Their prisoned souls are throbbing like my own.
Perchance they loved once, were ambitious, proud:
Or do they only dream of wider life,
Ache from intenseness, yearn to burst the wall
Compact of crystal splendour, and to flood
Some wider space with glory? ¹

This search for understanding and sympathy with womanhood in gilded cages is central to George Eliot's fictive world. Realism was Eliot's forte. Like Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen, George Eliot's imagination is rooted in realism. Holding Ruskin's Modern Painters as her model, George Eliot wrote,

_The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism_ — _the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality._ ²

In _Silly Novels_ by lady Novelists, Eliot lambasts her contemporary female writers who "instead of faithfully depicting life and leaving it to teach its own lesson,"³ employ affected diction, melodramatic plots, stereotyped characters, and a facile didactism to create a fictional world which is both false and pernicious.⁴ George Eliot's 'manifold, but disinterested and impartially observant sympathy' has been eulogized by the renowned historian Lord Acton:

_George Eliot seemed to me capable not only of reading the diverse hearts of men, but of creeping_
into their skin, watching the world through their eyes, feeling their latent background of conviction, discerning theory and habit influences of thought and knowledge, of life and descent, and having obtained this experience, recovering her independence, stripping off the borrowed shell, and exposing scientifically and indifferently the soul of a Vestal, a Crusader, an Anabaptist, an Inquisitor, a Dervish, a Nihilist, or a Cavalier without attraction, preference, or caricature. 5

George Eliot herself characterizes her writing as:

simply a set of experiments in life — an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of — what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive — what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more than shifting theory. 6

To reproduce life faithfully is a 'sacred' task for the artist, "a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" and thereby to obliterate the "vulgarity of exclusiveness." 7

It was this all-pervasive humanism that prevented George Eliot from confining her comprehensive vision only to feminism. Her focus keeps on moving and she does not linger to make a point. Her canvas is rich and has a strong undercurrent of love and community. Her grasp of human heart — its stirrings, its aspirations, and her strong moral vision rooted in a sense of continuity placed her in 'the Great Tradition.' F.R.Leavis considers Jane Austen, George Eliot, James and Conrad as,

...the major novelists who count in the same way as
the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life.8

George Eliot kept herself aloof from abstractions but her comprehension of female difficulties and the anomalies of marriage gave her a natural sympathy with the women's movement. She was aware of a desperation invariably suffered by many women as they sought to reconcile the conflicting demands made upon them. This empathy or instinctive sympathy for womanhood was engendered by her personal anguish, and as she wrote in 1871, "Hopelessness has been to me, all through my life, but especially in the painful years of my youth, the chief source of wasted energy with the consequent bitterness of regret."9

George Eliot earnestly believed "that the mysterious complexity of life is not to be embraced by maxims."10 Yet her abiding interest was with ambitious, unconventional, atypical women, impatient with their stereotyped parameters. Commenting on George Eliot's heroines Virginia Woolf remarked:

_They do not find what they seek, and we cannot wonder. The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something — they scarcely know what — for something that is perhaps incompatible with facts of human existence._11

Women since time immemorial, have played a secondary role in a patriarchal
society. The feminist movement like the black movement and the youth movement, has been an endeavour to question the entire social order.

The parallelism between the feminist movement and other movements involving the oppressed has often been drawn. But in literature, particularly the literature written by female writers, it has not merely been the conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor — which is no doubt one of the aspects of the movement — that has been highlighted, but the distinct nature of their experience. Patricia Spacks seeks "the special point of view," in the "patterns dictated by the same few clearly defined issues — patterns, if not universal, at least very widespread in female experience." 12 It is for this reason, that it has not taken an overt class character.

Betty Friedan in The Second Stage seems to affirm Jean Paul Sartre's views: "I have never thought that the class struggle was a good analogy for the man/woman relationship. It denies the totality of the real relationship between them." 13 Betty Friedan's endeavour has throughout been to keep the "Women's Movement on its own existential course — feeling, somehow, that we must continue to find the truth from the questions and actions stemming from the reality of our own existence." 14 Owing to the constraints of the society, women are confronted with problems like economic hardship, social ostracism, psychological isolation and quite often, with a combination of all these. No wonder, the heroines of George Eliot have to face one or the other of these problems.

The male-dominated society appears to be inevitably hostile to the
feminine sensibility. A significant feature of feminine sensibility is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others. The disruption of an affiliation is perceived not as just a loss of relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self. George Eliot's depiction of the female world is exceedingly authentic and convincing, because of her acceptance of the extreme complexity of the female mind. The life pattern of her female protagonists is determined by their highly individualistic emotionality, their vulnerability to human relationships, the social milieu in which they exist, and by their own susceptibility to recurrent feelings of weakness and helplessness.

In most of her novels, George Eliot presents a beautiful virtuous young woman, whom she intends to make the 'good' heroine as symbolized in the characters of Dinah and Mirah. Virtue is sometimes shown to consist in striving after goodness as in Maggie, Romola, Dorothea and in a minor way in Esther. These heroines are the noblest of Eliot's characters and they reflect the writer's truest self. The urge towards moral elevation, in all instances, comes from spiritual communion with some man, be it Wakem, Savonarola, Felix Holt or Daniel Deronda.

In her aesthetics, woman is portrayed as part of the cosmos. Character, to George Eliot, is inextricably part of an intricate web or net of relationships within the community. *Adam Bede*, George Eliot's very first novel is set in an active, productive, rural backdrop. However, Eliot does not create a pastoral idyll. Instead, she presents human misery and wastage against the ramifications of natural growth and human endeavour:

*Family likeness has often a deep sadness in it.*
Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains; blends yearning and repulsion; and ties us by our heartstrings to the beings that jar us at every movement. We hear a voice with the very cadence of our own uttering the thoughts we despise; we see eyes - ah! so like our mother's - averted from us in cold alienation; and our last darling child startles us with the air and gestures of the sister we parted from in bitterness long years ago. The father to whom we owe our best heritage - the mechanical instinct, the keen sensibility to harmony, the unconscious skill of the modelling hand - galls us, and puts us to shame by his daily errors; the long-lost mother, whose face we begin to see in the glass as our own wrinkles come, once fretted our young souls with her anxious humours and irrational persistence.\textsuperscript{15}

George Eliot captures the tantalising burden of family ties - petty jealousies and animosities fostered by physical proximity. The families in Eliot's fictive world are remarkable for their verisimilitude and are concerned with conflicting emotions. She goes beyond the hackneyed themes of authority and rebellion. Adam and Seth, the two sons, hate their alcoholic and truant father. There is hardly any familial feeling subsisting in this family. Adam has no patience with his querulous mother and his propensity for cruelty, his severity and uprightness have to be appreciated in this context. The Irwines in the novel are champions of stability and believe in keeping up the facade of elegance, tasteful living, morality and character. Appearances matter a great deal to them. George Eliot does not approve of such morality which judges by appearances. She believes in the innate individuality of all living beings, male or female. Eliot's sympathies are with the Poysers, who are presented as a community because of their creative and productive
force. Work is the raison-d’-être of their lives, and is at the centre of their human values.

