in an almost similar manner when Farebrother discreetly offers his help. Suicide seems easier to him than accepting the Vicar's help.(Bk.7,Ch.63) And for all her perfunctory treatment of the 'gentle' Seth,⁴³ what George Eliot cures Adam Bede of is his stereotypical hardness.

It is also significant that George Eliot did not make a blackguard villain out of Arthur Donnithorne. It would probably have been much too easier to show him as a cool, calculating rascal and Hetty Sorrel as the typical, innocent victim. But George Eliot transforms the situation by showing Hetty as not all that innocent and by presenting Arthur also as a conscious victim of his own irrationality and passions.

Most of the strong male characters break at one point or the other. For:

The recurring motif in feminine fiction that does seem

⁴³ Nestor, *op. cit.*, p.183.

to show outright hostility, if not castration wishes, towards men, is the blinding, maiming, or blighting motif.⁴⁴

Thus Tom almost cripples himself while playing with a sword and becomes pathetically dependent on others, at least for some time, for physical and emotional fulfilments. (The Mill on the Floss, Bk.2, Ch.5) Casaubon and Bulstrode in Middlemarch, one representing intellectual power, the other economic, are left completely deflated and floored. True, 'these humiliations of the hero are not merely punitive'; we also witness the belief 'that a limited experience of dependency, frustration, and powerlessness - in short, of womanhood - was a healthy and instructive one for a hero.'⁴⁵ This we see in the case of Adam Bede when, for all his explosiveness, he realizes that fighting cannot avenge Hetty, indeed cannot achieve much. What is left in him is a maternal feeling for the sufferers and the catalytic force in this metamorphosis is the Rector Irwine who is himself endowed with motherly instincts;

Men, these novels are saying, must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced unwillingly into dependency. Only then can they understand that women need love but hate to be weak. If he is to be redeemed and to rediscover his humanity, the 'woman's man' must find out how it feels to be a woman.⁴⁶

All men are not mentors in George Eliot's world. There

⁴⁴ Showalter, op.cit., p.150.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.152.

are also failed fathers, failed husbands, less than ideal brothers, deceitful bankers, blackmailers etc. And like 'nature, that great dramatist, who knits us together by bone and muscles, and divides by the subtler web of our brains' (Adam Bede, Bk.1, Ch.4):

... the author of Middlemarch has given us this sample of web in which, like Rosamond, she has worked 'for' the female community by entangling the representatives of patriarchal culture - Casaubon, Bulstrode, Featherstone, and Lydgate - and by calling into question their authority.⁴⁷

Only George Eliot almost always manages to give us a glimpse of their insides. And even the mentors are not paragons of virtue and perfection. They have to learn, to grow, almost as much as the female protagonist. The heroes are as much 'meliorist' as the heroines. Inevitably, then, the interaction between the sexes is never one-sided.

⁴⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.524.

III. THE MOMENTS OF INTIMACY

This chapter seeks to discuss the rather 'intimate' moments between sexes in George Eliot's novels under discussion. The word 'intimate' is not being used only in its current, popular, euphemistic sense of sexual involvement. Rather, 'intimate' here has been employed to denote what usually goes by the name of 'love'. The term 'love', however, has been eschewed in favour of 'intimacy' because the latter covers a wider area of signification than the former. For example, it is hardly possible to characterize the Arthur Donnithorne-Hetty Sorrel episode in Adam Bede as one involving love. And any number of critics have debated whether what Maggie Tulliver feels for Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest in The Mill on the Floss may be categorized as love or not. In any case, 'love' seems somewhat abstract, more a concept we swear by all too often than something palpable and tangible, ready to submit to the analyst. Whereas 'intimacy' with its decidedly physical overtones is definitely more concrete, easier to visualize and, possibly, even analyse.

There are some 'intimacies', then, which get converted into marriage. But there are some which cannot (Maggie-Tom), which would not (Arthur-Hetty), which do not (Maggie-Philip; Maggie-Stephen). The latter have been discussed in this chapter while the next chapter shall take up the 'intimacies' which lead to marriages.

Romantic relationships between sexes, 'eros rather

than agape¹ has from time immemorial been a central occupation of literature, particularly of fiction. And this is no less true of George Eliot's novels under discussion. Still:

... romantic relationships play a rather different role in her work than in most of her fellow women writers. Whereas in the novels of Bronte and Craik, for instance, examination of the significance of emotional fulfilment in women's lives is a self-contained theme, Eliot sets her discussion of the topic in a wide social and philosophical context.²

Therefore:

While sexual commitment is an intrinsic element of her character's aspirations, it is also a moral testing-ground, a means of exploring the individual's relationship to the outside world and to more universal issues.³

The 'intimacies' therefore are never allowed to obscure the harsher, down-to-earth realities for a cloud-and-cuckoo world of romance. Rather, whenever a man and a woman come together, the event almost at once telescopes the interconnectedness of various familial or social strands into sharper focus. Besides, most often one set of relationship is set against the other and we are thereby led to evaluate the responses of the characters in a carefully and consciously provided frame of reference. The characters themselves may often be completely unconscious, or at best only dimly aware,

¹ John Bayley, The Character of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p.11.

² Shirley Foster, Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp.192-3.

³ Ibid, p.193.

of the process, but the texture of the novel and the voice of the narrator seek, though not always successfully, to keep the reader aware of the author's intentions. This function is performed, of course, in a very sophisticated manner, especially in her later novels, but performed it is nevertheless.

In her first novel, Adam Bede, George Eliot presents a love-triangle as such in her portrayal of Adam Bede-Hetty Sorrel-Arthur Donnithorne affair. This triangle occupies the central place in the novel because:

The issue is the humanistic education of one man, Adam Bede, his attainment of love and happiness through the rectification of his harsh character by suffering and learning to sympathize with the suffering of others, even those who caused his pain. Two events chiefly occasion Adam's education to full humanity: the drowning of his drunken father and the disgrace and loss of Hetty Sorrel because of Arthur Donnithorne's seduction.⁴

Of the two events cited, the first is decidedly a minor one, its full significance manifesting only in ^{the} context of the second event, when Adam softens finally and forgives even Arthur:

It's true what you say, sir. I'm hard- it's in my nature. I was too hard with my father, for doing wrong. I've been a bit hard t' everybody but her. I felt as if nobody pitied her enough - her suffering cut into me

⁴ Mary Ellen Doyle, The Sympathetic Response: George Eliot's Fictional Rhetoric (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981), p.23.

so; and when I thought the folks at the farm were too hard with her, I said I'd never be hard to anybody myself again....

(Adam Bede, Bk.5, Ch.48)

In Hetty Sorrel's presentation critics have seen George Eliot's vindictiveness towards beautiful women:

Beautiful women, with George Eliot, are generally silly, superficial, insensitive; the tragedy of human life lies precisely in the capacity of beautiful forms to have a significance that by far transcends the being they enclose, in the same way that the words of a genius have a wider meaning than the thought that prompted them.⁵

Or, as Graham Hough puts it, 'To be permissibly beautiful a woman must be a Methodist saint or a drowning Jewess.'⁶

But Mario Praz has demonstrated that other Victorian writers also, Trollope for instance, are often severe with beautiful women and so 'the intimate personal reasons to which George Eliot's aversion to beauty has been ascribed lose something of their validity.'⁷

Be it as it may, the fact remains that Hetty errs on two important counts: a. love and marriage for her are means of satisfying her vanity rather than relationships based on mutual sympathy; b. she shows a complete lack of maternal

⁵ Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, trans. from Italian, Angus Davidson (1956; paperback rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.357.

⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

feelings even before her personal crisis. In her presentation, George Eliot:

... combines scorn and sympathy towards Hetty, but she does not release her entirely from moral responsibility. Hetty offends against the pieties of womanhood in both its loving and maternal aspects.⁸

It has been recognized that in the Arthur Donnithorne-Hetty Sorrel episode, George Eliot was also seeking to defy Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of the fallen woman in Ruth (1853). Mrs Gaskell's novel is the story of an unmarried mother struggling to survive and raise her son in the face of a hostile world. Her seducer Bellingham, like Arthur Donnithorne, is 'anything but a beast':

Gaskell seems to realize that by presenting Bellingham as an out and out rogue he would become rather two-dimensional. By making him more human she makes her tale more realistic. George Eliot does the same thing with Arthur Donnithorne, the father of Hetty Sorrel's murdered baby. She gave Arthur a rather bad conscience during his courtship of Hetty. The loss of innocence in women is, therefore, partly due to the foibles of youth.⁹

Where, then does the difference lie between Ruth and Adam Bede? It lies in the presentation of Hetty Sorrel:

Many critics have found fault with George Eliot's presentation of Hetty, seeing it as ungenerous and rebuffing in its insistence on her small scope, her paucity of love, her vanity. But the treatment of Hetty is also a

⁸ Foster, op.cit., p.207.

⁹ George Watt, The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, and Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), pp.24-5.

radical challenge to stereotypical portrayals of virgins and fallen women.¹⁰

It is difficult to say, however, that George Eliot eschews all stereotypes. As George Watt points out, most Victorian novelists 'simply do not allow for the existence of female sexuality'; they:

give young men sexual impulses but endow their young women with romantic ones. It is this germ of romantic hope which makes them vulnerable when their Apollo appears on the scene.¹¹

This was the result of 'the sexual mores of a society that overlooked promiscuity in men but severely punished women for any breach of chastity':

This double standard was reinforced during the eighteenth century by the idealization of a supposedly natural feminine purity. So strong was this ideal by the nineteenth century that it was commonly held that normal women had no sexual desires at all.¹²

The nineteenth-century almost habitually accepted the above double standard but the previous century was more conscious of the purpose behind it 'which was that it helped keep women in subjection as pieces of family property.'¹³ By the nineteenth-century, there came 'a genuine conviction that

¹⁰ Gillian Beer, George Eliot (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p.69.

¹¹ op.cit., p.68.

¹² Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.109.

¹³ Ibid.

women were, naturally and habitually, morally superior to men; and so much more culpable when they fell.¹⁴

George Eliot in Adam Bede, then, willy-nilly seems to imbibe the prevalent double standard in that as opposed to Arthur's explicit sexual infatuation, Hetty's dreams are more romantic:

But for the last few weeks a new influence had come over Hetty - vague, atmospheric, shaping itself into no self-confessed hopes or prospects, but producing a pleasant narcotic effect, making her tread the ground and go about her work in a sort of dream, unconscious of weight or effort, and showing her all things through a soft, liquid veil, as if she were living not in this sordid world of brick and stone, but in a beatified world, such as the sun lights up for us in the waters.

(Bk.1,Ch.9)

The 'poor child' with her 'little silly imagination' does not conceive 'at present the idea that the young squire could ever be her lover.' But even in her 'unconscious' existence in the 'beatified world', Hetty looks up to Arthur as the sun-god:

Foolish thoughts! But all this happened, you must remember, nearly sixty years ago, and Hetty was quite uneducated - a simple farmer's girl, to whom a gentleman with a white hand was dazzling as an Olympian god.

(Ibid)

This metaphor of the god-figure underscores the 'double advantage' the seducers like Arthur Donnithorne possess—

¹⁴ A.O.J. Cockshut, Man & Woman: A Study of Love and the Novel, 1740-1940 (London: William Collins, 1977), p.16.

'male superiority and class superiority. The sense of euphoria being experienced by the young women makes them doubly vulnerable when combined with what they see as their greatest need' which in Hetty's case 'is to dream of luxuries and power.'¹⁵ It is a different matter that in due course 'the god figures become horribly human, and the euphoric dreams turn into horrific nightmares.'¹⁶ Mostly, then, when seduction-theme is treated:

The young men in the novels do differ, but the similarities are striking - youthful ardour, boredom and natural instinct react in an expected manner in the face of forthcoming worship from equally youthful innocent young women who dream of something better or a release from the strictures of a world which keeps them down.¹⁷

This pattern fits Arthur-Hetty affair in every way except in one important respect; despite a lot of emphasis being placed on Hetty's dormant consciousness, George Eliot 'never ascribes to her the kind of absolute unknowing innocence that is attributed to the heroine in Elizabeth Stone's The Young Seamstress or in Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth.'¹⁸ This defiance of stereotype, however, paradoxically leads her to another stereotype as Elizabeth Hardwick in her specific study of seduction and betrayal has noted:

¹⁵ Watt, op.cit., p.71.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Beer, op.cit., p.70.

In the novel, when the heroine's history turns about a sexual betrayal, it matters whether she is the central figure in the plot or a somewhat less powerfully and less fully considered 'victim' on the periphery. If she is the central figure, psychological structure seems to demand a sort of purity and innocence. Not physical innocence, but a lack of mean calculations, of vindictiveness, of self-abasing weakness.¹⁹

While Hetty Sorrel may not exactly be a character on the 'periphery', the eschewing of innocence in her case definitely sealed her fate as the central character in the novel. Nevertheless, the presentation of Hetty as a not so innocent victim marked a significant departure from the standard seduction tales in which 'the pretty young girl who is seduced usually finally falls because she is simple, trusting, and affectionate.'²⁰ This kind of theme was self-defeating because 'Positing a myth of female innocence and male guilt to explain seduction, it helped reinforce the ideology of femininity as purity at the same time as attacking those who demanded purity of women and not of men.'²¹ It is on this count that George Eliot's refusal to show the seduced girl as impossibly innocent and virtuous gains significance and we can appreciate her departure from Mrs Gaskell's Ruth.

¹⁹ Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p.182.

²⁰ Susan Staves, "British Seduced Maidens", Eighteenth-Century Studies 14(1980-1), pp.109-34.

²¹ Spencer, op.cit., p.112.

Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede are situated in a society with very clear-cut hierarchical distinctions. This is especially made clear in the party that celebrates Arthur's coming of age. The difference between Arthur and Hetty however is that, unlike Hetty, Arthur genuinely wants to live by the codes of such a society. If anything, he wants to make things better, 'as different as possible from what was now associated with the name of Donnithorne.' (Bk.1,Ch.12) He very consciously struggles against the passions that force him towards Hetty because:

To flirt with Hetty was a very different affair from flirting with a pretty girl of his own station: that was understood to be an amusement on both sides, or, if it became serious, there was no obstacle to marriage. But this little thing would be spoken ill of directly, if she happened to be seen walking with him; and then those excellent people, the Poysers, to whom a good name was as precious as if they had the best blood in the land in their veins - he should hate himself if he made a scandal of that sort, on the estate that was to be his own some day, and among tenants by whom he liked, above all, to be respected.

(Bk.1,Ch.13)

It is not only the fear of scandal that troubles him. He understands the psychological implications also very well - 'And even if no one knew anything about it, they might get too fond of each other, and then there could be nothing but the misery of parting, after all.' (Ibid) He knows very well that 'No gentleman, out of a ballad, could marry a farmer's niece. There must be an end to the whole thing at once. It was so foolish.' (Ibid) The trouble however is that he does

not have 'self-mastery enough to be always as harmless and purely beneficent as his good nature led him to desire.'

(Bk.1,Ch.12)

Arthur Donnithorne is thus weak rather than vicious. But there is something that makes it difficult for us to absolve him of his guilt: his self-centred consciousness. Even though he thinks of the Poysers: 'to whom a good name was as precious as if they had the best blood in the land in their veins,' he ends up thinking about himself - 'he should hate himself if he made a scandal of that sort...' Arthur's failure is thus 'rooted in an ugly vanity and lack of real concern for others.'²² If we still do not feel hostile towards him, it is because the narrator does not present him only externally as a two-dimensional character. We are permitted a graphic glimpse of his inner thoughts and struggles interspersed with the narrator's gentle irony, notably in Chapters 12, 13 and 16. Arthur really believes that any 'real harm' in Hetty's case is out of question because he 'accepted his own bond for himself with perfect confidence.' (Bk.1,Ch.12) More than once he resolves to break the affair - 'He would amuse himself by seeing Hetty today, and get rid of the whole thing from his mind.' (Ibid) And yet when he comes face to face with her, he simply loses control of himself:

Ah, he doesn't know in the least what he is saying. This is not what he meant to say. His arm is stealing round the waist again; it is tightening its clasp; he is bending his face nearer and nearer to the round

²² Doyle, op.cit., p.33.

cheek; his lips are meeting those pouting child-lips, and for a long moment time has vanished. He may be a shepherd in Arcadia for aught he knows, he may be the first youth kissing the first maiden, he may be Eros himself, sipping the lips of Psyche - it is all one.

