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GEORGE ELIOT: FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S VOCATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to determine George Eliot's concepts of women's opportunities for self-dedication, as demonstrated in the novels, and to show how these concepts are modified by contemporary feminist issues.

Chapter one attempts to define feminism in its various phases. George Eliot usually supported those feminist issues which called for a reform of the existing system. She was especially concerned in the novels with the lady as a unique product of nineteenth century industrialization. A man's wife was considered a purely ornamental creature, an index of his success in the new middle classes. The housework was done by cheap domestic labor, and intelligent women were forced to look outside the home for objects of self-dedication. The question "What am I to do with myself?" is an increasingly important concern for Victorian women, and for George Eliot's heroines.

George Eliot feels that men and women are basically unequal, in that woman has the greater emotional capacity, while man has a greater reasoning ability. Chapter two deals with the Positivist philosophy as a source of the marital ideal which George Eliot would promote for women.
The Positivist ideal of woman's role is one in which woman is the moral standard of the family and community. In this George Eliot concurs. She also agrees with John Stuart Mill, however, in recognizing that the Victorian reality is a far cry from the Positivist ideal.

Chapter three is an examination of the early novels as proposing marriage as the solution to woman's ardent nature. Her first novel, Adam Bede, comes close to embodying a Positivist ideal in the character of Dinah. In The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot is concerned with depicting the rise of the middle-class lady, and the narrowing and closing of her function in society. In Felix Holt, George Eliot uses the character of Mrs. Transome to expose the Victorian concept of the perfect lady for the horror that it really was. Middlemarch is the final novel in which George Eliot affirms the marriage ideal.

Daniel Deronda is treated in chapter four as a departure from George Eliot's previous ideals for women. Gwendolen Harleth is not fit for marriage, and is forced into it by economic and social pressure. Her fortunate release from the marriage is an individual's fate, and does not soften George Eliot's critique of the society that has produced the major characters of the novel. Marriage as an existing social institution is strongly criticized, if not condemned.
The Victorian era of the nineteenth century never could decide what its image was to be, and so constantly fluctuated between ideals of other ages. The process of the age has been described as a ceaseless dialectic. George Eliot was a significant feature of the self-consciousness of the Victorians, being both product and observer of the age. Her role was to pick the age apart, attempting to explain the era's great web of relationships of men, institutions, and society. The age must have been a stimulating one for an observer such as she, for perspectives must have been constantly shifting, as these relationships were being redefined. Her associates were debating—and writing about—the great issues of the day, and some saw their ideas become facts of the later nineteenth century. As aware as George Eliot must have been of the rapidly changing status of women in society, her writings apparently ignore the issue. The expanding possibilities for what a woman could or could not do, and the debates over the 'capacity' of women are not directly treated in her novels. This is not to say that she was unaware of the issues, nor that she disapproved of the feminist position. While on the one hand she seems a prude, her extra-marital union with George Henry Lewes reveals some of the most radical ideas about the sanctity of marriage in the nineteenth century.
George Eliot's marital situation evidently led to some confusions about her stand on feminism at the time. Gordon Haight notes that many of the radicals of the time were misled by her "open defiance of the marriage convention," and tried to enlist her aid in their causes. They were invariably rebuffed. Her biographers, from her husband John Walter Cross down to Gordon Haight in 1968, have assumed that she was a conservative on the matter of the rights of women, and that her liaison with Lewes was an accident outside her rational views. These biographers are usually working from her letters, and from various associates' recollections. The letters are at least semi-public expressions of her views. The ones which were to feminist leaders such as Barbara Bodichon could potentially be used as evidence of her support, as testimonials of a sort. Thomas Pinney notes that only in her anonymous essays did George Eliot feel that she could write without using her name and peculiar status in society to weight the issue one way or the other.

In his edition of her essays, he finds at least an awareness of the issues of women's rights. He indicates that he would find a strong strain of sympathy for the feminist causes.

There is then some question about her 'sympathy' for the cause of feminism, due to an evident reluctance to express herself in a way that would use her name. She
was quite aware of her powers as a successful woman author, and as someone criticized for her extra-marital union. In addition, a careful reader of the letters finds her sensitive to the limitations of the letter as expressive of her views:

Some little phrase or allusion is misinterpreted, and on this false basis a great fabric of misconception is reared, which even explanatory conversations will not remove. Life is too precious to be spent in this weaving and unweaving of false impressions, and it is better to live quietly on under some degree of misrepresentation... (Letters, II, p. 254)

Evidently a consideration of her views on women and their roles in society must go beyond these refusals to aid public causes. Her 'public expressions' in the letters must be considered together with the milieu in which they circulated, to determine more precisely what she thought about women's roles. Such a background is preliminary to a study of her treatment in the novels of women and their roles in society.

The novels at first reading seem to reiterate the thesis that woman's place is in the home—married. The pattern is set by the Methodist preacher, Dinah, in the first novel, Adam Bede. She comes closer than the later heroines to being an independent woman, dedicated to a cause outside the home and family. By marrying Adam Bede, she throws over her vocation. Dinah apparently quite irrationally gives in to her emotions in marrying him. George Eliot quite neatly solves the potential conflict.
between marriage and career by closing the possibility of her preaching after her marriage. The Methodist Conference decree forbidding women to preach comes at an early point in her marriage, thus blurring the issue of her function in the outside world. Seth Bede is allowed to grumble against the decree in the epilogue, and Adam to defend the rule, but Dinah maintains a circumspect silence. George Eliot has avoided the issue.

*Middlemarch* is another novel in which the issue of feminism is muted. The prologue which implies that Dorothea has an epic vision, and a longing to dedicate herself to great causes, is apparently not fulfilled in her romantic marriage to Ladislaw. The critics who are dissatisfied with the marriage endings of the two novels do not seem to try to explain why the marriages are intended to fit the characters and their possibilities. One cannot argue intention over result, but one can attempt a close study of the possibilities open to the character. George Eliot had perhaps a peculiar conception of the feminine nature. The possibilities for vocations—a meaningful self-dedication—open to the women must be explored as they are presented in the narrative.

Marriage will be the solution, modified by circumstance and personality, in all but the last book, *Daniel Deronda*. George Eliot's last novel embodies a response to current issues about women, and perhaps a different perspective about their roles and possible vocations.
within society. During the several decades of George Eliot's career in fiction, the 'woman question' had progressed from the rights of divorced or separated women, to a consideration of the nature of the marriage institution, to the question of what a woman was. The time period of *Daniel Deronda* is later than the other books, and George Eliot seems more concerned with what the Victorian concept of woman's place and of marriage has done to corrupt the later generations. Gwendolen Harleth will be seen to belong to a third generation of nineteenth century wife--beyond the housekeeper, beyond the perfect lady--and the picture of her marriage is directly connected to these previous generations. Gwendolen is not provided with a romantic and sufficiently hazy future, but instead constantly asking, throughout the novel, "What am I to do with myself?" George Eliot shows that Gwendolen's and society's answer--a conveniently negative one--is not good enough any more.

The first section of the paper will then attempt to precisely define feminism in its various phases, in order to determine what George Eliot thought about the role of women in society. Her letters and essays must be considered with reference to the groups to which they were addressed. George Eliot's place in one particular movement--Positivism--must be clarified, because of the Positivists peculiar stand on the 'woman question'. The second section of the
paper will attempt to show her awareness of the changing role of women in society, and to demonstrate that her 'ideal' of marriage works within the novels. The last section will consider Daniel Deronda as a departure from the previous novels, in that marriage is not the solution for the 'normal' Victorian girl, the one who is a product of the age's notions of marriage and vocations. Previous to the last novel, the woman who had a vocation outside marriage could only be seen as a professional, superior to the normal kind of young woman. The search for fulfillment of woman's ardent nature will change to a search for an ardent way of life.
I. THE BACKGROUND OF FEMINISM

George Eliot made certain distinctions between the issues which the feminists advocated—those which called for a reform of the existing system, she usually supported. The 'existing system' was derived from the Christian concept of marriage, in which the husband and wife were made one, and were considered a social unit. This religious concept left a legacy in the legal concept in which women had no existence separate from their husbands:

Their position was the same as it had been when Blackstone stated in his Commentaries on the Laws of England in 1765:

'By marriage the very being, or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, or cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law a feme covert.'

George Eliot supported those forms of legislation by which women could have some kind of separate existence under the law. In this view she signed Barbara Leigh Smith's petition of January, 1856, in support of a Married Women's Property Bill, a law which would permit women to own property independent of their husbands. This bill never psssed because another bill was passed which provided property clauses for the protection of deserted or
divorced wives. (This was the Marriage and Divorce Bill of 1856.) The larger issue was lost for the time.

On the question of the proper education of women, her ideas were more complex. The usual education of women was not in keeping with the times, and George Eliot belonged to a group which felt that all education evidenced a similar divorce from reality. The universities were dominated by the humanists, who took refuge in the classics at the expense of the real world. A series of economic crises made the deficiency of female education evident to a large segment of the population.

The system of female education had been without system since the days when women were not sent to school or taught at all. The daughters of the middle class in nineteenth century England were educated with one goal in mind—a successful marriage. That this was not an overly ambitious or often denied goal for the early Victorians is seen from the example of the Miss Dodsons' success in *Mill on the Floss*. They were not exactly the best of choices, as is implied in the narrator's ironic tone:

The Miss Dodsons had always been thought to hold up their heads very high, and no one was surprised the two eldest had married so well—not at an early age, for that was not the practice of the Dodson family. (*Mill*, p. 50)

The 'practice' is evidently a product of the chance, for some of the Dodsons, and particularly Aunt Glegg, seem less than ideal mates. The narrator is careful
to establish the pecuniary basis for Mr. Glegg's proposal:

Mr. Glegg had chosen the eldest Miss Dodson as a handsome embodiment of female prudence and thrift, and being himself of a money-getting, money-keeping turn, had calculated on much conjugal harmony. (Mill, p. 133)

The Miss Dodsons are from a generation previous to that of George Eliot's heroines, and their habits date them. The sisters are all intimately concerned with household affairs, they measure their wealth in household goods, and judge others by their skill in maintaining an establishment. Although they may have servants in middle age, they were reared to be good housekeepers, and their educations evidently consisted of learning to make jelly, to clean house, and to please their husbands.

As the Dodsons became more affluent, their daughters were no longer educated to be good housekeepers. Lucy Deane, and even Maggie do not inherit their predecessors' concern with household goods. The industrial revolution, which gave birth to a new middle class, also produced a new class of cheap domestic labor. The ideal for the middle class daughter was no longer the 'perfect wife;' but the 'perfect lady':

There was a repudiation of the purely domestic virtues precisely because of their association with a rather more lowly past...The result was to emancipate the middle-class women from the exclusively domestic role and to give her more leisure in which to indicate that the appropriate status symbols had been acquired.