George Eliot’s aesthetics is comprehensive and not exclusive. It has enough room both for work-worn hands of old women and weather-beaten face of peasants. In her fictive world, Eliot is a great leveller and work, love, community are the keystones of her knowable community. The novel presents two significant female protagonists: Hetty and Dinah; with Mrs Poyser, a close contender in the wings. Hetty is a sinner, Dinah a preacher and Mrs Poyser is a robust country woman. Robert Speaight, considers Mrs Poyser as an immortal character when he says:

She provides nature’s own sceptical answer to Dinah’s — and George Eliot’s — spiritual intensity. Less idyllic than Adam, less exalted than Dinah, less emotional than Hetty, she redresses the balance of the book. She contributes a comic realism which is more valuable, and more artistic, than comic relief. 16

George Eliot’s progressive and emancipated vision is articulated in Hetty Sorrel’s sympathetic delineation. Hetty is:

the femme moyenne sensuelle at her most attractive and her sin is as natural as Mrs. Poyser’s prattling. It springs from a warmth of blood and heart. There is no judgement in George Eliot’s tracing of her fortunes. It would, moreover, be misleading to suggest that she drew Dinah from looking into the mirror and Hetty from looking into the meadow. She was no stranger to Hetty’s sensuality, and this is discreetly attested in a dozen passages. 17
Hetty has not only pandered to her sensuality by allowing herself to be seduced by Arthur Donnithorne, she has further sinned by murdering her illegitimate child. Though society condemns her, Hetty's family stand by her in her hour of shame. George Eliot strongly believed that art should enlarge a man's sympathies. Dinah does not preach like other preachers but speaks "directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith." Dinah's strong emotion elicits from Hetty every detail of her crime and Dinah's warm sympathies rooted in her Evangelical faith prevail upon the hardened, miserable soul of Hetty, redeeming the sinner. It is a tribute to George Eliot's humanism that even the seducer, Arthur Donnithorne, does not end up as a caricature.

The theme of seduction and betrayal is not the main theme in Adam Bede. It is an adjunct to the development of the eponymous hero, Adam who has been compared to the patriarch Joseph:

The honour and love you bear him is nothing but meet, for God has given him great gifts, and he uses them as the patriarch Joseph did, who, when he was exalted to a place of power and trust, yet yearned with tenderness towards his parent and his younger brother.

The unfortunate affair of Hetty and Arthur juxtaposes Adam Bede's naivety and earthly ruggedness with Arthur Donnithorne's suave and worldly ways. The affair pinpoints Adam Bede's inability to plumb human nature. He misjudges Hetty, Dinah and even Arthur.

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

She is the precursor of Rosamond and Gwendolen. George Eliot compares Hetty to a 'vessel': "But that will not save the vessel—the pretty thing that might have been a lasting joy."21 At another place Hetty is compared to an apple: "And there was Hetty, like a bright-cheeked apple hanging over the orchard wall, within sight of everybody, and everybody must long for her!"22 This simile of apple re-enforces Hetty's enticing beauty. Its undertones are very significant in the light of Eve's seduction of Adam. The metaphor of peach underscores her outer beauty while comparing her soul to a stone: "No: people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it."23 Hetty has also been described as rootless. Her soul is parched, 'a trivial soul.' She is deaf to music, and to the service in church. She has no love for her cousins. Mrs Poyser is acutely aware of Hetty's self-centred nature, but even she is moved by her bewitching beauty:

Not as you'd care much, I daresay, if you did hear; for you're too feather-headed to mind if everybody was dead, so as you could stay up-stairs a-dressing yourself for two hours by the clock. 24

Hetty is conscious of the sway of her beauty over Adam.

She knew still better, that Adam Bede—tall, upright.
Hetty's affair comes as a great shock to Adam. It is a betrayal of his expectations and of his faith in Hetty and in Arthur.

Hetty's seduction and betrayal by Arthur is presented with great psychological insight. Both Arthur and Hetty are unable to stem the tide of their passion:

Arthur had laid his hand on the soft arm that was nearest to him, and was stooping towards Hetty with a look of coaxing entreaty. Hetty lifted her long dewy lashes, and met the eyes that were bent towards her with a sweet, timid, beseeching look. What a space of time those three moments were, while their eyes met and his arms touched her! Love is such a simple thing when we have only one-and-twenty summers and a sweet girl of seventeen trembles under our glance, as if she were a bud first opening her heart with wondering rapture to the morning. Such young unfurrowed souls roll to meet each other like two velvet peaches that touch softly and are at rest; they mingle as easily as two brooklets that ask for nothing but to entwine themselves and ripple with ever-interlacing curves in the leafiest hiding places. While Arthur gazed into Hetty's dark beseeching eyes, it made no difference to him what sort of English she spoke; and even if hoops and powder had been in fashion, he would very likely not have been
The villain is Hetty's kitten-like beauty, which "seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women." Arthur's inner turmoil always succumbs to the bewitching hold of Hetty:

"He was ready to pitch everything else — no matter where — for the sake of surrendering himself to this delicious feeling which had just disclosed itself. It was no use blinking the fact now — they would get too fond of each other, if he went on taking notice of her — and what would come of it?... He must not see her alone again; he must keep out of her way. What a fool he was for coming back from Gawaine’s!... The soft air did not help his resolutions.... He wondered if the dear little thing were thinking of him too — twenty to one she was. How beautiful her eyes were with the tear on their lashes! He would like to satisfy his soul for a day with looking at them, and he must see her again."

Hetty's soulless beauty and Arthur's irresponsible acts were bound to lead to misery. But it is Hetty who is indicted severely and who has to bear the cross. Her death is presented as a just retribution for her sin. Arthur is let off lightly, thus laying bare the double standards of our andocentric culture. Adam is more severe on Arthur. The only punishment that Arthur gets is being knocked down by Adam. But even he exonerates Arthur in the end.

Hetty's 'trivial' soul highlights by contrast Dinah's spiritual grandeur.

"What a strange contrast the two figures made! Visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight. Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening..."
from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. They were nearly of the same height; Dinah evidently a little the taller as she put her arm round Hetty’s waist, and kissed her forehead. 29

If Hetty spreads ripples of misery all around her, Dinah’s love sets out to checkmate the agonizing consequences. Dinah is a source of great comfort to Poysers, Adam, Arthur, and most of all to the sinner Hetty. Dinah’s love overpowers Hetty’s resistance. George Eliot has been castigated by many a feminist for making Dinah give up preaching. They forget, however that Dinah did not give up preaching under pressure from her husband who was actually in favour of her continuing with her avocation:

> And you can do almost as much as you do now. I won't ask you to go to church with me of a Sunday; you shall go where you like among the people, and teach 'em; for though I like church best, I don't put my soul above yours, as if my words was better for you to follow than your own conscience. And you can help the sick just as much, and you'll have more means o' making 'em a bit comfortable; and you'll be among all your own friends as love you, and can help 'em and be a blessing to 'em till their dying day. Surely, Dinah, you'd be as near to God as if you was living lonely and away from me. 30

Dinah stopped preaching because of the injunction against ‘women preaching’ by conference. Indeed George Eliot should be acclaimed for daring to portray a woman
methodist preacher whereas it is only now that the Anglican Church has finally accepted women priests.

Though George Eliot recognized the importance of confession, she did not have much faith in institutionalized religion. She had read widely and was deeply affected by Charles Kingsley's novel *Yeast* (1848) and Charles Hennell's *An Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838).

Her whole soul was imbued by, and fired with, the scientific spirit of her age, by the constant, rapid development of ideas in the Western world, and she felt that, as yet, no completely sufficient religious formula had been reached, or any political system that was likely to be final.

The publication of *Adam Bede* coincided with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The novel presents a delectable blend of a pastoral ambience of characters with the iconoclastic temper of the age. But the novel conveys its moral purpose without being overtly didactic.

George Eliot deliberately kept aloof from women's movement, because she was not inclined towards doctrines but she wove the emerging aspirations into her aesthetics. In Hetty Sorrel, Eliot articulates the latent violence in women which comes to the fore when they are driven against the wall. George Eliot's vibrant heroines are dissatisfied with their traditional roles and seek fulfilment through un-conventional methods.