(Bk.1,Ch.13)

But the moment the two separate, Arthur starts thinking that he would not like to create 'scandal of that sort'. In Chapter 16, he almost brings himself to confess to the Rector, Mr Irwine, but the latter prematurely and fatally puts a direct question - 'Is it some danger of your own that you are considering in this philosophical, general way?' - and he shies away:

Brought suddenly and involuntarily to the brink of confession, Arthur shrank back and felt less disposed towards it than ever. The conversation had taken a more serious tone than he had intended - it would quite mislead Irwine - he would imagine there was a deep passion for Hetty, while there was no such thing....

(Bk.1,Ch.16)

Hetty Sorrel is not endowed with such complex reflections. Rather, she is hardly reflective. As noted in the second chapter of this study, she exists with 'the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal' (Bk.5,Ch.37), with 'the beauty of young frisking things' carrying a 'false air of innocence.' (Bk.1,Ch.7) Unlike Arthur, she never is capable of understanding that a gentleman, out of ballad, cannot marry a farmer's niece. What is emphasized in her presentation is disorientation from her proper values. She does not have any intuitive, pastoral sympathies. She does not 'under-

stand how anybody could be very fond of middle-aged people' and would only be 'glad to hear that she should never see a child again.' (Bk.1,Ch.15) Whereas Dinah Morris at once sets out to comfort Lisbeth Bede in her sorrow, Hetty remains completely unccncerned. If Arthur has a streak of self-centredness, Hetty is wholly trapped within herself. Whereas Dinah Morris gazes out of the window at the moon and the universe without, and in the process her thoughts lead her to Hetty, Hetty in the adjoining bed-chamber is shown lost in an almost narcissistic admiration of her own beauty.

(Ibid) She starts fantasizing of herself as a lady:

But Captain Donnithorne would know; he was a great gentleman, and could have his way in everything, and could buy everything he liked. And nothing could be as it had been again: perhaps some day she should be a grand lady, and ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair, and her dress sweeping the ground, like Miss Lydia and Lady Dacey, when she saw them going into the dining-room, one evening as she peeped through the little round window in the lobby; only she should not be old and ugly like Miss Lydia, or all the same thickness like Lady Dacey, but very pretty, with her hair done in a great many different ways, and sometimes in a pink dress, and sometimes in a white one - she didn't know which she liked best; and Mary Burge and everybody would perhaps see her going out in her carriage - or rather, they would hear of it....

(Bk.1,Ch.15)

This fantasy is counterbalanced by the narrator's ironic presentation of another fantasy - that of Adam Bede's -

'Ah, what a prize the man gets who wins a sweet bride like

Hetty!' Adam believes her heart to be 'soft', temper to be 'free from angles' and character 'pliant' so much so that 'If anything ever goes wrong, it must be the husband's fault there.' While Hetty finds children nuisance, Adam's imagination leads him to think- 'How she will dote on her children!' (Ibid) At fault, the narrator suggests, is Hetty's beauty - 'Before you despise Adam as deficient in penetration, pray ask yourself if you were predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman...' But as though unsure of the total validity of this explanation, the narrator offers another - 'The man who awakes the wondering tremulous passion of young girl always thinks her affectionate...' Then again we are reminded that 'a long dark eyelash' may 'go along with deceit, speculation, and stupidity' rather than 'depth of soul.' (Ibid) The narrator again repeats this logic in a later chapter when we are asked not to think lightly of Adam for falling in love with a girl 'of whose inward self he was really very ignorant' because:

The noblest nature sees the most of this impersonal expression in beauty ... and for this reason, the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes.

(Bk.4,Ch.33)

What we are asked, in effect, is to appreciate that Adam being noble also loads Hetty with a nobility of his own invention. This, however, is contrary to his usual self-righteous nature and we can only grant this delusion as a tragic aberration on his part, a less than convincing exception to the normal rule, particularly if we are to

consider him only the more noble because of his delusion.

Anyway, we find Adam bewitched when at his sight Hetty 'turned from pale to deep red. That blush made his heart beat with a new happiness. Hetty had never blushed at seeing him before.' (Bk.2, Ch.20) He, then, 'looked straight into her eyes with the subdued tenderness that belongs to the first moments of hopeful love.' (Ibid) And this does not escape Hetty:

For the first time Hetty felt that there was something soothing to her in Adam's timid yet manly tenderness. She wanted to be treated lovingly - oh, it was very hard to bear this blank of absence, silence, apparent indifference, after those moments of glowing love.

(Ibid)

While Adam 'drank in the sweet delusion', his love only leads her to Arthur. After all, what has he got to offer that can match the 'brocaded silk' and 'carriage'.

Hetty is made positively duplicitous and scheming when she realizes that Adam has discovered her entanglement with Arthur - 'she could perhaps even make him believe that she didn't care for Arthur; and as long as Adam thought there was any hope of having her, he would do just what she liked, she knew. Besides, she must go on seeming to encourage Adam, lest her uncle and aunt should be angry and suspect her of having some secret lover.' (Bk.4, Ch.30) What makes her character almost totally unsympathetic is not only her 'love' for Arthur as a short-cut to upward mobility but her feeling-

less, almost flirtatious, turning to Adam when Arthur in his letter disavows any ideas of marriage with her:

Why should she not marry Adam? She did not care what she did, so that it made some change in her life. She felt confident that he would still want to marry her, and any further thought about Adam's happiness in the matter had never yet visited her.

(Bk.4,Ch.31)

All the ups and downs of her life thus fail to convert Hetty: love fails to turn her around. Her killing of her child is a product of that impulsive, scheming part of her 'little brain' that we see in Chapter 30. She covers the baby up with grass and wooden chips thinking that 'perhaps somebody 'ud come and take care of it, and then it wouldn't die.' (Bk.5,Ch.45) True, she seeks Adam's forgiveness and says that under Dinah's influence she is trying to forgive Arthur. (Bk.5,Ch.47) But it is Dinah who looms large in these moments. Hetty's final task in her artistic life, by implication, therefore, is to prepare her successor and then drop out of the novel.²³

It is not with Hetty's conversion, however, that George Eliot is concerned. Nor with that of Arthur's. George Eliot's concern is with the conversion of Adam Bede from a self-righteous, hard-hearted man to a man with overflowing sympathy and understanding. His self-righteousness is made clear

²³ Doyle, op.cit., p.42.

in the very first chapter- 'Look there now! I can't abide to see men throw away their tools i' that way, the minute the clock begins to strike, as if they took no pleasure i' their work and was afraid o' doing a stroke too much.' (Bk.1,Ch.1) He starts preaching at the slightest provocation- 'A foreman, if he's got a conscience, and delights in his work, will do his business as well as if he was a partner. I wouldn't give a penny for a man as 'ud drive a nail in slack because he didn't get extra pay for it.' (Bk.1,Ch.16) And it is only **after** his father dies that he regrets his self-righteous hardness towards him.

Hetty's predicament releases the pent up store of sympathy in him. The hardness which he finds in people towards her, especially in the Poysers, changes him completely and he undertakes to suffer along with her. The metamorphosis is complete in the 'dull upper room' in Stoniton Street when we are told:

You would hardly have known it was Adam without being told. His face has got thinner this last week: he has the sunken eyes, the neglected beard of a man just risen from a sick-bed. His heavy black hair hangs over his forehead, and there is no active impulse in him which inclines him to push it off, that he may be more awake to what is around him.

(Bk.5,Ch.41)

A stock, jealous, disappointed lover would probably have not looked twice at the woman who rejected him in favour of someone else. Rather, he would have derived satisfaction from her plight. But Adam Bede's strength of character is demonstrated

when he sits by her side throughout the trial with 'startling' marks of suffering on his face. (Bk.5, Ch.43) And, ironically, it is he in whom the maternal instincts are roused at the sight of the suffering Hetty:

But the mother's yearning, that completest type of the life in another life which is the essence of real human love, feels the presence of the cherished child even in the debased, degraded man; and to Adam, this pale, hard-looking culprit was the Hetty who had smiled at him in the garden under the apple-tree boughs - she was that Hetty's corpse, which he had trembled to look at the first time, and then was unwilling to turn away his eyes from.

(Ibid)

Even the normally insensitive Hetty recognizes this:

When the sad eyes met - when Hetty and Adam looked at each other - she felt the change in him too, and it seemed to strike her with fresh fear. It was the first time she had seen any being whose face seemed to reflect the change in herself: Adam was a new image of the dreadful present. She trembled more as she looked at him.

(Bk.5, Ch.46)

It is the awakening of this motherly feeling that finally makes him responsive to Irwine's urges to forgive Arthur who will be tormented by his own conscience throughout his life. The final reconciliation "is the penultimate scene of his self-discovery and purgation."²⁴ It finally prepares Adam for the discovery of his love for Dinah. George Eliot

²⁴ Joan Bennet, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art (1948; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.111.

brings about a feminization of his character that is decidedly positive in its import. Adam Bede is redeemed when he feels the way a mother must.

As we move over to The Mill on the Floss, however, it becomes rather difficult to make definitive pronouncements. The narrator's attitude and the logic of the text often seem to be ambivalent. It may be because 'both the greater strength and the greater weakness of this novel compared with the first Adam Bede arise out of a new element in it, the element of autobiography.'²⁵ Another critic objects rather vehemently- '... having raised certain moral issues, George Eliot is not entitled to sweep them aside in mere identification with the heroine.'²⁶ R.H. Lee does not like to accept this view. He seeks to 'dispel' the idea that the book ultimately loses its vitality as George Eliot moves away from the strictly autobiographical pattern. To him, 'if the final two books are a comparative failure, it is not because they are less "vital" than the others, but because the author has failed to put the deliberately created vitality in its rightful place in the total conception.'²⁷ But this begs the question as to why does the

²⁵ Ibid, p.115.

²⁶ Laurence Lerner, "Which is the Way Home?" (1967) in R.P. Draper, ed. George Eliot: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner, Casebook Series (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1977), p.169.

²⁷ "The Unity of The Mill on the Floss" (1964) in *ibid*, p.140.

author fail? And the answer to this again points to the autobiographical element in the novel. Particularly when George Eliot herself admitted that 'my love of the childhood scenes made me linger over them; so that I could not develop as I wished the concluding "Book" in which the tragedy occurs, and which I had looked forward to with much attention and premeditation from the beginning.'²⁸

The Mill on the Floss, however, is not the only novel of the Victorian age to benefit from and yet be flawed by ~~because of~~ the autobiographical element. 'The uneven and complex relations between the work of art and its source' affect other works like Jane Eyre and David Copperfield too:

Each novel seems to fail for a good reason: the solutions and conclusions are so visibly needed by the artist, not by the tale. Each novel is an instance of technique acting, not as discovery, but as obscuring fantasy.²⁹

The rhetoric of The Mill on the Floss, in fact, gets entangled as it moves. In the first book, Tom appears primarily as Maggie's foil. But the second book in which he predominates seems to establish him as the joint protagonist. And this continues till he pays his father's debts off. In the chapters devoted to his rise in business, Maggie hardly plays any role. But after that he decreases in impor-

²⁸ Gordon S. Haight, ed. The George Eliot Letters (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), vol.iii, p.374.

²⁹ Barbara Hardy, "The Mill on the Floss" in Hardy, ed. Critical Essays on George Eliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp.43-4.

tance and his presence becomes rare, especially in the last two books. The ultimate impression that we have of him is of the most important person in Maggie's life throughout. Thus despite some vacillation on the part of the author:

... it is essentially the story of Maggie Tulliver's tragic failure to become a whole and fulfilled woman, despite great intellectual and emotional potential. The failure is due to her inability either to adapt freely to her society's mores and win its approval or to reject those mores and choose her own path out of her own inner freedom and security. Her brother, Tom, is more in this story than anyone else because he is the chief cause of her psychic destruction and reflects it in his own personality. He too is destroyed, as Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest are not (this does not refer to his drowning). Part of Maggie's problem is that she is predominantly 'Sister Maggie'; she always turns to Tom for salvation, turns compulsively, and he cannot provide it because he himself is a damaged and unfree person.³⁰

Maggie's predicament is that she is 'torn between the desire to be loved and the desire to express her individuality', the predicament centring on 'the two versions of femaleness offered her.'³¹ She can either conform to the orthodox, subordinate, feminine role and propitiate men. We find her following this in her childhood in the jam-puff episode. The model for this is provided in Maggie's cousin Lucy, and Maggie

³⁰ Doyle, op.cit., p.58.

³¹ Foster, op.cit., p.205.

is constrained to imagine herself as a crowned queen in Lucy's place, but in Lucy's form. The other option is to rebel. As discussed in the second chapter of this study, Maggie's intelligence makes her the odd girl out, a maverick. She protests, as when she cuts off her hair or when she runs off to the gypsies, but only meets with social disapproval or disillusionment. The pattern of alternating between compliance and rebellion, neither providing ^{her} satisfactory ways to lead her life, continues throughout her life.

As Maggie moves towards adolescence, we find her pre-occupied with Thomas à Kempis's creed which emphasizes resignation and rejection of self-will. True:

She rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness, and fits even of anger and hatred towards her father and mother, who were so unlike what she would have them be - towards Tom, who checked her, and met her thought or feeling always by some thwarting difference - would flow out over her affections and and conscience like a lava stream, and frighten her with a sense that it was not difficult for her to become a demon. Then her brain would be busy with wild romances of a flight from home in search of something less sordid and dreary: 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. But, in the middle of her vision, her father would perhaps enter the room for the evening, and, surprised that she sat still without noticing him, would say complainingly, 'Come, am I to fetch my slippers myself?' The voice pierced through Maggie like a sword: there was another sadness besides her own, and she had been thinking of turning her back on it and forsaking it.

(Bk.4,Ch.3)

This realization of 'another sadness besides her own' and the sense of duty towards it turns her from Scott to Kempis. Kempis makes her think '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 the universe.' (Ibid) Kempis thus offers a 'spiritualized version of traditional female behaviour; Maggie's dedication to its tenets actually makes her more womanly, giving her face "a tender soft light".'³²

The narrator's disapproval of this, however, is clear:

From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even in 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.

(Ibid)

At this stage in Maggie's life reappears Philip Wakem. As a child, he had wanted her for a sister:

She sat on a low stool at nearly a right angle with the two boys, watching first one and then the other; and Philip, looking off his book once towards the fireplace, caught the pair of questioning dark eyes fixed upon him. He thought this sister of Tulliver's seemed a nice little thing, quite unlike her brother; he wished he had a little sister. What was it, he wondered, that made Maggie's dark eyes remind him of the stories about princesses being turned into animals?... I think it was that her eyes were full of

³² Foster, op.cit., p.206.

unsatisfied intelligence, and unsatisfied, beseeching affection.

(Bk.2,Ch.5)

Maggie, too, with her 'tenderness for deformed things,'(Ibid) responds because she finds him more sympathetic, because she finds him 'fonder of me than Tom is.'(Bk.2,Ch.6)

When Philip returns in her life, the Wakems and the Tullivers have been completely estranged. But that does not prevent them from coming together. When Philip protests that 'it is not right to sacrifice everything to other people's unreasonable feelings', (Bk.5, Ch.1) Maggie hesitates but then allows herself to be persuaded:

'I've been a great deal happier,' she said at last, timidly, 'since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn't have my own will. Our life is determined for us - and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do.'

'But I can't give up wishing,' said Philip, impatiently. 'It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?'

