

# George Eliot's Feminine Assertion in *Middlemarch*

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**Abstract**—As a female writer, especially the one capable of winning a unique reputation among the male-dominated literary circle during the Victorian era, George Eliot was sensitive and much concerned for women's living circumstances and difficulties in the community. The article aims to make a tentative interpretation on Eliot's feminine perspectives by a closing reading of her representative novel, *Middlemarch*. The article concludes that George Eliot was not a feminist, and she herself might refuse to be entitled a feminist. Through analysis of her female images, it is clear that George Eliot never put man and woman on the two contradictory extremes, and she didn't contend that women's pursuit for social worth and individual values should be obtained at the loss of feminine qualities, such as to be a wife and mother. Thus, George Eliot is definitely not a feminist; instead, she is a female writer with advanced consciousness of women's independence, social worth and individual values. Instead of emphasizing women's sexual identity, Eliot puts priority on women's social identity--- a human being equal to men. No matter a man or a woman, they should enjoy the same rights and undertake the same obligations. Just like herself, she succeeded in writing and didn't give up her pursuit for love and marriage.

**Index Terms**—feminine, social value, independence

## I. INTRODUCTION

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter states in the Chapter IV "Feminine Heroines: Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot" that: "Women beginning their literary careers in the 1840s were seeking heroines-both professional role-models and fictional ideals-who could combine strength and intelligence with feminine tenderness, tact, and domestic expertise. At the same time, they perceived themselves and their fictional heroines as innovators who would provide role-models for future generations"(Showalter, 2004, p.100). It is much of the truth that George Eliot emphasizes the feminine qualities of women. She believes that women's strength and intelligence are equal to, even greater than those of men. When comparing George Eliot with Charlotte Bronte, Elaine Showalter maintains that in terms of Charlotte Bronte, she chose a volcanic literature of the body as well as of the heart, a sexual and often supernatural world, thus she is usually seen as the romantic, the spontaneous artist who pours forth her feelings without premeditation. While George Eliot, on the contrary, is a writer and a woman in the Jane Austen tradition, studies, intellectual, cultivated (P.104). In her reviews of the silly lady novelists, Eliot defined her own professional ideals, the really cultured women, who "is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge...she does not make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right estimate of herself. She neither spouts poetry nor quotes Cicero on slight provocation. ...she does not write books to confound philosophers, perhaps because she is able to write books that delight them. In conversation she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you, without wanting to make you aware that you can't understand her" (Showalter, 2004, p.104).

George Eliot's views and her unconventional life experiences incurred much doubts and disgust from the contemporary female writers. "Victorian women writers, when they contemplated George, had felt somewhat betrayed. They thought she had rejected them because she had avoided intimacy; they thought she had despised them because she had held them to a rigorous standard. They could not equal her, and they could see no way around her" (Showalter, 2004, p.111).

The feminists berated her for her compromise and submission to male-dominated social values, and concluded that Eliot was subject to the ideological limitations in the Victorian era. However, it's fair to say that Eliot is a mild philosopher rather than a radical social activist. As an outstanding writer with realistic spirit, George Eliot was sensitive to women's living conditions and social circumstances at the era. Thus, George Eliot didn't strongly advise women to pursue social values at the cost of love, marriage and family life, for she was aware that no one should encourage women to slap the door behind and applaud for their courage and volition of running away from women's identity without providing the feasible suggestions for them to live in the current male-dominated society.

It was not until Virginia Woolf that female writers changed their views on George Eliot. Virginia Woolf

complimented Eliot and regarded her as a heroine instead of a rival. In 1919, Virginia Woolf wrote an essay helping restoring Eliot to her rightful position after a period of Victorian and Edwardian backlash. While Woolf admitted that there were flaws in Eliot's novels, she appreciated Eliot's fidelity to female experience depicted in the heroines. To explore the feminine assertions of George Eliot, the best way is to explore the characters, especially the female images in her works.

