

A Portrait of George Eliot

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For Britain the Victorian Age was an era of glory, of national well-being. In the field of literature the Victorian Age was the heyday of fiction.

Wuthering Heights and *Villette* were published in 1853. Thackeray's *The Virginians* was running in a serial form, as well as Dickens's *Little Dorrit*; and *A Tale of Two Cities* was to appear in 1859. George Eliot's first story, *Amos Barton* appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1857. Thus many famous novelists such as Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontë Sisters, Mrs Gaskell, and George Eliot appeared and wrote many excellent novels in this period.

I have chosen George Eliot out of this galaxy firstly because she was a novelist of outstanding genius, but secondly because in her work we can see clear signs of the new interest in women as human beings which led on to the twentieth century.

1) The Flowering of the Novel: the Fertile Soil

Nineteenth century England was a time of extraordinary change: the Industrial Revolution, Charles Darwin's revelations about evolution, explosive beginnings of nationalism, socialism, and liberalism. There was a complete reshaping of ideas and ways of life. Fiction flourished in this ferment of ideas and there were other circumstances which contributed to the rise in popularity of the novel. Here I want to think about the general reasons for the popularity of the novel in this era.

Firstly, the growing prosperity of England meant that more money was available for education, hence a greater degree of literacy amongst the population developed. Novels imply reading and so this was an important pre-requisite. Secondly, industrialisation meant a large, prosperous middle class with plenty of servants. Hence there was plenty of leisure, which was another important pre-requisite. This was especially true of wives and daughters, and women were avid readers of fiction.

Thirdly, it was an age of self improvement. It was possible for a working class youth to make a fortune by his own endeavours. Actually many did, but these men often felt their lack of education later in life and undertook programmes of education to remedy their deficiencies. Reading novels could

be considered to fall into this category. The majority of Victorian novels were of high moral tone and the novel lost the reputation for encouraging flightiness and silliness which it had in the eighteenth century.

Lastly, family life was in the ascendance in the Victorian era largely because of the example set by the royal family. Victoria married her cousin Prince Albert in 1840; she was devoted to her husband and they had nine children. Their family life considerably influenced ordinary English people's life. For example, novel reading (often aloud) was a suitable home based occupation and one practiced by Prince Albert himself. Drama encouraged people to leave their homes and has always been regarded as morally suspect in England since the closure of the theatres by the Puritans. It is significant that poetry, which had similar advantages to those of the novel, remained strong in the period while drama declined in quality.

Four great women novelists, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot appeared in this period and the reasons for this sudden emergence of women writers are not hard to find.

Firstly, a large number of leisured women came on the scene who had time to look at their lives and who did not like what they saw. They were legally not persons. They had no vote, and if they married, they were entirely subject to their husbands. They were poorly educated, led very restricted lives and, perhaps worst of all, felt the lack of meaningful employment. They were, in short, frustrated and angry. Therefore they wrote novels to express their impatience, their frustrations, their indignation in writing.

Secondly, writing was amongst the few acceptable occupations for a lady. Margaret Drabble¹ says the women turned to write fiction because they were not permitted to exercise their talents in any other way. I think her opinion is absolutely right. Moreover, most careers and most artistic pursuits demanded expenditure of money. On the other hand, it hardly needed money to write novels, apart from the cost of writing paper. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women succeeded as writers before they succeeded in the other professions.

Thirdly, they were sure of reaching a large audience. This was more important to some (George Eliot and Mrs Gaskell) than to others (the Brontës). As far as the forms are concerned, the sonnet and the ode had long masculine traditions, so their form was fixed. On the other hand, the novel was a newcomer to the literary scene and did not have long traditions, so its form was not fixed. Therefore fiction was the easiest thing for a woman to write and they were able to adapt the novel to their own purposes.

Lastly, women were able to use materials within their own experience.

In this era a woman's place was certainly not in an office but at home, so she had to superintend her husband's household, see to his servants, bear his children, and hold herself properly in subjection. Thus the circle of women's daily lives was restricted, but they were able to describe the things that were particularly dear and close to them in the novels. George Eliot tells us exactly the same thing in her essay, *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*.