(Ibid)

In the next meeting with him, Maggie makes it clear that she tries to subdue her will because 'I was never satisfied with a little of anything. That is why it is better for me to do without earthly happiness altogether...' (Bk.5,Ch.3) She admits renunciation is not easy but hopes she shall have

'strength given me.'(Ibid) Philip then emphasizes the value of mental enlargement enumerating the distortions involved in this kind of resignation:

... no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite.

(Ibid)

As we have noted, the narrator does not approve of Maggie's life-denying renunciation of the self. Yet when Tom forcibly separates Maggie from Philip, the narrator seems to find it agreeable. Thus we see that even when Maggie cringes at Tom's brutal treatment of Philip and even when she does not feel that 'she was entirely wrong, and that Tom had been entirely right,' yet, 'how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip?' (Bk.5,Ch.5)

What then goes wrong with this relationship? First of all, we must note 'the sense of a deliverance from concealment.'(Ibid) The relationship comes in the path of duty and loyalty to the family and the 'concealment' that is necessitated is not morally sound. Then, this concealment is also not occasioned out of healthy emotions. While ostensibly Maggie seems to be recovering from the life-denying doctrines of renunciation, in reality her continued meeting with Philip

is only another form of self-sacrifice:

It was very cruel for Philip that he should be shrunk from, because of an unjustifiable vindictiveness towards his father - poor Philip, whom some people would shrink from only because he was deformed. The idea that he might become her lover, or that her meeting him could cause disapproval in that light had not occurred to her; and Philip saw the absence of this idea clearly enough - saw it with a certain pang...

(Bk.5,Ch.1)

Philip, therefore, from the very beginning knows what he wants, an adult, sexual, love from Maggie. But Maggie, even after some time, is only 'grateful for any love' and kisses Philip, when asked to do so, 'almost as simply and quietly as she had done when she was twelve years old.' (Bk.5,Ch.4) This kind of attitude in Maggie inevitably disqualifies Philip for a life-long and satisfying sexual partner for Maggie.

Besides, the rhetoric of the text makes it clear that if Maggie's renunciation is unhealthy, Philip's doctrine of self-gratification also can be equally bad. This becomes clear in the Chapter 5 of Book 4 when 'Philip's premature declaration of love is a demand he makes on Maggie because he cannot wait in patience for her possible growth in love or for possible right conditions for fulfilment. In itself this demand distances him as a faulted character who must learn selflessness.'³³ He redeems himself, however, when, unlike Tom, he, rejecting the family feud, defies his father with declaration of his love for Maggie and wins his consent for marriage. (Bk.6,Ch.8)

³³ Doyle, op.cit., p.71.

Stephen Guest comes into Maggie's life when she comes for a rest at her cousin, Lucy's place after leaving 'her situation, where she has been nearly two years, poor thing - ever since her father's death.' (Bk.6,Ch.1) He, too, presents to Maggie his doctrine of unrestricted self-gratification, but:

Stephen's doctrine is morally more perilous than Philip's. Maggie's involvement with him is associated with her earlier acts of rebellion, and commitment to him would mean the destruction of friendships and family loyalties. Even to marry him would be an offence against all pieties of womanhood, because it would be pure self-pleasing and a denial of the wider human sympathies on which such relationship must be founded.³⁴

Laurence Lerner thinks that Lucy and Stephen are engaged,³⁵ but in reality:

She and Stephen were in that stage of courtship which makes the most exquisite moment of youth, the freshest blossom - time of passion - when each is sure of the other's love, but no formal declaration has been made, and all is mutual divination, exalting the most trivial word, the slightest gesture, into thrills delicate and delicious as wafted jasmine scent. The explicitness of an engagement wears off this finest edge of susceptibility: it is jasmine gathered and presented in a large bouquet.

(Floss, Bk.6,Ch.1)

In Lucy, Stephen sees his ideal of womanhood and greets

³⁴ Foster, op.cit., p.206.

³⁵ Lerner, op.cit., p.160.

the news of Maggie's impending arrival with displeasure. In Lucy, 'this slim maiden of eighteen', he reckons, he has found:

quite the sort of wife a man would not be likely to repent of marrying? — a woman who was loving and thoughtful for other women, not giving them Judas-kisses with eyes askance on their welcome defects, but with real care and vision for their half-hidden pains and mortifications, with long ruminating enjoyment of little pleasures prepared for them?

(Bk.6,Ch.1)

The narrator at once clarifies that the above description may or may not fit Lucy. What is significant is the glimpse this provides in ^{Stephen's}~~Philip's~~ mind:

Perhaps the emphasis of his admiration did not fall precisely on this rarest quality in her — perhaps he approved his own choice of her chiefly because she did not strike him as a remarkable rarity. A man likes his wife to be pretty: well, Lucy was pretty, but not to a maddening extent. A man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate and not stupid; and Lucy had all these qualifications.

(Ibid, emphasis added)

The conservatism underlying Stephen's attitude is also underscored when later on he recommends to Maggie, albeit jokingly, 'the example of that most charming heroine, Miss Sophia Western, who had a great "respect for the understanding of men,"' (Bk.6,Ch.6) and asks 'to know what is the proper function of women, if it is not to make reasons for husbands to stay at home, and still stronger reasons for bachelors to go out.' (Ibid).

In the light of all this, no wonder it is difficult for

most readers to appreciate Maggie being charmed by Stephen—
 'We understand what happens to her, but we do not feel with
 her.'³⁶ Mary Ellen Doyle regrets that 'there simply is not
 enough physical presentation of Stephen to make us feel the
 force of Maggie's attraction and his functional contrast to
 Philip. We end up assuming that he must be compellingly
 handsome because Maggie is attracted so strongly, not because
 we are able to see with her eyes.'³⁷ But it is doubtful if
 more physical details would have helped, for whatever little
 we have only serves to distance us. Stephen Guest with his
 'diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure'
 and with 'a square forehead, short dark-brown hair standing
 erect, with a slight wave at the end, like a thick crop of
 corn, and a half-sarcastic glance from under his well-marked
 horizontal eyebrows' does not quite convince us as 'a rather
 striking man of five-and twenty.' (Bk.6, Ch.1) Joan Bennet
 rightly notes that 'to communicate the experience of "falling
 in love" when that experience includes the inexplicable
 delight given by the physical presence, the voice, gestures,
 mannerisms of the beloved, is far more difficult', for such
 descriptions 'often produce an opposite effect on the reader
 from that which they are intended to produce: they seem cal-
 culated to irritate rather than delight'; therefore, 'the

³⁶ Bennet, op.cit., p.120.

³⁷ Doyle, op.cit., p.77.

less the artist attempts to convey those physical characteristics in detail to the reader the better.'³⁸

Anyway, Stephen is presented as a person who has done serious reading, is capable of serious discussion, ~~can appreciate discussion~~, can appreciate Dr Kenn's spirituality and is capable of some irony at his own expense. (Bk.6, Chaps. 2, 3, 4, passim) And his vanity which generally overshadows these qualities begins to melt as he confronts Maggie. He quite confidently asserts to Lucy that 'she is not my type of women' because 'he was not fond of women who had any peculiarity of character,' he cannot help being fascinated - 'but here the peculiarity seemed really of a superior kind; and provided one is not obliged to marry such women, why, they certainly make a variety in social intercourse.' (Bk.6, Ch.2) What draws him to Maggie is her 'entire absence of self-consciousness' which makes her more bewitching for him than if 'Maggie had been the queen of coquettes.' (Ibid) Despite his professions to the contrary - 'Had he fallen in love with this surprising daughter of Mrs Tulliver at first sight? Certainly not. Such passions are never heard of in real life.' (Ibid) - he is soon head to heel in love with her. And Maggie, feeling 'lonely, cut off from Philip - the only person who had ever seemed to love her devotedly, as she had always longed to be loved' (Ibid), subconsciously starts responding to his love soon. The sensitive Philip, when he 're-enters', inevitably notices the change and does not know whether to withdraw 'that he might reflect coolly on

³⁸ Bennet, op.cit., pp.119-20.

these false images, till he had convinced himself of their nullity' or 'to stay as long as Stephen stayed - always to be present when Stephen was present with Maggie.' (Bk.6,Ch.7)

When Maggie herself becomes conscious of her love, she flies the scene in a bid to fight off her passions, ~~but in a bid to fight off her passions,~~ but in vain. Stephen follows her to her aunt's place and when the crucial moment comes:

It darted through Maggie's mind that here was a mode of releasing herself from outward struggle - to tell Stephen that her whole heart was Philip's. But her lips would not utter that, and she was silent.

(Bk.6,Ch.9)

Stephen's manly overtures have taught her 'the power of sexual passion, the less ethereal side of her incipient womanhood'³⁹ and she finds herself powerless before this new awakening. And as the claims of past and present duties, loyalties, and 'tacit engagements' assert, she cries out to Stephen:

Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly - that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned. Don't urge me; help me - help me, because I love you.

(Ibid)

Maggie, however, comes back to St Ogg's to Lucy's house.

³⁹ Foster, op.cit., p.206.

Lucy plans a boat-ride and contrives to absent herself and Stephen so that Philip and Maggie would be left alone. But Philip's 'state of hideous doubt mingled with wretched certainty' about Stephen-Maggie relationship disturbs his delicate constitution and he falls ill. Stephen comes instead and after some vacillation the two decide to go for the boat-ride. Maggie lets go of her conscious-self as soon as the excursion starts:

Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat, having the cushion and cloak arranged for her feet, and her parasol opened for her (which she had forgotten) - all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic - and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded.

(Bk.6,Ch.13)

In this 'dimly conscious' state she does only belatedly realize with a 'terrible alarm' that they have come far beyond the original destination. When she protests, Stephen confesses that he was also hardly conscious when it happened but then 'it came into my mind that we would go on.' (Ibid) And Maggie again lapses into her subconscious-self:

Maggie obeyed: there was an unspeakable charm in being told what to do, and having everything decided for her.... Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence: that dreamy gliding in the boat, which had lasted for four hours, and had brought some weariness and exhaustion - the recoil of her fatigued sensations from the inexplicable difficulty of getting out of the boat at this unknown distance from home, and walking

for long miles - all helped to bring her into more complete subjection to that mysterious charm which made a last parting from Stephen seem the death of all joy - which made the thought of wounding him like the first touch of the torturing iron before which resolution shrank. And then there was the present happiness of being with him, which was enough to absorb all her languid energy.

(Ibid)

Naturally, Stephen does not have the slightest inkling of what is to come when Maggie says 'we must part at once' (Bk.6,Ch.14) the next morning. This time she remains conscious and firm throughout:

I have suffered, and had no one to pity me; and now I have made others suffer. It would never leave me; it would embitter your love for me. I do care for Philip - in a different way: I remember all we said to each other; I know how he thought of me as the one promise of his life. He was given to me that I might make his lot less hard; and I have forsaken him. And Lucy - she has been deceived - she who trusted me more than any one. I cannot marry you: I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery. It is not the force that ought to rule us - this that we feel for each other; it would rend me away from all that my past life has made dear and holy to me. I can't set out on a fresh life, and forget that: I must go back to it, else I shall feel as if there were nothing firm beneath my feet.

(Ibid)

Thus we find her going back to her creed of renunciation:

We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or **for** another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only

choose whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us - for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard: it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go for ever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life.

(Ibid)

In childhood, Maggie had pushed Lucy into the pond and ran away to the gypsies and finding things different from her expectations had returned 'having in fact made only half the gesture.'⁴⁰ The elopement of her adult life follows a similar pattern. Does then she develop? R.H. Lee thinks she does- '... the development is from an unconscious acceptance to a conscious grasp and evaluation of what she is, and the forces that have made her what she is.'⁴¹ But the alterations between renunciation and temptation and then back to renunciation takes place again in the final chapter of the book when in answer to Stephen's pleading letter she almost writes 'Come!', and then recoils. George Eliot does not finally seem to make up her mind and answers the problem by removing the heroine from the scene altogether by means of a contrived flood which has made any number of readers feel cheated:

The flooded river has no symbolic or metaphorical value. It is only the dreamed-of perfect accident that gives us the opportunity for the dreamed-of heroic act - the act that shall vindicate us against a harshly misjudging world, bring emotional fulfilment and (in

⁴⁰ Lee, op.cit., p.149.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 40.

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.⁴²

If you have a river in a novel, a flood is always tempting; but by yielding to the temptation, George Eliot, instead of allowing Maggie to resolve the moral dilemma in which she found herself, and live by its consequences, took the easy way and substituted for a genuine resolution a cliché-ending from the stock of Victorian fiction.⁴³

In fact, one can go on quoting critics who have expressed similar views. That the book is flawed in the end, even George Eliot admitted. That the heroism offered Maggie is somewhat accidental, the new vision granted Tom at the end somewhat suspect, and the final drowning fortuitous, are also difficult to deny. But many critics have lately found it regrettable that, in the final analysis, Maggie remains the heroine of renunciation. One constant refrain is, why does George Eliot not allow Maggie the kind of choice she made in her own life? Barbara Hardy has met this charge very convincingly. 'The renunciation of Stephen,' she finds, 'to be a typical and successful instance of problem solving':

In her own case there is the breaking of a social, moral, and religious 'law'; in Maggie's case nothing

⁴² F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.60.

⁴³ Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (1954; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.227.

approaching law or contract. In her own case there are no human victims, but George Eliot's own freedom and isolation, and Lewes's already wrecked relationship with his unfaithful wife; in Maggie's case there are two human beings, Lucy and Philip, out^{of} whose painful deprivation would be taken her joy. The novel's apologia says, in effect: had human ties been involved, I would not ever have broken the faintest commitment; since there were none, I was prepared to break social laws and commandments.⁴⁴

The problems for the readers remain however. Maggie's reversal of elopement cannot save Lucy and Philip from the misery of knowing that they are not loved. And this makes it difficult for the reader to accept her sacrifice as worthwhile.⁴⁵ On this ground, Jane Eyre has often been preferred as the heroine of self-assertion and fulfilment. But for Charlotte Bronte the rule of right is absolute. The question "Who will be injured by what you do?" is irrelevant; but for George Eliot it is all important.⁴⁶

True, but why must George Eliot kill her heroine? Why is it that nothing is done narratively to suggest that a new home and fresh impressions are precisely what she needs to give new opportunity and vigour to a life that, at nineteen, should not be despaired of, or that a move, if only Maggie were capable of choice, would be a decisive step toward

⁴⁴ ed. Critical Essays(1970), op.cit., pp.50-1.

⁴⁵ Bennet, op.cit., p.127.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.122.

maturity'?⁴⁷ Could this 'psychological tragedy' 'have not 'ended' credibly only on a coach bound for some provincial school or home'?⁴⁸ The trouble with this view is that while objecting to the psychological aspect of the rhetoric, it resorts to non-psychological solutions. In psychological terms, Maggie's life is fulfilled and she dies having realized the dream of her life in the form of Tom's love:

This liebstod, the consummation of a union for which there is no place in the social order, is a deeper psychic challenge to the reader than the repudiated union with Stephen - a union which, though outside marriage, mimics parallel social forms. In the union of Maggie and Tom there is both the fullness of incestuous love, and a claim for a profound reconstitution of the self as split between the permitted potentialities of male and female.⁴⁹

Is the drowning of the heroine, however, in the ultimate analysis, a defeatist solution? In her childhood, Maggie wondered over the 'dreadful picture' of a supposed witch in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress:

That old woman in the water's a witch - they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned - and killed, you know - she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she is drowned?

(Bk.1, Ch.3)

⁴⁷ Doyle, op.cit., pp.84-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.86.

⁴⁹ Beer, op.cit., p.101.

What good, then, does Maggie's 'final rescue' by drowning do her?

