

## Advocating and Subverting Stereotypes of Women: An Examination on Victorian Marriages and Feminist Perspective in *Middlemarch*

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### Abstract

This paper explores George Eliot's use of stereotypes of women in the Victorian period and of meanings of marriage in patriarchal British society in her most renowned novel, *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Eliot, employing Victorian stereotypes of women based on a dichotomy of Madonna and whore, is capable of depicting how male dominated society exerts harmful influences on women. On the other hand, in comparing Dorothea's and Rosamond's marriages, Eliot advocated an institution of matrimony because a good married life is vital to establish and maintain a happy and respectable family life which is important in establishing a harmonious community. Dorothea's second marriage to Will Ladislaw can paradoxically be seen as a metaphor for her resistance to the patriarchal system, even abandoning her late husband's legacy. Eliot was too realist a novelist to romanticize women's political potential without proper education. Her ambivalent attitude toward women's participation in politics in order to improve their social and domestic positions is clearly expressed in her main female characters in *Middlemarch*.

### Introduction

In George Eliot's novels, marriage and conjugal ties are a recurring motif as a crucial form of human relationship between main characters. However, it is quite important to note that in her fiction marriage as a customary institution is by no means as privileged as one expects: rather it is doubtless that she made artistic efforts to conceptualize her notion of marriage by portraying the Victorian marriage as realistically as possible. For this very purpose, I would argue that she appropriates the Victorian stereotypes of women which operate as her vital literary device.

In this paper, I would like to explore how various marriages play certain roles to construct the cosmic world of a provincial area in Victorian England in her most renowned novel, *Middlemarch* (1871-72). In this novel, George Eliot reexamines marriage as a conventional institution, intending to attack British patriarchal society by depicting unsuccessful married couples. Notwithstanding her artistic intention to criticize the institution, however, Eliot provides her new concepts of an ideal marital status without entirely dismissing the heterosexual institution that had developed under the patriarchal power-dynamics.

Her emphasis is that women should become one of the two popular stereotypes of Victorian women: an angel in the house who should embody a Madonna-like figure since Madonna involves a wife and mother that Eliot seemed to consider to be essential for a respectable family and harmonious community. In *Middlemarch*, although marital status serves to confine women's position within domestic affairs and domain, Dorothea Brooke, the female protagonist of the novel, after experiencing her previous failed matrimony with an old mentor-figure gentleman, finally finds marital bliss. To her, the married life does not function to restrict her sincere desire to contribute to the community and elevate her spiritual ambition but rather becomes a vehicle to exert her womanly force and talent through the domestic sphere for the (re)construction of a better community.

### I

A glance at her novels allows the reader to notice that stereotypes of women in the Victorian period are depicted in her novels: "the fragrant angel in the house and the fallen woman in the street" (Pickering 5). Deploying these opposite stereotypes of women in a very tactical

fashion, George Eliot contrives different versions resting on the stereotypes. For instance, in *Adam Bede* (1859), Hetty Sorrel is a fallen maiden who gives birth to a baby resulting from her premarital affair with Arthur Donnithorne while Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher, is a saint-like figure who salves Hetty's conscience by evoking a true confession of infanticide from her. As Victorian people might assume, those female characters deserve what stereotypical women are supposed to deserve: Hetty eventually dies after her five-year exile in Australia while Dinah, giving up her religious vocation, has a blissful married life with Adam Bede and their two children. Ultimately, Eliot situates Dinah in the domestic space despite her intense desire to serve God. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), furthermore, Maggie Tulliver is condemned as a fallen girl by the community of St. Ogg because she is thought to almost have eloped with Stephen Guest who is practically the fiancé of her cousin, Lucy Deane. Lucy can, by contrast, be considered an angelic figure in the house, especially when she shows her capability by condoning Maggie's misbehavior. As with Hetty in *Adam Bede*, Maggie is incurring disgrace from the community and is destined to die young at the end of the story.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, *Felix Holt* (1866) presents an angelic maiden, Ether Lyon, and the fallen-woman figure Mrs. Transome: Ether rescues Felix Holt at the murder trial by making her beautiful oration like a saintly speech, whereas Mrs. Transome has a dark secret that she had committed adultery and, because of which, she gave birth to an illegitimate son, Harold Transome. As a consequence, Mrs. Transome continues to be doomed to cursed sufferings from her immoral conduct in the past.