No educational restrictions can shut women out from the materials of fiction, and there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements. Like crystalline masses, it may take any form, and yet be beautiful.²

What George Eliot says here is that the novel in its concern with daily life, with human relationships, with ordinary people, was free to women because women were able to experience daily life as much as men.

No reader of Victorian novels can fail to notice that the novels of women writers differ fundamentally from those written by men. The truth is that men and women led vastly different lives. Women played a subservient role in society, were poorly educated and had virtually no legal rights.

2) Education for Women in the Victorian Age

Popular interest in education increased as the century progressed, although England was slow to take a serious interest in providing state education (compulsory education did not arrive until 1870). The Second Reform Act of 1867 gave the vote to the artisans and more prosperous workers in the towns and highlighted the necessity for education. Before this, education was in the hands of religious organisations and private individuals who wished to make a profit. Dotheboys Hall springs readily to mind as an example of the very worst kind of private establishment.

As far as education for women in the Victorian Age was concerned, most of the daughters of the upper and middle classes received an education of sorts, but it was generally a superficial education which concentrated on accomplishments: smatterings of foreign languages, playing instruments and singing, decorative sewing. Ladies were carefully brought up to be ornamental and they were educated with the sole aim of getting husbands. They were educated at boarding schools or at home, where they were taught by gover-

nesses. Working class girls, if they were fortunate, received a few years' education at a charity school, where the emphasis was on education which would fit them to do domestic work and to read the Bible, and were then usually forced, at an early age, by economic necessity to find employment as servants or in factories. Thus women's education in the nineteenth century was far removed from that of modern times. In his essay *Queen's Gardens* Ruskin states his conviction that a woman should be educated 'not for self-development, but for self-renunciation', a view which was diametrically opposed to George Eliot's.

Since the novel is a mirror of society, it is not surprising that education appears again and again as a theme. George Eliot's novels are no exception.

In *the Mill on the Floss* Maggie Tulliver wanted to be independent, but she was aware of her lack of education, so she said she had been saving her money to pay for some lessons since she realized that she would never get a better situation without more accomplishments. She also felt that her education did not equip her to cope with life. Moreover, she clearly felt her situation was different from Tom's: at least Tom was able to do something active about mending his father's fortunes, while she had only the alternative of plain sewing, which she hated of "a dreary situation in a school". These poignant words express her feeling of frustration: "Tom, you are a man and have power, so you can do something in the world." On the other hand, Tom had no sympathy with Maggie's desire to be independent and to achieve something and he said, "I wish my sister to be a lady, and I will always have taken care of you as my father desires, until you are well-married." As far as Tom was concerned, redundant marriage was the only road open to Maggie.

In *Middlemarch* the heroine, Dorothea is an exceptional human being like Maggie. Though her reading is very different from Mrs Transome's and Esther's, she is uneducated like Maggie and her lack of education is exposed in this book. Dorothea married Rev. Casaubon to develop her range of knowledge and to widen her horizons through her husband's scholarship. However, when they went to Rome on their honeymoon, she became aware that her husband was an inadequate human being and also not the scholar she had imagined, and she was very disappointed. In short she made her initial mistake because of her ardour for knowledge. In other words, Dorothea was an ardent creature whose intellectual longings were born of intellectual inexperience. But she was rescued by Casaubon's death and by her personal happy ending.

George Eliot's educational satire is certainly not restricted to female education. She is critical of education both for boys and girls. For example,

she comments on the defective education of Mr Edward Tulliver and Tom in *the Mill on the Floss*. As Mr Edward Tulliver, the owner of Dorlcote Mill, did not have much formal education himself, he determined to give his son a good education which would be "a bread to him" and placed him in school with the Reverend Walter Stelling who gave him an entirely unsuitable education for his subsequent position in life.