Maggie Tulliver, in *The Mill on the Floss* is a blend of Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris. In her avid yearning for beauty and knowledge, Maggie
symbolizes the aspirations, of suppressed womanhood. Unlike Dinah and Dorothea, Maggie inhabits a human world. Her excessive sensibility and weakness of character evoke empathy. Maggie's sensitive nature rebels against the oppressive narrowness of society at St. Ogg's:

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie—how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths.32

Maggie's longing for a fuller life translates into rebellious gestures like persuading Tom to cut off her hair. Her meetings with Philip Wakem on the sly are a kind of escape. Maggie is exceptional among George Eliot's heroines in her steadfast refusal to be circumscribed by femininity. Passion, a traditionally male prerogative, manifests in Maggie as intellectual and emotional craving. The witch's tale from Defoe's History of the Devil fascinates Maggie.

O, I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? But I can't help looking at it. That old woman in the water's a witch— they've put her in, to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned—and killed, you know, she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she'd go to heaven, and God would

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The witch's tale is presented as an allegory of Maggie's ultimate dilemma. The novel abounds with literary allusions and lays bare the stereotyped portrayal of men and women.

As soon as I came to the blond-haired young lady reading in the park, I shut it up and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I'm determined to read no more books where the blond haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca and Flora Mac-Ivor, and Minna and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones.

Though Maggie is sharper and quicker than Tom and shows her ability to learn, she is denied access to classical learning.

Girls can't do Euclid: can they, sir? 'They can pick up a little of everything, I daresay,' said Mr Stelling. 'They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow.' As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified: she had been so proud to be called 'quick' all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority.

Maggie hates women and wants to be different from them by being 'clever' as is reflected in her remarks to Tom: "But I shall be a clever woman." Tom's retort is significant: "O, I dare say, and a nasty conceited thing. Everybody'll hate you."
Maggie's spirits sink under this assault. Her bitterness is articulated by George Eliot's description of Maggie as an 'apparatus of shallow quickness'.

Eliot adroitly delineates the claustrophobic world of gossiping women, where regression is abetted by the repressive Dodson aunts. Passivity is embraced deliberately; resignation and submission require a great deal of courage. Resigned submission is presented as an act of choice, requiring a great effort.

Maggie's ambition now and then breaks through her restraint:

> From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud. 37

Philip protests against Maggie's 'narrow asceticism' of denying herself the pleasure of poetry, music, art and knowledge.

> 'Yes, Maggie,' said Philip, vehemently, 'and you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed— that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance— to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. I am not resigned: I am not sure that
George Eliot, deftly contrasts the meaninglessness of the inner space reserved for woman with the boundless busier world of men.

While Maggie's life-struggles had lain almost entirely within her own soul, one shadowy army fighting another, and the slain shadows for ever rising again, Tom was engaged in a dustier, noisier warfare, grappling with more substantial obstacles, and gaining more definite conquests.

Philip is, like Will Ladislaw a sensitive and effeminate man. Philip's foreboding that Maggie's negations will assail her like a savage appetite proves to be true. The novel resonates with impotent passivity of woman. The author is at pains to stress that woman's passivity is not congenital. Maggie, with her eyes full of `unsatisfied intelligence,' as a child is much brighter than her stupid brother Tom. She has flair for Latin, which Tom finds extremely dreary.

An average dour man can scale heights with his diligence, whereas, a woman in George Eliot's fictional world can at best look for a situation as a teacher or governess. Maggie feels frustrated at her inability to alleviate her family's financial troubles. She is full of spirited defiance. As Mrs Pullet puts it, "she's beyond everything for boldness and unthankfulness." Even Philip though deformed and puny is endowed with the active principle of self-validation and has the courage to stand up to his father.

But it is not right, Maggie — don't you be angry with me, I am so used to call you Maggie in my thoughts — it is not right to sacrifice everything to

life is long enough to learn that lesson. You are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself."
other people’s unreasonable feelings. I would give up a great deal for my father; but I would not give up a friendship or an attachment of any sort, in obedience to any wish of his that I didn’t recognise as right. 41

Philip is the repository of erudition. Gillian Beer compares him to the “wounded Philoctetes” who gives them “access to the warmth of learning in their lives.”42 Inspite of his deformity or because of it, Philip has a keen sensibility. His forced passivity sharpens his perceptions and enables him to judge others by ‘studying expression’. Like Will Ladislaw, he is presented as a sensitive man, akin to women. But his gender makes all the difference. He is capable of defying paternal authority. Not only that, because of his insight, he can make quick and clear decisions. He is not mentally crippled by his physical handicap. His avowal of love for Maggie bespeaks his self-confidence.

Maggie, a sharp, intelligent girl grows up to become a young, tall, dark beauty with her animal like avid eyes and long hair. Her mother feels proud of her, but Mr Tulliver, knowing the ways of the world, foresees a bleak future for her. For a girl, poverty is a great handicap. Maggie deliberately suppresses her longings by resorting to asceticism in dress and thought. She internalizes her passion in the form of passive, deterministic, sad resignation. Her only outing is to Red Deeps, where Maggie significantly encounters Philip, who makes her conscious of the longings and cravings buried ‘deep’ in her. Her walks in Red Deeps along with her meetings with Philip signify her communion with her sub-conscious. Her discontent is just under the surface. Her asceticism is only skin ‘deep’. She accuses Philip of having made her restless by arousing her discontent. George Eliot skilfully
juxtaposes Maggie and Philip to underpin futility of ‘will’ in women. Maggie has learnt to bear her situation by subjugating her will.

'I’ve been a great deal happier,' she said at last, timidly, 'since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn’t have my own will. Our life is determined for us — and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do.' 43

In contrast, Philip considers life worthless, without longings.

'But I can’t give up wishing,' said Philip, impatiently. 'It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?.... Then, there are many other things I long for— here Philip hesitated a little, and then said— things that other men have, and that will always be denied to me. My life will have nothing great or beautiful in it— I would rather not have lived.' 44

Philip wins Maggie's half-hearted avowal of love through his perseverance. He is portrayed as tender, timid and beseeching. But Maggie's avowal is more of sacrifice than self-indulgence. Their relationship, at least on her side, lacks passion as is evident from their first kiss. When Tom forbids Maggie to meet Philip, she is relieved.

And yet— how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip? Surely it was only because the sense of a deliverance from concealment was welcome at any cost? 45
SURELY expresses Maggie's doubts. This asexual relationship is more like sister-brother relationship. Philip's love boosts Maggie's confidence and after her father's death, she determines to be independent. Maggie even gathers courage to stand up to her brother Tom's harsh and cruel remarks. Her passion and longings interred intentionally by Maggie, surface with vengeance when she meets Stephen Guest. As the very name suggests, Stephen cannot find an abiding space within Maggie's heart, but he certainly succeeds in re-kindling the spark of passion in her heart.