According to Michael Pickering, these Victorian stereotypes of women are "sometimes represented in historical analysis as the madonna/whore dichotomy" (Pickering 5). George Eliot's deployment of these stereotypes exemplifies such a dichotomy since the distinction between the angelic figures and the fallen-woman figures in these novels is not due to anything but digression from sexual norms in the Victorian age. In this case, the cause of sexual

deviation from the conventional norms in itself should not be attributed only to women. Yet in Eliot's stories it is always women that suffer both emotional and social reproaches because of adultery or premarital sex, while men are seldom to blame socially or legally. For example, in *Adam Bede*, Arthur, despite his sincere repentance, remains unable to protect Hetty from public shame in one way or another even though he manages to prevent her suffering a death sentence in the very nick of time. Moreover, Stephen in *The Mill on the Floss* hardly suffers any social sanctions (although he shows Maggie his sincere responsibility for community's condemnation on her by writing her a letter in which he begs her to marry him).

Almost all the female characters I mentioned have one specific disposition in common: they essentially possess an ambitious spirit or aspirations to elevate their social status as a woman in the domestic sphere. However, their ambitions are eventually all in vain under the patriarchal social system which circumscribes women's social activities. For example, Hetty is, although physically old enough to get pregnant, essentially still a child, an underprivileged orphan, without her real parents and lacking education. Her intentions and conduct certainly betray her naiveté and pure egoism so that the consequences of her childish and selfish actions are morally unforgivable to Victorian people.<sup>2</sup> What Hetty attempts to do is to lead a better life within a socially permissible convention: marriage to a man of the upper class. However, the "sexual and class ideologies" (Logan 19) about which Hetty lacks knowledge, circumvent her design to lift herself with marriage, one of the few ways available to uneducated maidens like her in the 19th century. On the other hand, Dinah's initial intention can be also regarded as an ambition to exalt her spiritual status as a woman although within a traditional social convention: zealous devotion to religion. Refusing the stereotypical status for women in the domestic sphere, Dinah is determined to completely deny her sexuality as a woman and attempts to achieve her religious objectives. In a way, she seems to intend to act like a man, rejecting the conventional women's roles. In this

regard, her initial refusals to marry Seth, and later Adam, evinces her resistance to the idea of marriage which represents a patriarchal emblem both minimizing women's rights and suppressing their political and social desires by imposing an ideal female figure on them to achieve men's ends. Yet Eliot decides to make Dinah stay in the domestic area ultimately under a conjugal life with Adam Bede. This decision to make her heroines become housewives has simply puzzled many of her feminist critics.<sup>3</sup>

## II

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot did not adopt the dichotomy of Victorian stereotypical women figures as the previous novels I dealt with. However, it does not mean that in this novel she provides a brand new female figure to deconstruct the common stereotypes of English women in the Victorian age. Rather, the novel can be seen as a close study on one type in the stereotypical dichotomy with the specific intention of exhausting women's conditions in provincial life. As far as marriage motif is concerned, what distinguishes *Middlemarch* from the three novels I discussed above is that in *Middlemarch* the reader has an opportunity to observe the married lives two of which are found to be failed marriages while in the previous novels married lives only give the reader an implication that the couples will basically live happily ever after.