There simply was not that much to be done anymore, and
intelligent women began to look outside the home for occupations for their leisure time:

'The married ladies of former days, instead of sitting in drawing-rooms, eating the bread of idleness, got through a vast amount of household business, which their successors cannot possibly do, simply because it is not there to be done. An educated woman, of active, methodological habits, blessed with good servants, as good mistresses generally are, finds an hour a day amply sufficient for her housekeeping.'

Their emancipation from housekeeping did not make women any less dependent upon the male members of their family. Instead of being treated as useful members of society, women were increasingly treated as status objects, a symbol of a man's success, and perhaps an impediment to his progress, because of their economic drain upon his income. No longer devoted to household management, the education of a future lady was directed to acquiring appropriate accomplishments. Young girls went to school to learn how to walk, how to converse on appropriate subjects, to play the piano, and to be artistic (in a non-serious way.) They walked, they talked, but they did not think. Of course some intelligent women rebelled, but there were few outlets for their excess energy.

Charity and philanthropy were obvious solutions for these bored young women. Most of the serious charity work, however, was deemed improper for unmarried ladies. They might be allowed to sponsor a sewing club for the poor of their district, or to send baskets of food down
into the slums, but very rarely was an unmarried woman allowed to do anything which might shock her 'delicate sensibilities.'

It was men alone who were considered capable of making large gestures; women, because of their sex, could merely do good in a small way. This attitude was especially marked in 'Church families' where the women had been bred in an atmosphere of reverent submission to the opinions of their men-folk.

Miss Thomson also observes that novelists in general seemed to feel that it was only the heroines who were "debarred from active social work by the conventions of youth and innocence." Most of the Victorian heroines were also ladies, and a third criteria of class would forbid active social work. As the lower classes also desired the elusive qualities of ladyhood, they imitated the upper-class practice of sheltering their young girls from the cruder aspects of life. The possibility of gaining power to execute her projects undoubtedly influences Dorothea to marry Casaubon:

...he would not disapprove of her occupying herself with it (the cottages) in leisure moments, as other women expected to occupy themselves with their dress and embroidery... .

Once a woman had achieved the magic goal of marriage, she could do more extensive charity work.

Charity was not seen as a satisfactory outlet or occupation for women by George Eliot:

Unlike the other novelists, she was first of all
interested in finding out to what extent men and women were responsible for their own fate and to what degree one should expect progress in the moral, social, and intellectual worlds.

Mr. Wright would show George Eliot rejecting two methods of industrial reform by which the working class would be raised from above. She opposed Dickens on this issue, because he would propose a kind of beneficent paternalism by which the rich would share their wealth. He didn't propose any change in an economic system which would permit the poor to better themselves—good feelings would simply motivate the rich to share. Disraeli had a slightly different focus to his views of reform. The aristocracy, as Disraeli saw it, were to protect the poor from the middle class. George Eliot's views most nearly approached the Chartist position, by which laws would give the workers the right to legislate their own reforms. However, because she disliked ignorant power and legislating what should be natural, she tended to favor the philanthropist's course, by which 'charity' was directed at the fundamental causes of misery, instead of at its more obvious defects. Thus Dorothea would build cottages for Mr. Brooke's tenants, while he would excuse their poaching time and again, until the law actually had to execute some of them. Dorothea has consciously chosen philanthropy over simple charity in choosing to marry Casaubon. She meditates on her future if she does not marry Casaubon:
With some endowment of stupidity and conceit, she might have thought that a Christian young lady of fortune should find her ideal of life in village charities. 

(Middlemarch p. 21)

Philanthropy is an occupation, and perhaps a vocation, for the young woman of special attributes—married, with an independent income, and free of managing male relatives. George Eliot demonstrates that it is not the solution to woman's ardent nature. Dorothea will eventually abandon her efforts in the village, saying: "I never could do anything that I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet." (Middlemarch, p. 600) The lack of freedom she has found in her widowhood is one powerful reason for the giving up of her schemes for the betterment of Tipton and Middlemarch, and she redirects her 'epic vision' toward the greater fulfilment of her ardent nature in her marriage to Ladislaw.

Obviously not every woman had recourse to a romantic husband. The frustration of being unable to marry precipitated the rebellion of young women against the present situation. The economic prosperity at first fostered the unnatural situation by which the male members of the middle class supported mothers, wives, and daughters who fulfilled no useful function. Other factors reduced the field of prospective husbands for these ornamental females. Young men soon realized that the cost of maintaining their female relatives, and of having their own large families,
necessitated that they postpone marriage until middle age. Victorian attitudes toward marriage and the home were an effective discouragement, as men hesitated to initiate what might at best be an endured relationship producing ten children. Many young men were reluctant to marry, and many more left the country for better business opportunities. The lower life expectancy of men siphoned off a large number from the field of prospective husbands. By the 1860's, thirty per cent of the women in England were unmarried. 11

For the woman who never married, or who at best spent a good portion of her adult years as a spinster, the possibilities were endless, timewise. What she could do with her time in actuality was another matter. Newly arisen class consciousness prevented them from making themselves useful in the households of their more fortunate family members. Previously unmarried female relatives were needed and welcome in a household, for the sewing, cooking, and the rearing of children. Because of the cheap domestic labor, this was no longer an honorable outlet. Thus the image of the Reverend Farebrother's three female relatives sitting in the parlor for fifty years, pouncing on each new visitor for escape from boredom, is a sad and dismal one. Even more sad is the fact that Farebrother never could afford to marry because he was responsible for maintaining three
women, the unmarried females of two generations, in some kind of style. The woman who failed to acquire a husband, and failed to have her own establishment, assumed such a menial place in her family, that often a bad marriage was seen as better than none at all. A woman had a great deal of social pressure on her to marry.

The immediate problem which stimulated the reformers was not the boredom of being a lady, but the pitiable condition of the 'ladies' who were suddenly called upon to be useful. Having been educated for the accomplishments of married ladies, they had no money-earning capabilities. Any financial crisis in a family, such as the death of a father or brother, could force the unmarried woman to find a new way to maintain herself. The obvious escape from disaster was to become a governess. A position as a governess was also the solution for the woman who wanted to be entirely independent of her relatives—such as Maggie Tulliver. The advantage of being a governess was that one was still considered a 'lady,' although often the governess had to perform like a slave in order to maintain her status. Most governesses were fit only to perpetuate their self-images as ladies. A movement to upgrade the educational training of governesses eventually resulted in the founding of the women's colleges. The feminists were not in the main sympathetic to the plight of the governesses. Their occu-
pations were most often evasions of the question "What am I to do with myself?" A governess job was always regarded as temporary, a prelude to a marriage that might come at any time--but seldom came. None of George Eliot's heroines relish their governess jobs, and they are always regarded as last resorts. The ardor of devoting oneself to teaching others is simply lacking.

The question of the 'proper' education of girls then became an issue, and the training of more competent governesses was one solution. Beyond the primary training there was much dissenion as to the best course. Some of the more avid reformers wanted to open the universities to women. A committee with Emily Davies as its secretary was formed in 1862 "to secure the admission of women to university examinations," but women were not admitted to Oxford and Cambridge until 1870. Mark Pattison conducted the first lectures for women in Oxford in 1865. George Eliot had substantial reason to be wary of those militants who would see the university as the ultimate goal in women's education. The example of Lewes and Herbert Spencer, both non-university men probably prejudiced her against the elitist system of Oxford and Cambridge. Both men probably suffered because they did not have the 'contacts' which a university education provides. Then too, Matilde Parlett suggests that George Eliot, as one who had been denied the
university education and had triumphed despite it, had the
contempt for the universities that a self-made millionaire
has for the aristocrat.

George Eliot's bias against the universities was
evidently not wholly emotional. She was largely objecting
to the humanist point of view fostered in the universities.
The humanists, as she understood them, were pre-occupied
with the classics to the extent of finding in them a solace
and escape from the demands of everyday life. Their pleas¬
ures took the form of an assumed superiority to the worka-
day world. The humanists' attitude, traditional in the ex¬
treme, toward the education of women, also contributed to
her dislike: "That the humanist is apathetic, if not
inimical toward these efforts she very evidently believes."¹³

Despite the failure of Miss Davies' efforts to open the
universities to women, she persevered, and redirected her
energies to the founding of Girton. George Eliot contrib¬
buted fifty pounds and a little advice. She was constantly
afraid that her advice might be misinterpreted, and that
a plan of action might be based on the association of her
name with it. George Eliot, in her correspondence with
relative unknowns, tended to sidestep and, in doing so,
go beyond the issue of university education for women.
Her concern that she be fully understood in her letters
led her to be very guarded and precise in them:

I have no personal knowledge of Mrs. Manning and
no practical connexion with the proposed college, beyond subscribing to it and occasionally answering questions which Miss Davies has put to me about the curriculum which would be desirable. I feel too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women and also I feel too imperfect a sympathy with many women who have put themselves forward in connexion with such measures, to give any practical adhesion to them. There is no subject on which I am more incline to hold my peace and learn, than on the 'woman question'. It seems to me to overhang abysses, of which even prostitution is not the worst. Conclusions seem easy so long as we keep large blinkers on and look in the direction of our own private path.

... But on one point I have a strong conviction, and I feel bound to act on it, so far as my retired way of life allows of public action. And that is, that women ought to have the same fund of truth placed within their reach as men have; that their lives (i.e. the lives of men and women) ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis. And this unity in their faith can only be produced by their having each the same store of fundamental knowledge. (Letters, p. 57)

Gordon Haight would conclude that on female education "her attitudes were always conservative." When she is writing to Emily Davies and to Barbara Bodichon, however, her attitude is more than luke-warm. A letter to John Morley, trusted friend Lewes' success or as editor of the Fortnightly Review, is much less guarded:

I would certainly not oppose any plan which held out any reasonable promise of tending to establish as far as possible an equivalence of advantages for the sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development. ... The one conviction on the matter which I hold with some tenacity is, that through all transition the goal towards which we are now proceeding is a more clearly discerned distinction of function (allowing always for exceptional
cases of individual organization) with as near an approach to equivalence of good for woman and for man as can be secured by the effort of growing moral force to lighten the pressure of hard non-moral outward conditions. . . (Letters, IV, p. 364)

This does not seem like a conservative attitude toward the education of women, but instead a hesitancy to prescribe a particular university curriculum for them.