## II. MIDDLEMARCH

First published during 1871 and 1872, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* is set in the fictitious Midlands town of Middlemarch during 1829 to 1832. The novel is composed of several different but interweaving stories and quite a large cast of characters. *Middlemarch* is centered on the lives of the residents of Middlemarch. The narrative consists of three or four plots of unequal emphasis: the life of Dorothea Brooke; the career of Tertius Lydgate; the courtship of Mary Garth by Fred Vincy; and the disgrace of Bulstrode. Dorothea and Lydgate are the main characters and their stories are those of the main plots in the novel. Dorothea is the female representative to reflect explicitly Eliot's feminine thoughts.

Dorothea Brooke is a 17-year-old lady. After her parents' death, she lived with Celia, her younger sister, under the guardianship of her uncle, Mr. Brook. Dorothea is an ambitious and pious young woman, who always dreams of being useful and exerts efforts to do something great. However, her uncle discourages her several times for her identity of being a woman. Dorothea turned down Sir James Chettam, a young man close to her own age, instead, she is attracted to Casaubon, a much older and ugly scholar despite her uncle's advice and sister's misgivings. Dorothea accepts Casaubon for the reason that she might be useful to her husband in his great work and assists in achieving something great. However, Dorothea soon becomes disappointed and gets depressed during their honeymoon in Rome, for she finds that her husband has no intention to involve her in his intellectual pursuits. Casaubon's cousin Will Ladislav is attracted to Dorothea. Oblivious as she remains to him, the two become friendly. When Casaubon returns from Rome, he suffers an attack and diagnosed by the doctor that he only has about fifteen years left if he takes it easy and ceases his studies. In poor health, Casaubon attempts to extract from Dorothea a promise that, should he die, she will "avoid doing what I should deprecate, and apply yourself to do what I should desire" (Eliot, 1994, P.367). Casaubon dies before she can reply, and she later learns that Casaubon leaves the will that if she marries Ladislav, she will lose her inheritance. In the end, Dorothea denounced her heritage and married Will Ladislav.

## III. FEMININE THOUGHTS REFLECTED FROM *MIDDLEMARCH*

Virginia Woolf drew a perfect conclusion about the character of George Eliot's novels on the combination of Aesthetics and ethical value: "George Eliot makes us join in their (characters in novels) life with sympathy not deigning and curiosity... Her broad mind contains a group of main factors of human nature, she loosely gets them together with a sound understanding, and we read them again and again, not only finding that her characters are dynamic, free and unconstrained, but also surprisingly finding that they can control our laughter and tears" (Showalter, 2004, p.136). In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot explores the awakening of self-independent consciousness of women, the rebellion and struggle undertaken by women who are in pursuit of their personal independent personality, and the confused state because of its unavoidable limitation of the times and the pressure from the patriarchal society, thus she reveals her concern for women and exhibits her feminine consciousness.

### A. *Dorothea's Pursuits*

Dorothea Brook, as the premier character in the novel, is first introduced to readers as a 19-year-old woman brimming with youthful vitality and noble ambition. Dorothea and her sister Celia are brought up by her bachelor uncle, Mr. Brook. As ladies of the landed gentry class, she and her sister have been educated in convent school abroad. Quite similar to Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, Dorothea is an intelligent girl with pursuits beyond duty imposed on women in the Victorian era. Insightful as Dorothea is, when compared with other women at her day, George Eliot set that the meagre education received, enforced by her ardent nature, theoretic mind and a rather dull, reclusive life, has inspired the young lady onto a precarious road of life and vocation.

Dorothea grows into an extraordinary woman, a young lady of "eccentricities", as is known in the neighborhood. She is not satisfied by the prospect of a life of ease and comfort typical of women of her class at the time, but sincerely hopes to rise above her peers, above their trivial, pitiable confinement of femininity, and to mold her life into something wider in scope and profounder in meaning. Her religious zeal finds vent in her eagerness to embrace the holy doctrines she can lay hold of and in her yearning for a life of glory through religious martyrdom.

Dorothea seems always different from others for her excessive ambition. As her sister Celia says, she always sees what nobody else sees and never sees what is quite plain. Unlike the young ladies of the day, Dorothea doesn't like jewelry at all. Dorothea doesn't like the jewels not because the jewels are not beautiful but that the jewels don't match her soul and her higher quest for spiritual contentment. Dorothea's refusal to jewels is a symbol of her refusal of stereotypes imposed on women. For Dorothea, women should have nobler quest other than dressing up like dolls.