One of the reasons for failure of the marriage between Dorothea and Edward Casaubon is principally because of her natural instinct to refuse the marital status of wives in Victorian England. That is, she is, perhaps unconsciously, aware that to be a wife is to be so dependent entirely upon her husband that without her husband her social status is narrowly limited. For ambitious women like her, wives are depersonalized by the institution of marriage that guarantees marital/familial comfort and financial dependence in power relationship between a husband as master and wife as subordinate. For example, in Chapter 3, Dorothea shows her view on pets in general to Sir James Chattam who later proposes to her:

It is painful to see these creature that are bred as pets . . . . I believe all the petting that is given them does not make them happy. *They are too helpless: their lives are too frail. A weasel or a mouse that gets its own living is more interesting.* I like to think that the animals about us have souls something like our own, and either carry on their own little affairs or can be companions to us, like Monk here. *Those creatures are parasitic.* (Italics mine, *Middlemarch* 30)

The passage explicitly serves to metaphorically illustrate Dorothea's view on the wifely position. Eliot inserts this rendering relatively early in the novel to imply that Dorothea identifies pets with wives who basically share similar conditions to pets: wives are subordinated to their husbands under the matrimonial systems or laws. She articulates, albeit implicitly, that she would not like to be in such a parasitic condition as theirs.

On the contrary, Celia Brooke, Dorothea's sister, is depicted as being content with such a dependent status. In the ensuing passage, the narrator details Dorothea's mind and lets her explain to Sir James:

The objectionable puppy, whose nose and eyes were equally black and expressive, was thus got rid of, since Miss Brooke decided that it had better not have been born. But she felt it necessary to explain. "You must not judge of Celia's feeling from mine. I think she likes these small pets. She had a tiny terrier once, which she was very fond of. It made me unhappy, because I was afraid of treading on it. I am rather short-sighted." (*Middlemarch* 30).<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Dorothea, Celia is not concerned about a wife's status under marital conditions. In this dialogue, Dorothea must identify her sister with pets, which is why she calls Celia "Kitty" (*Middlemarch* 536 and elsewhere). It can be assumed that George Eliot juxtaposes Dorothea with Celia, expressing figuratively the opposite

views on marital conditions in which women are bound to lead their lives in the domestic space. It is then fundamental for Dorothea to have sincere love if she should get married despite her negative views on woman's role as wife. What I mean by this is that she ought to have love earnest enough to accept pet-like conditions as wife. However, it is obvious that marriage between them is not founded on such honest love but on each other's self-interest and illusion of each other. My argument on the reason why Dorothea determines to marry Casaubon is that, without conceiving a genuine love for him, she desires to pursue her ambition to gain wider knowledge and truth through a role and function as the wife of an erudite churchman.<sup>5</sup> In terms of her decision to accept his proposal, she is "rather short-sighted" because she sees through rose-colored glasses in her mind's eye, a glittering illusion of Casaubon. Marrying the sexually unattractive but scholarly old man can paradoxically signify her remaining as a "virgin" maiden predicated upon "Eliot's love for the pure, noble, desexed Madonna figure" (Flint 164).

On the other hand, what Rosamond Vincy is concerned about in her marriage with Tertius Lydgate is ultimately financial stability rather than loving feelings. She is in fact rather selfish and has no intention to overcome domestic problems according to her husband's directions. Her concern is what the community would think about her as a wife or adult woman. She does in every way succeed in making the entire community believe that she is an angelic figure in the house so that they have considered her the best woman in the region. As in Eliot's other novels, what counts for a woman's character is the reputation she can establish in the community. In short, stereotypes are easily acceptable: the closer one becomes an established stereotype, the more readily others can estimate one's reputation. Cara Weber illuminates that

In her self-regulating adherence to a static, ideologically scripted role, Rosamond presents an example of selfhood underwritten by the paradigm of identification, one that foregrounds the cultural production of this paradigm. Further, Rosamond's case

emphasizes how the ideology of femininity is particularly structured to incite anxiety about human identity as all-too-theatrical, in the sense of a performance with nothing behind it. . . . Since Rosamond deliberately expresses a stereotype, the question of where or how to locate her self [*sic*] in this expression is a real one. (Weber 504-505)