George Eliot talks about a 'distinction of function' which some critics might interpret as the recognition that woman's function is necessarily a maternal one. She does recognize that men and women are different, but the differences she finds do not restrict woman's chances. Some anti-feminists had argued that it was nature's intention that woman be restricted to child-rearing, and for that reason she had been made weaker, and periodically incapacitated. This George Eliot felt was a 'pitiable fallacy.' The differences between the sexes which she recognized were in woman's greater emotional capacity, versus man's higher reasoning ability:

Under every imaginable social condition, she will necessarily have a class of sensations and emotions—the maternal ones—which must remain unknown to man; and the fact of her comparative physical weakness, which, however it may have been exaggerated by a vicious civilization, can never be cancelled, introduces a distinctively feminine condition into the wondrous chemistry of distinctive forms and combinations. A certain amount of psychological difference between man and woman necessarily arises out of the difference of sex, and instead of being destined to vanish before a complete development of woman's intellectual and moral nature, will be a permanent source of variety and beauty, as long as the tender
light and dewy freshness of morning affect us differently from the strength and brilliancy of the mid-day sun. The physiological differences between man and woman are important then only as they cause psychological differences in the sexes. George Eliot's article on women in France was written in the months just after she left England to live with Lewes, and before she wrote any of her fiction. The feminists in England, among them Barbara Leigh Smith, were campaigning for the right to a separate existence for married women. This equality in marriage is one of the best things George Eliot finds about French women:

"...A secondary cause (of the earlier development of intellectual women in France) was probably the laxity of opinion and practice with regard to the marriage-tie...it is undeniable, that unions formed in the maturity of thought and feeling, and grounded only on inherent fitness and mutual attraction, tended to bring women into more intelligent sympathy with men, and to heighten and complicate their share in the political drama."

It must be remembered that George Eliot's concept of the same 'fund of knowledge' for men and women does not extend to the professional level. Her advocacy of a reform of the existing educational systems doesn't provide new roles for women to play in society, any more than reform of the marriage laws will provide new vocations for women outside of marriage. In some ways, moreover, she absolutely disapproves of women in the professions. First of all, one incompetent 'professional' woman could do more harm for the cause of women than a thousand insignificant ladies. George Eliot seems to desire a professionalism on the part of the
well-educated woman so that she will continue to be an exemplum to her sex, as well as to masculine detractors. Such a professional woman has a responsibility to wield her power of influencing others in the same professional way as her talent. Thus she wrote to Mrs. Nassau John Senior, congratulating her as the first woman appointed inspector of workhouses and pauper schools: "The influence of one woman's life on the lot of other women is getting greater and greater with the quickening spread of all influences." (Letters, V, p. 372) At another time she wrote to Mrs. Theodore Martin, after seeing her portrayal of Rosalind in As You Like It: "My first delight was in your art—in the good you were giving others, My next delight was in the good for you of being what you were for others." (Letters, IV, p. 181)

George Eliot believed that a professional woman should in a sense abandon her sex in subjecting herself to criticism. Too often a woman attained some degree of fame (usually as an authoress or as a singer), only to retreat behind the facade of her gentility in the face of criticism. This kind of woman always regarded herself as a lady above all, who was doing very well indeed, yes indeed, to perform as well as she did. Evidently George Eliot felt that women tended to view knowledge as an accomplishment similar to music or painting—and failed to absorb it into their culture: "...she has a feverish consciousness of her attain-
ments; she keeps a sort of mental pocket-mirror, and is continually looking in it at her own 'intellectuality.' The professions acceptable for these women were the traditional cultural outlets: the stage, art, literature, and so forth.

The kind of professional woman whom George Eliot advocated, then, would function outside the general masculine-feminine states. She would be one of the 'exceptional cases of individual organization' which George Eliot felt herself to be. These exceptional women tended to triumph despite social disadvantages, and the question of woman's role was not especially pertinent to them. Concepts of role or function become important in those exceptional organizations who have no cultural outlets. Dorothea has the soul of Saint Theresa, but domestic difficulties prevent her fullest self-expression. None of the heroines defy social convention radically in their vocations. The question of woman's vocations for George Eliot centers on the fate of the member of society, and not on the female genius or tremendously talented person whose ability transcends social mores.
II. GEORGE ELIOT AND POSITIVISM

To understand how George Eliot felt that a woman's role in society could change, one must know something of her relationship to Auguste Comte and the Positivist philosophy. Even more importantly one must know how her friends and associates differed from certain of Comte's basic tenets while still remaining Positivists. George Eliot's early editorship of the *Westminster Review* brought her into contact with Harriet Martineau, Herbert Spencer and George Henry Lewes at a time when Positivism was exerting its most powerful influence on them. Harriet Martineau published a translation of Comte that was also an abridgment, while Lewes published an important commentary. John Stuart Mill, who often wrote for the review, was an early adherent. No one has ever established George Eliot's precise feelings on the subject, possibly because she became involved with two or three splinter groups of Positivists. The Positivist philosophy was as radical as any of the new movements of the time in its strangeness and extreme proposals. Its concepts, however, of the nature of society and the place of women in the family as the basic social unit, are extremely 'conservative.' They bear a direct relation to
George Eliot's concepts of the nature of woman and her function.

Gordon Haight asserts that she owes little to Positivism for her conservative stance:

Though Harrison saw in this reluctance evidence of her conception of 'woman's sphere,' her view can be traced back long before her acquaintance with Comte, and shows no sympathy for his cult of the Vierge Mère. 18

It is difficult to trace George Eliot's 'conservative stance' back before her exposure to Comte, for her editorship of the Westminster Review and her first important essays brought her into contact with those persons who understood and admired Comte most in all of England. Thomas Pinney would perhaps find early traces of her conservatism in her reverence for the past, and for experience:

The basis of George Eliot's conservatism was a piety towards her early experience that grew out of affection, imagination, and reverence rather than formal argument. 19

Pinney also admits that she was influenced by a "reasoned analysis of society." For that matter, the basic tenet of Positivism was common in nineteenth century intellectual thought: scientific principles could be applied to any discipline. Comte himself believed that the human mind, in its investigation of any discipline, proceeded in three stages. The first theological stage would explain phenomena in terms of the will of anthropomorphic gods. The metaphysical stage was one in which all was explained in terms
of metaphysical abstractions. The final positivist stage was the one in which the discipline was explained in terms of scientific truth. Comte felt that the time had come for sociology to reach the positivist stage. He felt that a revolution of society, with himself as the high priest, was incipient.

Comte's ideas first were noticed in England by John Stuart Mill about 1837. Mill learned a great deal from Comte, and acknowledged this debt in his *System of Logic* of 1843. Mill later cooled in his admiration of Comte, and commented in his *Autobiography* that nothing of Comte's influenced him after his *Logic*. Critics of both men agree that Mill is correct.

One of the essential points of difference between Comte and Mill was on the subject of the place of women in society. Comte was strongly influenced by Roman Catholic culture, and by his intense but pure relationship with Clotilde de Vaux during the year before her death. Many of his disciples felt that his subsequent cultivation of the feelings of love, reverence, and devotion made Comte a sentimentalist. Many were unable to accept him after this interlude. His *Religion of Humanity* henceforth included adoration of women as 'spontaneous priestesses of humanity.' Comte venerated women as the sources of moral perfection in humanity, and the primary influence of women in the
positivist society was to be as progenitors of this moral growth of man. The moral growth was to be stimulated through women's emotional powers:

The chief motive, doubtless, for public and private veneration is the mission of sympathy, which is woman's peculiar vocation. Woman is seen as leading the basic social unit of the family into the positivist cause. This unit is constructed on the premise that man has more energy and mental capacity than woman, while she excels in feeling. Each serves the other in the field of greatest strength. Because of the sacredness of the family as a social unit, divorce was never to be permitted.

The unique vocation of women—educating and influencing their sons and husbands—necessitated, according to Comte, an equal education for the sexes, up to the point of professional education. Teachers of men and women would be the same, to assure equality, but they would be taught separately. This system of education resembles in its broad aspects the one which George Eliot advocated in her letters to Emily Davies and other reformers.

Mill strongly differed from Comte in his opinions of the position of women in society after marriage. Mill considered the 'feme couvert' to be virtually enslaved. Some of their differences may have been cultural ones. George Eliot finds the position of women in France to be vastly different from that of English wives, due to the
laxity of the marriage tie, the different temperament of Frenchwomen, and their cultural outlet in the salons. She felt that natural unions, whether in marriage or not, tended to involve women more in the world outside of domestic cares. Comte and George Eliot are both considering ideal unions, in which the female partner is stimulated by contact with a different world, and is, so to speak, moved to her most talented behavior. Comte's ideas have a strong heritage from the Catholic Church, and perhaps because of this, he simply ignores the prospect of a worn-out marriage. Once a woman's delight has passed from her husband, it should settle in her children, and in their moral betterment.

George Eliot and Mill were alike, then, in recognizing that English marriages tended to domestic drudgery in many cases, and certainly forced the complete exclusion of the woman from outside society. Mill published a summary and critique of Comte's second phase in 1865. His *Auguste Comte and Positivism* is at least tactful in lacking a direct rebuttal to Comte's theories. His criticisms are implicit, considering the reader's knowledge of the injustices of English marriages. According to Comte's theories the man should have complete power in the home, "but should forbear to exert it." That she should better exercise her educational powers, woman is denied all other functions:
"She is to have no powers of government, even domestic, and no property." The future of women, under Positivist rule would be far bleaker than the contemporary position of English wives. Mill's complete rebuttal on the women question is contained in The Subjection of Women of 1869. This document exposed the Victorian marriage idyll for the horror that it really was. It popularized the fight for the rights of wives and mothers, and argued for the equality of the sexes. One of Mill's main arguments was that the 'nature of woman' and her capabilities could never be fully known until she was treated with equality. The only way that a woman's nature could be truly known, Mill said, was in a good and harmonious marriage relationship. This all too seldom occurred. He emphasized the necessity for learning the psychological make-up of women before any judgment could be made. In this aspect of his work he seems very close to George Eliot's theories of the psychological nature of the man-woman relationship:

On the contrary, when each of two persons, instead of being a nothing, is a something; when they are attached to one another, and are not too much unlike to begin with; the constant partaking in the same things, assisted by their sympathy, draws out the latent capacities of each for being interested in the things which were at first interesting only to the other; and works a gradual assimilation of the tastes and characters to one another, partly by the insensible modification of each, but more by a real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to his own.22
Comte's was not the only Positivist philosophy which influenced George Eliot. Herbert Spencer always asserted that his own ideas were developed independently of Comte:

...Spencer indeed found it necessary specifically to repudiate the suggestion of his indebtedness to Comte, asserting that he resembled the latter only with respect to ideas not original with Comte, ideas which both of them took from the general 'atmosphere of scientific thought'—the idea of sociology as a science and of society as an 'organism'.

This view of society as an organism meant that changes in society were an evolutionary process, and could not be forced. All of George Eliot's proposals for changes, even in Felix Holt, are reforms of existing institutions. Changes in society could not be legislated, she felt, when the change would be unnatural.