To satisfy her puritanical self-sacrificial ideal, she even withdraws from the activities she enjoys most. She devotes

herself to reforming the living conditions of her uncle's cottagers and busying herself with visiting the poor and helping the sick. When her efforts are not readily appreciated by the people around, and certainly inconvenienced by her own maidenhood dependency, she transfers her hope and ambition onto Casaubon, a crusty old scholarly priest, in hopes of attaining the final realization of her ideal. The Reverend Edward Casaubon, noted for his profound learning, is said to have been engaging on a great work concerning religious history; without much understanding and contact, Dorothea grows inclination for Casaubon, mainly from his being called a knowledgeable scholar. When Celia says how ugly Mr. Casaubon is, Dorothea defends that he is one of the most distinguished-looking men she ever saw, and he is remarkably like the portrait of Locke with the same eye-sockets (Eliot, 1994).

It is obvious that Dorothea's self-realization is not limited to a pious religious follower, but, rather, as noted in *Prelude*, she aspires to be a new St Theresa. In other words, with a life which combined great practical achievement with continual prayer and religious sanctity, she hopes to reach a state of spiritual marriage with God. And a most holy and glorious life like St. Theresa's is what Dorothea has in mind when she sets out on her journey of life. Whatever noble ideal Dorothea has in mind, she wishes to achieve the greatness of St Theresa, her ignorance about herself and the society, and her personal experience of the narrowness of this small world she is dwelling in makes her seek her martyrdom rather blindly. Since there is no way for her to do anything socially practical, she naturally turns her eyes to learning, the profound, holy knowledge which seems to hold the key to her fantasy of sainthood.

Apparently, everyone is clear that the reason Dorothea chose Casaubon was not out of passion and love from a woman to man, but admiration and respect from a student or follower to scholar and tutor. To some extent, Dorothea is not to choose a lover but a mentor. Her love for Casaubon is blind and irrational. Eliot often applies "childlike" and "childish" to characterize Dorothea in her early days. She is confused about the devotion to religion and faith with the devotion to family life and husband. Even worse, she is meddled with the realization of her personal quest for ideal life with the fulfillment of social values. It turns out that her plans are not met with much enthusiasm.

#### B. *Dorothea's Disillusionment*

As Mr. Brook and Celia say of Dorothea, her thoughts and behaviors are not in line with the expected roles of women. At the very beginning of Chapter I of Book One, George Eliot quotes from *The Maid's Tragedy: Beaumont and Fletcher* that: Since I can do no good because a woman, Reach constantly at something that is near it (Eliot, 1994, p.5). "Something" that Dorothea chose is to find an ideal husband. "Ideal" for her is not social status, property or appearance. On the contrary, she despises all of these superficial judgments and claims that the ideal man for her is "who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed" (Eliot, 1994, p.38).

Too much devoted to her religion and quest for great expectations, Dorothea, instead of being rational and wise, falls into the other extreme. She is blind to people's advice and refuses to accept people's judgment on Casaubon. Casaubon turns out to be indifferent, lack of manly affections for his wife. No wonder that he is ever called "no better than a mummy" by Sir James, a loyal courtier of Dorothea. In the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea's depression grows day by day. When Dorothea told her husband that she wished to be more useful to him and urged him to write book about his research, Casaubon got irritated.

Desperate to be of use to her husband and take part in the great research he's devoting to, Dorothea can't help but show her eagerness to urge her husband to do something as she expects. When it fails to her expectation, Dorothea, out of her natural reaction, is agitated and relentless. Dorothea's failure of the first marriage is resulted from the complicated social elements as well as her personal causes concerning her breed, religion, characters, etc.

In terms of social elements, Dorothea is subject to the identity as a woman. Her devotion to the spiritual perfection, her thirsty for knowledge, her quest to change the world are out of the line with the supposed roles of a woman. Though Mr. Brook was an intellect, he emphasizes the identity of women in a contemptuous tone: Young ladies don't understand political economy, and "I cannot let young ladies meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty" (Eliot, 42). For Casaubon, Dorothea is a companion who can stay and take care of him in his declining years. He never expects his wife to be of use of his work, let alone to involve her in his research and writing. Casaubon doesn't have the passion of love and the spirit of dedication to love that Dorothea has. His lukewarm attitude and his intentional refusal of communion disappoint Dorothea. With more and more understanding, Dorothea finds that her marriage is completely different from what she has expected. Neither can she realize her noble quest for spiritual contentment, nor can she seek warmth and comforts from her husband.