A definitive answer to this question is difficult to offer. I personally incline to agree with Gillian Beer's view that in The Mill on the Floss 'the dark woman triumphs' if only by implication:

The narrative finally rejects the form of Bildungsroman, in which the growing ego of a young man comes to terms with the society in which it dwells and accepts both attrition and continuity. Maggie's Bildung takes her only to the point where she knows there is no place for her in her own community ...⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.98-9.

IV. THE CONFINES OF DOMESTICITY

The present chapter seeks to discuss the presentation of marital relationships in George Eliot's novels under discussion. 'Gestation, impregnation, domination and the avoidance of incest,' remarks Robin Fox, 'lie at the root of all social organization.'¹ For lawful gestation and impregnation, and for the avoidance of incest, the institution of marriage has come into existence in most societies. But the institution inevitably involves 'domination' also in which, most societies being patriarchal, women have been at the receiving end:

For the greater part of human history, women were getting on with their highly specialized task of bearing and rearing the children. It was the men who hunted the game, fought the enemies, and made the decisions. This is not to say that from her hearth the woman does not exercise enormous influence ... but the sheer physiological facts of existence make her role secondary to that of the male in decision-making process at any level higher than domestic.²

One can go on hunting reasons for this domestication of women and apportioning blame. There is, of course, the concept of honour. Paternity being a supposition as opposed to maternity which is a fact, woman must be segregated, confined and obliged to maintain her chastity so that man may be sure that his children are his. In economic terms, all this is necessary for the passing on of the private property to the

¹ Robin Fox, Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective (1967; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.31.

² Ibid, pp.31-2.

lawful heir. One can also, following Gregory Zilboorg, give women a more active role in their own subordination:

The most socially valued attributes of the male, Zilboorg argues, are a result of the natural selection imposed upon him by the female's original power to instinctively sense which mate was biologically fitter. This primal dominance arouses in man insecurity, jealousy, and hostility towards women....³

Be it as it may, the fact remains that at least in the times when George Eliot situated her novels, for women the state of marriage was almost synonymous with the confines of domesticity. Not only that, George Eliot herself, we have also noted earlier, 'is curiously judgmental towards those of her heroines who seek, as she did, to escape from the frustrations of domesticity and family responsibility.'⁴ This we see in the case of Armgart, the heroine of the eponymous dramatic poem, and Princess Halm-Eberstein in Daniel Deronda who seek autonomy through stage-careers and are made to lose their voice by way of punishment. Not that George Eliot takes exception to their careerism, but for her 'even the noblest creative impulse cannot validate betrayal of the most sacred female responsibilities.'⁵

At the same time, George Eliot vehemently reacts to the

³ Ashis Nandy, At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.33.

⁴ Shirley Foster, Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (London and Sydney: Croom-Helm, 1985), p.198.

⁵ Ibid, p.199.

fact that women have to curb their real selves to conform to the tastes of marriageable men. True, she does not find a viable alternative to matrimony. Rather, marriage is, in her novels, often 'a means of moral regeneration and emotional satisfaction.'⁶ But still she does not present marriage as an exactly blissful state. Of course, this applies to both men and women. But in women's case the disappointment is greater because for them it is the main occupation of their lives, the one point on which all their ambitions centre. The exploration of the marital state as representing the confines of domesticity is validated because despite her 'androgynous imagination' and preoccupation with human condition as such, George Eliot 'puts most of herself into her central female characters, using them as the focal point for her exploration of marital roles.'⁷ And for women, marriage means the final stamp on the domestication of their selves.

The problem can be approached however from a different angle. The circumloquacity of the Victorian age made it impossible to present the explicitly sexual facet of man-woman relationship, even in the context of marriage. One good reason for this no doubt was that in the Victorian period the woman was the 'Angel of the House' and 'angels didn't have bodies; she was too pure and sacred to share in

⁶ Ibid, p.196.

⁷ Ibid, p.197.

the disgusting lusts that afflicted men. Men and women were told this by sex "experts", by religious teachers and priests and by the popular literature and poetry of the day. It was an entirely new phenomenon in Western society because hitherto women were thought to be sexually insatiable. Certain needs and pressures in Victorian society created this new "angelic" woman who was sexually frigid.⁸ Thus we find that happy marriages are usually postscripted with the narrator taking command and dictating to us what we should know. This apparently made it possible to sustain the illusion of 'and they lived happily ever after' which no actual presentation through action would likely be able to create, and:

On the explicitly sexual side, the wedding at the end of the volume provides a neat method of avoiding the consummation. And we find that the shyness about speaking of this is, for most novelists, far greater than any that would afflict them in describing an illicit relationship. In this, the novelists seem to be following closely the practice of the earlier poets and dramatists. The paradoxical conclusion is that in the interests of morality and decency, sexual intercourse is usually excluded from literature when it is legitimate, moral, pure and loving.⁹

This was true of even an otherwise sexually outspoken book like Tom Jones. We can, therefore, appreciate Lawrence's

⁸ Karen Armstrong, The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's Creation of the Sex War in the West (1986; rpt. London: Pan Books, 1987), p.5.

⁹ A.O.J. Cockshut, Man & Woman: A Study of Love and the Novel, 1740-1940 (London: William Collins, 1977), p.22.

enterprise in presenting the sexual side of marriage in The Rainbow, a pioneering novel in this regard.

But what was true even of Fielding was only more so for George Eliot. For in her age it was only in the brothel and the mental hospital where 'would untrammelled sex have a right to (safely insularized) forms of reality, and only to clandestine, circumscribed, and coded types of discourse. Everywhere else, modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence.'¹⁰ In the Victorian age, 'Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule.'¹¹

Thus, while George Eliot's 'dramatization of the conflict between life-values and death-values - Eros and Thanatos - will appear to have a good deal in common with Lady Chatterley's Lover' and unlike Dickens in whose novels 'sex as an aspect of personal relation scarcely comes', 'George Eliot is plainly giving her actions some sexual substance in Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Daniel Deronda.' But she ends up emphasizing the overt domestic aspects of marriage:

Her domestic drama seems restrained when we compare her with Tolstoy, but restraint is not the same thing as

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, trans. from French, Robert Hurley (1976; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.4-5.

¹¹ Ibid, p.3.

omission, and if we confuse the two when discussing Middlemarch we are surely imprecise when we proffer the favourite words of praise like 'adult' and 'realistic'. I am not claiming sexual realism for George Eliot. D.H. Lawrence allows himself total explicitness and is moreover interested in aspects of sexual behaviour which do not concern Middlemarch in any way. George Eliot writes within a restricted convention of reticence, and is emphasizing sensibility rather than sexuality.¹²

What then George Eliot concentrates on is the tracing out of the constricting nature of the confines of domesticity, i.e. the marital state, if it is not accompanied by the 'mutual subjection of the soul between a man and woman.'¹³ And most often, 'Eliot's emphasis on seemingly trivial domestic details results in a potentially radical critique of patriarchal culture.'¹⁴ George Eliot explodes the view that sees marriage as a one-sided affair, emotionally, economically, intellectually, and sexually, with one party as provider and the other as provided, and finds nothing wrong with it. For George Eliot, marriage is 'a state of higher duties' (Middlemarch, Bk.1, Ch.4) for both men and women. It is not merely a private affair between two

¹² Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (1964; corrected rpt. London: University of London and The Athlone Press, 1971), p.110.

¹³ G.S. Haight, ed. The George Eliot Letters (London: Oxford University press, 1954), vol. iv, p.468.

¹⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.500.

individuals but has a wider significance in that 'in her novels, marriage is both a key to and a touchstone for modes of human behaviour.'¹⁵ Marriage as it were reformulates the entire context and tests the participants in a new situation which is not individual but based essentially and inevitably on interaction. Moreover, marriage in her novels is not merely the meeting ground for two individuals of different sex but a vital link which interconnects the various strands of society. The marital confines of domesticity have a provincial, if not cosmic, significance in the novels of George Eliot.

In the last chapter we noted that Hetty Sorrel's artistic life ends after Adam Bede has been cured of his hard self-righteousness. Hetty then leaves the stage to her double, Dinah Morris. The textual rhetoric quickly makes it explicit that the author intends to bring Adam and Dinah together through marriage and considers it to be the most desirable resolution for Adam Bede. But before this resolution is effected, Dinah, too, must be cured of her angelic demeanour which, though not negative in itself, is unhealthy because it makes her oblivious of her instinctive feminine self.

Dinah Morris is not presented as a rebel against

¹⁵ Foster, op.cit., p.193.

traditional womanliness. Rather, there is a lot of 'feminine delicacy' in her appearance. She strikes the stranger as a 'sweet woman'. Her eyebrows are 'perfectly horizontal and firmly pencilled'. There is sufficient charm in the 'mellow treble tones' of her voice. She has a face that makes 'one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals.' And the expression on her face, 'so simple, so candid, so gravely loving', gives her a saint-like aura. What distinguishes her from most average women, however, is the 'total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanour,' (Bk.1, Ch.2):

'And you never feel any embarrassment from the sense of your youth - that you are a lovely young woman on whom men's eyes are fixed?' he said aloud.

'No, I've no room for such feelings, and I don't believe the people ever take notice about that. I think, sir, when God makes His presence felt through us, we are like the burning bush...'

(Bk.1,Ch.8)

Hetty Sorrel, by contrast, is fully conscious that people like to look at her and distinguishes herself 'with quite a self-possessed, coquettish air, slyly conscious that no turn of her head was lost.' (Bk.1,Ch.7) The contrast between Hetty and Dinah is also established in that while Hetty regards children as nuisance and cannot understand how people can be fond of middle-aged persons, Dinah has an instinctive love for all. When Adam's father dies of drowning, Hetty remains totally unconcerned whereas Dinah at once sets out to comfort

the widow. Dinah Morris, in sum, is:

George Eliot's tribute to Feuerbach, the highest nature who sublimates her love of human beings through Methodism. Her sympathy, in the Spencerian formulas ... give her a great potential for adaptability which is realized through her material participation in reality when she marries the integrated individualist, Adam.¹⁶

Yet, as the above commentator notes, 'George Eliot goes beyond Feuerbach in her portrayal of Dinah and undermines the adaptational pattern in her relationship with Hetty.' For, 'the continual juxtaposition of her altruism in contrast with Hetty's egoism enforces as well a parallel between them in that both are alienated dreamers. If the primary function of the "Two Bed-Chambers" scene is to underline the difference between them, it is also true that both are looking for a world beyond that in which they find themselves.'¹⁷

What makes Dinah deficient is that she neglects the calls of her womanhood because she considers herself divinely called:

But my heart is not free to marry. That is good for other women, and it is a great and a blessed thing to be a wife and mother; but 'as God has distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every man, so let him walk.' God has called me to minister to others, not to have any joys

¹⁶ John Goode, "Adam Bede", in Barbara Hardy, ed. Critical Essays on George Eliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp.37-8.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.38-9.

or sorrows of my own, but to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with those that weep ... I desire to live and die without husband or children. I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own, it has pleased God to fill my heart so full with the wants and sufferings of his poor people.

(Bk.1,Ch.3)

This refrain continues even when she becomes aware of Adam's feelings towards her:

I know marriage is a holy state for those who are truly called to it, and have no other drawing; but from my childhood upwards I have been led towards another path; all my peace and my joy have come from having no life of my own, no wants, no wishes for myself, and living only in God and those of his creatures whose sorrows and joys he has given me to know.

(Bk.6, Ch.52)

The first unhealthy effects of this almost fanatical doctrine of renunciation manifest when she rebukes the adolescent Bessy Grange quite severely for wearing ear-rings:

Ah, tear off those follies! Cast them away from you, as if they were stinging adders. They are stinging you - they are poisoning your soul - they are dragging you down into a dark bottomless pit, where you will sink for ever, and for ever, and for ever, further away from light and God.

(Bk.1,Ch.2)

The result is that the child is seized with 'a great terror!'. Equally, her vague premonitions of trouble only leave Hetty bewildered and terrified. More than her good intentions and empathy, these scenes establish her 'higher nature' which

must learn the comprehension of the lower one .(Bk.1,Ch.15)

Like Princess Halm-Eberstein in Daniel Deronda, Dinah also thinks that every woman need not have the same set of motives. But the princess uses her wifely role and artistic genius for unwomanly ends. Therefore, she is punished. Dinah's belief, on the other hand, is not born out of ego or narcissism. She has therefore gently to be restored to womanhood as such.

The fault is diagnosed through the comments of many characters. Seth Bede, her frustrated lover, finds her 'too good and holy for any man, let alone me.'(Bk.1,Ch.3) And Mrs Poyser finds her obstinate who 'wonna be persuaded, and settle down like any other woman in her senses.'(Bk.1,Ch.6) When she goes to comfort Lisbeth Bede in her sorrow, her 'sweet treble voice' has its characteristic effect on the latter - 'Could it be her sister's spirit come back to her from the dead after all those years? She trembled and dared not look.'(Bk.1,Ch.10) It is a great relief for Lisbeth to find that Dinah has the hands of a working woman. Dinah addresses Lisbeth in her typical manner and leaves her overwhelmed:

Yes, dear friend, your affliction is great. It would be hardness of heart to say that your trouble was not heavy to bear. God didn't send me to make light of your sorrow, but to mourn with you, if you will let me...

(Ibid)

Possibly, 'it is not George Eliot's intention to burden

Dinah with self-conscious virtue'; in these utterances, however, there is 'a distasteful overcarefulness about Dinah's idiom. The consciousness of virtue, hard to distinguish from self-righteousness, that Dinah's speeches betray is an obstacle to sympathy...'¹⁸

That all is not lost in Dinah's case, however, is made clear soon when we are shown her blushing at the sight of the manly Adam:

Dinah, for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness; there was something in the dark penetrating glance of this strong man so different from the mildness and timidity of his brother Seth. A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it.

(Bk.1,Ch.11)

Lisbeth recognizes the latent womanliness in Dinah and when Seth protests that 'she'll never love any man as a husband', she tells him at once not to lose heart. For:

She's made out o' stuff with a finer grain than most o' the women; I can see that clear enough. But if she's better than they are in other things, I canna think she'll fall short of 'em in loving.

(Bk.1,Ch.12)

Lisbeth, however, can instinctively comprehend Adam as the better match for Dinah and even tells her so - 'But happen,

¹⁸ Joan Bennet, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art (1948; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.109.

thee'dst like a husband better as isna just the cut 'thy-sen: the runnin' brook isna athirst for th' rain. Adam 'ud ha' done for thee...' (Bk.6,Ch.51) And 'since Adam did not want to marry Dinah himself, Lisbeth felt peevish on that score' (Bk.1,Ch.14) at a quite early stage in the novel when even she herself has not really made up her mind on the question of Adam's marriage. Later also, when told by Adam that 'Dinah's not for marrying', she at once cries out - 'very like she's none for marr'ing, when them as she'd be willing t' marry wanna ax her.' (Bk.6,Ch.51)

However, it is not these 'natterings' of Lisbeth which catapult Adam and Dinah into love with each other. But they prepare the two as also the reader for the right response at the right moment. And that moment comes when Dinah and Adam find themselves together in their sympathy for the suffering Hetty.

After Hetty is transported, Dinah again prepares to go away from Hayslope. But now Adam is more active in his meetings with her and when Mrs Poyser criticizes Dinah for obstinacy, he at once jumps to her defence - 'Nay, I can't find fault with anything Dinah does. I believe her thoughts are better than our guesses, let 'em be what they may...' (Bk.6,Ch.49) Yet he is not actually conscious of his love for her. Rather, 'he felt a little vexed, for his brother's sake, and he could not help thinking regretfully how Dinah's, as Seth's wife, would have made their home as happy as it could be for them all...' (Bk.6,Ch.50) Unlike Lisbeth, he

cannot understand why she does not respond to Seth's love when 'anybody 'ud think he was just cut out for her.'(Ibid) The only explanation he can find is that 'she's cut out o' different stuff from most women,'(Ibid) a view that echoes Dinah's own.