Only when public opinion supported a change was it valid. It is then easy to see why George Eliot did not advocate the radical reforms of people like Mill. Her concept of the role of women, and the changing perspective of her possibilities was checked by her view of the evolutionary character of social change. Spencer was like Mill in advocating the complete equality of the sexes. In his Social States published in 1851 he advocated an advanced kind of woman who would be an emotional and intellectual ideal. His relationship with George Eliot caused a shift in his views of the perfect wife, because she embodied his own ideal, but he was unwilling to marry her. He added beauty as a criterion and of course she failed.

Spencer's acquaintance with Comtism had actually
come through George Henry Lewes, the Englishman most instrumental in spreading Comte's doctrines (after the early defection of Mill). Lewes never entirely repudiated the second phase of Comte's career, as Mill did. His articles in the journals and his history of philosophy all praised Comte. Most ominously, Lewes is generally thought to have fully accepted the General View, which had so irritated Mill:

Lewes...was delighted 'beyond measure' by the General View, especially its sections on society and the place of women in it.  

Simon modifies his statement by saying that Lewes' enthusiasm for Comte somewhat diminished by 1852. Lewes did, however, accept the second phase of Comte with far more equanimity than any of his other adherents in England. Most positivists were disturbed by the issue of Comte's relationship with Clotilde de Vaux and its probable influences on the philosophy. Lewes was able to accept the affections as central to society, and thus his agreement with Comte's view of women is probable.

Harriet Martineau's place in the circle of Comte's admirers is curious, considering that she was otherwise quite a radical, and quite a feminist. Miss Martineau published a translation and abridgment of the Cours in November, 1853. Lewes thought it well done, but some of the more rigorous positivists such as Frederic Harrison objected that she had oversimplified Comte's philosophy.
The publication of the book represents her only contribution to Positivism. Her interest, according to one biog-
grapher, is an index to the interest in Comte of the nine-
teenth century intellectual. On the subject of women's
place in the Comtist scheme she is silent:

Comte's views on the natural subordination of woman
and—even though his later religion worshipped
woman—on her confinement to her own proper fields
were abhorrent to Miss Martineau, so obviously so
that she never refers to them, even to refute them.. in anything I have seen; her whole tone on the sub-
ject of women remained utterly alien to Comte's.

The attraction which Comte had for Miss Martineau was that
of systemitizing her own beliefs, "the best remedy for the
prevailing anarchy of opinion." Like Spencer, she anti-
cipated much that Comte later proclaimed about ultimate
human progress. She too believed that legislations could
do nothing on social issues, unless public opinion supported
it.

Harriet Martineau was also 'utterly alien' to George
Eliot, after the latter began to live with Lewes. Miss
Martineau spread some rumors which made the whole situation
worse for George Eliot.

The attraction which Positi ism had for Harriet
Martineau may be similar to its attraction in its relig-
ous aspects for George Eliot. She too had abandoned
conventional religion. Evidently she differed from Lewes
in this respect, and was somewhat closer to Frederic Harrison.
She could not go as far as he in intellectual submission to Comte's philosophy. As early as July, 1866, Harrison was trying to persuade George Eliot to write a novel about an ideal Positivist community. George Eliot's reply was that she felt that she had to look to the past for the necessary idealization of her novels, and that she could not construct an ideal future effectively. She also said that she often used tragedy to "urge the human sanctities." She subsequently wrote "The Spanish Gypsy," which has been called a Positivist poem, but she never attempted to depict Harrison's Positivist ideal. This example of the philosopher's beliefs being qualified by the artist's judgment may very well apply to her portrayals of women. The ideal woman—what a woman 'should be'—would be an anomaly, outside the context of the society that she was depicting.

This may be one reason also why her romantic ideals seldom come off. This does not mean that George Eliot had a negative view of human progress. Nor does it imply that she saw no future for an individual struggling against society:

No suggestion is intended, for example, that the 'general' with which the 'individual' collides may be a matter of the arbitrary intervention in human affairs of over-powering impersonal forces—or to use words which she herself employs elsewhere, of 'what is not human'.

George Eliot was not a Positivist in the strictest sense, but it is easy to see how certain aspects of Comte's
philosophy intrigued her. His ideals of woman's role in society, and of an ideal male-female relationship, are reflected in her essays. The organic nature of society is basic to her work. Her views of the education of men and women are identical in general outline to Comte's. So there is evidence that she was aware of theories of women's role in society. Her 'conservatism' is at least partly the reluctance to comment on so complex and controversial an issue. The last section of the paper will show how, in the novels, George Eliot demonstrates an increasing awareness of the possibilities for self-dedication open to women in a changing society.
III. WOMEN'S VOCATIONS IN THE NOVELS

George Eliot does not directly relate the question of women's role with the contemporary issues of feminism. In the first place, all of the novels except Daniel Deronda are set in the past, before the issues of the 60's and 70's came to light. A basic assumption that the careful critic must make, however, is that George Eliot is utilizing contemporary points of view in writing about past periods. The historical settings of several of the novels provide a relevance for the woman question, and are a part of the action of the novel. An example already discussed is that of the Methodist Conference decree in Adam Bede. In Mill on the Floss, industrialization comes to St. Oggs as Maggie is growing up, thus providing a crucial break between the generations of Dodson women, and providing a new world which necessitates new perspectives. The contrast between the accomplished Lucy Deane and her practical housekeeping aunts shows the change in society's expectations of a young woman. The contrast between Maggie and her cousin then shows the two faces of the new standards of ladyhood—their pleasant aspects, and their unfortunate
results. The fortunate can marry well, while the unfortu-
unate have little prospect of a happy life. Another ob-
vious reason for the issue of feminism to be muted is that
the novels were George Eliot's public writings, and in-
variably reflected on her relationship with Lewes. George
Eliot also hated lady novelists who used their books as
vehicles for their 'causes':

The most pitiable of all silly novels by lady novelists
are what we may call the oracular species—novels
intended to expound the writer's religious, philos-
ophical, or moral theories.29

Her heroines function within society, and are not outstanding
examples of ideal women. George Eliot does, however, offer
various possibilities for her female characters in the
context of different novels. In her early novels the pos-
sibilities open to women are not always congruent with the
novel as a whole. Daniel Deronda more completely inte-
grates the problems of the heroine with the rest of the
novel.

Her first novel, Adam Bede, comes close to embodying a
Positivist ideal in the character of Dinah. Dinah's marriage
to Adam and her return to Hayslope are an example of the
way in which a woman through her role as wife and mother
exerts a strong moral influence on the community. Of course
she has a certain role to fill in maintaining the pastoral
atmosphere of Hayslope, completing the form of the book
in which the good reign united over an ordered community.
Beyond the formal concerns, she maintains moral order in the community. At her marriage Bessie Cranage is in her "neatest cap and frock." The narrator implies that Bessie will remain neat and clean, and will contribute to the order of the scene:

...for, as her cousin Wiry Ben, who stood near her, judiciously suggested, Dinah was not going away, and if Bessie was in low spirits, the best thing for her to do was to follow Dinah's example, and marry an honest fellow who was ready to have her. (Adam Bede, p. 548)

Dinah's influence after her marriage extends to Arthur Donnithorne and "talking to the people a bit in their houses." (Adam Bede, p. 550) She is also effective in maintaining Adam's moral consciousness:

'It's like as if it was a new strength to me,' he said to himself, 'to love her, and know as she loves me. I shall look't her to help me to see things right. For she's better than I am—there's less o' self in her, and pride. And it's a feeling as gives you a sort o' liberty, as if you could walk more fearless, when you've more trust in another than y' have in yourself.' (Adam Bede, p. 540-1)

Her influence is central to Adam's moral regeneration.

It has also provided the additional step as sorrow passes to sympathy to the power of loving:

He did not know that the power of loving was all the while gaining new force within him; that the new sensibilities bought by a deep experience were so many new fibres by which it was possible, nay, necessary to him, that his nature should intertwine with another. (Adam Bede, p. 499)

It would be difficult to say that Dinah is a Positivist
woman, but she does provide an ideal for the moral function of woman in the home and in the surrounding community. The lesson to be learned from the examples of Bessie Cranage and others is perhaps that progress occurs, men are changed for the better, not by the transitory exhortation of an outside agent, but by the moral uplift of a healthy relationship—whether in marriage or in the community.

Critics generally agree that Dinah is a failure as a realistic and believable character. The reader knows too little of her for a major character, and her sudden overthrow of her preaching in Stonyshire for marriage with Adam seems inconsistent with this vocation. Probably W. J. Harvey is correct in saying that the issue of her religious vocation is necessarily suppressed:

The latent conflict between a religious vocation and a desire for marriage which might have given Dinah greater psychological solidity is gestured at earlier in the novel, but clearly George Eliot had to keep this theme muted and subsidiary; it is inherently so strong a theme that had it been developed it would have disrupted the whole novel. Dinah herself justifies her decision on feeling alone. George Eliot has failed to show earlier in the novel how this decision is the 'right one.' The reader is not fully aware why Dinah must seek the images of warmth, light, and order implicit in Hayslope, and abandon the cold impersonality of Stonyshire. This is not an excessive demand.
George Eliot provides the web of circumstances for everyone else, and its lack in Dinah is a painful psychological discontinuity.

The big escape clause is, of course, the decree forbidding women to preach. George Eliot depicts Dinah as a 'professional' who functions irrespective of her sex. The women who were really forbidden to preach were the 'amateurs', who did more harm than good by their example. Thus George Eliot makes a little dig at the amateurs. Dinah is utilizing her feminine traits in marriage, as she never used them in her preaching. Supposedly she recognizes this. Unfortunately, her new role is articulated before the marriage by Adam, and also by him in the epilogue. There is no probe into the mind of Dinah herself, and the discontinuity remains.

The possibility that marriage is not the only outlet for woman's ardent nature is not considered. Dinah's marriage is not so much a choice of direction as the assumption of an entirely different path of conduct. Neither are the abuses of marriage and the training of young 'perfect ladies' considered. Awareness of these issues will come with the later novels.

Maggie Tulliver is the example of the young girl who can find no vocation except self-dedication to the
preservation of childhood associations. Her ardent nature is curbed by the role which her family envisions for her as a child, and the only vocation which she eventually thinks will provide happiness for her is a negative one of renunciation.

The roles which their children will someday play in the community are a central concern of the Tulliver parents. Tom's future is predetermined by his father, who wants him to go into business reinforced by a knowledge of bookkeeping and economics. Unfortunately the father assumes that accomplishments will make Tom successful, and does not look into the fact that his teacher is mistakenly educating Tom to be a gentleman, with a gentleman's forgotten Latin and Euclid. Maggie's brains are treated as an impediment to the future that her parents would design for her, or at least as no blessing:

"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."

(Mill, p. 17)

The Tullivers would anticipate a successful marriage for Maggie, if she can attain the ideals for marriage—namely accomplishments.