In the case of Rosamond, she is regarded as the perfect wife not because she actually is so but precisely because she exactly fits the Victorian stereotype of woman, as angel in the house. Rosamond was raised learning the social and cultural expectations of good women. Her mother, Mrs. Vincy, remarks: "Rosamond always had an angel of a temper, her brother used very often not to please her, but she was never the girl to show temper; from a baby she was always as good as good, and with a complexion beyond anything" (*Middlemarch* 642). Accordingly, Rosamond is inclined to conceal her displeasure and anger, which means that she manages to play a role as the stereotypical good woman in the house. For the community, Rosamond is not to blame for their financial crisis as long as she deals with her domestic affairs properly. But it is Lydgate that is supposed to be condemned for their financial difficulties as belonging to men's duties (the public sphere), which is what he is responsible for.<sup>6</sup>

George Eliot seems to have a profound conviction that a solid family relationship is indispensable for a successful marriage. For instance, in *Adam Bede*, Hetty fails to marry Arthur and has a tragic disaster in part because she lacks parental guidance while, in *The Mill on the Floss*, her beloved brother, Tom, has no understanding of Maggie throughout the story except the ending right before the moment when they are both drown together due to the flood. In *Felix Holt*, Esther has no mother, but her step-father, Mr. Lyon, expresses respect and warm affection for her. In *Middlemarch*, Caleb Girth, father of Mary, gives help to Fred despite the fact that Fred has lost Caleb's money in business deals and permits marriage between Mary and Fred.<sup>7</sup>

It is predictable that marriage between Rosamond and Lydgate could be saved if her parents



would give this couple financial help to pay off their debts. Yet Eliot, I suppose, had no intention to ameliorate or restore their marital bond since Rosamond hardly deserves the ideal marriage she envisaged. For Eliot, Rosamond is her literary agent who misbehaves, under the brilliant disguise of being an angel in the house, to destroy her matrimony with her devoted husband. Eliot employs her character as a morally fallen and egoistic pseudo-angel in the house who attempts to socially survive by playing the positive stereotypical role. For instance, although their financial crisis is ultimately solved by Dorothea's bona fide financial aid, Lydgate and Rosamond are no longer capable of recovering their happy married life as it used to be. It can be surmised that Rosamond's concept of marriage is not based on mutual love but on social reputation. Therefore, she repeatedly requests Lydgate to leave Middlemarch together in order to avoid public infamy (*Middlemarch* 752-54). The failure of their married life results, I would underscore, from their total dependence on the Victorian stereotypes of the two sexes. In describing a huge gap between these stereotypes and their real identities and personalities, Eliot subverted the stereotypes in order to criticize the patriarchal values of restricting women's roles in the domestic sphere.

### III

George Eliot had a strategy to question Victorian patriarchal society where men desire to maintain power, privilege and social order over women. As Daniel Vitaglione summarizes the substance of marriage in patriarchal societies:

Most of the anger against male dominance is directed towards marriage. Indeed, marriage constituted then the most repressive condition for women. An unmarried woman had few options but at least she enjoyed the advantage of not being legally and materially dependent on her husband. Marriage was unfortunately the only alternative for women. Their education only prepared them to be wives and mothers. (Vitaglione 181)

This is exactly the case with Victorian England. Although Eliot supported the then feminist movement's effort to elevate women's social status, she simultaneously criticizes some of their agenda.<sup>8</sup> It is worth pointing out that her attitude toward a marriage system and conjugal status in the Victorian era was not wholly critical. It is true that she attempted to seek an ideal relationship in a marital form.

Dorothea's remarriage to Will Ladislav is in fact a challenge to the patriarchal social system, which can paradoxically be seen as a metaphor for her resistance to the system, abandoning her first husband's legacy. Casaubon's addition of a codicil to his will, which denies Dorothea's inheritance if she marries Will, exhibits Casaubon's abnormal desire to exert his posthumous mastery over his wife. Hence, the codicil is an emblem of the husband's power that the patriarchal society produces as well as "pathological nature of his assertion of power" (Graver 212). Insofar as she complies with her ex-husband's will, her obedience precisely signifies that she accepts that her life is restricted by the patriarchal system, succumbing to patriarchal conditions even though she might achieve her desire to support others in the community with her late husband's inheritance.