Dinah, too, once again involuntarily reacts to Adam's 'deep, strong voice' in a way which affirms her femininity:

It was as if Dinah had put her hands unawares on a vibrating chord. She was shaken with an intense thrill, and for the instant felt nothing else; then she knew her cheeks were glowing, and dared not look round, but stood still...

(Ibid)

The only obstacle in their coming together is removed when Seth, reconciled to his lot, proclaims that he 'should be as thankful t' have her for a sister as thee wouldst t' have her for a daughter.'(Bk.6,Ch.51) Now it is for Lisbeth and Seth to make Adam conscious of his love, to impress upon him the necessity for action in the right direction.

This time Adam is internally more ready and therefore responds favourably when Lisbeth approaches him - "'But thee canstna be sure as the trembling means love?" said Adam anxiously.'(Ibid) When Lisbeth assures him, he is 'moved' and realizes for the first time that 'his love for her had grown out of that past' which involved Hetty.(Ibid) The only question for him now is, 'But Seth? Would the lad be hurt?', though subconsciously he has perceived that 'he had seemed

quite contented of late.' Seth assures him that he has not
 "felt thy trouble so little that I shouldna feel thy joy."
 (Ibid)

Now it is for Adam to rouse Dinah to consciousness and
 when he proclaims his love to her, Dinah cannot but admit
 that she, too, has felt likewise but with a rider:

Yes, Adam, my heart is drawn strongly towards you; and
 of my own will, if I had no clear showing to the
 contrary, I could find my happiness in being near you
 and ministering to you continually. I fear I should
 forget to rejoice and weep with others; nay, I fear I
 should forget the Divine presence, and seek no love
 but yours.

(Bk.6,Ch.52)

To this, Adam gives probably the only possible answer - 'who
 put this great love into our hearts? Can anything be holier
 than that?'(Ibid) He assures her that 'we can help one
 another in everything as is good. I'd never think o' putting
 myself between you and God, and saying you oughtn't to do
 this and you oughtn't to do that. You'd follow your conscience
 as much as you do now.'(Ibid) Dinah then admits that earlier
 too she had felt strongly drawn to Adam but she had suppres-
 sed her feelings because she did not want to be 'enslaved to
 an earthly affection.' Now, however, her mind is 'full of
 questionings' and she wants time to see light through dark-
 ness. Adam agrees gracefully giving the proof that he will
 'never be the man t' urge you against your conscience.'(Ibid)

When Dinah finally accepts his love as the 'Divine Will',

her soul being 'so knit to yours that it is but a divided life I live without you,' (Bk.6, Ch.54) however, the scene impresses as less convincing, more sudden. The narrator seems aware of the problem and has to intensify the effect through deliberate comments like - 'What a look of yearning love it was that the mild grey eyes turned on the strong dark-eyed man!', and - 'What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life...'
 (Ibid) As in the case of Maggie's love for Stephen in The Mill on the Floss, we understand what happens to Dinah, we do not feel with her.

Anyway, the marriage-bells ring soon afterwards and finally the Epilogue presents us with a fully domesticated Dinah Morris, happy with her husband and children, her vocation as preacher gone as the Wesleyan Conference has 'forbidden the women preaching'. The 'gentle' Seth alone protests against this discrimination. Adam finds it quite right because most women, not having 'Dinah's gift nor her spirit ... do more harm nor good with their preaching.'
 (Epilogue) But more significantly, Dinah herself does not betray any signs of discontent.

It has been difficult for most readers, however, to accept the marriage in question. To David Cecil, 'the marriage between Dinah and Adam, which provides the happy ending for Adam Bede, does not strike us as inevitable; indeed what we have learnt of Adam's taste in women leads us to think it very unlikely. But the moral purpose which directs the story demands that Adam and Dinah, the two

virtuous characters in the book, should be adequately rewarded for their virtue. And marrying them to each other seems the handiest reward in the circumstances. In order to achieve structural symmetry George Eliot has been forced to relax her vigilant grip on truth.¹⁹

Walter Allen puts his finger on other problems - 'The lack of feeling for sexual passion, indeed, this deliberate turning away from it, makes Adam Bede's marriage to Dinah at the end of the book difficult to accept. And here a further complication abtrudes: neither Adam nor Dinah quite convinces. The "good" characters set in contrast to Donni-thorne and Hetty, they are too good to be true.'²⁰

Adam, we have noted, is not a faultless character, too good to be true. That this is the author's intention is also quite clear in the text. But 'the descriptions of Dinah simply smother the human girl under ill-chosen rhetoric' because 'these descriptions, though sometimes laughable, betray no scrap of humour or irony in the narrator. They all appear in episodes where Dinah's acts or conversation are clearly meant to win the fullest approval and sympathy for her and not at all to point her limitations.'²¹ Before the

¹⁹ Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation (1934; rpt. Ludhiana: Kalyani, 1972), pp.246-7.

²⁰ The English Novel: A Short Critical History(1954; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp.222-3.

²¹ Mary Ellen Doyle, The Sympathetic Response: George Eliot's Fictional Rhetoric(London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1981), p.44.

prison-scene, she remains shadowy and even afterwards 'we are not allowed to see her outgrowing scruples about her right to accept his love.'²²

We know that the marriage of Adam and Dinah was a result of Lewes's suggestion. But the way she went about it, we can say, 'demonstrates the inherent conservatism underlying all her thinking about women.'²³ But while the domestication of Dinah Morris seems to win George Eliot's complete approval on the surface, the rhetoric of the novel clearly betrays her unease.

The Mill on the Floss is unconventional in that despite its plot involving courtship and romance, it does not have a proper hero and eschews marriage as the final resolution. There are virtually no young couples in the novel except for the peripheral Bob Jakin and his wife. But probably for this very reason the marital state is presented in this novel in the most mundane light, at a stage when no romance is left. On the one hand, we have Mr and Mrs Tulliver. On the other, the Dodson sisters and their husbands. Marriage is one of the most prominent spheres where the Tulliver outlook and the Dodson outlook is differentiated and established.

²² Ibid, p.47.

²³ Foster, op.cit., p.202.

In Mr and Mrs Tulliver we have a couple which goes through the daily chores of life without much mutual understanding. Mrs Tulliver prepares the best Holland sheets thinking, evidently without much feeling for her husband, that 'if you was to die to-morrow, Mr Tulliver, they're mangled beautiful, an' all ready...' Mr Tulliver, for his part, is not 'a susceptible man in his conjugal relation' and has 'the marital habit of not listening very closely.' (Bk.1, Ch.2) The proverbial pejorative references to each other's family is also there:

'But,' continued Mr Tulliver after a pause, 'what I'm a bit afraid on is, as Tom hasn't got the right sort o' brains for a smart fellow. I doubt he's a bit slowish. He takes after your family, Bessy.'

'Yes, that he does,' said Mrs Tulliver, accepting the last proposition entirely on its own merits; 'he's wonderful for liking a deal o' salt in his broth. That was my brother's way, and my father's before him.'

(Ibid)

Mrs Tulliver knows that 'Tulliver's hasty, and says odd things', (Bk.1, Ch.9) but does not show either understanding or the positive restraining influence which George Eliot has often presented as capable of. Rather, 'Mrs Tulliver had lived thirteen years with her husband, yet she retained in all the freshness of her early married life a facility of saying things which drove him in the opposite direction to the one she desired.' (Bk.1, Ch.8) She remains weak, neither a real Tulliver, nor a real Dodson and without any strong individuality of her own.

Whatever little understanding the couple shares collapses in the face of adversity. Mr Tulliver lies sick, dying. But Mrs Tulliver has no compassion in store. All she can think of is her linen and her china and her furniture - '... everything's going to be sold up ... to think as your father should ha' married me to bring me to this!' (Bk.3,Ch.2) She ignores Maggie's heartfelt remonstrances and is only subdued when rebuked by one of her own clans, Mrs Glegg:

You must bring your mind to your circumstances, Bessy, and not be thinking o' silver and chany; but whether you shall get so much as a flock-bed to lie on, and a blanket to cover you, and a stool to sit on...

(Bk.3,Ch.3)

The other Dodson sisters, however, have exercised greater control over their husbands except for Mrs Deane whose husband is a self-made man and retains his independence. But he is not fundamentally at variance with the Dodson ethic of thrift, caution and family loyalties. And his wife, too, 'was proud and "having" enough: she wouldn't let her husband stand still in the world for want of spurring.' (Bk.1,Ch.7)

Mr Deane and Mr Pullet along with Mr Tulliver like it when women are gone because 'they could carry on their serious talk without frivolous interruption.' (Ibid) But, in reality, except for Mrs Tulliver, the Dodson sisters are too dominating and clever to be left out of anything 'serious'. So much so that even Mrs Tulliver with her 'sighing sense that her husband would do as he liked, whatever sister Glegg said, or sister Pullet either', does nevertheless

bring in the subject of Tom's education in their front so that 'at least they would not be able to say, if the thing turned out ill, that Bessy had fallen in with her husband's folly without letting her own friends know a word about it.' (Ibid) When Mr Glegg lightheartedly sides with Mr Tulliver on Tom's education, he is instantly reprimanded by his wife - 'I pity your weakness, Mr Glegg. I say it's unbecoming to be making a joke when you see your own kin going headlong to ruin.' (Ibid) When Mr Tulliver flies off the handle at this, Mrs Glegg again scolds Mr Glegg as 'a husband as'll sit by and see me abused by them as 'ud never ha' had the chance if there hadn't been them in our family as married worse than they might ha' done.' (Ibid) In Mr Glegg we have 'a man with an affectionate disposition, who finds a wife to concur with his fundamental idea of life, easily comes to persuade himself that no other woman would have suited him so well, and does a little daily snapping and quarrelling without any sense of alienation.' He does have 'much wondering meditation on the peculiar constitution of the female mind as unfolded to him in his domestic life; and yet he thought Mrs Glegg's household ways a model for her sex.' (Bk.1, Ch.12) Mr Pullet, 'nervous about his investments' (Bk.1, Ch.9), is even more acquiescing than Mr Glegg. But it is the most Dodsonian Gleggs who also get the more prominent role in the Tullivers' lives.

The Tullivers and the Dodsons congregate again after Mr Tulliver becomes bankrupt and lies severely ill. Tom flares up at the cold aloofness of his Dodson aunts and asks them

that if they 'think of leaving any money to me and Maggie, wouldn't it be better to give it now, and pay the debt we're going to be sold up for...' (Bk.3, Ch.3) Mr Glegg, intent on 'drawing Tom out, rather than reflecting on the practicability of his proposal', applauds him and Mrs Pullet also seems to be agreeing. But Mrs Glegg reacts severely:

'Yes, Mr Glegg!' said that lady, with angry sarcasm. 'It's pleasant work for you to be giving my money away, as you've pretended to leave at my own disposal. And my money, as was my own father's gift, and not yours, Mr Glegg; and I've saved it, and added to it myself, and had more to put out almost every year, and it's to go and be sunk in other folks furniture, and encourage 'em in luxury and extravagance as they've no means of supporting; and I'm to alter my will, or have a codicil made and leave two or three hundred less behind me when I die - me as have allays done right and been careful, and the eldest o' the family; and my money's to go and be squandered on them as have had the same chance as me, only they've been wicked and wasteful. Sister Pullet, you may do as you like, and you may let your husband rob you back again o' the money he's given you, but that isn't my sperrit.'

(Ibid)

Meeting with such fiery opposition, both Mr Glegg and Mrs Pullet beat a nasty retreat leaving the Tullivers in the lurch.

True to her nature, Mrs Glegg becomes very cautious when Tom, a Dodson in effect, approaches for a loan to start a business of his own. But her interest is immediately aroused at the mention of the 'large interest' of ten or

twelve per cent. Once again it is the husband who has to bear the brunt of her anger - "Then why wasn't I let to know o' such things before, Mr Glegg?" said Mrs Glegg, turning to her husband, with a deep grating tone of reproach. "Haven't you allays told me as there was no getting more not five per cent?" (Bk.5,Ch.2) She again becomes doubtful as to the security of the investment and when Mr Glegg tells her that 'I shall perhaps start Tom here with a bit of a nest-egg - he'll pay me int'rest, you know...', she rejoins that they should not count on her. (Ibid) But as Mr Glegg decides to do without her and she realizes that the investment is safe, she suddenly becomes the sweetest of aunts, scolding once again the poor husband in the process:

'And now, I suppose, you'll go all the other way, Mr Glegg,' said Mrs G., 'and want to shut me out o' my own nephey's business. I never said I wouldn't put money into it - I don't say as it shall be twenty pounds, though you're so ready to say it for me - but he'll see some day as his aunt's in the right not to risk the money she's saved for him till it's proved as it won't be lost.'

(Ibid)

It is apparent that George Eliot's satirical pen does not spare either the Tullivers or the Dodsons. The Tullivers are represented chiefly by Mr Tulliver who lacks self-control. He is restless, overpassionate, impulsive and stubborn. The Dodsons represent an excess of inflexibility and self-interestedness. While Mr Tulliver generally acts first, thinks afterwards, the Dodsons' overcaution makes them wary of any action at all. Like Forster's Sawston-people and Monteriano-people,

or the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, the Tullivers and the Dodsons represent two completely different ways of life. And, like Forster, George Eliot makes it clear that neither of the two is perfect. Mr Tulliver needs something of the Dodson prudence and restraint, the Dodsons something of his warmth. But unlike Forster who emphasized connection, George Eliot does not seem to avow any such ideology. It does not appear that 'one part Tulliver plus one part Dodson, mixed well, will result in wholeness or maturity. In fact the two ways will not readily mix, for each seems entire and all of a piece.'²⁴ That the two ways do not go together and neither of the two models offered her is perfect is one of the fundamental tragedies of Maggie's life. The one marriage between the two clans is essentially a failure. If anything, the interactions necessitated by it only throw the basic characteristics of the Tullivers and the Dodsons into greater relief and haunt Tom and Maggie, the central characters, throughout their life.

Of all George Eliot's novels, marriage has probably its most pivotal role in Middlemarch. The novel concludes with the marriage of Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw. But,

²⁴ Jerome Thale, "The Sociology of Dodsons and Tullivers" (1959), in R.P. Draper, ed. George Eliot: The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner, A Casebook (1977; rpt. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), p.135.

therefore, marriage does not only have the function of 'rounding off' the novel here, of ending the book neatly.²⁵ Rather, marriages take place as soon as the novel gets under way and become the most crucial factor in shaping up the lives of the two protagonists, Lydgate and Dorothea.

The respective marriages of the two central characters are flanked by a number of other marital relationships and the rhetoric of the text enforces regular comparisons and contrasts between all of them guiding the reader constantly in the formulation of his responses. Three conjugal relationships of the kind, though presented aptly at a low key, are those between Fred Vincy and Mary Garth, between Mr and Mrs Bulstrode, and between Caleb Garth and his wife.

In Mary Garth George Eliot presents some of the most ennobling qualities a woman can embody. Physically, Mary does not impress the onlookers as an angel but rather 'had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low'(Bk.1, Ch.12), and for this reason Fred's mother does not approve of her as her prospective daughter-in-law. She also has a sharp temper - 'Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability, or, not feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent...'(Ibid) She does not have the commonplace virtues, "that perfect good sense and good principle

²⁵ E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel(1927; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp.61-3.

... with a flavour of resignation'(Ibid), which the society recommends in a woman. But she has something better and for this she wins her creator's full approval:

For honesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue: she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when she was in good mood she had humour enough in her to laugh at herself.

(Ibid)

Both Dorothea and Rosamond, by contrast, create illusions and the narcissist Rosamond can never laugh at herself.