Tom's progress—or lack of it—in school makes him something of a foil for the way Maggie's thirst for education is denied. George Eliot is careful to show, however, that Maggie's ardor is first of all a longing for a different
world than the one in which she is held deficient. The mill holds a life-giving fascination for the young girl:

Maggie loved to linger in the great spaces of the mill, and often came out with her black hair powdered to a soft whiteness that made her dark eyes flash out with new fire. (Mill, p. 35)

Her impulse to run away to the gypsies is prompted by a desire to reign in the way her cousin Lucy does in the family. While Lucy is favored for her docility and beauty, Maggie will reign over the gypsies by virtue of her superior knowledge. The knowledge turns out to consist of book learning—bits and pieces of information not even applicable to her situation. Maggie makes the same mistake in valuing abstract knowledge as a key to her life when she tries to master Tom's schoolbooks after the family's first crash. George Eliot specifically criticizes the system of upbringing which in sheltering her has failed to teach her how to live:

She was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilized world of that day who had come out of her school-life with a soul untrained for inevitable struggles; with no other part of her inherited share in the hard-won treasures of thought, of men, than shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history; with much futile information about Saxon and other kings of doubtful example; but unhappily quite without that knowledge of the irreversible laws within and without her which, governing the habits, becomes morality... (Mill, p. 303)

The faults of her education are not to be remedied by
Tom's schoolbooks. She turns to a different kind of learning, equally fragmentary in that it too is a formula, but Thomas a Kempis provides a way of meeting her situation and her prospects.

Maggie's prospects have steadily narrowed as her family fortune's tumbled. The role which she is to play in life is consistently judged in economic terms. As her father sinks, he associates Maggie more and more with his own unfortunate sister. The sister plays a significant part in Mr. Tulliver's ruin. The father, bound by his affections, admonishes Tom to take the same care of Maggie. Maggie's role then in the family is to be that of a poor relation, a drain on her brother's income when he needs all possible capital. Her taking a situation as a governess on her father's death is an attempt to remain independent of Tom and of the Dodsons. This independence turns out to be virtual enslavement of her mind and body. George Eliot's condemnation of governess situations leads one to ask what kind of prospects are open to Maggie. She must look forward to a succession of situations, or allow herself to be maintained by relatives who would control mind, body, and soul. She can also snare a husband, and it is obvious that the family hopes that her visit with Lucy Deane will result in just that. As Maggie achieves social success at the charity bazaar, her status rises in the minds of the Dodson's:
"Now she was capable of being at once ornamental and useful." (Mill, p. 475) The Dodsons belong to an earlier generation, which has not yet seized upon the governess position as a way out, of maintaining one's status as a lady in a mercenary world. Their habit of calling it 'going into service' is intuitively correct. The Dodsons realize that familial relations are a more natural situation for a girl like Maggie.

Lucy Deane is the other side of the coin, the public evidence of progress, and an example of what Maggie's fate could have been. Lucy is mistress of numerous accomplishments such as singing and embroidery. Her star has risen because of the industrial revolution. She is visible evidence of her father's increased prosperity, and her prospective marriage to Stephen Guest will firmly place her in the local aristocracy.

Maggie cannot find a place in the local society. She longs for a world outside her emotions, a rational, absorbing world. She is consistently made aware that she is inadequate at functioning in the world of feeling. Her relationship with Philip is forbidden and even inadequate in its passionless nature. Tom is alienated from her, and the Dodsons have always impressed her as cold and calculating. Maggie obviously is not able to function well within the family, but there is no other alternative for
her ardent nature to express itself. She does temporarily give in to feeling in her adventure with Stephen, but quickly renounces marriage with him as a solution to the question of what she is to do with herself. Her trip with Stephen is not fully effective in the novel, unless one sees it as the same kind of alternative that Maggie once saw in the gypsies. Public opinion of the escapade makes it impossible for Maggie to retain a place in the society of St. Ogg's. Even the clergyman who tries in his own way to legislate morality is convinced that she must leave. Maggie refuses to accept the fact that there is no place for her, ignoring the fact that all people have to function in relationships with others.

The final chapters are an attempt by George Eliot to show that familial affection does triumph. Lucy forgives Maggie, the mother takes care of her, and in the final scene brother and sister are reunited, "living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together." (Mill, p. 546) The reaffirmation of the old ties in a changing society is perhaps sentimental of George Eliot, but she attempts to show that it is the only outlet for Maggie's ardent nature, given her background.

Maggie is the first of the heroines shown as a product of the new lady concept. Her fate is determined:
she is obviously destined for a place different from that of her parents. In *Felix Holt* George Eliot experiments with a new situation, and a more unstable one. The heroine is given a choice of her place in society. Esther Lyon's greatest pleasure in life has been in the self-indulgence of her daydream of being a lady. Mrs. Transome has been a lady all of her life. As Esther learns more and more about Mrs. Transome's life, she is coming closer to assuming Mrs. Transome's place in the manor. A complicated plot gives Esther the choice of the Transome fortune (such as it is) and the manor house. Unlike most Victorian heroines, she doesn't even have to marry the heir to obtain it. The conflict in Esther's mind then is fairly clear-cut; she is allowed to choose whether or not she wants a certain way of life. The complex plot which discloses Esther's rights to the estate also discloses the bitter and lonely life that Mrs. Transome has led. She married for convenience and to maintain her status, and for many years has been shut up on a crumbling estate with an imbecile husband. With the return of her favorite son as heir to the estate, she counts on serving in local society as she had always dreamed. She has carefully preserved as much of the estate as possible in the years of his absence, and expects to serve as Harold's trusted steward. Instead Harold assumes total control of the estate, deprecates her past efforts as to
be expected of a woman, and strips her of power in the management of the estate.

Mrs. Transome has been molded by her strange position. She has a lust for power that George Eliot represents as the result of the lack of her normal function as wife and mother:

She had begun to live merely in small immediate cares and occupations, and, like all eager-minded women who advance in life without any activity of tenderness or any large sympathy, she had contracted small rigid habits of thinking and acting, she had her 'ways' which must not be crossed, and had learned to fill up the great void of life with giving small orders to tenants, insisting on medicines for infirm cottagers... *(Felix Holt, p. 21)*

Mrs. Transome had no other outlet for her ardent nature, and increasing years had narrowed her prospects rather than widening them. The latter part of Mrs. Transome's life could not be filled by her girlish accomplishments of the turn of the century. Mrs. Transome is an effective portrait of the sterility which a lady's life can contain when she forms no significant relationships.

Harold Transome is a special kind of gentleman, also. His ideal of marriage had been a dark-eyed submissive Eastern girl, and there is some indication that she was a slave, or at best a mistress. That is the way in which he fulfills his passions. The function of women in an English home, he believes, is ornamental. He relegates his mother to the position of an ornament in the sitting room that he has redecorated for her. The irony of the room
is that the youthful portrait of Mrs. Transome which hangs in it seems more alive than the aged woman below it. Harold is specially anxious to marry, and views a wife as something to be acquired.

Esther Lyon might be a portrait of the young Mrs. Transome, for her accomplishments and attire are at least a good imitation of the born lady's. In indulging her sensitivity to the coarseness of her life with her father, she thinks herself escaping some of its boredom. Esther has very little filial affection for her father; she is merely filling a place in the household. She is ready and waiting to move up into a different circle. Felix Holt immediately perceives that there is something wrong in Esther's relationship to her father, and attributes it to a lack of guiding principle in her:

If a woman really believes herself to be a lower kind of being, she should place herself in subjection; she should be ruled by the thoughts of her father or husband. (Felix Holt, p. 190)

Felix perceives that the perfect lady hypothesis is really detrimental to the male in marriage as well as to the female, for ladies often have an inhibiting power in the family. His idea that a woman should have principles equal to a man's because otherwise she will restrict and narrow his perspectives reveals an understanding of the marriage relationship that Mill will discuss in The Subjection of Women. The woman who
has no existence outside her status as a married woman
will often acquire a power over her husband, by the very
act of convincing him that she has no will—only advice.

By entirely sinking her own existence in her husband;
by having no will (or persuading him that she has
no will) but his, in anything which regards their
joint relation, and by making it the business of
her life to work upon his sentiments, a wife may
gratify herself by influencing, and very probably
perverting, his conduct, in those of his external
relations which she has never qualified herself
to judge of or in which she is herself wholly in-
fluenced by some personal or other partiality or
prejudice.  

Mill and Felix Holt are trying to show why the English system
of marriage is bad from the male point of view. By keeping
women ignorant and entirely without rights in marriage,
they are fostering an insidious perversion of their own
interests. Felix despairs of finding a wife who has prin-
ciples and can enter an honest relationship.

Felix's opinion reflects on the way in which Mrs. Tran-
some's character has been perverted by the lust for power,
and also is a reflection of her attitude toward the possi-
ble marriage of Esther and Harold. The only hope that she
finds for a woman in marriage is to make her husband love
her. If she can arouse his affections, she can achieve
a certain power in the relationship, and get what she wants.
The flaw in Mrs. Transome's reasoning is in what she wants
from marriage—the ladylike niceties. Mrs. Transome some-
how feels that if her past few years could have been mate-
rially more satisfactory, she might have felt less lonely:
A woman's love is always freezing into fear. She wants everything, she is secure of nothing. (Felix Holt, p. 330)

The model which Mrs. Transome presents for Esther is then very grim, and Felix's ideas are another influence detrimental to her ambition. George Eliot does not present a single solution to Esther's problem. She vaguely but increasingly becomes aware of the whole progression of Mrs. Transome's life, and how futile the joys of her girlhood have proved. Harold Transome's attentions have a shade of indifference about them, as neither his attachment nor her response has an emotional basis. Despite this, Esther is attracted to him, and has some degree of affection for him. Esther's future seems symbolized by the rose sitting room, in which the portrait of the young Mrs. Transome dominates the living figure below it. In her physical presence, Mrs. Transome gives the lie to the portrait of an accomplished and gracious young woman.

When Esther learns that her relationship with her father is purely one of an emotional attachment on his part, she is stimulated to affection. Her emotional attachment to Felix assumes greater importance, and the narrator clearly depicts marriage with him as a high ideal, "a supreme love, a motive that gives a sublime rhythm to a woman's life." (Felix Holt, p. 413) The static, or even downhill motion of Mrs. Transome's life is an effective contrast.
To do without love then seems "a fall and a degradation." (Felix Holt, p. 414) Esther is unable to make a decision because she is unsure of a future with one man, and has some small degree of affection for the other. The catalyst—and person who eventually directs her action—is Mrs. Transome. Harold utterly fails to comfort his mother when she is bitterly unhappy, not because he is intentionally cruel, but because there is a basic lack of filial affection in him. He will do what is right, but his actions are not an instinctual response generated by a natural relationship. Esther would prefer a life of affection and emotion to material wealth and position.