Nineteenth century education for boys was firmly based on a thorough grounding in the classics, which was thought to equip a young man intellectually for whatever profession he entered. A knowledge of classical literature was the sine qua non of an English gentlemen without which he could not hope to command the respect of other gentlemen, whatever his other achievements might be. In Mrs Gaskell's novel *North and South* Mr Thornton, a successful businessman full of sound common sense and estimable human qualities feels it necessary to take private lessons in Greek and Latin from an impoverished ex-clergyman to remedy a keenly felt deficiency in his educational equipment. In view of the fact that England's prosperity now largely depended on industry, it is strange that such necessary skills as engineering, modern languages and accounting can so long have been despised and neglected and George Eliot's perception of the inadequacy of education is in opposition of the climate of opinion of her time. She makes us see very clearly that Tom is poorly equipped for the practical commercial life he has to lead and his lessons in bookkeeping are a sharp criticism of the educational system.

George Eliot seems to point out too that people of poor educational background themselves are likely to continue poor education in their children through ignorance of what education really is. For example, Mr Tulliver is a believer in education and yet he does not realize that he could be giving Tom an unsuitable education.

The treatment of Tom's education emphasizes the idea that ignorance of the immediate purpose of education leads to more poor education. It also suggests that George Eliot believed the aptitudes of the student should be taken into consideration before any course of study is given him. Ironically, Maggie, who would have loved the course of study prescribed for Tom, has to instruct herself in the very courses Tom dislikes so much.

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot criticizes the sterility of Casaubon's scholarship harshly although at that time English education consisted almost entirely of training in the classics.

George Eliot was considered the most learned novelist of all the novelists in the nineteenth century though there were many excellent men writers such as Dickens and Thackeray. Lord David Cecil³ regarded her as a high-brow

writer, Lord Acton had said that George Eliot was greater than Dante, and Herbert Spencer⁴ exempted her novels from that category when he banned all fiction from the London Library.

From the beginning, George Eliot was aware of the deficiencies of her own education and made great efforts to remedy them. She continued to urge the importance of education for women, no doubt feeling the lack of formal instruction which frequently haunts the self educated.

One of her predecessors, Mary Wollstonecraft was a great influence on George Eliot in thinking of education for women. She insisted upon the fact that if women were given proper opportunity, they could give an equally good account of themselves.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a woman writer in the eighteenth century when, as in the nineteenth century, the only way a woman could rise in the world was by marriage. She made an effort to reform education for women and wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in which she weighed what she had first discussed the rights of woman and national education. Secondly, she urged that men and women had to be better educated. Thirdly, she pointed out that independence was necessary for women. Education meant access to knowledge which was the key to thought, to creativeness, to the good life. Knowledge was meant to be used and its right use was consequent upon understanding. Understanding came through experience. She pointed out that one reason why men have a more solid basis to their virtue was that they have more opportunities for experience. Moreover, she recommended primary schools which would abolish all distinctions of class. The earliest reactions to her treatise were actually favourable. Her name is certainly prominent in the records of women's education in England.

George Eliot was also influenced by contemporary agitators for better education for women's, such as Frederick Denison Maurice, John Stuart Mill, Emily Davies, Anne Clough, Dorothea Beale, Frances Mary Buss and the Butlers, the Garretts and the Sidgwicks. George Eliot had a great admiration for these people who were actively engaged in working for higher education for women. Possibly she was predisposed to an interest in women's rights by the fact of her irregular union with Lewes.

George Eliot learned a lot from Mary Wollstonecraft and her book was influential when George Eliot thought of education for women. As Mary Wollstonecraft's way of thinking about education for women was taken over by George Eliot, so George Eliot's was taken over by one of her successors, Virginia Woolf.

As for Virginia Woolf, she realized that the emancipation of women as

people and as writers was a very slow process, consequently she argues very strongly in favour of women's right to higher education in *A Room of One's Own*. Here we notice that it took many years and many women's efforts for women to get the same education as men.

3) George Eliot's Views on Women's Position in the Victorian Age

The Victorians had a curiously ambivalent attitude to women. They were regarded as the weaker sex, yet they actually led very hard lives. For instance, they bore numerous children and worked very hard to maintain the family life. Working class women worked very long hours and did heavy manual work as servants or in the mines or in factories.