Mary Garth's honesty is vindicated in the face of one of the greatest temptations an ordinary mortal can countenance. Mammon himself as it were comes in the form of dying Featherstone to lead her astray. Featherstone in his last moments wants to temper his will. Being bed-ridden and invalid, he cannot do this on his own. So he seeks Mary's help. The bribe he offers for this, Mary knows well, can succour her father from his monetary difficulties. Moreover, she fully understands that the tempering of the will is intentioned to favour her suitor, Fred Vincy, and does feel bad that her act would rob Fred of his great chance. But never for a moment do all these considerations waver her moral principles and she remains firm that 'I will not let the close of your/Featherstone's life soil the beginning of mine.'(Bk.3,Ch.33)

Mary Garth is courted by Fred Vincy. Farebrother also

loves her but never spells his love out. He matches her selflessness when he takes Fred's message to her. But Mary is conscious of his feelings and even considers him as a possible husband. But then, like George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*, she decides in favour of the man who may deserve her less but decidedly needs her more.

Mary Garth is her father's daughter and would not have Fred as husband because 'My father would think it a disgrace to me if I accepted a man who got into debt, and would not work!' (Bk. 2, Ch. 14) True to her mettle, she remains firm despite all Fred's pleadings:

'I think that is quite wicked, Mary. If you love me, you ought to promise to marry me.'

'On the contrary, I think it would be wicked in me to marry you even if I did love you.'

'You mean, just as I am, without any means of maintaining a wife. Of course: I am but three-and twenty.'

'In that last point you will alter. But I am not so sure of any other alteration. My father says an idle man ought not to exist, much less be married.'

(Ibid)

Fred does feel remorse for having got the Garths into trouble, but there is more of self-pity than self-reproach in his grief. And Mary criticizes him for this without any mincing of words:

'What does it matter whether I forgive you?' said Mary passionately. 'Would that make it any better for my mother to lose the money she had been earning by lessons for four years, that she might send Alfred to Mr Hanmer's? Should you think all that pleasant enough if I forgive you?'

(Bk. 3, Ch. 25)

When Fred suggests that 'any man may be unfortunate', that even her father, though 'there is not a better man in the world', has 'got into trouble', Mary is almost beyond herself with anger:

'How dare you make any comparison between my father and you, Fred?' said Mary, in a deep tone of indignation. 'He never got into trouble by thinking of his own idle pleasures, but because he was always thinking of the work he was doing for other people. And he has fared hard, and worked hard to make good everybody's loss.'

(Ibid)

But Mary's indignation is laced with 'something like what a mother feels at the imagined sobs or cries of her naughty truant child, which may lose itself and get harm.' (Ibid) And so 'the dull despairing glance' of Fred does melt her heart. Fred, too, rises to the occasion - 'I will try to be anything you like, Mary, if you will say that you love me.' (Ibid) Mary at once makes clear what he must do to deserve her love - 'I should be ashamed to say I loved a man who must always be hanging on others, and reckoning on what they would do for him.' (Ibid) After this Fred is made to promise that he would not speak on the subject again.

Both Fred Vincy and Rosamond are self-centred egoists, only Fred is educable. What redeems the wayward Fred is his intense love for Mary. His love makes him reform his life through a process of conscious struggle. He resumes his abandoned studies and takes his degree. But he must consult

Mary before he chooses a vocation for himself. This he does through Farebrother so that she may not find it presumptuous. Mary is really moved to hear that 'Fred will not take any course which would lessen the chance that you would consent to be his wife; but with that prospect he will try his best at anything you approve.' (Bk.5, Ch.52) She confesses to Farebrother that she has 'too strong a feeling for Fred to give him up for any one else. I should never be quite happy if I thought he was unhappy for the loss of me.' (Ibid) But she will only marry him when she sees him 'worthy of every one's respect.' (Ibid)

Fred never meets Dorothea and has little active part in Lydgate's story either except for once when he stops the doctor's gambling just when he himself has been tempted to start again. Nevertheless, his life and marriage presents a foil to those of both the protagonists. Unlike Dorothea and Lydgate who both fail on a large scale of potential, he succeeds, albeit on a smaller one:

In a society of commonplace and egoistic values and aspirations, ordinary good people can achieve ordinary happiness (Fred Vincy); but uncommon people are liable to destruction or grave failure, either from their own 'spots of commonness' reflecting society's (Lydgate) or from the commonness of the society that overpowers them (Dorothea). In such a society, the individual's best hope for giving and achieving happiness lies in a realistic altruism toward the nearest other persons; attempts to do good on a public scale are likely to fail.

²⁶ Doyle, op.cit., p.120.

'By shaping Fred's life and values, Mary demonstrates the elevating effects of a woman's influence even as she reminds us of the deceit practiced by the women who function as a power behind the scenes.'²⁷ Married to Mary Garth, Fred does not become rich, but he attains something more important, a happy home to which he comes with 'a pleasant vision beforehand of the bright hearth in wainscoated parlour ... sorry for other men who could not have Mary for their wife...'
(Finale)

If Mary Garth presents a contrast to Rosamond in making a happy home, so does her mother. Mrs Garth knows well her husband's 'incapacity of minding his own interests, and met the consequences cheerfully', never complaining to 'her feminine neighbours concerning Mr Garth's want of prudence and the sums he might have had if he had been like other men.'
(Bk.3,Ch.24) Caleb Garth, like his forerunner Adam Bede, is always more interested in job-satisfaction than money. Sincere, trusting and affectionate, he puts his name on one of Fred Vincy's bills of debt worth a hundred and sixty pounds at a time when his own business is passing through a lean phase. Fred's inability to pay the bill on time means great hardship for him. His wife, however, firmly stands by him sacrificing her hard-earned savings without a moment's hesitation even though her husband had not consulted her on the issue beforehand. Caleb reproaches himself for being in the wrong, but his wife knows it is not the time for accusa-

²⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, op.cit., p.513.

tion but for sympathetic understanding:

'I was a fool, Susan.'

'That you were,' said the wife, nodding and smiling. 'But I should not have gone to publish it in the market place. Why should you keep such things from me? It is just so with your buttons; you let them burst off without telling me, and go out with your wristband hanging. If I had only known I might have been ready with some better plan.'

(Bk.3,Ch.24)

Sad as she is to have lost the money she had saved through hard work for her son's education, she faces the calamity with a smile on her face:

It is very well that I had scraped it together; and it is you who will have to suffer, for you must give up your bad habits. Some men take to drinking, and you have taken to working without pay. You must indulge a little less in that...

(Ibid)

It is this support and sympathy, at a moment when all present and future plans have been upset, which sustains the self-respecting Caleb Garth and enables him to reject having anything to do with Bulstrode's tainted money without a second thought.

In Nicholas Bulstrode we have a man to whom 'To point out other people's errors was a duty...' (Bk.2,Ch.13) But for all his self-righteousness, he does not shrink from selling inferior dyes to Mr Vincy which rot his silk. A settler at Middlemarch and married to Mr Vincy's sister, he has a shady past. Through the vagabond, Joshua Rigg, who had

assisted him in his deceit, the story of his unscrupulous past surfaces and Bulstrode finds himself lonely and wretched, afraid even to confide in his wife. Mrs Bulstrode senses that 'some calamity had befallen her husband, of which she was to be kept in ignorance' and that 'the misfortune was something more than the loss of money.' (Bk.8, Ch.74) She approaches various people for enlightenment. It is her brother who finally tells her the whole truth and she is left aghast and utterly miserable:

She locked herself in her room. She needed time to get used to her maimed consciousness, her poor lopped life, before she could walk steadily to the place allotted her. A new searching light had fallen on her husband's character, and she could not judge him leniently: the twenty years in which she had believed in him and venerated him by virtue of his concealments came back with particulars that made them seem an odious deceit. He had married her with that bad past life hidden behind him and she had no faith left to protest his innocence of the worst that was imputed to him....

(Ibid)

Nevertheless, she finds she cannot desert him, for:

this imperfectly-taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her - now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him.... But she needed time to gather up her strength; she needed to sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her life.

(Ibid)

She decides to 'espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I

will mourn and not reproach' and goes down to her husband.

Meanwhile, Bulstrode had thought that it would be easier that she knew the truth from others than that he should have to confess. But nevertheless when he knows that this has happened, he awaits the result in anguish, full of trepidation that 'he should never see his wife's face with affection in it again.' (Ibid) Mrs Bulstrodes attains tragic grandeur as she approaches her husband:

It was eight o'clock in the evening before the door opened and his wife entered. He dared not look up at her. He sat with his eyes bent down, and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller - he seemed so withered and shrunken. A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave, and putting one hand on his which rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder, she said, solemnly but kindly -

'Look up, Nicholas.'

He raised his eyes with a little start and looked at her half amazed for a moment: her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling about her mouth, all said, 'I know'; and her hands and eyes rested gently on him. He burst out crying and they cried together, she sitting at his side. They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, 'How much is only slander and false suspicion?' and he did not say, 'I am innocent.'

(Ibid)

These pictures of conjugal harmony even in the face of adversities contrast sharply with the marital life of Lydgate and Rosamond which presents a picture of discord. Tertius Lydgate comes to Middlemarch with the ambition 'to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world.' (Bk.2,Ch.14) He wants to serve people with his up-to-date medical knowledge but meets with a generally insensitive society utterly incapable of appreciating his novel ways and superior knowledge. It is as much this as the faults in his own personality which precipitate the crisis in his life. But there is a greater emphasis on the lack of harmony in his marriage in that we are given to understand that he could have overcome all his troubles if only he had not married Rosamond.

The novel establishes Lydgate as an essentially tragic character, noble but dangerously proud and a victim of his masculine prejudices:

Lydgate's spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices which, in spite of noble intention and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons.

(Bk.2,Ch.15)

As soon as the novel has established ^{him} as a sympathetic character, we are told about his folly over an actress who shocked him by blandly accepting that she killed her husband deliberately because she did not love him. We learn that even this

experience of extreme nature has failed to alter his conventional perception of women as tender, delicate beings who stand in need of protection from men. He does not understand that a woman can be capable of meeting men on equal grounds and is therefore unable to appreciate Dorothea's personality the first time he meets her:

'She is a good creature - that fine girl - but a little too earnest,' he thought. 'It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste.'

(Bk.1,Ch.10)

It takes a complete reversal of fortunes, socially, financially and matrimonially, before he can appreciate Dorothea as a woman with 'a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary' who has 'a fountain of friendship towards men - a man can make a friend of her.'(Bk.8,Ch.76)

Meanwhile, finding Dorothea 'ignorant', he turns to the educated Rosamond who '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.'(Bk.3, Ch.27) Her education at Mrs Lemon's, giving emphasis 'even to extras, such getting in and out of a carriage', has made her 'the accomplished female'(Bk.1,Ch.11), accomplished enough to catch hold of a husband for herself, but utterly unworthy for the life after it.

True, Rosamond being 'by nature an actress of parts ... even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own.' (Bk.1,Ch.12) But she never does really hide anything of her character or present an exterior different from her real-self. It is well before the marriage that she sums up her character to Lydgate quite explicitly - 'I never give up anything that I choose to do.' (Bk.4,Ch.35) But Lydgate, blinded by his prejudices, cannot quite comprehend. For Rosamond has '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 happen to be less exquisite.' (Bk.1,Ch.12) Lydgate, however, believes that she corresponds to his ideal of 'that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys.' (Bk.2,Ch.16) He finds her to be 'grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music.' (Bk.1,Ch.11)

Rosamond, for her part, dissatisfied with her present lot, feels that 'she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer.' (Ibid) Her society has 'presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people...' (Bk.2,Ch.16) To Rosamond, Lydgate is the fulfil-

ment of all her dreams - '... being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which offered vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank; a man of talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave...'
 (Bk.1,Ch.12) That she and Lydgate would never make a good match becomes clear as we are told that Rosamond 'cared about what were considered refinements, and not about the money that was to pay for them.' (Ibid) This is precisely Lydgate's fault also and therefore financial trouble in their married life is a foregone conclusion.

True, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, Rosamond with her dreams of fulfilment through marriage and as a victim of miseducation presents a foil to Dorothea.²⁸ Inevitably, therefore, she wrings some pity out of her creator:

Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing....

(Bk.2,Ch.16)

Think no unfair evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide. She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light - they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please.

(Bk.3,Ch.27)

Her father has failed her in that he did not take 'the only

²⁸ op.cit., pp.514-7.



decisive line of conduct in relation to his daughter's engagement - namely, to inquire thoroughly into Lydgate's circumstances, declare his own inability to furnish money, and forbid alike either a speedy marriage or an engagement which must be too lengthy.' (Bk.4, Ch.36) Lydgate also, if only because of his noble intentions, fails to take Rosamond into confidence beforehand and expects her to accede to his prearranged plans without demur - 'You must learn to take my judgment on questions you don't understand.' (Bk.6, Ch.58) For these reasons, Rosamond may be regarded as 'Eliot's most significant study of female rebellion.'²⁹

But for all this, the perspective established by Mrs Garth's and Mrs Bulstrode's sympathy towards their husbands in the moment of crisis does not absolve Rosamond of her guilt. True, she does not harbour any 'wicked plots' as such, but while her husband does confide in her, if only afterwards, she wrecks all his plans maintaining complete secrecy and not out of any noble intentions but because of her constitutional self-centredness. She cannot escape responsibility for her remorseless egoism, particularly when she kills her child on its altar. Lydgate warns her well in advance of the dangers of a horse-ride in her advance stage of pregnancy. Commonsense alone should make the gravity of the warning clear, but it also has the additional weight of coming from a professional doctor. But Rosamond wilfully defies her husband and suffers a miscarriage.

²⁹ Ibid, p.514.

Rosamond resembles Hetty Sorrel in her attitude to life. As such, though one does pity her for her delusions, it is difficult to sympathize with her. But 'one of the ironies of novel in fact is that the false angel triumphs in her deviousness ... she is neither punished by real adversity nor reborn into true womanliness':

Curiously enough, it is with Rosamond that Eliot reveals her most realistic attitude towards women in this novel ... Dorothea becomes an angel-wife; even the down-to-earth Mary Garth is a model of uprightness and dependability. Rosamond, the antithesis of female virtue, is allowed to survive, and though her unshakable egocentricity is made more despicable because juxtaposed with the image of ideal womanhood, it is not questioned by them.³⁰

Rosamond succeeds in forcing Lydgate out of Middlemarch and converting him into a mundane daily-practitioner. Her counterparts in Chekhov's short story "The Grasshopper" and in Somerset Maugham's novel The Painted Veil come to have some understanding for their doctor husbands if only after their death. But Rosamond survives Lydgate as 'his basil plant', marries an 'elderly and wealthy physician', and continues 'to be mild in her temper, inflexible in her judgment, disposed to admonish her husband, and able to frustrate him by stratagem.' (Finale)

³⁰ Foster, op.cit., p.210.

In Dorothea Brooke's story we have echoes of the 'woman question'. Rosamond's story seems to corroborate that part of George Eliot's belief that women as yet do not deserve a better lot than the one men give them. But Dorothea's story clearly illustrates that at least some women do deserve a better lot. In the Prelude, despite her slightly ironical presentation of the original Saint Theresa of Avila, George Eliot clearly wants us to sympathize with the later born Therasas 'who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action', whose 'ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse.' The Prelude also establishes Dorothea as a cygnet in the pond, as one 'whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed.'

It is the 'woman question' which looms large in the Prelude. Soon afterwards, however, Lydgate's story is taken up and developed on an equal scale with Dorothea's. Then there are so many sub-plots not entirely connected with the woman's lot. As such, many have regarded the Prelude as a mistake because the novel fails to answer the expectations raised therein. While it is difficult to refute this view totally, it is also difficult to endorse fully Laurence Lerner's opinion that 'anxious to portray Dorothea's lot as belonging "to the common lot of human life"', George Eliot

does not develop the woman question.³¹ First of all, we have noted in Chapter 2 of this study, the very authenticity she displays in her portrayal of Lydgate as also of other men has a bearing on the 'woman question' as it embodies a challenge to her contemporary role-model for women writers. Within the text also, it is made perfectly clear that while marriage is incidental for Lydgate as also Casaubon, it is the centre of all the ambitions and aspirations of women like Dorothea and Rosamond:

Middlemarch issues out of this debate, though it is not confined to it. It is about work and the right to work, about the need to discover a vocation which will satisfy the whole self and to be educated to undertake it. This theme is explored principally in Lydgate and in Dorothea and the novel nicely judges their different problems. Middlemarch is about false education, both of women and men. In its narrative order it puts taxonomy under pressure as it first classifies, and then discovers more and more subtle and vital differences. The novel is most particularly concerned with the problems of women excluded from work and from fulfilling activity, sequestered by their education.³²

If then, however, the 'woman question' is put in the wider human perspective as such, it only gives a more balanced picture of the situation than a constant harping on the woman's lot would ever give. George Eliot unequivocally

³¹ "Dorothea and the Theresa-Complex" (1967) in Patrick Swinden, ed. George Eliot: Middlemarch, A Casebook (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), p.244.