Esther and Felix's marriage is seen as an ideal in that each as a positive moral effect on the other. Esther has made Felix aware of the value of emotion in marriage; a good marriage is not just based on shared principles. Esther is not unflawed at the end. George Eliot points out that she might not have been able to renounce the Transome fortune, and perhaps Harold, if she had not had the prospect of marriage with Felix. Harold's courtship is a convincing portrait of how Victorian marriages of convenience among ladies and gentlemen were made. Esther does come close to accepting him. Also, for Esther the path of her inclination happens to accord with the path of greatest good for the greatest number of people. She
is much simpler than Maggie in her character and in the alternatives she has for self-dedication. Esther has a chance to gratify her ardent nature. Maggie's vocation, as she has seen it, has been a renunciation of all pleasure for herself in the preservation of her childhood relationships. Philip acutely perceives that in seeking a form of happiness in renunciation, Maggie will one day find the goal and the method divorced.

In placing her emphasis on the individual's choice of roles instead of society's influences on the future of a young girl, George Eliot seems to find characterization more difficult. A large part of Maggie's character is in her response to the inhibiting actions of society. Esther comes across in the beginning of the novel as a prig, an over-refined sensibility, and not much more. Mrs. Transome is a much more effective presentation because George Eliot has an opportunity to show all of the little tribulations and past glories that make her what she is. One is reminded of George Eliot's statement to Frederic Harrison that she has trouble depicting future ideals. Esther is nothing yet. In *Middlemarch* she will present in Dorothea a character without much of a past. She too will be involved in decision-making. Dorothea's ardent nature is a determining influence, however, and the panorama of the novel is large enough to give a convincing portrait
of her. Dorothea makes mistakes—often—and the reader observes how she must cope with them. An ideal such as Esther very nearly is, will not again be a major character.

Many critics feel that the emphasis of the beginning of Middlemarch is on the feminist aspects of Dorothea Brooke. This feminist emphasis is also generally agreed to be subsumed in the greater complexity of the book:

This does not mean that George Eliot is writing as a proselytizing feminist. We know of her friendship with Barbara Bodichon, her support for the foundation of Girton and the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, and her general sympathy with Victorian feminism, but she played no active part in the movement, and her books make their feminist protest in a very muted way...Any suggestion of a feminist moral (in Middlemarch) is controlled and extended by the complex plot, which puts Dorothea in her place as an example less of a feminine problem than of the frustrations of the human condition.

The 'frustrations of the human condition' in Middlemarch are closely concerned with the question of self-dedication or vocation:

The two themes (of reform and religion) come together in the idea of 'vocation', especially if we take the religious overtures of the term seriously. The problem of vocation is as pervasive as that of reform. The main characters are either involved in a search for a vocation, or in a desperate attempt to truly fulfil their chosen vocation.

Dorothea's nature is slanted toward higher considerations than Maggie's unspecified longings for some object of devotion. Dorothea is not searching for a role outside of her social milieu; she longs to reform the situations of Tipton and Middlemarch. The interest of the
novel, then, is to see how well she succeeds within society, not despite it. Dorothea never really defies Sir James and her uncle until she decides to marry Ladislaw. The relation which the Prologue makes between Theresa and Dorothea is in Dodo's lack of a "coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardentlly willing soul." (Middlemarch, p. 3) This "lack of a social faith and order" refers to the bewildered states of mind of the nineteenth century men and women who had no system in which the individual could assert his will. Thus ultimately utilitarian railway stations were built in what was once considered the image and likeness of the divine spirit. Dorothea has no religious faith urging her into a convent or into the streets with tracts:

Since the Evangelicals had provided opposition to feudal bounty, most female works of charity had a religious colouring.

The narrator of the prologue finds that women view their possibilities in one of two ways, as a "vague ideal" or the "common yearning of womankind." The common yearning probably refers to the maternal emotions which George Eliot felt modified all women's psychological responses to experience. She also felt that women had a common desire for affection. George Eliot certainly doesn't attempt to define the "vague ideals" in all of their far-ranging alternatives. The "blundering lives" of women result from
their lack of direction, lack of clear function beyond the maternal one. At one point in the prologue she seems to mock the Positivist approach, which would be to scientifically analyze the situation:

...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. (Middlemarch, p. 4)

Middlemarch was published just as Mill had shifted the woman question from the rights of divorced and separated women to the question of the general evil of the whole system of Victorian marriage. Mill's immediate concern was with pressing for reforms in public and private attitudes toward marriage. Middlemarch considers the question of woman's prospects for self-dedication in marriage, and eventually affirms marriage as a solution to woman's urge for epic self-dedication. The book does not consider the problem as one which has been eating away at the institution of marriage for generations, as will Deronda. Gwendolen Harleth will be the only heroine who has preconceived ideas of the function of women in marriage that are formed from realistic observation. She is the only one who takes into account Mill's smashup of the Victorian marriage idyll. Dorothea is a more subtle depiction of what a woman could look forward to in her society. The example of Lydgate and Rosamond is a commentary on the situation of Dorothea, and it presents alternatives to her own marriage.
The attitudes of Casaubon and her own reactions are not shown to be isolated. Celia is also a foil for her sister. She has more common sense in understanding the people around her, and functions more effectively in local society because of it. She continually acts as the weight to Dorothea's balloon, curbing her wild impulses. Celia has the "common yearning of womankind: for affection, a home, and children. Dorothea is strange, is not understood by the residents, and has "vague ideals" for an epic vision.

Dorothea's vague longings to devote herself to something grand are soon particularized in the prospect of marrying Casaubon. When she first realizes that he may propose, she considers and rejects the other alternatives open to her. She rejects the system of female education that will give her more information but will not tell her how to live: "...not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse." (Middlemarch, p. 21) She has already found that her grand plans for the cottagers are stymied by the necessity for masculine approval. The prospects if she is not to marry Casaubon seem negligible:

With some endowment of stupidity and conceit, she might have thought that a Christian young lady of fortune should find her ideal of life in village charities, patronage of the humbler clergy, the perusal of 'Female Scripture Characters,' unfolding the private experience of Sara under the Old Dispensation, and Dorcas under the New, and the care of her soul over her embroidery in her own boudoir
--with a background of prospective marriage to a man who, if less strict than herself, as being involved in affairs religiously inexplicable, might be prayed for and seasonably exhorted.

(Middlemarch, p.21)

Dorothea is too wide--in her desire for complete knowledge and in her dislike of the restrictive paths asked of such religious models. Her mental description of her alternative fate is so critical that the reader knows the bias, even the decision, of her mind. She already is eager to marry Casaubon. She is too acutely aware of the deficiencies of her own education to want to feel superior to the man she marries. She has no qualms about submission to a man who is her superior, who will, so to speak, bring her up to the masculine level of knowledge and wisdom: "the grandest path". She also expects marriage to equip her for noble philanthropic schemes, both in terms of moral purpose and feminine power.

Casaubon is another of those men in George Eliot who treats his wife as something to be acquired. Dorothea's pet cottages will be treated as one more accomplishment not to be taken seriously in a masculine world. The cottages, symbol of Dorothea's first attempt to devote herself to philanthropy on a broad scale--she wants to build a model village and help to support Lydgate's hospital. Sir James and Mr. Brooke manage to convince her that the first project is completely impractical, and she concentrates on
the second. Dorothea's existence during this period is a dreary one: she continues to wear her widow's weeds and actually derives little satisfaction from her projects. The remainder of the book traces her decision to marry Ladislaw. The narrator presents marriage to him as a greater prospect for Dorothea to fulfill her ardent nature. Philanthropy has provided her with no significant relationships; she lives alone in Lowick Manor. Dorothea's jealousy of Rosamund forces her to recognize that she has an emotional nature that demands satisfaction:

No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself. (Middlemarch, p. 610)

Dorothea's highest function is seen as a double one: of fulfilling her womanly nature and also of contributing to a great cause. Whether or not the "beneficent activity" is worthy of her is debatable. Dorothea herself senses that there might have been other ways in which she could have devoted herself to a great cause:

Dorothea herself had no 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. (Middlemarch, p. 610)

The vague ideal remains undefined, and Dorothea is ultimately to be seen not as an ideal but as a woman who has found a happy niche, happier than her earlier prospects would
have indicated.

It seems significant that Ladislaw is a foreigner by heritage and education. He is also outside the scope of Middlemarch society. At the opening of the novel, there is no one in local society who would be a fit match for Dorothea. Mr. Brooke's dinner party makes it obvious that Dorothea is not understood by the local people, and is counted as lesser than the superficial Miss Vincy. Her romance comes from outside the normal structure of Victorian society.
IV. DANIEL DERONDA: THE REJECTION OF MARRIAGE

In Daniel Deronda—and more specifically, that part of the novel which deal with Gwendolen Harleth—George Eliot for the first time finds that marriage is not the answer for her heroine. It might be argued that Henleigh Grandcourt is an exceptional husband in his brutality and attitude toward women—he is not the Ladislaw, not the romantic solution to Gwendolen's question of what to do with herself. A careful examination of the models, foils, and ideals which the author provides for Gwendolen reveals that his attitudes are prevalent in society. Marriage is condemned as a future for Gwendolen no matter who the husband. In the previous novels the ardent nature of the heroine has predicated marriage. Dorothea, for example, cannot live without emotion. She marries Ladislaw in order to vent her emotion on more than cold philanthropic plans. At the beginning of this last novel, the heroine has no emotional impetus toward marriage. She even dislikes the prospect. Gwendolen has a physical revulsion toward sex that can almost be called pathological. Her marriage to Grandcourt will be seen as an indulgence of this revulsion, for Grandcourt promises an aridity, correctness and
coldness that appeal to her. His surface correctness, however, is merely the mask for his even abnormal lust.

Gwendolen Harleth combines the situations of Maggie and Dorothea—the need for an income and the desire for a specific vocation—with a difference. She is not presented in the novel from her childhood, as is Maggie, nor is she so well-defined as Miss Brooke of Tipton. Contrary to the other heroines, she is singularly unformed, and occupies an uncertain place in the world she moves in. The pressure of family history and past associations does not motivate her in quite the same way it does Maggie. She also lacks the fine income and finer prospects of Dorothea. From the beginning of the novel the reader is made aware that Gwendolen's 'wealth' is in her beauty and her attitudes, which will probably bring her a fine husband.

George Eliot's method of introducing Gwendolen emphasizes her uncertain character, and increases an aura of mystery. The narrative begins with Deronda's noticing her at the gaming tables, unable to decide what she is and if he approves of her. The narrator then establishes the soundness of Deronda's judgment by reviewing Daniel's observations about the other gamblers. The reader's and Daniel's judgments are expected to be the same. The moral touchstone which will appeal to the reader's sense of morality is the inclusion of the small boy held captive
in the gloomy spaces. Children and gambling always imply corruption. The whole gambling arena is being judged in moral terms in Deronda's mind—as the scene is contrasted with the relatively innocent aspects of pagans tossing coins under sunny skies. Gwendolen's compulsive gambling becomes evil in the scheme of things as the peasants' imagined tosses seem relatively innocent. Deronda's first conclusion is that the dynamism and unrest evident in the girl is something evil.