For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair, a the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. This new experience was very agreeable to her—so agreeable that it almost effaced her previous emotion about Philip. There was a new brightness in her eyes, and a very becoming flush on her cheek as she seated herself. 46

Both of them feel the onset of a powerful emotion affecting Stephen with a blush and Maggie with a flush. The tide of emotion is too much for them. Maggie, being nobler of the two, tries to anchor herself firmly by reminding herself of her obligations towards her cousin Lucy and poor Philip Wakem. Maggie is charmed by the taller and stronger Stephen's graceful manner of taking care of her. George Eliot subtly delineates woman's need to be taken care of in Maggie's passion for Stephen and her pity for Philip.
...it was rather that she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries. Her mind glanced back once or twice to the time when she had courted privation, when she had thought all longing, all impatience was subdued, but that condition seemed irrecoverably gone, and she recoiled from the remembrance of it. No prayer, no striving now would bring back that negative peace: the battle of her life, it seemed, was not to be decided in that short and easy way—by perfect renunciation at the very threshold of her youth. 47

In Maggie's awakened state of mind, conjuring up faint images of love, beauty and delight, there can be little room for the pale, puny and deformed Philip. When the hopeful Lucy tries to paint a rosy picture by saying, "And Philip will adore you like a husband in a fairy tale,"48 Maggie recoils, "Maggie tried to smile, but shivered, as if she felt a sudden chill."49

Maggie's love for Philip has gone cold and his place, if ever there was one, has been supplanted by Stephen. Ironically, Maggie-Philip affair seems quite romantic to sweet Lucy. Lucy's keenness for rapprochement between Wakems and Tom reflects her fear of Maggie's 'witchery' and 'uncanniness'. Stephen is smitten with this dark-eyed nymph, but a la Darcy he allays Lucy's fears by discounting Maggie. 'Too tall' said Stephen, smiling down upon her, "and a little too fiery. She is not my type of woman, you know."50 Maggie is caught in a no-win position. In order to barricade her heart against the onslaught of passion, Maggie must turn to Philip. But that would entail breaking her word to her brother. She takes recourse
to the only alternative left to her, that of going away. When Philip urges her to reconsider her decision, her response is stoical:

'Yes, Phillip,' she said, looking at him pleadingly, as if she entreated him to believe that she was compelled to this course. 'At least, as things are, I don’t know what may be in years to come. But I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving; I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do. 51

But the flood of emotions overwhelms her before she can make good her escape. The novel is singular in having a tangible love scene which provoked much criticism of George Eliot’s venture into this forbidden arena. Swayed by his passionate longing, Stephen ardently kisses Maggie’s arm.

But they had reached the end of the conservatory, and were obliged to pause and turn. The change of movement brought a new consciousness to Maggie: she blushed deeply, turned away her head, and drew her arm from Stephen’s, going up to some flowers to smell them. Stephen stood motionless and still pale....A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted towards the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist. But the next moment Maggie snatched it from him and glared at him like a wounded war-goddess, quivering with rage and humiliation. 52

Maggie is riven with inner strife, unlike Tom who is embroiled in the great task of paying back his father’s debts and buying back the old mill. Stephen tries to prevail upon Maggie by appealing to her sense of fair play.

'The pledge can’t be fulfilled,' he said, with impetuous insistance. 'It is unnatural; we can only
pretend to give ourselves to any one else. There is wrong in that too — there may be misery in it for them as well as for us. Maggie, you must see that you do see that. 53

But fate in the form of coincidence throws spanner in the works. Maggie is enticed by Stephen to go for boating with him. Stephen's strong presence deprives her of her will power. In this trance-like state, both of them lose contact with reality, present or past, even memory was excluded:

And they went Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat, having the cushion and cloak arranged for her feet, and her parasol opened for her (which she had forgotten) — all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic— and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded. 54

Stephen with manly nonchalance pleads with Maggie to make use of this God-given opportunity of running away from all unnatural ties. But Maggie has too many scruples. She cannot build her happiness riding rough-shod on the happiness of others.

...he would belong to her for ever — and all that was his was hers — had no value for him except as it was hers. Such things, uttered in low broken tones by the one voice that has first stirred the fibre of young passion, have only a feeble effect — on experienced minds at a distance from them. To poor Maggie they were very near: they were like nectar held close to thirsty lips: there was, there must be, then, a life for mortals here below
which was not hard and chill—in which affection would no longer be self-sacrifice. Stephen’s passionate words made the vision of such a life more fully present to her than it had ever been before; and the vision for the time excluded all realities—all except the returning sun-gleams which broke out on the waters as the evening approached, and mingled with the visionary sun-light of promised happiness—all except the hand that pressed hers, and the voice that spoke to her, and the eyes that looked at her with grave, unspeakable love. 

Stephen's avowals of love—'he would belong to her for ever'—have been characterized as nectar held to Maggie's thirsty lips, embodying fulfilment of all her yearnings. But Maggie soon wakes to reality and resists this tide of love. George Eliot time and again uses the word 'choice'. Maggie refuses to be subsumed by events. George Eliot redeems Maggie's pitiable plight by investing her with the prerogative of choice to resolve the dichotomy of heart and soul. Predictably, our noble heroine chooses to stifle the joys of love and cater to calmer affections. "I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery." 

In making this choice, Maggie has not only made a 'patient sacrifice' but has earned for herself, prolonged suffering. George Eliot like Richardson, underscores integrity of soul. Maggie comes back to proclaim her innocence but is rejected by Tom, a symbol of bourgeois normality. Maggie's innocence is vindicated by the forgiveness of Lucy and Philip, but Maggie's soul cannot rest in peace without conciliation with her brother. Her tumultuous feelings take the shape of flood. But this time, she has the oars and the initiative. It is she who goes to Tom's rescue and together they find their deliverance from their travails. The
Maggie-Tom relationship has "literary — historical as well as biographical" connotations.57

The heroines of George Eliot's novels — Maggie Tulliver, Romola, Esther Lyon, Dorothea Brooke and Gwendolen Harleth — all share the disability of being women. In *Amos*, it was an unattractive person and little sensibility, in *Adam Bede* it was social inferiority of Hetty. With George Eliot's heroines, this disability ceases to be a matter of class, though Maggie is an exception for whom it becomes a matter of gender. The heroines are deprived an outlet in action because of lack of opportunities. Thus they are driven into passive and tormenting ennui. When Mr Tulliver loses his law-suit and is bedridden with a stroke, Maggie can only keep vigil beside her father's bed. It devolves upon Tom to do something tangible in their hour of need. George Eliot, a pioneer of the psychological novel, analyzes very minutely, emotional and intellectual patterns of her heroines. Maggie's conflict of passion and duty defines the parameters of the outward action.

*The Mill on the Floss* portrays sympathetically the plight of an intelligent young woman struggling to transcend narrow and restrictive circumstances. Maggie's encounter with the gypsies is significantly painful, since it shatters her illusion and she has to fall back upon the security of her paternal home. There seems to be no escape from the narrow horizons. In this patriarchal society, property rights are inextricably linked with paternal authority and privilege which are cogently reflected in Tom's behaviour and his domineering attitude. Maggie's voyage of self-discovery is made all the more precarious by the fact that self-realization for a woman is hard to define except in relation to a social
group. The ending which offers Maggie an opportunity to exercise her choice marks a milestone in the evolution of a woman's free spirit.

In *Romola*, a kind of romance, the heroine has more scope, particularly as the action takes place in a gone by era. Romola is the sainted lady who engages in loving deeds of rescue and redemption. *Romola* is the only novel to be named after the female protagonist. Her name, a derivative of *Romulus* implies the epical virtues ingrained in her. Nevertheless, Romola is a typical George Eliot heroine, nobler than Maggie and Gwendolen but not highbrow like Dorothea. Her experiences open to her vistas unknown to any other woman character in George Eliot's corpus.

> She is certainly statuesque and she tends towards passivity; but the elements of fire, resolution and independence, which are inbred in her, only need their occasion to assert themselves.  

Romola's awe inspiring, 'tall, finely wrought frame' is endowed with queenly grace.

> ...the doubtful attractiveness of Romola's face, in which pride and passion seemed to be quivering in the balance with native refinement and intelligence, was transfigured to the most lovable womanliness by mingled pity and affection.  

Her tender care of her father bespeaks her deep feelings. She patiently serves as his amanuensis. George Eliot subtly evokes Romola's resentment of her father's repressive severity which sets her apart from other women.