- ³² Gillian Beer, George Eliot (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1986), pp.161-2.

asserts, therefore, that she should not be expected to concern herself with 'always Dorothea' as if only Dorothea's viewpoint mattered. (Bk.3, Ch.29)

Dorothea's viewpoint does matter however, not exclusively but very importantly nonetheless. The very opening book of the novel establishes this. We see her with her dignified beauty 'thrown into relief by poor dress' and we learn that she is 'clever'. Her sister, Celia, on the other hand, has 'more common-sense' and also 'a shade of coquetry'. (Bk.1, Ch.1) That Dorothea is not meant to be a perfect specimen is made clear by the narrator at once:

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, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it.

(Ibid)

Lydgate thus is not all that mistaken when he regards her 'a little too earnest'. We are told that it is quite probable that '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, or even might lead her at last to refuse all offers.' (Ibid) She presents a challenge to a society which expects women to have 'weak opinions' which too are not to be 'acted on'. (Ibid) As such, 'the rural opinion ... was generally in favour of Celia.' (Ibid)

Dorothea is 'open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring.' (Ibid) But sexually she is too innocent. Thus she cannot comprehend that Sir James Chettam always agrees with whatever she says because he is in love with her and has a childish view of marriage - '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.' (Ibid) She also suppresses her instinctive feminine feelings a la Dinah Morris and can only like gems as 'fragments of heaven.' (Ibid) The narrator makes it plain that Celia who needs no such spiritual justification for wearing jewels presents a more healthy outlook on the matter.

But while Dorothea's follies are not glossed over, they are clearly presented as defects of a virtue - 'Better to be foolish and fine-minded than worldly-wise and light-minded. Dorothea, at least, is that rare egoist who has some humility. So if her idealism leads her to misery, she will be pitiable rather than contemptible.'³³ Nothing that is ever said actually goes to her discredit. The narrator fully succeeds in distancing her erroneous notions without damaging her character in the least.

This becomes clear during the courtship of Casaubon. The rhetoric during the courtship wins 'informed sympathy for their mutual error, with the greater share of the sympathy prepared for Dorothea.'³⁴ To Dorothea, Casaubon

³³ Doyle, op.cit., p.139.

³⁴ Ibid.

resembles Milton, Locke and Hooker, a man with a great soul 'who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed.' (Bk.1,Ch.2) In him she finds 'a listener who understood her at once, who could assure her of his own agreement with that view when duly tempered with wise conformity...' (Bk.1,Ch.3) His old age does not bother her, for she wishes to 'have a husband who was above me in judgment and in all knowledge.' The question of love seems immaterial to her as she is to accept him because 'I admire and honour him more than any man I ever saw.' (Bk.1,Ch.4)

Naturally, she is more than ready to respond to his proposal of marriage 'with a sort of reverential gratitude.' (Bk.1,Ch.3) 'Not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse' (Ibid), she in Casaubon finds 'a winged messenger [who] had suddenly stood beside her path and held out his hand towards her!' 'Struggling in the bands of narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led nowhither...', she looks up to marriage with Casaubon with great hopes for the future:

'I should learn everything then,' she said to herself, still walking quickly along the bridle road through the wood. 'It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing

trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know what to do, when I get older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here - now - in England. I don't feel sure about doing good in any way now: everything seems like going on a mission to a people whose language I don't know; - unless it were building good cottages - there can be no doubt about that. Oh, I hope I should be able to get the people well housed in Lowick! I will draw plenty of plans while I have time.'

(Ibid)

Dorothea is beyond herself in joy when the actual proposal comes through a letter and the narrator has to take over to introduce the note of caution:

How could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love? Her whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte about to enter on a higher grade of initiation. She was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and pressure of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the world's habits.

(Bk.1,Ch.5)

Dorothea does to Casaubon what Lydgate does to Rosamond - seeing qualities that are not there. For 'signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable' (Bk.1,Ch.3), says George Eliot, echoing Nietzsche.³⁵ As such, 'Dorothea's faith supplied all that Mr Casaubon's

³⁵ K.M. Newton, George Eliot: Romantic Humanist, A Study of the Philosophical Structure of her Novels(London: Macmillan, 1981), p.144.

words seemed to leave unsaid: what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put into it, and even his bad grammar is sublime.'(Bk.1,Ch.5)

Dorothea's exalted feelings are continually juxtaposed to those of Casaubon's. Casaubon is not looking for an intellectual mate. Rather, as he tells Dorothea, feeling the disadvantage of loneliness, he is in 'need of that cheerful companionship with which the presence of youth can lighten or vary the serious toils of maturity.'(Ibid) This point he also makes in his pedantic letter of proposal. He wants to be 'your husband and the earthly guardian of your welfare' such that her 'early bloom of youth', 'elevation of thought' and 'capability of devotedness' would 'supply aid in graver labours' and, more importantly, 'cast a charm over vacant hours'.(Bk.1,Ch.5) In sum, he hopes to find in her a secretary-cum-entertainer, not one who will ever discuss with him on equal footing. In Dorothea he claims to have found 'those qualities which I have ever regarded as the characteristic excellences of womanhood', viz. 'capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection.'(Bk.1,Ch.6) At this stage, she really obliges him by not asking 'if he were good enough for her, but merely asking herself anxiously how she could be good enough for Mr Casaubon.'(Bk.1,Ch.5)

Almost nobody except the over-tolerant Mr Cadwallader finds the idea of this marriage pleasant. Mr Brooke considers

it as one of the foibles of the feminine mind and washes his hand of the matter. 'There was something funereal in the whole affair', meditates Celia (Bk.1,Ch.5) and we agree despite all her limited egoism and superficial commonsense. Nor do we incline to disagree with Sir James Chettam, though he speaks with the bitterness of a 'disappointed rival', when he finds Casaubon to be 'no better than a mummy.' (Bk.1,Ch.6) To Mrs Cadwallader, marriage to this 'Lowick Cicero' (Ibid) who 'dreams footnotes' and whose blood is 'all semicolons and perentheses' is as good as going to nunnery. (Bk.1,Ch.7) And Will Ladislaw believes that 'she must be an unpleasant girl, since she was going to marry Casaubon' (Bk.1,Ch.9) and that 'there could be no sort of passion in a girl who would marry Casaubon.' (Ibid) His acrimony only increases as he subconsciously falls in love with her. He begins to find it 'too intolerable that Dorothea should be worshipping this husband' (Bk.2,Ch.21) and starts considering the marriage as 'the most horrible of virgin sacrifices.' (Bk.4,Ch.37) He is disgusted that 'this dried up pedant ... having first got this adorable young creature to marry him' should be 'passing his honeymoon away from her, groping after mouldy futilities.' (Bk.2,Ch.21)

These disparaging external references, however, are soon superceded by a vivid presentation of Casaubon's own inner conflicts. First of all, we learn that 'the hindrances which courtship occasioned to the progress of his great work - the Key to all Mythologies - naturally made him look forward the more eagerly to the happy termination of courtship' and therefore 'he concluded that the poets had much

exaggerated the force of masculine passion.(Bk.1,Ch.7) The result is that:

... in truth, as the day fixed for his marriage came nearer, Mr Casaubon did not find his spirits rising; nor did the contemplation of that matrimonial garden-scene, where, as all experience showed, the path was to be bordered with flowers, prove persistently more enchanting to him than the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand. He did not confess to himself, still less could he have breathed to another, his surprise that though he had won a lovely and noble-hearted girl he had not won delight, - which he had also regarded as an object to be found by search.

(Bk.1,Ch.10)

Not confident of his grand project, 'without seeming nearer to the goal', he is naturally apprehensive of being found out and worse still 'his was that worst loneliness which would shrink from sympathy.'(Ibid)

The marriage of Dorothea and Casaubon is doomed from the start because, like Rosamond and Lydgate, both of them have radically opposed expectations from the conjugal life. Yearning for something 'by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent', Dorothea seeks to marry Casaubon because 'after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas.'(Ibid) Casaubon, on the other hand, wants '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 labour with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the

solace of female tendence for his declining years.'(Bk.1,Ch.7)

Misunderstanding starts with the very plan for honeymoon when Casaubon tells her that he wants 'to make the utmost use of my time during our stay in Rome, and I should feel more at liberty if you had a companion.' This seems quite disagreeable to Dorothea - 'The words "I should feel more at liberty" grated on Dorothea. For the first time in speaking to Mr Casaubon she coloured from annoyance.'(Bk.1,Ch.10) With such an ominous start, we are not really surprised to find Dorothea sobbing on her honeymoon - 'Rome becomes for Dorothea the symbol of culture as it is represented by her husband.'³⁶ For Rome presents a 'vast wreck of ambitious ideas', a 'masquerade of ages, in which her own life seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes.'(Bk.2,Ch.20) Not that Mr Casaubon has changed but:

The fact is unalterable, that a fellow-mortal with whose nature you are acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits of a few imaginative weeks called courtship, may, when seen in the continuity of married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear altogether the same.
(Ibid)

Moreover:

... no man was more incapable of flashy make-believe than Mr Casaubon: he was as genuine a character as any ruminating animal, and he had not actively assisted in creating any illusions about himself. How was it that

³⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, op.cit., p.503.

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 ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither?

(Ibid)

George Eliot with her acid-irony manages to invoke pity for both Dorothea and Casaubon - 'But was not Mr Casaubon just as learned as before? Had his forms of expression changed, or his sentiments become less laudable? O waywardness of womanhood!' (Ibid)

The marriage, probably never consummated, lacks singularly in tenderness and affection:

These characteristics, fixed and unchangeable as bone in Mr Casaubon, might have remained longer unfelt by Dorothea if she had been encouraged to pour forth her girlish and womanly feeling - if he would have held her hands between his and listened with the delight of tenderness and understanding to all the little histories which made up her experience, and would have given her the same sort of intimacy in return, so that the past life of each could be included in their mutual knowledge and affection ...

(Ibid)

As it is, Dorothea now realizes that 'With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to sunlight.' (Ibid) She nevertheless seeks to salvage whatever is possible and asks Casaubon to 'begin to write the book which will make your

vast knowledge useful to the world', offering her help for the project.(Ibid) But this only irritates Casaubon.

At the moment of the greatest crisis in her heroine's life, however, George Eliot shows her stroke of genius by refusing to make Casaubon ridiculous, much less villanous. What she wants from her readers is rather sympathy for the tortured soul of this failed man. Both Dorothea and Casaubon are presented as equally 'blind' to each other's 'inward troubles', and we can feel Casaubon's agitation as he contemplates on his 'young bride, who, instead of observing his abundant pen scratches and amplitude of paper with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference.'(Ibid)

The sympathy for Casaubon only increases as Will Ladislaw spells out to Dorothea the various shortcomings of Casaubon's methodology confirming thereby Dorothea's own instinctive doubts about her husband's potential. As such, much as we dislike his harsh treatment of Dorothea, especially when she pleads that Ladislaw be restored the inheritance that his grandmother was deprived of because of her rebellion against the family tradition and when the codicil to his will is revealed, we always respond with sympathy to his fears that Dorothea 'judged' him.(Bk.4,Ch.42)

It is one of the greatest triumphs of the novel that our sympathy for the one never offsets our sympathy for the other and we feel touched at the one tender moment of

genuine affection which the couple achieves. This occurs when burdened with the knowledge of his illness which can kill him any time, he rebukes Dorothea severely. Angry and bitter, she nevertheless worries about him and for once Casaubon responds with equal feeling:

'Dorothea!' he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone. 'Were you waiting for me?'

'Yes, I did not like to disturb you.'

'Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not extend your life by watching.'

When the kind quite melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together.

(Ibid)

In the face of certain death, Casaubon finally admits that he cannot finish his Key to all Mythologies. He now wants Dorothea to work on it after his death. Dorothea's heart sinks and she begs for time before she commits herself. After much inward struggle, she prepares to say yes to him as her refusal 'would be crushing that bruised heart.' (Bk. 5, Ch. 48) Having brought her heroine on the verge of martyrdom, however, George Eliot saves her by contriving the death of Casaubon before Dorothea can make the fatal promise. She apparently cares too much for her heroine to finally make her fate tragic, a feeling which does not operate in case of Lydgate. Casaubon's death for Dorothea becomes the Victorian substitute of divorce.

Casaubon by adding a codicil to his will which forbids Dorothea the inheritance of his wealth in case she marries Will Ladislaw brings the focus of the story to his cousin once removed. In order not to make things seem sudden, rushed or contrived, George Eliot presents vividly Ladislaw's emerging love for Dorothea during her honeymoon itself: 'Why was he making any fuss about Mrs Casaubon? And yet he felt as if something had happened to him with regard to her.' (Bk.2,Ch.19) He cannot tolerate his painter-friend Naumann's light-hearted references to her and declares to Dorothea - 'You are a poem - and that is to be the best part of a poet - what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods.' (Bk.2,Ch.22) It would however be highly improper in the context of Victorian ethics if Dorothea responded to his overtures while her husband was alive. Subconsciously, nevertheless, she does contrast her husband with Will favouring the latter:

She longed for work which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain, and now it appeared that she was to live more and more in a virtual tomb, where there was the apparatus of a ghastly labour producing what would never see the light. To-day she had stood at the door of the tomb and seen Will Ladislaw receding into the distant world of warm activity and fellowship - turning his face towards her as he went.

(Bk.5,Ch.48)

Casaubon's codicil defeats its own purpose when it elicits from Dorothea a response as complex as Maggie's attitude to Philip Wakem. Maggie for all her misery at the

forced separation from Philip also finds a sense of relief in her at the moment. Dorothea for all her shock at her dead husband's jealousy does not find the idea of Ladislaw as a lover unpleasant:

... it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said or did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw.
(Bk.5, Ch.50)

Almost every critic of Middlemarch has commented on Will Ladislaw's suitability or otherwise as a mate for Dorothea. Joan Bennet objects that he should be condemned as a dilettante merely because in his early twenties he cannot choose a career and settle down to it.³⁷ Gilbert and Gubar defend him on feminist grounds as one 'mythically linked with female power and female inspiration ... feminine because he is an outsider in his society', one whose dispossession 'reveals most strikingly his feminine strength for survival, as well as his matrilineal geneology.' And, therefore, they argue that 'in his romance with Dorothea Eliot substitute the equality of a brother/sister model for the hierarchical inadequacy of father/daughter relationship.'³⁸

It has, however, been difficult for most critics to accept Will Ladislaw and Dorothea herself is seen as a faulted character in her relationship with him - '... if

³⁷ op.cit., p.176.