However, Dorothea (as well as the reader) is confronted with a paradox: it is quite ironic that she must cling to or rely upon a system of marriage predicated on patriarchal notions in order to release herself from the "dead hand" which is trying to dominate her life even after his demise. Absolutely, this dilemma brought by the condition complicates the issue of the social advancement of women. Thus, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are right when they assert that her remarriage to Ladislav is "the most subversive act available to her within the context defined by the author since it is the only act prohibited by the stipulations of the dead man, and by her family and friends as well" (Gilbert and Gubar 528). Indeed, the authorial decision is crucial enough to reveal her view of marriage. Eliot fully comprehended, I would suggest, both the positive and negative dimensions of the institution of marriage and intended to propose her notion that it is necessary to consider how

socially and culturally to unite the two sexes. In this sense, marital status should be the perfect concept as long as it works mutually for both sexes.

The question is whether the social elevation of women's status is compatible with the institution of marriage which confines wives to the domestic sphere and in which husbands usually possess dominant influence over them. Patricia Lorimer Lundberg perceives the very intention of Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot's real name) regarding Dorothea's remarriage:

Evans surely tried to change the perceptions of her male audience, too; had Evans been interested only in what a female audience thought, she would not have felt the need for a male persona to modulate her tone. Nevertheless, Evans seems to support the dominant tradition even as her subversiveness surfaces before the careful reader . . . . Defying the authority figures in her life is indeed a very subversive act for Dorothea, a woman of renunciation. Evans had, I think, to tailor her women's rebellion to such subversive activities as would remain acceptable to her male audience. (Lundberg 273)

Dorothea's decision to remarry seems questionable to many feminist readers who are apt to conceive of it as a defeat or failure. But her resolution can be construed as a necessary and realistic reconciliation or compromise to proceed with the social reform on the basis of her conviction of constructing a better community. Amy A. Kass explicates the effect of Dorothea's remarriage with Will on the couple:

Under Dorothea's sway, then Will, hitherto a casual and amorous aesthete, becomes politically and humanly more serious. Dorothea, hitherto a self-denying moralist, becomes more aware of her own desires, more amorous, and, eventually, more self-fulfilled. Each re-forms the other, as in parallel, they reform themselves. Together

they embody mutual respect, steady love, and lasting intimacy; . . . . Dorothea has found a better, less illusory foundation for marriage. We should cheer, too, for the reliable and steady anchor of everyday married life, which enables her confidently to move outward and effectively into the community" (Kass 20).

My conviction is that Dorothea's remarriage to him mirrors Eliot's conception of marriage. According to Suzanne Graver, *Middlemarch* demonstrates the idea of a new ideal marriage: marriage based on a "true friendship." Presenting the idea of John Stuart Mill, the English philosopher and economist, Graver asserts:

Mill argues because the laws governing the institution of marriage make the woman's lot so dependent on the treatment she receives from her husband, and because a woman has little choice but to marry, 'it is a very cruel aggravation of her fate that she should be allowed to try this chance *only once*' . . . . Dorothea is saved from this aggravation; she is given a second chance, a second husband who neither paternal nor despotic. Will Ladislaw, wherever the reader's reservations about him, is among other things a friend to Dorothea, sharing with her 'that union of thoughts and inclinations' which Mill, making friendship his model, call the true 'ideal of married life.' (Graver, *Community* 214, Italics mine)

If Eliot sought equal status between two sexes in marital circumstances, marriage on the basis of true friendship can be considered ideal. Nonetheless, Graver finds Dorothea's second marriage insufficient for her principles of seeking social reform mainly for the sake of the community. Graver goes on to claim:

But her escape does not signify organic recovery . . . . Her move to London is an expatriation, not an integrating act so far as the community of Middlemarch is con-

cerned. At the same time, the most essential of the social structures that shape her future life is not new but old in form. Dorothea as the wife of Will Ladislaw remains almost as far from fulfilling her aspirations for a ‘grand life—here—now—in England’ as she had been as the wife of Casaubon. (Graver, *Community* 214)

Graver’s examination suggests that Dorothea’s final decision appears to retreat from the social reform to which she initially intends to contribute. As a consequence, Eliot’s realist aesthetics endow her with a keen artistic consciousness that serves to complicate the feminist concerns. Hence, such a binary opposition (marriage and no marriage) tends to hinder the reader from grasping the import of her artistic aims. In other words, applying the binary opposition is not effective enough to satisfy both the social advancement of women and the social reform reinforcing the significance of the community. In this regard, Dorothea’s subversive act of remarrying Ladislaw reflects Eliot’s realist approach to the social issues as well. Her sense of reality might be that the rapid and total change of conventional notions is utterly impossible and is not worth pursuing since a number of conventions have been constructed by the most essential cohesive unity for society: the community.