> For thou art not like the herd of thy sex: thou art
such a woman as the immortal poets had a vision of when they sang the lives of the heroes—tender but strong, like thy voice, which has been to me instead of the light in the years of my blindness. 60

Romola is emotional but not sentimental. The sight of her brother fills her with repugnance, because,

_There was an unconquerable repulsion for her in that monkish aspect; it seemed to her the brand of the dastardly undutifulness which had left her father desolate—of the grovelling superstition which could give such undutifulness the name of piety._ 61

Her husband's betrayal leaves a bitter taste in her mouth. Tito finds her coldness convenient, but Romola is not the one to bear injustice for long. She indignantly plans to leave him and be on her own:

_Tito felt that Romola was a more unforgiving woman than he had imagined; her love was not that sweet clinging instinct, stronger than all judgements, which, he began to see now, made the great charm of a wife. Still, this petrified coldness was better than a passionate futile opposition... Inwardly she was very far from being in a state of quiet endurance, and the days that had passed since the scene which had divided her from Tito had been days of active planning and preparation for the fulfilment of a purpose._ 62

In a gesture reminiscent of Fanny Burney's Juliet, she takes off her wedding ring.

But there is hardly any change in the choices for unhappy wives.

_Her life could never be happy any more, but it must not, could not, be ignoble. And by a pathetic mixture of childish romance with her woman's trials, the philosophy which had nothing to do with this_
great decisive deed of hers had its place in her imagination of the future: so far as she conceived her solitary loveless life at all, she saw it animated by a proud stoical heroism, and by an indistinct but strong purpose of labour, that she might be wise enough to write something which would rescue her father’s name from oblivion. After all, she was only a young girl—this poor Romola, who had found herself at the end of her joys. 63

In *Adam Bede*, Hetty was the temptress, in *Romola*, Tito is the great tempter. Romola’s marriage makes her lose belief in the happiness she had once yearned for. It seems to her now "a hateful, smiling, soft-handed thing, with a narrow, selfish heart."64 She finds herself in a blind alley with no light at the end of the tunnel. Romola’s innate energy militates against such a negative approach towards life, and Tito’s betrayal only reinforces her yearning for independence. Adversity brings out the best in Romola. Her father had felt the greatness inchoate in Romola that sets her apart from other women. She does not wallow in self-pity or masochism.

*And one March morning the people in the valley were gathered together to see the blessed Lady depart.... Her steps were hindered by the wailing people, who knelt and kissed her hands, then clung to her skirts and kissed the grey folds, crying, ‘Ah, why will you go, when the good season is beginning and the crops will be plentiful? Why will you go?’ ‘Do not be, sorry,’ said Romola, ‘you are well now, and I shall remember you. I must go and see if my own people want me.’ 65

Romola is suffused with boundless love, piety and tolerance. In her ethical grandeur, she surpasses Dorothea Brooke. Romola goes out of her way to
find Tito's first wife, Tessa and her two children. In the Epilogue, all of them are portrayed living in harmony. Older and wiser Romola schools little Lillo in ethical values:

*And so, my Lillo, if you mean to act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within reach of men, you must learn to fix your mind on that end, not on what will happen to you because of it. And remember, if you were to choose something lower, and make it the rule of your life to seek your own pleasure and escape from what is disagreeable, calamity might come just the same; and it would be calamity falling on a base mind, which is the one form of sorrow that has no balm in it, and that may well make a man say, — "It would have been better for me if I had never been born."*

George Eliot's next novel *Silas Marner* apparently is of little significance from the point of view of feminism. But in the misery and lowly occupation of Silas Marner, George Eliot locates an affinity with women.

*Why, there isn't many love men 'ud ha' been wishing to take up with a little un like that: but I reckon the weaving makes you handier than men as do out-door work — you're partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning.*

*Silas Marner is described as an 'ant' and 'insect'.* An ardent Christian, he is unfairly implicated in theft by his close friend. Forsaken by his beloved and his community, he has to leave Lantern Yard in disgrace. With his hard work and perseverance he is able to start his life afresh in Raveloe. His assimilation in society and religion is brought about by a golden haired baby girl.
Silas Marner is a world of men where women are an incongruous presence. Molly’s death underlines, like a litmus paper, the inequality of women. Silas Marner for all his misery survives but one cannot imagine a female Silas Marner living in wilderness all by herself. Silas Marner’s deft bringing up of Eppie is a refutation of the patriarchal concept of ‘motherhood’ as being exclusive to women.

So Eppie was reared without punishment, the burden of her misdeeds being borne vicariously by father Silas. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined with downy patience: and also in the world that lay beyond the stone hut she knew nothing of frowns and denials.

George Eliot reinforces this demolition of stereotypes by Nancy’s stoic acceptance of her childless state, in contrast with her husband, Godfrey Cass, who longs for a child.

The issues of parenting and contradictions of marriage continue to be George Eliot’s concern in Felix Holt (the Radical). As the title suggests, the novel deals with the conflict between the radicals and the conservatives in the field of politics. George Eliot’s foray into this male bastion is a tribute to the breadth of her vision. Interestingly, Mrs Transome, the arch conservative has the most radical feelings. George Eliot delineates the contradictions between private feelings and public postures. While citing various critics like Henry James, Arnold Kettle, Linda Bamber, Bonnie Zimmerman, Gilbert and Gubar, F.S. Dallas, John Morley, on sexual politics and class politics in the novel, Gillian Beer regrets their
failure to connect the two. According to Beer, *Felix Holt* "potentiates radical questioning without itself being in command of it."\(^{70}\)

In the 'Prelude' to *Middlemarch*, George Eliot likens her heroines to St. Theresa, whose "passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life" and "soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self."\(^{71}\) George Eliot laments the lot of these 'later-born Theresas', who in place of an epic life found "only a life of mistakes, the offspring of certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity."\(^{72}\) This conflict between opportunity and aspirations is central to her novels.

George Eliot's own life is a paradigm of modern day feminists. Her life is a saga of grandeur that created opportunities for itself. For Eliot, example was better than precept, which explains her reluctance to side with any causes. The conflict,

\[
\text{Since I can do no good because a woman,} \\
\text{Reach constantly at something that is near it.} \quad ^{73}
\]

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\text{at the start of *Middlemarch* underlines George Eliot's awareness of the grim and limiting scenario. However, the above mentioned couplet succeeds in focusing on the determination and perseverance of the female protagonist to transcend her passivity. George Eliot's ideal, St Theresa, combined a life of religious contemplation with intense practical activity, and Dorothea Brooke is full of aspirations, though, short on achievements. Dorothea's destiny is played out on a human plane, though her nobility resonates throughout *Middlemarch*. Dorothea has}
\]
been described by her creator as,

...young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. 74

Will Ladislaw uses the analogy of heaven and hell to compare Dorothea and Rosamond. Dorothea is 'ideal treasure of his life.'

I never had a preference for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living. 75

Dorothea is the epitome of innocence. Innocence's four attributes, "mercy, pity, peace and love" 76 are imbued in her. Convinced of her mission in life she considers her inexperience and gender as irrelevant:

The idea of some active good within her reach 'haunted her like a passion,' and another's need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless. 77

Dorothea's "noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity" 78 changes Lydgate's life by reviving his self-confidence. This young lady is capable of quick and independent decisions. She is not swayed by public opinion. Guided by truth and justice, she would go to any length to clear Lydgate's name. But she is extremely modest," I have very little to do. There is nothing better that I can do in the world." 79
Like Burney's heroines, these noble, virtuous women embrace philanthropy and charity as an outlet for their suppressed energy. Dorothea’s mind yearned for greatness, intensity and lofty conception of the world. In the beginning of the novel, George Eliot presents her as "likely to seek martyrdom to make retraction, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it."80 Dorothea's religious piety, her love of extremes, her ardent and open nature set her apart from her sister Celia who loves jewels and fine clothes. But like Shakespeare’s heroes, Dorothea suffers from a tragic flaw because of which she makes ‘the mistaken choice.’ She considers herself very wise but she fails in her judgement of Casaubon. In fact, her ideas of marriage are not simply ‘child like’, but childish:

She felt sure that she would have accepted … any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure. The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it. 81

Not surprisingly, Dorothea is fascinated by Casaubon, old enough to be her father, because he “could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion.”82 Her penchant for knowledge, because she has been starved of it, makes her overlook Casaubon's ugliness. She reproves her sister for criticising Casaubon’s uncouth manners and white moles with hairs as only commonest minds are prone to look upon human beings as animals. Dorothea accepts Casaubon because of the greatness of his soul. His proposal elevates her to ‘divine consciousness,’ distancing her further from reality:
How could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love? Her whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte about to enter on a higher grade of initiation. She was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and pressure of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the world’s habits.