Women of the middle, upper and working-classes in the Victorian Age were legally powerless; no women had the vote, so they could not alter their legal position for themselves. Respectable females belonged to males and the bearing and rearing of large families reinforced the wife's dependence on her husband. Thus very few of women in the Victorian Age were financially or economically independent. Most of the women in this era had never had a penny that they could call their own. Mrs Gaskell was not permitted by the law of the day to have her own bank account, though she earned money as a writer. When at the end of her life she wanted to buy a new house in the country and to surprise her husband with this magnificent achievement, she had to buy the house through her son-in-law because only men were allowed to handle money.

In *the Mill on the Floss*, Maggie's brother Tom tried to help his father when Mr Tulliver lost all his fortunes. But at that time he noticed that he had really been given the wrong kind of education for the commercial world. He felt it would have been better if he had been studying bookkeeping and calculation. However, he is devoted to his parents and to Dorlcote Mill. In fact he worked very hard and in consequence he was able to pay off his father's debts and finally buy back Dorlcote Mill. Though he led a lonely, unmarried life, he obviously became more and more successful in a purely economic way. On the other hand, Maggie was powerless to help her family's wretched condition. She only became a school teacher and a governess to be independent.

Tom causes pain to Maggie by thinking of his own feeling rather than hers many times. He lives by his own ideas and never seems to admit his ideas are wrong. Therefore he tells Maggie not to meet Philip when she begins to love Philip, who is the son of her father's enemy. When Tom discovers that Maggie meets Philip in the Red Deeps, he makes her swear she will never see him

again. When he learns that she has eloped with Stephen Guest, he does not forgive her and turns her from his door. Though Tom has some admirable characteristics, he is strong and determined in his opinions and actions toward Maggie. Tom's conception of conduct is much the same as that of the Dodsons and the Gleggs. Briefly he is a conservative man and his attitude seems to be typical of the men in the Victorian Age. His attitude reminds me of George Eliot's brother Isaac. On the other hand, Maggie is a more complicated person than Tom and it makes a strong contrast between them. Maggie's concept of conduct is more nearly that of George Eliot. Maggie's way of thinking is akin to that of contemporary women, so it would have been unnecessary for Maggie to groan under oppressions if she had lived in modern times. However, Maggie lived in the nineteenth century when women were treated very harshly, so she had to suffer from her love until at last she was rescued by death.

Sex was a forbidden topic in the Victorian era. It was thought that respectable women has no sexual urges. Large numbers of prostitutes existed as an outlet for frustrated husbands too gentlemanly to inflict themselves on their wives. Passion is not absent from George Eliot's novels, however. It would be surprising if it were, since she herself was a very passionate woman. Though the passion cannot be openly expressed, it is clearly there in both *Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch* as a factor in the life of both Maggie and Dorothea.

In those days marriage was the only road open to women. In other words the only way a woman could rise in the world was by marriage. Marriage was a girl's most likely career. The subservient economic, legal, and social roles of women made practicality the major consideration in choosing a mate and no doubt a number of marriages were very unhappy.

In *Middlemarch* marriage is a central concern and Dorothea's first marriage is unhappy. She retained very childlike ideas about marriage at first. She wanted to marry an educated and intelligent man. Therefore she is deeply impressed with Rev. Casaubon's remarkable knowledge when she first meets him. Later she dreams of becoming his wife and secretary to a scholar involved in important research. The reason why she begins to think so is that she had found in Casaubon a close approximation to her notion of the judicious Hooker or the blind John Milton. She romantically imagines herself as a sharer in his great goal: the completion of his book, *A Key to All Mythologies*. Therefore she accepts willingly the role of disciple and asks him to teach her Latin and Greek so that she may be of greater assistance to him and to develop her range of knowledge. Thus Dorothea thinks of Casaubon as a kind of father and teacher rather than as a husband. She looks forward to marriage

as opening new vistas of learning for her.