#### IV

In the novels I dealt with before *Middlemarch*, it is implied that socially acceptable wives are all rewarded and lead happy lives. On the other hand, the novel demonstrates that it is not necessarily the case for some marriages. Even the angels in the house can be not only frustrated at but can also suffer emotionally through their failed marriage. George Eliot once clarified her aesthetic conviction that “It is not enough to simply reach truth . . . we want it to be so taught as to compel men’s attention to sympathy” (*Selected Essays*, 368-69). Perhaps for this reason, she valued Victorian stereotype of wife/mother in order to illustrate the true situation of wives within the domestic space although

it was in fact purely fabricated and taken full advantage of by men to maintain power and order in stabilizing their patriarchal privileges. As Eileen Gillooly points out:

As the public sphere became increasingly identified as exclusively masculine space . . . , domesticity came more visibly under feminine management. From her privileged if confining position at the center of the household, the Angel in the House (otherwise known as the wife and mother) was expected to radiate sympathy and moral influence throughout the domestic sphere—and sometimes, as Ruskin would have it, beyond. (Gillooly 397-98).

It seems notable to me that Eliot hoped marriage would create such a figure in women. I argue that Eliot believed that the family should be a key unit of the web structure in society and that this unit should be protected not by the husband/father, but by the wife/mother as the domestic Madonna who holds tenderness and affection for her family and the community. Kimberly VanEsveld Adams explains how the Madonna functions in Eliot’s fiction: “The Madonna is Eliot’s symbol of a woman who has developed her intellectual and emotional capacities, who is for herself but also for the others, as wife and mother; a woman is independent yet also materially grounded in her own body and connected to the social body” (Adams 60–61). Therefore, Dorothea ought to get married and establish a family to “radiate” her good will (affection and sympathy) through and beyond the family that constitutes the most elemental social unit in the web of human society not only because the web “of interconnectedness . . . is not static, but fluid and supple, *responding to the slightest tremor and reflecting the minutest action*” (Italics mine, Langland 80) but also because the “web exists not only as interconnection in space but *as succession in time*” (Italics mine, Armitt 155). In this sense, it is essential for Dorothea to become both a wife and mother in order to contribute spatiotemporally to social reform in the community. In addition, her remarriage provides Dorothea with a

more appropriate role for her personality than supporting the community financially with Casaubon's legacy. For she is a very kind and considerate woman who is always concerned for others with a truly altruistic compassion, as Lydgate discerns the true power she possesses: "This young creature [Dorothea] has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary . . . . She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her. . . . Well, her love might help a man more than her money" (*Middlemarch* 768-69).

One of the most important themes in *Middlemarch* is to examine social structure and gender issues in order for George Eliot to propose a theory of social reform. As far as gender issues are concerned, her conclusion seems to retard progression in feminist movements in the Victorian period as Dorothea retreats to the domestic sphere. For Eliot with the strong conviction that the bond of the community should be maintained and highly valued, it is impossible for her to ignore the notions of family and marriage simply because they represent the Western patriarchal conventions. In her essay, "'Incarnate History': The Feminism of *Middlemarch*," Suzanne Graver comments upon its controversial ending:

*Middlemarch* legitimates, as well as challenges, Victorian cultural paradigms, despite its powerful social critique. There is certain inevitability in this: literary conventions must to some extent encode social conventions. Writers cannot help but call on the same signifying codes that pervade social interactions, even when they seek to challenge those codes. While the closing of the novel continues the indictment of the dominant culture, its final celebrations nonetheless enforce the status quo, so far as the family and female spirituality are concerned. The novel mounts a powerful critique of the doctrine of separate spheres, and it mourns the gendered opposition of the familial and the vocational, but the closing blesses "the family [that] was made whole again on the birth of

Dorothea's child. The effect is to separate what elsewhere this novel often brilliantly connects—the realm of politics and the realm of the family" (Graver, "Incarnate History" 73).