Had Dorothea perused the letter, she would have recoiled at its condescending tenor and lack of passion. George Eliot applauds Casaubon’s honesty when in his first tête-à-tête with Dorothea, he pompously declares, “The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.” Dorothea’s tragic flaw is her ardour to court pain and martyrdom. Casaubon cannot be faulted for hypocrisy. He makes clear his intentions and expectations at the outset. Dorothea is expected by this male chauvinist to be the stereotyped self-effacing subservient appendage. George Eliot indict Miss Brooke for being ‘hasty in her trust’ and for not recognizing that Casaubon had merely “set alight the fine inflammable material of her youthful illusions.” Interestingly, the experienced Casaubon realizes the incompatibility of his alliance. The prospect of this lovely, noble girl as his bride does not fill him with delight nor do his spirits rise. George Eliot is caustic about this sterile pedagogue and “his blankness of sensibility.”

Dreading the prospect of being alone with Dorothea, Casaubon makes the ludicrous suggestion, that Dorothea take her sister Celia along, on their honeymoon. Dorothea's failure to see through Casaubon's arrogance and passionless
sterility and break off the engagement can be adduced to her asceticism. She is deeply hurt but checks her weak and selfish state of mind. Her human aspect is quickly smothered by her serene and noble self, "a picture of Santa Barbara."

Mrs Cadwallader, true to her name, understands the ways of this world and clairvoyantly asserts:  

Really, by the side of Sir James, he looks like a death's head skinned over for the occasion. Mark my words: in a year from this time that girl will hate him. She looks up to him as an oracle now, and by-and-by she will be at the other extreme. All flightiness.

Dorothea's self-effacement and her self-righteous demeanour has provoked strident criticism. Ellen Moers considers Dorothea Brooke as, "good for nothing but to be admired. An arrogant, selfish, spoiled, rich beauty, she does but little harm in the novel." Anthea Zeman is equally impatient with this 'uninspiring' myopic heroine: "We are asked to believe in the importance of a girl who seldom succeeds in doing anything of the remotest practical use," besides suffering from "physical and social myopia." Dorothea's "Saint-Theresa Syndrome" rouses the ire of many feminists by narrowing down the parameters of an energetic, vivacious, intelligent beautiful young woman. These critics feel cheated by Dorothea's lot of 'common womanhood'. Kate Millet deplores the constricting horizons of Eliot's heroines, particularly in the context of Dorothea:

'Living in sin,' George Eliot lived the revolution as well perhaps, but she did not write of it. She is stuck with the Ruskinian service ethic and the pervasive Victorian fantasy of the good woman who goes down into Samaria and rescues the fallen.
man—nurse, guide, mother, adjunct of the race. Dorothea’s predicament in Middlemarch is an eloquent plea that a fine mind be allowed an occupation; but it goes no further than petition. She marries Will Ladislaw and can expect no more of life than the discovery of a good companion whom she can serve as secretary. 92

Notwithstanding, these denunciations of avowed feminists, Middlemarch is implicitly concerned with vital issues of women’s liberation. Gillian Beer in "Middlemarch and The Woman Question" gives a full account of this exploration. George Eliot was very close to Barbara Bodichon and Bersie Rayner Parker, the founder and the editor of The English Woman’s Journal. Barbara Bodichon, a radical but pragmatic feminist, was one of the founders of Girton College in 1870’s. In her book Women and Work (1857), she made education and work mandatory for women.

As long as fathers regard the sex of a child as a reason why it should not be taught to gain its own bread, so long must women be degraded. Adult women must not be supported by men, if they are to stand as dignified, rational beings before God. 93

Middlemarch examines in detail the right to work, and grapples with the question of gainful employment for women, whereby they can realize their potential. Its basic concern is with women’s metier.

This theme is explored principally in Lydgate and in Dorothea and the novel nicely judges their different problems. Middlemarch is about false education, both of women and of men. In its narrative order it puts taxonomy under pressure as it first
classifies, and then discovers more and more subtle and vital differences. The novel is most particularly concerned with the problems of women excluded from work and from fulfilling activity, sequestered by their education. The English Woman's Journal debates the problem of philanthropic voluntary work and questions whether middle-class women should work without wages. It looks too at "model cottages," and at the intellectual exclusion of women.  

Rosamond, whom George Eliot characterizes as 'shallow' is a trenchant criticism of the feminine mystique. George Eliot had little regard for feminine occupations like sewing, mending, knitting or embroidery into which women weave the nothingness of their meaningless lives. Lydgate had married Rosamond because she,

...appeared to be that perfect piece of womanhood who would reverence her husband's mind after the fashion of an accomplished mermaid, using her comb and looking-glass and singing her song for the relaxation of his adored wisdom alone.  

Lydgate's views on wifely duties are not much different from Casaubon's. But whereas Casaubon had an intelligent wife, Lydgate is embittered with "blank unreflecting surface" of Rosamond's mind. Eliot further explodes the feminine mystique by making noble Dorothea pliable and malleable, while Rosamond turns out to be quite intractable, equivocal and duplicitous. Woman's influence, deemed to be a compensation for their confined life "is mocked in Middlemarch in the simplicity with which Rosamond sees straight through every issue to what concerns herself."
In the same way, George Eliot takes to pieces the illusion "that women untrained in complexity and constricted by education were endowed with a preternatural insight" through Dorothea's mistakes and the limited successes of Rosamond. In the 'Prelude', George Eliot echoes the prevailing opinion about naturalness of woman's place and work.

Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse.

Middlemarch thus debunks generalization and classification and lays stress on individualism.

The novel presents a comparative study of two marriages, Lydgates and Casaubons. The web of these two marriages gets more intricate with the entry of Will Ladislaw who is 'the other man', common to both the marriages. Lydgate opens his heart to Dorothea, as both of them are the victims of hopes gone awry:

Why should I not tell you? — you know what sort of bond marriage is. You will understand everything. Dorothea felt her heart beginning to beat faster. Had he that sorrow too?

One of George Eliot's great contributions lies in exposing the futility of neat
categorization. The saving grace of Lydgates is the presence of passion. Physical love between Rosamond and Lydgate makes up for the lack of intellectual communion and accounts for the longevity of Lydgates' marriage. Eliot uses the medium of death to excise the abominable Casaubon from the scene.