When Gwendolen senses that there is less than admiration in one of the viewer's judgments, she loses her composure and her luck. The girl had been the center of attention, and had felt herself to be in complete control of the situation. Gwendolen's ambitions had been specifically to acquire the 'divine' image of the gambler who successfully controls chance (his fate): "...she had visions of being followed by a cortege who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury. Such things had been known of male gamblers; why should not a woman have a like supremacy?" (Deronda, p. 38-39)

Deronda's implicit criticism upsets this vision of herself, and makes her realize that the control she exercised was that of a superior person in an inferior crowd. George Eliot's choice of this scene to open the novel should be taken seriously, as more than the portrait of a dissolute young woman. George Eliot opens the novel at a
crucial point in her life, when she is being forced to decide her future, perhaps knowing that she really has no choice to make. What she will do has been determined long ago. Gwendolen's lust for gambling reveals what moves her: she wants power and the unquestioning allegiance of a group of people. Moreover, she seems to thrive on the uncertainty of action of the gambling table, and the sense that she actually is controlling her destiny. Inasmuch as Deronda is presented as a positive moral force, Gwendolen is seen as willing to compromise her morality to achieve her goal.

The narrative then moves to a flashback of the year just previous to this scene, and establishes reasons for the picture of moral uncertainty that Deronda has just sensed. The year at Offendene also indicates that there is something uncertainly charming and evil to Gwendolen's personality. Gwendolen's mother was twice widowed, abused by her second husband, and before the time of the story has never had an establishment. Mrs. Davilow's sister's family functions in obvious contrast to her own. The sister's family, the Gascoigne's, began in much the way her own did, but has been relatively happy and stable, and has produced a lovely daughter so different from Gwendolen as to be an effective foil for her.

The "sweet habit of the blood " which motivated Maggie is obviously lacking in Gwendolen. Affection has
not taken root in her, and the narrator attributes this lack to her lack of a home:

Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harelth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to the dogs and donkey, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. (Daniel Deronda, p. 50)

Gwendolen is then immediately seen as lacking the very characteristics which had made marriage imperative for Dorothea, and which had been the guiding principle of Maggie's integrity. If she is not to marry to gratify her ardent nature why is she to marry? Or does she have to?

The reasons why Gwendolen must and will marry lie in the kinds of assumptions which her family and society have made about marriage. The reason for their previous lack of a permanent home, and their eventual acquisition of one lies in the character of her stepfather, Captain Davilow. Gwendolen only gradually becomes aware of the unhappiness of her mother's past life. At the first stage of the story she cannot understand why their financial state should improve with his death, but the reason is hinted to the reader. He had lived with his family in a "brief and fitful manner: for the past nine years, and they were not too saddened at his death."
Probably the captain and Mrs. Davilow were separated, and he spent her income on his separate establishment. Gwendolen's lack of interest in the whys of their change of fortune indicates that she isn't concerned with the nature of the adults' relationship. When Gwendolen was a child her mother tried to stimulate a peculiar filial sympathy in her for the father she had never seen. Gwendolen will not allow her mother to indulge her memories, and asks why she remarried, if the first one was so happy. Mrs. Davilow's response is a recognition of Gwendolen's total lack of affection: "'You have no feeling, child!'" Mrs. Gascoigne evidently married for love the first time, and in weakness the second. The second one is all too familiar: it was made on at least one side for money, and the husband controlled all material goods. The characters of the mother and aunt Gascoigne are represented as being peculiarly suited for the submissive marriage: "Their closest resemblance lay in a non-resistant disposition, inclined to imitation and obedience." (Deronda, p.59) Mrs. Gascoigne's submission combined with the character of her husband tends to breed feminine power in the household. She has made capital out of her marriage. Her husband began, as did Mrs. Davilow's second husband, as an army captain. He switched to clergyman, and by the time of the novel is well-respected and prosperous.

The Gascoigne household then represents what might have been for Mrs. Davilow, and Gwendolen's counterpart is Anna.
Their greatest difference, generated by the fact that Anna is the product of an affectionate home relationship, is Anna's greater sensitivity to the affections of theirs. Her example in dealing with Rex points up Gwendolen's greatest deficiencies. Her relationships with people give her a talent for interacting with them in the charades, while Gwendolen has to content herself with tableaux.

One of the primary purposes of the move to Offendene is to launch Gwendolen in local society. She has been educated to have certain accomplishments, in which she led her school. It must be emphasized that Gwendolen is not a Dorothea, wanting the key to all knowledge instead of girl-school smatterings. Gwendolen is satisfied with her accomplishments, including her much-praised singing. Despite her marriage-oriented education, Gwendolen does not direct her talents toward marriage, but to a far more intangible goal: being happy. Gwendolen's idea of marriage, formed from the examples around her is of a rather dreary state:

Her observation of matrimony had inclined her to think it rather a dreary state, in which a woman could not do what she liked, had more children than were desirable, was consequently dull, and became irrevocably immersed in humdrum. (Deronda, p. 68)

This concept of marriage includes all the important criticisms which feminists were leveling at it. It was boring, restrictive and even enslaving, produced a family difficult to support and impossible to rear, and was generally un-
fortunate. Gwendolen is one of the few Victorian heroines to articulate such criticisms. For most of the middle-class young women, marriage was a romantic goal which at least gave them a greater degree of importance in society. Gwendolen is a child of this middle class who has been trained as a perfect wife, but she is also the child of a mother who has suffered in her married life.

Gwendolen does not intend to submit to this typical marriage, but remains dispassionate as long as she does not have to face it directly. Her own concept of her role is a curious kind of romantic indolence, in which she is perpetually adored and courted in the chivalric manner—in which she is treated as a queen.

She meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy.

(Deronda, p. 69)

The attitude of her family is acutely mirrored in the society around her, from the wealthiest to the humblest. Catherine Arrowpoint is also on the marriage market, and her wealth ensures that she has plenty of eligible suitors. Catherine marries Klesmer, however, in defiance of her family. It is highly ironic that her mother cannot see the romance of the situation, for she remarks to Gwendolen early in the novel that she (as a woman author) would
have had Leonora marry Tasso despite family objections:

"Leonora, who in my opinion, was a cold-hearted woman, or else she would have married him in spite of her brother..."  
(Deronda, p. 76)

The narrator recalls this statement, as what Mrs. Arrowpoint had wished for the dead Leonora is enacted by her own daughter:

It is hard for us to live up to our own eloquence, and keep pace with our winged words, while we are treading the solid earth and are liable to heavy dining. Besides, it has long been understood that the proprieties of literature are not those of practical life.  
(Deronda, p. 76)

Catherine's marriage eventually is accepted by her parents. Her success indicates that her marriage is to be considered the closest thing to an ideal found in the book.

The villagers' opinion of Gwendolen's marriage is not any more romantic. They debate on the nature of woman's lot in marriage:

"Oh, child, men's men: gentle or simple, they're much of a muchness. I've heard my mother say Squire Pelton used to take his dogs and a long whip into his wife's room, and flog 'em there to frighten her; and my mother was lady's-maid there at the very time."  
(Deronda, p. 401)

The villagers conclude that Grandcourt is perfectly suited for following the example of the old squire. Such talk on a marriage day gives a sinister air to the occasion, and here is prophetic. Grandcourt is as sadistic (even in his treatment of his dogs) as was the old squire. The
attitude of the villagers, that this is how the gentry behaves, reveals how widespread such abuses have become.

Circumstance (and George Eliot) provide Gwendolen with a serious suitor before she ever meets Grandcourt. Her cousin Rex is represented from the first by the family as unsuitable for her, because no new money would be brought into the family. Nevertheless, he falls in love with her, and her reaction is a curious enactment and shrinking from her own romantic dreams. The scene where she and Rex ride to the hunt is presented with a complete idealism: "It was all morning to them, within and without." (Deronda, p. 99) Rex offers to gratify her every wish. George Eliot, knowing that Gwendolen will reject him, speculates in one of her authorial intrusions about the romance that might have been. The might have been is founded on feeling, and is expressive of the goodness that she would like to find in Gwendolen's actual fate: "...the germ prospering in the darkness, it has put forth delicate green blades, and by-and-by the trembling blossoms are ready to be dashed off by an hour of rough wind or rain." (Deronda, p. 100) Rex is the natural alternative, and Gwendolen's rejection of him demonstrates how her lack of feeling also is connected to her opinions about sex, and being made love to. She shies away from Rex out of a fear of the physical side of romance:

Besides, she objected, with a sort of physical repul-
sion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her.

(Deronda, p. 102)

Her liking for Grandcourt is-in part based on his negative approach to love-making; he does nothing to repulse her. At the same time, his attentions unsettle her and attract her. He appears to be the most suitable husband possible, for she thinks that he will not hinder her intention of being more free in marriage than in girlhood. Gwendolen is not quite cold-blooded enough to accept him at first, and she solicits family opinion in order to persuade herself. Her uncle feels that it is her duty to marry Grandcourt, and does not consider seriously the rumours of his past life. Mrs. Davilow's attitude reveals what must have been her own experience in marriage:

"Is he a man she would be happy with?" was a question that inevitably arose in the mother's mind. "Well, perhaps as happy as she would be with any one else-or as most other women are" was the answer which she cited to quiet herself; for she could not imagine Gwendolen under the influence of any feeling which would make her satisfied in what we traditionally call "mean circumstances".

(Deronda, p.167)

Some of the awfulness of Mrs. Glasher is that she is a representative of the all-too-physical side of Grandcourt. She has too many children and they are evidence of the same lust that Gwendolen can expect to endure. George Eliot comes as close as she ever comes to spelling out the sadistic aspects of Gwendolen and Grandcourt's
marital life. The image of Mrs. Glasher hangs over the marriage, coloring all of their relations. She knew of Mrs. Glasher prior to her acceptance of Grandcourt, and so goes into the marriage knowing of his habits and cruelty. She really has not been unaware of his sexual power. His presence excites and unsettles her in a way that she does not give words to. It might be asked whether she is subconsciously seeking this. Mrs. Glasher's history reiterates the issue of the bad marriage, and is an example of evil coming out of a supposed good, the indissolubility of marriage. Her husband had refused to give her a divorce so that she could marry Grandcourt, and her lack of legal ties has been the source of all her misery. Grandcourt has proved a brute to Mrs. Glasher in the same way Davilow was cruel to Gwendolen's mother. When Gwendolen discovers Mrs. Glasher for the first time, she expresses her revulsion in universal terms: "I believe all men are bad, and I hate them." (Deronda, p. 192) Her flight to the continent is as much from the idea of marriage as from the individual man. Gwendolen of course does return to Offendene, and with narrowed prospects. She has not gained a sense of power or of her fate from the gaming tables, and she certainly has not increased her ardor of living. When she returns and the family has lost all of its money, the question no longer is of discovering a more ardent life, but of main-
taining the one they had. She is in the same economic bind that her parents' generations were in, and fact as well as opinion says that she must marry an income. Gwendolen's natural impulse is to avoid marriage, and she decides to capitalize on her voice and acting. Gwendolen still has a sense of power within herself to determine her own future.