Graver's argument about the novel's simultaneously legitimating and challenging Victorian cultural paradigms, I believe, perfectly mirrors Eliot's artistic vision to advocate and question notions of both family and community, no matter how oppressive patriarchal ideologies and institutions are to women. In particular, nurturing children in the family is women's privilege as mother to help ameliorate both domestic and communal conditions. As Kate Flint perceives,

The figure of the mother is a key one in George Eliot's writing, partly because of the emotional resonance that it held for her, and partly because it provides an ideal site on which to examine the nexus of ideas concerning the social and natural that lie at the heart of her treatment of gender. She invested the role of motherhood with sacredness, representing the highest form of duty of which most women were capable. (Flint 165)

To Eliot, motherhood or the role of mother located on the center of the domestic sphere must be crucial in establishing and maintaining good family relations which should be the core of a stable community. Otherwise, bad mothers such as Mrs. Rosamond Lydgate are very likely to cause a broken or dysfunctional family, having no respect for their husbands.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would stress that George Eliot granted priority to the cohesion of the community over feminist activities that seek to correct patriarchal privileges. This reveals, I strongly believe, that Eliot was a hard-core realist who was too earnest to fancy an unrealistic



solution and simultaneously so sincere that she can admit her limitations of artistic capability for social reform. Hence, she might seem conservative to many feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar who call Eliot “feminine anti-feminism” (Gilbert and Gubar 466) as the use of her masculine pseudonym might imply. It might be assumed that Finale of *Middlemarch* might serve to intimate that Eliot as a woman artist makes an apology for not presenting a new or better solution for the feminist issues and admits her artistic limitations as a social reformer. Notwithstanding her incapacity for showing any direction of movement, her reconciliation not to expressly promulgate her own solution to women’s issues, I would argue, should be regarded as coming from her ambivalent feelings towards women’s social status and ambitions. At least, it can be said that George Eliot was so sincere and true to herself, supposedly torn between her support of women’s political ambition and the reality of women’s socioeconomic limitation in the Victorian period. Her ambivalent attitude toward women’s participation in politics is clearly expressed in her main female characters such as Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary in *Middlemarch*.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the relation between Maggie’s destiny and her community, see Philip Fisher, *Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot*. In chapter 3 of the book, he connects the “witch trial” by water Maggie refers to in the beginning of the story (Fisher 66-67) and her destiny as she drowns in the flood. Basically, he maintains that Maggie must die in order to restore her innocence: “To come under suspicion is to be lost. If she saves herself by swimming, she is given to the fire as a witch. Only by sinking can she clear her name. . . . But the satisfactions are those of tragedy where innocence can only be known in consenting to be sacrificed” (Fisher 66).

<sup>2</sup> Deborah A. Logan keenly observes that “Hetty’s character represents less an individual deviation than a reflection of a major cultural shift—in this case, the demise of agrarian economy. In the light of this broader cultural context, Eliot’s case for infanticide is unconvincing as presented because it ultimately suggests Hetty is failed by—rather than a

threat to—her community” (Logan 19).

<sup>3</sup> Zelda Austen sums up the feminist argument: “The feminist’s insistence that literature show women as more than bride, wife, and mother is admirable, warning that it is unfair to apply the insistence to “novels that were written when most women were either brides, wives, mothers, or dependent spinsters—unless George Eliot had written exclusively about herself” (Austen 120).

<sup>4</sup> Dorothea sympathizes with the conditions under which pets live rather than hating them. The narrator states that “. . . rising and going to the open window, where Monk was looking in, panting and wagging his tail. She [Dorothea] leaned her back against the window-frame, and laid her hand on the dog’s head; for though, as we know, she was not fond of pets that must be held in the hands or trodden on, she was always attentive to the feelings of dogs, and very polite if she had to decline their advances” (*Middlemarch* 390).