³⁸ op.cit., p.529.

he had not been Dorothea's lover, he would have been widely praised as a portrait of a dilettante, drawn with sympathy well laced with irony. But he is Dorothea's lover, and in this we can see both the cause and partial justification for the way critics have treated him.³⁹ While giving various reasons for their dislike of Will, critics have by and large endorsed F.R. Leavis's celebrated comments:

George Eliot's valuation of Will Ladislaw, in short, is Dorothea's, just as Will's of Dorothea is George Eliot's. Dorothea, to put it another way, is a product of George Eliot's own 'soul hunger' - another day-dream ideal self. This persistence, in the midst of so much that is so other, of an unreduced enclave of the old immaturity is disconcerting in the extreme. We have an alternation between the poised impersonal insight of a finely tempered wisdom and something like the emotional, confusion and self-importance of adolescence.⁴⁰

It is difficult to refute that George Eliot's love for Dorothea does not let her make her heroine as consistent a tragic figure as Lydgate. Thus despite being a parallel to Lydgate's story, Dorothea's story becomes ambivalent in its rhetoric:

It is also clear that she will eventually marry Will Ladislaw. Because all events in Dorothea's story have so far suggested that she is parallel to Lydgate in being an uncommon person tragically or seriously diminished in an unsatisfactory marriage, the reader

³⁹ Lerner, op.cit., p.242.

⁴⁰ The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.92.

has, at this point, a reasonable expectation that her new marriage will be clearly treated as a second, even more pitiable error and source of dissatisfaction for her. Or, if it is to be a happy, mainly satisfying affair to Dorothea's perception, then she must be seen as finally diminished and deceived, which also would be pathetic if not tragic. But if the reader too is to be happy and satisfied for her, then Dorothea is no longer parallel to Lydgate but to Fred Vincy; her role has been changed - a switch that no rhetoric can justify or make acceptable. The fact is that all three interpretations pertain to some extent, and the result is rhetorical chaos and the loss of any sense of tragedy in Dorothea's story.⁴¹

The trouble, the commentator notes, lies in Will Ladislaw's portrayal:

The source of the trouble is the rhetorically flawed characterization of Will and hence of Dorothea as his lover.... As an individual, is Will an amusing dilettante and romantic, or another idealized soul, unjustly depreciated by a crass society? If the former, does he mature enough to warrant his success in love and marriage? Critics may decide, but the novel never does.⁴²

Will Ladislaw, says W.J. Harvey, 'is perhaps the clearest case of a character who crumples under the weight of the symbolic value with which he is laden.'⁴³ The Plutonic presentation of Casaubon emphasizes gloom, darkness, decay and claustrophobia. The Orphic Will by contrast presents

⁴¹ Doyle, op.cit., p.143.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The Art of George Eliot (1961; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.185.

sunlight, the open air, spiritual refreshment - '... the mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in the wall of her prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air...' (Bk.4, Ch.37) But 'while the gloomy and claustrophobic images clustering about Casaubon blend with and reinforce everything else we know about him, the opposing light images assigned to Will assert a meaning which is discontinuous with the rest of his character. Will, in so far as he is realized as a human being, is simply not strong enough to bear the values which Dorothea - and George Eliot - find in him. Naturalism and symbolism here contradict and cancel each other out.'⁴⁴

Before the death of Casaubon, Will is definitely presented as a dilettante and ridiculed:

Genius, he held, is necessarily intolerant of fetters: on the one hand it must have the utmost play for its spontaneity; on the other, it may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only placing itself in an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime chances.

(Bk.1, Ch.10)

His painter-friend in Rome calls him 'dilettantish and amateurish' (Bk.2, Ch.19), one whose 'walk must be belles-lettres' (Bk.2, Ch.22) At home we have Mr Brooke's deflating patronage and inane praises. The more Brooke compares him to great poets and politicians, the more ludicrous he seems; in this he closely resembles Casaubon. It must be admitted,

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.186.

however, that while Casaubon's ironic presentation is unequivocal, in the case of Ladislaw it is difficult to say whether the irony is meant to negate his potentials or only suggests that he needs more realistic circumstances. And as soon as he thinks of Dorothea as 'a creature worthy to be perfectly loved', the narrator steps in to assure us that 'his own feelings at that moment were perfect, for we mortals have our divine moments, when love is satisfied in the completeness of the beloved object.' (Bk.4, Ch.37)

Dorothea becomes his anchor in life. For the first time he decides to stick to a career as the editor of Mr Brooke's newspaper, Pioneer. When Dorothea expresses her fear that it means 'a sacrifice of higher prospects' for him, he replies suitably:

Perhaps; but I have always been blamed for thinking of prospects, and not settling to anything. And here is something offered to me. If you would not like me to accept it, I will give it up. Otherwise I would rather stay in this part of the country than go away. I belong to nobody anywhere else.

(Ibid)

When Dorothea tells him that even if Mr Casaubon dislikes him, it is not proper for him to be ungrateful to the man who has financially supported him all these years, he readily accepts his mistake - 'You teach me better.' (Ibid) The first time Dorothea finds him alone with Rosamond, he feels 'mortified' (Bk.5, Ch.43) and we approve of him when he wants to go away from Middlemarch after hearing of Casaubon's codicil. Under Dorothea's influence his romantic ardour

gets social expression and from a dreamy rebel who feels that "genius" cannot but be "intolerant of fetters" (Bk.1,Ch.10), he ends up as a public man devoted to social good:

And you care that justice should be done to every one. I am so glad. When we were in Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the rest of the world.

(Bk.6,Ch.54)

However, while Dorothea longs to see the "receptive" Will and feels immensely sad when he comes to say goodbye, she is not yet conscious of her love for him:

She did not know then that it was Love who had come to her briefly as in a dream before awaking, 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. She only felt that there was something irrevocably amiss and lost in her lot, and her thoughts about the future were the more readily shapen into resolve. Ardent souls, ready to construct their coming lives, are apt to commit themselves to the fulfilment of their own visions.

(Bk.6,Ch.55)

A crisis is needed to make her conscious of her love. This comes when expressing faith in Lydgate, she goes to his house to deliver a cheque that would relieve him of his financial troubles and is shocked to find Rosamond and Will clasping each other's arms.

Will's flirtation with Rosamond is, of course, somewhat mitigated by the fact that it occurs after he has convinced

himself that 'according to Mr Casaubon's arrangement marriage to him, Will Ladislaw, would mean that she consented to be penniless. That was not what he could wish for even in his secret heart, or even if she had been ready to meet such hard contrast for his sake.' (Bk.6,Ch.62) Dorothea's sudden appearance on the scene of flirtation has the final cathartic effect in Will's life and while making clear to Rosamond that she means nothing to him, he laments:

I had no hope before - not much - of anything better to come. But I had one certainty - that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done about me, she believed in me. - That's gone! She'll never again think me anything but a paltry pretence - too nice to take heaven except upon flattering conditions, and yet selling myself for any devil's change by the sly. She'll think of me as an incarnate insult to her...

(Bk.8,Ch.78)

The episode proves a blessing in disguise for Dorothea too. For the first time she moans, 'Oh, I did love him!', and feels wretched as to why had Will not stayed among the crowd of whom she asked nothing.' (Ibid) Dorothea rises to great heights when she goes back to Rosamond after the incident to plead Lydgate's case. And in Dorothea's angelic presence, for once:

Rosamond, taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own - hurried along in a new movement which gave all things some new, awful, undefined aspect - could find no words, but involuntarily she put her lips to Dorothea's forehead which was very near her, and then for a minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck.

(Bk.8,Ch.81)

Rosamond tells Dorothea that if Will cares for any woman, it is Dorothea and that he has been very miserable because 'you could never think well of him again.' (Ibid) Tragedy in Dorothea's case is averted once more and Will and Dorothea come together:

While he was speaking there came a vivid flash of lightning which lit each of them up for the other - and the light seemed to be the terror of a hopeless love. Dorothea darted instantaneously from the window; 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, while the thunder gave a tremendous crack and roll above them, and the rain began to pour down. Then they turned their faces towards each other, with the memory of his last words in them, and they did not loose each other's hands.

(Bk.8,Ch.83)

The theme of rescue into love, one which Middlemarch shares with novels like A Room with a View and Lady Chatterley's Lover, is accomplished. But the problem remains, what with the childlike naivete of the scene just quoted. Barbara Hardy has diagnosed the problem succinctly:

The rescue into love ... involves some social diagnosis of personal failures in feeling and relationship. It makes a symbolic equation of social and sexual energy in ways which hold both terms in equal tension. The virile rescuer can be a vivid symbol of social revolution; the decadent society can be seen as a cause of individual sterility; the failure of love can be explored causally - in the condensed causality of symbolism - and generalized. Such symbolism is condensed: it is not necessarily true

that reactionaries are sexually impotent, and in these novels their impotence functions as metaphor. But this is more than rhetoric. There is some literal truth in relating the capacity for loving humanity, and although the sexually impotent may be capable of love, the novelist can use both kinds of impotence and energy as mutual reinforcements. Unfortunately, Middlemarch does not make this reinforcement in a sufficiently complete fashion. The rescue and its implications are blurred and softened by an inadequate rescuer.⁴⁵

The Finale also leaves some doubts about the ultimate value of the rescue. We are once again told that a new Theresa or a new Antigone cannot have the same heroic opportunities. Then are we to regard Dorothea's second marriage as tragic or at least pathetic? Hardly. For Dorothea does not have any 'dreams of being praised above other women, feeling that there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better' and is quite content that 'she should give wifely help' to her husband. Yet some uncertainty over her domestication remains:

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. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done...

(Finale)

A Victorian woman with Victorian prospects, Dorothea,

⁴⁵ Appropriate Form, pp.110-11.

unlike Maggie, is allowed to live but without any grand achievements. In the end, then, a compromise in that, as the epigraph to Chapter 46 says, 'Since we cannot get what we like, let us like what we can get'? While noting that Dorothea 'represents her creator's most considered vindication of the ultimate sanctity of matrimony', Shirley Foster complains that 'Eliot leaves us with no very strong sense of protest.'⁴⁶ An alternate view is possible however and is enunciated by Gilbert and Gubar:

While it is true that her Dorothea's life is absorbed in another's and that she must be satisfied not with great work but with an 'incalculably diffusive' influence (Finale), her marriage is still the most subversive act available to her within the context defined by the author, since it is the only act prohibited by the stipulations of the dead man, and by her family and friends as well. Dorothea utters Lucy Snowe's words, 'My heart will break'(Chap.83); while not renouncing Lucy's need for male approval, she does extricate herself from an entanglement with the male teacher and chooses instead a student for her second husband.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ op.cit., pp.221-2.

⁴⁷ op.cit., p.530.

V. CONCLUSION

U.C. Knoepflmacher in one of his most well known papers on George Eliot regrets that the criticism of the novelist has been 'singularly one-sided':

Critics have either concentrated on a close scrutiny of George Eliot's art by fastening their attention on 'form' and thus ignored or failed to exploit the ideological purposes which shape the formal features of her novels; or, conversely, aware of George Eliot's centrality as a Victorian thinker, they have reconstructed her ideology in the light of Darwin, Huxley, Comte, Mill, Spencer, Lewes, Hennel, Strauss, or Feuerbach.¹

It would, no doubt, be desirable and most fruitful if the discussion on the ideology and the discussion on the rhetoric of George Eliot's novels could proceed simultaneously. But as the work of most commentators shows, one of the two inevitably eludes the critic, and this only enhances one's respect and admiration for the great synthesizing prowess of the novelist. The present study also cannot claim to be an exception on this score. While the rhetoric and structure of the novels under consideration, viz. Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch, has been taken into account now and then, the emphasis has always fallen on the sexual ideology of George Eliot.

Even after the best and the closest possible scrutiny,

¹ "George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism" (1964) in George R. Creeger, ed. George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth-Century Views Series (1970; rpt. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p.79.

which the present study does not claim to be, it seems difficult to formulate generalizations about George Eliot's art:

The phrase 'George Eliot' signifies nothing more than the insertion of certain specific ideological determinations - Evangelical Christianity, rural organicism, incipient feminism, petty-bourgeois moralism - into a hegemonic ideological formation which is partly supported, partly embarrassed by their presence. This contradictory unity of ideological structures provides the productive matrix of her fiction; yet the ideology of her text is not, of course, reducible to it.²

George Eliot often seems to struggle after a synthesis of the apparently irreconcilable opposites. We find her reconciling 'the two main streams of the nineteenth-century mind - its two kinds of one-sidedness - the Benthamite, which stands outside and tests all received opinions, and the Coleridgean, which tries from within to discover what is true to them.'³ Like most of the leading luminaries of her age, she hungers after a reconciliation 'between the Static and Dynamic principles, between Order and Progress, Tradition and Enlightenment, the heart and the head.'⁴ Yet for all her attempts at synthesis and reconciliation, her art seems to be characterized by a tension, a pervasive and ever-continuing conflict.

This tension or conflict is often taken for and some-

² Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (1975; rpt. London: Verso, 1986), p.113.

³ Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies (1949; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.205-6.

⁴ Ibid, p.207.

times does indeed lead the author into ambivalences. Both the rhetoric and the ideology of the novels seems willy-nilly to be determined by this tension. This manifests especially in the case of her sexual ideology which does 'both reinforce the drive to individual emancipation and ratify the "feminine" values (compassion, tolerance, passive resignation) called upon to forestall it.'⁵ Which leads to the lately oft-repeated regrets that George Eliot is no rebel or iconoclast.

Yet, as our study has shown, George Eliot is not strictly orthodox either. Most of her novels are deliberately set in the past and therefore that period of the nineteenth-century when the 'war' between sexes was at its peak is excluded. Yet in the very process of the struggle for social acceptance, her protagonists, particularly the female ones, manage to destabilize the predominant role-models, the prevailing ideologies.

George Eliot wanted to meet men on the level of equality if not superiority, and yet had to hide behind a male pseudonym. If this was because of her personal life, the same never applied to her consort, George Henry Lewes. In her novels also, equality or superiority is not determined by gender in the first instance. But then the society intervenes through its institutions and organizations in which women only have peripheral or secondary participation. Hetty Sorrel, Maggie Tulliver, Rosamond Vincy, and Dorothea Brooke, all suffer

⁵ Eagleton, op.cit., p.112.

in their different ways on this count and this manifests in their relationships with their male counterparts. The result is that even with the best possible intentions on the part of the author as also the characters, men and women fail to interact on equal terms and even the happiest union has a touch of pathos about it, of, to borrow Basil Willey's excellent phrase, wings being dabbled in the mud.⁶

George Eliot, of course, never puts all the blame on the society. The role-models are social-constructs. But this awareness does not let her reduce her characters into types - all men behaving in one way, all women in another. She deliberately chooses not to make the fate of her characters inevitable, something which irritates David Cecil.⁷ It is part of her moral design that out of certain options a character has to choose. And George Eliot makes it clear that no two people are likely to make the same choice, or if they do, it is not for the same reasons, something which lies at the root of most of the failed interactions between sexes. Be it the relationship of Adam Bede and Hetty, or Hetty and Arthur Donnithorne, or Rosamond and Lydgate, or Dorothea and Casaubon, everyone of these points in the same direction.

The author of the realist-fiction refuses to bargain the harsh realities of social existence for a fantasy of

⁶ op.cit., p.250.

⁷ Early-Victorian Novelists (1934; rpt. Ludhiana: Kalyani, 1972), pp.246-7.

individual self-assertion. Interaction and interconnectedness being the cornerstones of social existence, she takes both sides of coin into account. Thus she identifies 'the immutable social laws to which Romantic individualism, if it is to avoid both ethical anarchy and social disruption, must conform.'⁸ But, at the same time, she also shows that the failure to conform or to integrate represents maladjustment not only of the individual but also of the society.

We, of course, do not find her creating even tentative new role-models. In the earliest Adam Bede, she seems wholly satisfied with a conventional solution, though the rhetoric of the text betrays unease. In Maggie's case, she ultimately eschews the debate by rescuing the heroine from either conformity or rebellion through death by drowning. In Dorothea's case, the resolution through marriage suggests ambivalence on the part of the author. But the reader in each case does, and particularly in the case of The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch is also made to, wince at the tragic waste of great potentials, at the inadequacy of the resolution achieved. What appears like defeat or compromise thus itself becomes an eloquent comment on the desirability of the continuance of the status quo.

⁸ Eagleton, *op.cit.*, p.111.

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