On the other hand, Rev. Casaubon wishes to have a wife who will fill up the lonely periods in his life when he is not studying. In his letter proposing marriage to Dorothea, I notice his offer is not an expression of feelings but a statement. I might find further cause for misgivings in Casaubon's wish that Dorothea's sister Celia should accompany them on their wedding journey to Rome. When they visit Rome on their wedding trip, Casaubon leaves his new bride at home alone and goes out to do his further research at the Vatican Library. At this stage she comes to be aware that this marriage is a failure. As for Casaubon, he is also disappointed. He is furious to hear Dorothea suggest that she will help him only if he actually begins to write the work, because he expects to have gained a docile secretary. Here I notice he was viewed Dorothea as a good potential secretary=wife and he has never considered her rights to happiness in marriage. In short we can say that their marriage is a miserable and unhappy one.

Women in the Victorian Age had to be obedient to men, so some of the most famous heroines of the nineteenth century fiction written by men represent what men desire in women, but not necessarily what women are in themselves.

Here I propose to think about George Eliot's own ideas about marriage. George Eliot was unmarried until she became over sixty and got married to Cross. However, she had lived with George Henry Lewes for about twenty-five years. But she was not anti-marriage because there are pictures of happy marriages such as the Bartons (apart from their poverty) in *the Scenes of Clerical Life* and Celia and Sir James in *Middlemarch*. As for childbearing, George Eliot regards childbearing as a happy thing. Mrs Barton loves all her children though she is worn out and her health is undermined because of constant childbearing, and Celia is a proud and happy mother. Yet it is interesting that the heroines of *the Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch* are both childless. I suggest she dodges the issue of how women are to combine their intellectual development with their biological function. Time solved this problem with the development of birth control. George Eliot is realistic about women's problems.

George Eliot was herself a very passionate woman yearning for fervent love, so she had to be needed and loved utterly and entirely by one human being. When she was thirty-four, her deeply passionate nature at last found a wholly satisfying man. He was George Henry Lewes.

He played an important part in understanding her novels as well as her life because he was the very person to find that she had an ability to write the

highest fiction and to encourage her to write novels. It is no exaggeration to say that without him she might never have started to write novels. Therefore we can say 'George Eliot's history is the history of her novels from the time that she joined Lewes to his death. George Eliot lived with George Henry Lewes only because he was already married and not to make a gesture against the institution. Though there could not be a legal union because of the legal barrier of Lewes' former marriage, there was a strong and deep affection between them.

In *the Mill on the Floss* the scene in which Maggie elopes with Stephen is described feelingly. Elopement was as scandalous as living together in the nineteenth century. Therefore Tom says that she will find no home with him because she has disgraced the family and her father's name. She must suffer the consequences of violating the social code in her behavior with Stephen. In fact public opinion is too much against her. Though Maggie loves Stephen and he writes asking her to marry him after she comes back to St. Ogg's. Maggie's sense of duty to Lucy and her love for Tom keep her from accepting his offers. Emotionally tortured, she goes to Dr Kenn and asks for his advice, but scandalous gossip about his relationship with her forces him to advise her to leave St. Ogg's, and she now realizes that "she must be a lonely wanderer" the rest of her life. George Eliot and Lewes never married since Lewes was already married. Although the irrelationship was a loving one, it was not socially acceptable and George Eliot, in particular, suffered from the social criticism which ensued. It is clear that George Eliot suffered like Maggie because of living with Lewes because living together was a very scandalous thing in those days.

George Eliot's anger and frustration at the subservient position of women in society is clearly expressed in the novels. For example, her heroines are very bad at embroidery in general. They dislike sewing very much. They prick their fingers, they get blood on their fine embroidery, and I think this is an expression of the resentment of these women who had to spend evening after evening sewing and stitching.

In *the Mill on the Floss*, Maggie's cousin Lucy is an ideal woman in the Victorian Age. She is always pictured as doll-like and nearly perfect in dress and manners. On the other hand, Maggie is often pictured as unkempt in dress. She is told to brush her hair, change shoes, and come down to do her patchwork like a good girl by her mother. But Maggie does not want to do her patchwork to make a counterpane for her aunt Glegg and she regards it as foolish work, while she loves books and she bursts out crying at the loss of some of their favorite books when her father loses his fortune. I wonder if

Maggie's attitude is an implied criticism on the part of George Eliot of her position of women in society in her day.