<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Graver suggests that “the sole source of Dorothea’s affection for Casaubon is her pity for him” (Gravers, *Community* 211). On the other hand, Daniel Vitaglione uses the term, “maternal,” to express Dorothea’s love for Casaubon: “Her [George Eliot’s] heroines are maternal and when they love, it is in a maternal way. Maggie loves her brother like a mother. Dorothea’s behavior towards Casaubon is also maternal” (Vitaglione 188).

<sup>6</sup> Rosamond’s relatives who know their domestic affairs, however, clearly understand that Rosamond herself should try to reconcile her desires with the reality she faces and criticize her egoism. Her aunt, Mrs. Plymdale, frankly confides that “I am not so sorry for Rosamond Vincy that was as I am for her aunt . . . she needed a lesson” (*Middlemarch* 744), and also Mr. Bulstrode, who notices his “brother-in-law’s family . . . has always been of prodigal habits,” suggests to Lydgate that “instead of involving yourself [Lydgate] in further obligations, and continuing a doubtful struggle, you should simply become a bankrupt” (*Middlemarch* 683–84).

<sup>7</sup> In *Middlemarch*, conjugal relations between Mary Garth and Fred Vincy seem to be the most satisfactory in comparison to those between Dorothea and Casaubon or between Rosamond and Lydgate. It is probably because Mary and Fred have deeply loved each other, having known each other since their childhood. On the contrary, Dorothea, Casaubon, Rosamond, or Lydgate do not love their partner,

while idealizing him/her until their marriage. Furthermore, Mary as a working woman has a craving for neither luxuries nor social mobility, especially by marrying a man belonging to a higher class than hers or having a respectable profession. She is not only realistic enough to lead a steady life and but also wise enough to see through Fred's personality unqualified for clergyman by declaring that "I certainly never will be his wife if he becomes a clergyman . . . . I can never imagine him preaching and exhorting and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as I were looking at a caricature. His being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility" (*Middlemarch* 516) despite her awareness that "I have too strong a feeling for Fred to give him up for any one else" (*Middlemarch* 517). Their mutual affection is tantamount to their mutual respect so that their marital bond reflects Eliot's ideal of companionship between wife and husband.

<sup>8</sup> Evan Horowitz neatly describes Eliot's complex attitude toward her contemporary women's rights movement and notions about her politics: "Though she supported increasing the rights and improving the circumstances of women in the abstract, every particular proposal seems to her as likely to inhibit as to abet. In other words, Eliot's politics, like Felix Holt's, were stretched across the gap between intentions and actions, her intentions were progressive and often radical, but she could rarely see a way to translate those intentions into action" (Horowitz 24). See Flint for a comprehensive study of gender issues in Eliot's work.

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英国女性観のステレオタイプの擁護と転覆：  
『ミドルマーチ』におけるヴィクトリア朝の結婚観とフェミニスト観の検証

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論文要旨

本小論では、ジョージ・エリオットの最高傑作長編小説『ミドルマーチ』におけるヴィクトリア朝の女性表象のステレオタイプと作者の結婚観を分析する。当時支配的であったステレオタイプの女性像を利用することによって、女性に悪影響を与える19世紀の家父長制英国社会を描いており、女性主人公であるドロシアとロザモンドの両者の結婚を比較しながら、エリオットは家父長制下の結婚制度を支持しているが、それは、エリオットにとって、健全な家庭生活が共同体の調和の構築に重要な役割を担っていると感じていたからである。高額な遺産の受け取りを断念してまでも、再婚を決意するドロシアの行動は、逆説的ではあるが、家父長制への抵抗という隠喩の機能がある。エリオットは、現実主義者であり、女性への適切な教育なしでは、女性の政治参加を理想化することはできなかったが、女性の政治参加に対する彼女の両価的な（アンビバレントな）態度は、『ミドルマーチ』の主要女性登場人物のステレオタイプの人格描写に明確に表現されている。