Compared with the social elements, George Eliot reminds reader much of Dorothea's disadvantages in her religion, education and personality. In a sense, Dorothea is the one to blame for the failure of her marriage. In the story, the narrator says that Part of Dorothea's naive formula for marriage stems from her bachelor uncle's Protestant upbringing. In roman, the narrator says that "But let them conceive one more historical contrast: the gigantic broken revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meager Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the hand-screen sort; a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mold, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain (Eliot, 1994, p.384). From the sentences, it is rational to say that although compared with other women, Dorothea is quite noticeable for her smartness and quick wits,

but it's undeniable that with a limited education, Dorothea is self-indulgent in her noble and selfless devotion to the world.

Education plays a great role in Victorian women's marital choice. From Eliot's view, the educational gap between Victorian women and men reflects their outlook on marriage and further affects their marital choices. The failure of Dorothea's first marriage is first of all due to her meager education. Some critics once compared Dorothea to George Eliot. However, it is reasonable to say that Dorothea is endowed with Eliot's eager desire for knowledge and personal fulfillment, but lack of Eliot's sound and all-round education in languages, theology, philosophy, and even artistic tastes.

Firstly, Dorothea lost parents in her childhood, thus she has no formal domestic education for her parents, especially from her mother. When she and her sister live with her uncle, unmarried uncle still can't guide them in domestic education. The lack of domestic education arouses criticism from the neighborhood, and it's quite unusual and improper for young girls in the Victorian era. Thus, lack of guidance propels Dorothea's premature independence in thought. Despite a little formal education in Swiss, she teaches herself by voracious reading especially that of Greek and other classics. Thus, such education is not enough to cultivate a really independent lady with free and profound thinking, just like George Eliot.

Secondly, Dorothea doesn't receive a sound education. Although Dorothea gets some education, it's far from being called well educated. Details in the plots may suffice to prove it. When Mr. Brook mentions that women don't understand political economy, she feels annoyed but has to admit the truth of her ignorance of political economy, "that never-explained science which was thrust as an extinguisher over all her lights"(Eliot, 1994, p.9). In a sense, her talks about the reforms of farm and land, and her perspectives of ameliorating tenants' lives are not based on the systematic and sound knowledge but on her personal understanding.

In terms of characterization of Dorothea, Eliot's narrator is aware of and intentionally reminding reader of Dorothea's demerits in personalities.

Dorothea, for one thing, is self-indulgent. Dorothea always holds the quest for noble devotion to the world. When Casaubon showed her around his house and welcomed any alteration as she liked, Dorothea answered: "Pray do not speak of altering anything. There are so many other things in the world that want altering--I like to take these things as they are"(Eliot, 1994, p.91). Dorothea believed she is endowed with higher request to devote to the world, and she'd like to sacrifice her own desire at the sake of the welfare of the whole world. The way Dorothea looked at the world and her duty reminds readers of Saint Teresa. However, there isn't much common between Dorothea and Teresa except for Dorothea's eagerness to serve the world. Her ardent pursuits and ignorant incapability results in her rush and hasty decision in marriage, through which she tries to separates herself from the other women around her. However, when she goes to Rome for a honeymoon, she comes to the realization that her own knowledge and experience of the world to date has been woefully inadequate. The worst thing is that She is also despondent that her husband does not return her affectionate attentions towards him. The two have a disagreement one morning towards the end of their honeymoon in Rome in which each misunderstands the other. Casaubon mistakes Dorothea's request to be of aid with his intellectual endeavors to be a criticism of his inability to write a book on his scholarship while Dorothea's feelings of intellectual inadequacy compared to her husband increase. It's clear that Dorothea's Dorothea has always overestimates herself. The narrator has applied the word "stupid" and "conceit" foe many times to describe Dorothea's personality, and Dorothea, for her self indulgence and ignorance, doesn't realize her problems until she gets married. When Casaubon teaches her Latin and Greek as she requires, "Dorothea herself was a little shocked and discouraged at her own stupidity, and the answers she got to some timid questions about the value of the Greek accents gave her a painful suspicion that here indeed there might be secrets not capable of explanation to a woman's reason"(Eliot, 1994, p.180). Besides, Dorothea misjudges herself as well as her husband. When everyone around her reminds of reconsideration about her marriage to Casaubon, she believes that she judges a man from soul. To some extent, Casaubon never cheats her. It is Dorothea herself takes it for granted that Casaubon is a talented genius, who can be compared with the scholars such as Milton. Dorothea's expectation for marriage is based on her ignorance, lack of reason and narrow-mindedness. Thus, it's proper to say that Dorothea falls victim to her self-indulgence and conceit.