As for occupation, women were prevented from doing anything in the world even if they were capable. For working-class women, the choice of occupations was limited. But they became domestic servants and shop assistants and they worked at farms and factories just as hard as the men. For the women of the upper and middle classes, charity work and Sunday School were thought proper, but paid work was taboo. The heroines of George Eliot's novels such as Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brook and Romola all share what Barbara Hardy calls⁵, "the ex officio disability of being women." The women's disability provides the handicap. When George Eliot's heroines are faced with the problems of a career, none of them become novelists and some become governesses. The governess was supposedly a lady and wage-earner, living in the home but neither a servant nor a member of the family. As she might be well-born and educated, she was superior to the other servants. In other words, being a governess was rather like being an upper servant or a domestic servant, with no freedom, no privacy, and no respect. The salary was so low that there was no margin for illness or unemployment. Ladies whose father or brother had failed to support them had to become governess because ladies did not earn money. School teaching also provided a way of earning a living for women at that time. In *the Mill on the Floss* Maggie became a teacher to be independent when her father lost all his fortunes and died. Though Maggie was in a dreary situation in a school, she had to endure her occupation because she could not find any other meaningful employment.

In the Victorian Age there was no meaningful employment for women and most of the women in that era felt the lack of it, so they had no way except rising in the world by marriage. Had Maggie been able to follow a profession which exercised her undoubted talents and make her own way in the world, she would not have been a prey to her shifting emotions and would better have been able to resist the superficial attractions of Stephen Guest.

Dorothea envisaged that the duties of her married life would be great, but on her return from Rome, they "seemed to be shrinking with the furniture and the white vapour-walled landscape". After her husband's death she tries to apply her energies and talents to the building of model cottages, but her life still remains meaningless and she takes the only avenue which presents itself, Will.

Her heroines are deprived of their outlet in action and their opportunities. Thus George Eliot reveals problems of the lack of occupation, but has no

satisfactory answers in her novels. She herself found a satisfactory answer in her personal life. After she had settled down to the position as a editor of the *Westminster Review*, she began to live with Lewes. Marriage was not a means to rise in the world for her and it is true that she tried to rebel in print against the injustices of women's lot. 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. Briefly George Eliot's feminism recognizes the social injustice of women's position only to declare its irrelevance to the more important matter of personal fulfillment.

4) New Women in George Eliot's Novels

As I have already mentioned, the Victorian Age was the heyday of fiction, so various kinds of heroes and heroines were created by many novelists. Generally speaking, in the novels written by men novelists the main characters are always men and heroines play subservient roles. Dickens and Thackeray created many heroines in fact. However, their good women were good and their bad women were bad. In short they could not imagine that a good young woman could go to the bad.

On the other hand, the central figure in most of George Eliot's novels is a woman. Even in novels where the title might suggest otherwise, such as *Adam Bede*, the centre of interest lies mainly in Hetty Sowell and to a lesser extent, Dinah Morris. Even in *Silas Marner*, where a case could be made for an eponymous hero, Eppie steals a great deal of the limelight. It is remarkable that she created new kinds of women who are not found in the novels written by her contemporaries of her predecessors.

One of George Eliot's outstanding qualities was that of compassion, a quality rare indeed in Victorian times, in spite of their ostentatious charity. A society which condemned needy husbands and wives to separate lives in a workhouse after a lifetime together, and which sanctioned the employment of small children in factories and mines cannot fairly claim to be compassionate. But George Eliot lies outside the mainstream of thought in this direction. She faces the fact of moral lapses honestly and without condemnation and endeavours to paint a rounded picture of the circumstances which brought about the fall from grace. Only Thomas Hardy, later in the century, has matched this kind of tolerance.