Klesmer's function is to advise Gwendolen on her talent. His is an almost entirely sympathetic portrait of artistic genius. His view of the world of art, that it is "out of the reach of any but choice organizations" calls for an aristocracy of the greatly talented. He does not say that the elite is not for the feminine mind, but his view of the artistic vocation makes it almost impossible to attain for a girl of Gwendolen's class and background. He postulates real success only for those who have approached the work with an almost religious devotion. The goal of the true artist is excellence, regardless of money. His criticism of Gwendolen is applicable to all ordinary girls like her: her education has not prepared her for such a vocation, and the deficiency cannot be overcome by her small talent. Klesmer admits that she might achieve a certain degree of success on the stage if she accepts what she inevitably must be—a gifted amateur in search of a husband. This is what she had wanted to avoid. This world of second-rate performers excuses the failings
of its members whose performances are incidental to their greater roles as ladies and gentlemen. Klesmer's advice does far more than he anticipates, for it convinces Gwendolen that she has no prospects other than fulfilling her role as dutiful daughter and perfect lady; it is her only marketable talent. She realizes for the first time how much she enjoys being a lady, how much she enjoys accepting the homage due her. Gwendolen's moment of crisis occurs when she recognizes what her prospects are, what she can do, and what she is. She is a lady, and the happiness she wants cannot be found in any other situation:

And poor Gwendolen had never dissociated happiness from personal pre-eminence and éclat. (Deronda, p. 317)

Gwendolen's attitude is the common one: only certain occupations in the arts were suitable for a vocation. Her feminine furniture prevents her from considering the truly revolutionary possibilities envisioned by women such as Barbara Bodichon. In actuality the greatest chances for women to break into new fields were not in the traditional professional ones, but in the general scheme of new, industrially-related jobs:

The jobs which women found easiest to enter were in new and expanding areas of employment. Their efforts to break into traditionally masculine fields, such as 'professional' medicine, met with little success... Whether or not the feminist movement would have been so successful had this expansion in lower middle-class employment generally not taken place, is... a question which need not concern us here.
Gwendolen is sensible of the inevitable nature of her acceptance of Grandcourt, even as she is in the process of accepting him:

She seemed to herself to be, after all, only drifted towards the tremendous decision:--but drifting depends on something besides the currents, when the sails have been set beforehand. *Deronda*, p. 346

In direct contrast to this, George Eliot inserts her own speculations about marriage. She intrudes to justify the importance of the scenes that she is describing, and one girl's indecision about marriage. Women, she says, are the moral good for which all good deeds originate:

> In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections. *Deronda*, p. 160

This ideal of womanhood reminds the reader of the high seriousness of Gwendolen's making a decision that is so wrong. She is not helping to further human affections. The image of a vessel being borne on a current, repeated in Gwendolen's own thoughts, implies that she has the 'treasure of human affections' within her, because it is the common gift of the sex. The authorial intrusion points up the deficiencies of the marriage which the major characters are promoting, and reminds the reader that there still is an ideal.

Gwendolen's opposite in the story is of course Mirah, the mountebank's daughter who has been singing for a living
since she was a child. She is in fact the ideal that Klesmer holds up to Gwendolen, before he has even heard of the actual Mirah:

A mountebank's child who helps her father to earn shillings when she is six years old—a child that inherits a singing throat from a long line of choisters and learn to sing as it learns to talk, has a like-lier beginning. (Deronda, p. 300)

Even the scene in which Klesmer listens to Mirah's singing is the ideal of behavior which he had described to Gwendolen as what he would do in the presence of such a person. He shakes her hand, finds her education ideal, and assures her that her prospects are excellent. The contrast with his interview with Gwendolen is almost too pat. Klesmer seems to be the thinly-disguised voice of the author. He decides artistic fates with a perception that parallels the narrator's own. He is like the voice of truth to Gwendolen, forcing her to see herself in a diminished perspective. For Mirah he is an agent, who introduces her into the society of Deronda's and Gwendolen's friends. For the reader, his is the ideal marriage.

Klesmer agrees with Mirah that her voice is too weak for the stage. Mirah's utter gentility is thus assured, as the throat's weakness will keep her in fashionable drawing rooms. Thus her eventual marriage with Deronda is one of close equals, and he is assured that she will not repeat the career of his mother. In being Jewish, Mirah is not
subjected to the demands which English society made on Gwendolen. She is an individual free to be herself, because she is neither bound by rank, nor hampered in education. The Jewish artist, then, would seem to be a more natural product of his society than the English exceptional organization. The fault seems to lie once more with society. George Eliot is of course presenting an ideal in Mirah, and depicts none of the restrictions which her race impose on her.

Daniel's mother is a less sympathetic portrait of the Jewish artist. She is great, whereas Mirah is merely talented, but the demands of her temperament for freedom and greatness had killed any affection she might have had for familial attachments. She is the woman who was not made for marriage, the professional. She challenges certain ideas in the same way that Mill challenged them: "Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else be a monster...you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl." (Deronda, p. 694) Her father had tried to force her into domestic submission, but she wanted freedom. She looked upon the Christian attitude of accepting Jewish women as good actresses and singers as a release from her situation.

Whether or not her course in life has been a praise-
worthy one is not fully established. Her own unhappiness indicates that her life is not to be a model. The harm that was done Daniel was as much the fault of the custom that demanded that the princess marry, as her own lack of affection. The princess is essentially an unsympathetic portrait, but inasmuch as she is presented as an alternative to the mold in which women are assumed to be formed, inasmuch as George Eliot accepts that such persons exist and perhaps should not be forced by their society to marry, she represents a response to the question of women's abilities versus their natural function.

Gwendolen and the princess are alike in being devoid of affection for their families, and in being forced into marriage. Gwendolen's aversion to sex is an additional element in her reluctance. The example of these two women indicates that such a woman will have an unhappy life in marriage. The ideal which George Eliot depicts, of the role of woman in marriage as the 'vessel of affections,' indicates that marriage without affection is a perversion of its natural state. The woman who has the 'force of a man's genius' in her should be free to follow it. The third kind of person, the ordinary girl with no emotional attachments fitting her for marriage, is seen as the curious product of the Victorian system of marriage, and indeed she has no hope in society as it stands. The
highest expressions of a person's capabilities seems to be her role in a good and affectionate marriage, with the professional woman a special case.

Gwendolen's release from her marriage with Grandcourt is seen by George Eliot as a chance for her to return to Offendene and to acquire some of the sweet habits of the blood which she has lacked. After Grandcourt's drowning, Gwendolen had begun to hope that Daniel Deronda might come to mean more to her. It is difficult to deal with her disappointment in Daniel's marriage, without a general critique of the entire Deronda section. Deronda has been presented as blameless, a shining example, and his lack of characterization makes him both unbelievable and uninteresting. His marriage to Mirah is an obvious piece of plot machinery, designed to further the New Zionism theme. Deronda plays an isolated part in Gwendolen's life. She has no connection to speak of with the Jewish side of his existence, while he has none with Offendene. His function, like that of Klesmer, is that of a mentor, in this case a moral one. The careful psychological structuring of relationships underlying the Offendene scenes is lacking in the Deronda-Gwendolen one. Deronda never seems to the reader to be a serious possibility for her.

**Daniel Deronda** is the only one of George Eliot's books left open-ended. Gwendolen's future is not specified;
the reader knows only that she intends to live. Her ambition, an ardent way of life, appears possible with her new appreciation of her surroundings and family. The possibility that she will marry Rex still remains. It seems as if George Eliot could not resist a last romantic fling. Having denied her readers a Deronda-Gwendolen marriage, George Eliot must provide some hints of a romantic ending. Despite such possibilities, one must remember that Gwendolen is left at the end of the novel lone, finding greater happiness outside of marriage than she had as Grandcourt's wife. She must first learn to live alone, and to discover her more ardent way of life in the present, before looking to marriage as fulfillment.

From *Adam Bede* to *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot's opinions about the ideal vocation for a woman have not changed. Marriage remains an ideal to be sought for and prepared for. What has been modified is her view of the possibilities which the structure of society leaves open for a young woman's fulfillment. *Adam Bede* was a simple pastoral affirmation of the order and grace of a happy marriage. In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot explores the problems of an exceptional nature, Maggie Tulliver, who cannot fit in the social scheme. Her failure to find happiness in marriage is blamed on her unique personality, and her need to affirm
old ideals in a changed world. *Felix Holt* is an upward progression in social terms, as George Eliot considers the world of the upper classes, and what it can do to a young girl. The heroine Esther chooses to follow the promptings of her own heart, but hers is not the most dramatic situation. In *Mrs. Transome*, George Eliot exposes the Victorian concept of the perfect lady for the horror that it was. *Middlemarch* returns to the ardent nature of woman, and what she is to do with herself in society. Dorothea tries to find a role for herself and fails. She then marries unwisely, in the belief that her greatest path is in devoting herself to a great cause. She subsequently is disillusioned about the place of woman in a marriage that is not founded on mutual love and respect. Dorothea has no order in which to lose herself until she finds a husband with whom she can fulfill her affectionate nature. Her eventual marriage with Ladislaw is especially fortunate because he is outside the society in which she had been expected to find a mate. Gwendolen Harleth is the most extreme case, growing up in a horror story of wastral stepfathers, being haunted by her husband's discarded mistress, and so forth. Gwendolen is not fit for marriage, and her experiences do nothing to convince her that happiness can be found in marriage. She, too, however, is given a second chance, but George Eliot leaves one with the impression that Gwendolen's release is an individual fate, and represents no
great change in the society that created the Mrs. Glashers, Grandcourts, and Captain Davilows.

The question of what a woman is to do with herself has become all important in the last novels. For marriage to be a suitable vocation, it must be founded on the ideals being discussed by Mill and others. Marriage as an existing social institution is strongly criticized, if not condemned.
NOTES


11. Banks and Banks, p. 27.


13. Parlett, p. 43.


27. Letters, IV, p. 301.
30. George Eliot, Adam Bede (New York, 1948) Rinehart edition. This edition will be used throughout.
36. Thomson, p. 36.
37. Banks, p. 38.
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I. PRIMARY SOURCES


II. BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND CRITICISM


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