The name of Will Ladislaw is loaded with undertones and overtones. His circumstances place him in close kinship with female situations. An orphan, the offspring of an unfortunate marriage, without any financial resources, he is portrayed as a dilettante sans macho masculinity, who dabbles in art now and then. Mr Casaubon conscious of his sterility, regards Will Ladislaw, as a rival and forbids him to enter his estate, Lowick. Casaubon's distrust of Dorothea is manifest in the codicil to his will, whereby Dorothea must forfeit her property if she marries Will Ladislaw. This revelation sparks a convulsive change in Dorothea's mental, emotional and psychical state. She is filled with revulsion for her dead husband because of his perverted hidden thoughts. George Eliot dexterously portrays the connection of cause and effect. Casaubon's odious act boomerangs, bringing in its wake "a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw."101 Casaubon had banked upon the hold of power, position and property. Being a man, he had over- rated these patriarchal pillars. Moreover, he had not reckoned with Dorothea's asceticism. Money to her is a problem, besides it fills her with guilt. Though she has vowed not to remarry, yet she recants. Will Ladislaw is all set to leave Middlemarch but Dorothea glorying in her sacrifice, detains him: "I don't mind about poverty — I hate my wealth."102
Dorothea and Will Ladislaw are like siblings. The pedagogue-pupil relationship, normally associated with man-woman relationship is inverted. The novel delineates Dorothea's development. She learns to distinguish between love and learning, knowledge and passion. She is blessed with a life full of emotion and 'beneficent activity,' being the wife of an ardent public man. In the 'Finale', George Eliot explains the lot assigned by her to Dorothea:

Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done — not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislaw. 103

As cited in an earlier chapter Henry James had specifically asked the same question in his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* about the lack of opportunities for women.104 Barbara Hardy finds certain flaws of *Middlemarch's* realism and unity, particularly in its depiction of coy sexuality.

*The weakness of the novel, and the weakness of Will Ladislaw, are located in his relationship with Dorothea. It is when they are together, physically or on in thoughts of each other, that the romantic glow seems false and the childlike innocence implausible and inappropriate. In Will's other relations George Eliot can scarcely be accused of romantic softness, or of glossing over sexual problems. She keeps her heroine clear of any emotional conflict in her feeling for her husband and her feeling for Ladislaw, and here the moral scheme strikes the modern reader as being worked out at the expense of truthfulness.* 105
For all Hardy's undeniable eruditions, her charge is untenable. Dorothea's feelings for her husband after marriage have to be analyzed in terms of her ardent reverence for his intellectual powers. Casaubon himself is taken aback by Dorothea's child-like adulation. Any reader who can understand young, beautiful and rich Dorothea's reasons for marrying a middle-aged ugly man, while spurning Sir Jame's love and overriding her sister, Celia's objections to Casaubon's ugliness, cannot fault her subsequent behaviour. Dorothea's angry retort to her sister, that only animals think of such external attributes, makes clear her ethereal priorities. She marries Casaubon essentially because she is enchanted by the beauty of his soul. There are ample references to Dorothea's frustration for non-consummation of her marriage. But Dorothea is not Rosamond or Hetty. She is not even like Maggie, who recoiled and went cold at Lucy's suggestion of the ugly and deformed Philip as her husband. As already stated, Dorothea considers them as concerns not of a lesser mind but of a lesser species i.e. animals. Moreover, before indicting George Eliot for evasiveness in matters of sex, one must not forget that she compares Dorothea with St. Theresa and saints are notoriously incorporeal in attitudes.

Imbued with self-abnegation, Dorothea takes her physical rejection stoically. Only the realization of Casaubon's hollowness and shallowness brings about a gradual disenchantment. Even then, Dorothea is of a different mettle to find consolation in adultery or what Barbara Hardy characterizes as 'sexual rescue'. Initially her interest is motivated by a desire to redress the wrong done to him. Her naive persistence on this score endorses her essential innocence. She simply cannot attribute Casaubon's intolerance to jealousy. When later Dorothea becomes
conscious of her love for Will Ladislaw, she admits it to herself and when it becomes too overwhelming she is the one to urge Ladislaw to revoke his decision to leave her.

Daniel Deronda is George Eliot's last novel. The growth of George Eliot's vision resonates in the whittling down of angelic dimensions in the novel's female protagonist. Gwendolen is way down in the scale of moral values enshrined in Dinah Morris. Demonic force nascent in Maggie Tulliver assumes active and dangerous proportions in Gwendolen. George Eliot delineates Gwendolen's propensity for evil right in the beginning of the novel. Daniel feels it as he watches her at the gaming table and this enables Mr Vandemoordt to liken her to a snake. The evil is clearly defined in chapter 3 when she is projected as a killer, potentially of anything or anybody that crosses her will. This propensity manifests in her even as a child, she refuses to get out of bed to fetch her mother's medicine when the latter is in acute pain in the night. Mrs Davilow does not die because of this, but the attack had been severe enough and could even have proved to be fatal. In another situation, she kills her sister's canary by strangulating it "in a final fit of exasperation as its shrill singing which had again and again jarringly interrupted her own."106

Daniel Deronda, the eponymous hero of the novel is astonished to see "at work within her the same demonic force that had possessed her when she took him in her resolute glance and turned away a loser from the gaming-table."107 But marriage has incapacitated her 'resolute glance'. Instead Daniel perceives a 'quivering reluctance' and a facade of "a little hardness and
defiance by way of concealing some painful consciousness." Like other George Eliot's heroines, Gwendolen is beautiful, impressionable and impulsive. But unlike others, she is poor. Beauty and poverty in a girl logically culminate in a marriage for the sake of money. Deronda, who is Gwendolen's mentor aptly analyzes her pitiable situation.

I'm afraid she married him out of ambition — to escape poverty. But why did she run out of his way at first? The poverty came after, though. Poor thing! she may have been urged into it. How can one feel anything else than pity for a young creature like that — full of unused life — ignorantly rash — hanging all her blind expectations on that remnant of a human being! Anticipations of feminism reverberate in the ramifications of Gwendolen's choice and its aftermath. The hapless female spirit bound in silk and diamonds typifies the suffering of idle rich ladies:

Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh like that might be, wrapped round with fine raiment, her ears pierced for gems, her head held loftily, her mouth all smiling pretence, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things!

Gwendolen being beautiful had illusions of power, but marriage has exploded that illusion irrevocably. George Eliot's sympathies are articulated distinctly:

And the poor thing's belief in her power, with her other dreams before marriage, had often to be thrust aside now like the toys of a sick child, which it looks at with dull eyes, and has no heart to play with, however it may try.
The simile 'sick child', with 'dull eyes', and 'no heart', evokes the sick state of Grandcourt's marriage. Gwendolen's dilemma is appropriated by George Eliot to make a statement on the oppressive nature of marriage.

Fanny Burney in *The Wanderer* had delineated the deadly irrevocability of nuptial ties, which thanks to women's movement, had changed favourably for women. The Infant's Custody Act of 1819 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave mothers the custody of small children and made divorce possible on grounds of cruelty, desertion or rape. But it was not till 1923 that women could get divorce on grounds of adultery. Moreover, divorce was considered a social stigma. George Eliot subtly portrays the anomalies of marriage, particularly its tyranny. In *Middlemarch*, Casaubon had enjoyed his absolute power over Dorothea. But Dorothea had her sister Celia, her uncle, her money to fall back upon. Moreover, she found some vocation for herself within marriage. Dorothea's torment was psychic whereas, Gwendolen's torment is almost physical. Dorothea enjoyed freedom of movement but Gwendolen is under constant surveillance of either Grandcourt or his 'classless self' Mr Lush. Gwendolen is close to Rosamond in the consciousness of the power of her beauty. Like Rosamond, Gwendolen is least interested in 'knowledge' for which Dorothea married Casaubon, but Lydgate was too gentle to break Rosamond's will.

What makes Gwendolen's situation acutely agonising is her proud and rebellious spirit. Her imperious girlish will is trampled by Grandcourt, who is adept in the art of mastery over horses, dogs, servants and wife and mistress.
George Eliot underlines Gwendolen's naivety and Grandcourt's dexterity in this war of wills. Grandcourt's will is likened to "the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo," to "that of a crab or a boa-constrictor which goes on pinching or crushing without alarm at thunder."112 To make matters worse, this otherwise unsympathetic man can correctly divine Gwendolen's feelings which makes her a puppet in his hands. Grandcourt's sadistic gratification is in direct proportion to his awareness of Gwendolen's resistance.