Caterina in *Mr Gilfil's Love Story* who contemplated murder is one of the

new heroines in George Eliot's novels. Caterina is the daughter of an unhappy Italian singer, whom the Cheverels adopted. Captain Wybrow, the heir of Sir Christopher has won Caterina's heart. However, they differ in social standing and he is a selfish fellow, so he becomes engaged to the rich Miss Assher. As Captain Wybrow has continued his advances to Caterina after his engagement, Caterina suffers and feels jealousy and hatred toward Miss Assher, and thoughts of revenge toward Captain Wybrow and at last she decides to kill him. In other words her passionate nature is brought to the verge of lunacy and she takes the dagger with her and goes to the Rookery where he waits for her in order to kill him with the dagger only to find that he has already died because of long-established heart disease. Though Caterina does not actually kill him, her intention is unmistakable. In spite of this, Mr Gilfil, who has loved her deeply, cares for her and finally she marries him. It is impossible to think of another novelist of this period who could have written even a qualified happy ending for a potential murderer. Even *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* paid the supreme penalty. Maybe the compassion springs from a fellow feeling with Caterina who is separated from her surroundings by not being English, as Marian had felt herself isolated by a greater than average capacity for passion and suffering.

Janet Dempster in *Janet's Repentance* who takes refuge from her sorrows in drunkenness is another new heroine. Though she has a tender heart, her husband Robert Dempster drinks a lot and is violent towards her. Therefore she suffers from her husband's brutal treatment and begins to drink to escape from her sorrows. She wants to run away from him but she cannot because she knows that her husband will never consent to her living away from him and she has become necessary to his tyranny. She has not strength to sustain her in a course of self-defence and independence. Her husband has all her little property in his hands and if Janet went away alone, she knew that her husband would be sure to persecute her mother and she would have to work to maintain herself. Her husband's repeated brutalities make her appeal to Rev. Tryan for help and she begins to make efforts to stop drinking under Rev. Tryan's guidance and finally she is released from her husband because he dies of "delirium tremens" and she achieves self-conquest.

These two women seem to belong more to the modern novel because George Eliot's contemporaries and her predecessors never wrote and never imagined that good women such as Caterina and Janet could go to the bad: The former intends to commit murder and the latter begins to seek solace in drink. Here I notice George Eliot had already emerged from the tradition which we see in Dickens' or Thackeray's novels. These two heroines are a new

departure in fiction. At the same time Janet is a remarkable woman with a great possibility and George Eliot developed Janet in her later novels.

George Eliot goes one step further in *Adam Bede*. Hetty commits murder by killing her baby. Hetty is extremely beautiful and has lived a totally narcissistic life. She is also simple, poorly educated, and completely unsophisticated and is an easy prey to Arthur Donnithorne, the local squire. When Arthur Donnithorne begins to pay attention to her, she dreams that she will be his wife and is less aware of people around her than before. Her uncle hopes that she will marry Adam Bede, who is tall, upright, full of knowledge and who loves her, but she doesn't love him and says that she would have married him if he had been rich enough to satisfy her dreams of luxury. She receives a letter from Arthur which says that he loves her and will never forget her, but cannot marry her because their worlds are too different. Thus her dreams of the future are destroyed, so she decides to ask her uncle to let her become a lady's maid, but her uncle disagrees with her idea. As a result, broken-hearted Hetty consents to marry Adam, but before the marriage she discovers she is pregnant, so she suffers through a long trip to find Arthur. Though she is unable to find him, she can't return to Hayslop because of her pride and fear of shame. Though she wants to drown herself, she doesn't have the courage to kill herself. Finally her selfishness combines with her despair and makes her consider her new-born baby the symbol of all her wretchedness, and she murders her baby and as a result she is arrested.

Hetty sees only herself and is totally unprepared for life. In addition to this, her beauty leads to her tragedy as the landlady says that it would have been a good deal better for her if she had been uglier and had had higher standards of conduct. Though Hetty cannot be saved from punishment, she can save her soul under Dinah's guidance and at last she comes to beg Adam's forgiveness. Yet George Eliot never totally condemns Hetty, although Hetty is undoubtedly a murderess. Compassion for her simplicity is far stronger than the desire to blame her for her moral lapse and the scenes where Hetty innocently tries on her tawdry pieces of finery in the privacy of her own room are extremely moving.