In George Eliot's oeuvre, all the husbands take their authority and their wives' inferiority for granted. Grandcourt is the classic example of a domineering and ruthless husband.

The ultimate in this kind of relationship is exposed in the marriage of Gwendolen Harleth and Grandcourt in Daniel Deronda (1876). Grandcourt's only interest in life is the exertion of his mastery, and it is easier to be masterful over women than men. Except for his curious relationship with the enslaved Lush he opts out of relationships with men that would imply any kind of challenge or conflict.113

Grandcourt considers marriage as a 'locked hand-cuff' for Gwendolen which precludes any 'contradiction with his resolve'. Considering marriage as a contract, of which he had kept his part, he expected her to comply to his wishes and fulfill the obligations she had accepted.

Her marriage was a contract where all the ostensible advantages were on her side, and it was only one of those advantages that her husband should use his power to hinder her from any
injurious self-committal or unsuitable behaviour. He knew quite well that she had not married him — had not overcome her repugnance to certain facts — out of love to him personally; he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her, and these she had got: he had fulfilled his side of the contract. 114

Grandcourt is one of the rare evil characters in George Eliot's "knowable community."115 His tyranny over Gwendolen's body and spirit, forces her to internalize her "daring anger" into "the rage of dumbness."116 Gwendolen's miseries are aggravated by her determination to suppress her true feelings. The failure of their marriage is adduced to their isolation:

In this context marriage becomes an intensification of distance and differences. Gwendolen has no symbols of propriety, of the maintenance of tradition and continuity, that she can hang on to. Her only reality is her suffering as an isolated individual, and her realization of the mistake she has made. Marriage is not a safeguard; it is not stability, it is certainly not fulfilment. It is in fact none of the things that George Eliot has indicated keep people and families and communities jogging along, reining back the over-eager and spurring on the slow. One of the reasons for this is that Daniel Deronda's world is beyond community, beyond the recognized anchors of life. There are no solid values to support Gwendolen if she stumbles. George Eliot tries to suggest that good, strong, human values are to be found amongst the Jewish people in their strong sense of racial allegiance and family loyalty. But this is of no help to Gwendolen, although perhaps she gravitates to Deronda partly because she sees in him a response to this. She is totally on her own. 117

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Gwendolen's ordeal cannot be alleviated by deeming it as submission to duty. Her selfish motives in submitting to this yoke smite her conscience, making her undergo

...a sort of discipline for the refractory which, as little as possible like conversion, bends half the self with a terrible strain, and exasperates the unwillingness of the other half.\(^{118}\)

Grandcourt correctly connects Gwendolen's refractoriness with Deronda. And that is the reason of his resolve to prevent his wife meeting with Deronda. The author says:

Grandcourt did not feel that he had chosen the wrong wife; and having taken on himself the part of husband, he was not going in any way to be fooled, or allow himself to be seen in a light that could be regarded as pitiable. This was his state of mind—not jealousy; still, his behaviour in some respects was as like jealousy as yellow is to yellow, which colour we know may be the effect of very different causes.\(^{119}\)

Grandcourt expects his wife to observe certain standards commensurate with his status. The measures taken by Grandcourt to bring Gwendolen to her heels are coercive, but they do aim at her pride forcing her to compliance. He tells her in no uncertain terms that she is to 'appear decently,' not behave in a 'vulgar' manner. Grandcourt resorts to ruthlessness to curb Gwendolen's recalcitrance:

I don't care two straws about Deronda, or any other conceited hanger-on. You may talk to him as much as you like. He is not going to take my place. You are my wife. And you will either fill your place properly—to the world
George Eliot's distinctive contribution to feminism is the delineation of increasing hatred in Gwendolen's heart for her husband, and for the marital bond. Marriage for Gwendolen is a purgatory where she must atone for her sin of marrying without love. Nevertheless, it is Grandcourt who is cast in the role of a villain. There seems to be no release for Gwendolen, except through death, not her own but Grandcourt's. Gwendolen's heresy blazes a new trail for persecuted women. Her wishful fantasy fills her with terror lest "she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought." When Grandcourt takes Gwendolen, "collared and dragged" on a yatching expedition, there is no relief or distraction for her. Gwendolen had ample time for,

*The embitterment of hatred ... the intensest form of hatred is that rooted in fear, which compels to silence and drives vehemence into a constructive vindictiveness, an imaginary annihilation of the detested object.*

Gwendolen is driven with dread and self dread:

*In Gwendolen's consciousness Temptation and Dread met and stared like two pale phantoms, each seeing itself in the other — each obstructed by its own image; and all the while her fuller self beheld the apparitions and sobbed for deliverance from them.*

The vast seascape throws into relief Gwendolen's claustrophobic spirits. Deliverance comes to her when they are forced to stay at Genoa. Gwendolen dreams of solitude away from Grandcourt's oppressive presence. But the chance presence of Deronda rouses Grandcourt's jealous suspicions of a
But the chance presence of Deronda rouses Grandcourt's jealous suspicions of a conspiracy. Determined to thwart their meeting in his absence, Grandcourt forces his wife to accompany him for the boat ride. There is resistance, but it is of no avail. Gwendolen seething with resentment and anger warns Grandcourt: "And you had better leave me at liberty to speak with anyone I like. It would be better for you."\textsuperscript{125} The smug tyrant had no room for fear. But Gwendolen is smitten with diabolic hatred for this tyrant. She is seized by 'furies' bringing to her 'plans of evil' that would facilitate her deliverance:

\begin{quote}
Gwendolen, keeping her impassible air, as they moved away from the strand, felt her imagination obstinately at work. She was not afraid of any outward dangers — she was afraid of her own wishes, which were taking shapes possible and impossible, like a cloud of demon-faces. She was afraid of her own hatred, which under the cold iron touch that had compelled her today had gathered a fierce intensity. As she sat guiding the tiller under her husband's eyes, doing just what he told her, the strife within her seemed like her own effort to escape from herself. She clung to the thought of Deronda: she persuaded herself that he would not go away while she was there — he knew that she needed help. The sense that he was there would save her from acting out the evil within. And yet quick, quick, came images, plans of evil that would come again and seize her in the night, like furies preparing the deed that they would straightway avenge.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Gwendolen's only hope of deliverance from the demonic force of hatred is embodied in Deronda. Daniel Deronda, as the name suggests, is a saviour, a
Messiah:

He seemed to her a terrible-browed angel from whom she could not think of concealing any deed so as to win an ignorant regard for him: it belonged to the nature of their relation that she should be truthful, for his power over her had begun in the raising of a self-discontent which could be satisfied only by genuine change. 127

Deronda urges Gwendolen to turn her fear into a safeguard. Deronda plays a very significant role in the novel. He complements what Gwendolen lacks most—vision. His admonition garbed in the form of advice is George Eliot's exhortation to all women:

It is the curse of your life—for give me—of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it. Is there any single occupation of mind that you care about with passionate delight or even independent interest? 128

Women, George Eliot implies are incapable of transcending the narrow confines of their private sphere as all their vigour is spent in the pursuit of the trivial. Gwendolen’s shallowness prevented George Eliot from entitling the novel as Gwendolen Harleth. The end of chapter XI of Book II reveals George Eliot’s design vis-a-vis Gwendolen and Daniel Deronda.

What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea and the Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In those delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections. 129
Gwendolen's reverence and Deronda's pity connects the microcosm of Gwendolen with Daniel Deronda's spiritual and Jewish resurgence.

George Eliot's comprehensive vision unfolded a wider canvas of the world. Her heroines, pulsating with passionate longing for a fuller life, embody the common yearning of womanhood to an individual identity rather than as decorative appendages to the male of the species.
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