Caterina, Janet, and Hetty are new women in the sense that they were basically good women although they did bad things. Caterina would not have been brought to the verge of lunacy if she had not been fascinated by Captain Wybrow and had married Mr Gilfil without hesitation from the beginning. As for Hetty, she would not have killed her baby if she had not been misled in thinking of a misalliance with Arthur and had married Adam Bede unhesitatingly from the beginning. Both are victims of their own inexperience

and simplicity and the thoughtlessness of men in higher stations of life. Yet both Caterina and Janet are rescued in the end after all: the former is rescued by her marriage with Mr Gilfil although she dies soon after her marriage and the latter is rescued by Rev. Tryan. On the other hand, Hetty is not saved and is sentenced although her soul is rescued under Dinah's guidance.

No novelist can, of course, provide solutions for the problems which beset their characters. At the most, they are a mirror to the society in which they live. George Eliot is no exception. But at least she opened the eyes of the Victorians to the plight of such women as Dorothea and Maggie and (we dare add) herself. It is part of her greatness that she refused to accept the current Victorian cant about "good women" and "bad women" and set out courageously to present human frailty together with all the attendant social forces which cause it. It is in this sense that her heroines are "new", and because of this newness they are linked to the twentieth century novel with its psychoanalytical approach rather than to nineteenth century stereotypes such as those of Dickens and Thackeray.

5) Conclusion

George Eliot is the most intellectual and the most excellent writer of all her contemporary women novelists. As Lord David Cecil points out, Mrs Gaskell and the Brontë Sisters were all instinctive writers, and they didn't concern themselves with philosophy or theology. Therefore they were regarded as "low-brow". On the other hand, George Eliot had marvelous scholarly attainments and was great friends with learned people such as Herbert Spencer. Moreover, she was a woman actively at work in the journalistic world and reviewed religious and philosophic books, so she concerned herself with philosophy and theology naturally.

George Eliot also has other conspicuous special qualities. Firstly, George Eliot was the only novelist in her age who was interested in the evangelical movement, the clash between the old and new ways of ministry and worship in the church, while other novelists in her age neglected this problem. Though she herself gave up religion when she was young, her admiration for the evangelical movement colors her novels, and she deals with religious problems in her novels.

Secondly, George Eliot is said to be the first novelist who began to write modern novels. Her technique is marvelous. For example, we can find double plots in *Silas Marner*, and in *Adam Bede* George Eliot constantly uses mirror-imagery to depict Hetty's state of being. In *Middlemarch* the complexity of

the plot interests the reader consistently; skilful suspension of decision, which many characters face, stimulates curiosity; the abrupt revelation of sudden or hidden incidents creates surprise and intensifies interest. These are some of the reasons why George Eliot can be called an accomplished storyteller.

Thirdly, I realize that there is psychological depth in George Eliot's novels. Seldom in other Victorian writers do we encounter the analysis of character, background and motivation that we find in George Eliot's novels. Let us consider as an example, the description of Dorothea's state of mind in Chapter XX of *Middlemarch*. Dorothea's general misery is introduced by a physical sight — she is weeping. The cause for her present misery is then presented: she faces her own spiritual poverty (as she sees it) a girl with a Puritan background inadequately educated, is brought into contact with the splendours of the classic world and is stunned by its magnificence and totally unable to appreciate it. This inability to adjust to new ideas is a clear reflection of her inability to accept the new reality of her view of Rev. Casaubon which "was gradually changing with the secret motion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden dream." Using architectural images (as Henry James was to do later in *The Portrait of a Lady*) George Eliot makes us see the limitations of Casaubon and the disappointment and frustration of Dorothea when she finds that "the light had changed". This style of writing is the precursor of the stream of consciousness technique later fully developed by modern intellectual novelists such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and is certainly far in advance of the technique of other Victorian novelists in the exploration of characters.

Lastly, it is noticeable that George Eliot was the novelist who was the most interested in education, especially women's education. She regarded knowledge as the most important and basic thing in education. Moreover, she was deeply committed to the cause of human liberation in general and women's liberation in particular. As a social reformer, she especially worked for Women's Liberation and women's rights in education. Her way of thinking is revealed everywhere in her novels.

NOTES

1. See Margaret Drabble, *The Tradition of Women's Fiction*.
2. *Westminster Review*, LXVI (October, 1856), 442–461.

3. See David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*.
4. See J.D.Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer, The Evolution of a Sociologist*.
5. See Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot*.

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