For another, Dorothea intentionally suppresses herself for true love and desire. Influenced by puritan creeds, Dorothea follows the rule of self-repression. Take the jewels plot as an example. When Celia advises to divide the jewels left by their mother, Dorothea's natural reaction is that they should never wear them. Not until Celia puts forwards the idea that keeping jewels is in respect to their mum's memory does Dorothea agree to take the jewels out for the first time. Dorothea offers all the Jewels to Celia and claims, "if I were to put on such a necklace as that, I should feel as if I had been pirouetting. The world would go round with me, and I should not know how to walk" (Eliot, 1994, p.89). Besides, she intentionally avoid touching the jewels with careless deprecation, for she believes these jewels unable to match her souls. Celia's reaction is that "she felt a little hurt. There was a strong assumption of superiority in this Puritanical toleration, hardly less trying to the blond flesh of an unenthusiastic sister than a Puritanical persecution" (Eliot, 1994, p.89).

Dorothea despises the jewels out of her self-repression. She actually intentionally suppresses herself for love for the beautiful stuff that she assumes not to be becoming to her. However, as a young girl, seeing the beautiful gems, Dorothea can't help exclaiming under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. Dorothea has to admit these

gems are beautifully and “slipping the ring and bracelet on her finely turned finger and wrist, and holding them towards the window on a level with her eyes. All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colors by merging them in her mystic religious joy” (Eliot, 1994, p. 90). The detailed description here illustrates Dorothea’s true feeling towards the shining and bling jewels. Seeing Dorothea’s reaction, Celia begins to think with wonder that her sister shows some weakness. Once again, Dorothea feels contradictory between her natural spontaneous desire and self-repression for the greater soul. When she was persuaded to keep the ring and bracelet, she conceals her feeling and she says in another tone---Yet what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them! She paused again, and Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce the ornaments, as in consistency she ought to do (Eliot, 1994). Dorothea’s reactions show clearly that she actually restrains herself from her nature on purpose. Her refusal to her true nature annoys her and will sooner or later incur unexpected consequences.

Just as Eliot says in front of the chapter one, “Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed”(Eliot, 1994, p.4). Eliot has long predetermines Dorothea’s destiny. Loving and ardent as she is, Dorothea falls victim to her self-indulgence, conceit and self-repression as a result of her religion, inadequate education and demerits in her personalities.

### C. *Dorothea’s Self-consciousness*

Lack of mutual understanding and enough communions between the couple lead to the unhappiness soon after their marriage. Dorothea experiences several different psychological phases in dealing with her relationship with Casaubon. Dorothea, at beginning, was in the reaction of rebellious anger at her dull and indifferent husband. Dorothea has planned to protest against her husband’s indifference, mainly in meditative struggle. However, the religion and the education she has gradually turned her resentment into pity and sympathy on her old husband. Her deep-rooted self-repression for her truly desire overwhelmed again. Finding her husband’s face more haggard, hearing her husband’s soothing words with kind and quiet melancholy, Dorothea feels like she is devoting to something noble, and feels like she’s much needed and appreciated for her tolerance and submission. Dorothea once again convinced herself of the worth and value at the cost of her happiness and personal desires.

Just as Dorothea’s intentional repression from jewels and riding horse, Dorothea holds back her affections for Casaubon’s cousin, Will Ladislav. Once again, Dorothea is struggling between her desire for love and self-repression from personal desires. The night before Casaubon’s sudden death, Casaubon asks if Dorothea will carry out his wish and avoid doing what he deprecates and apply to do what he desires. Dorothea pleads for more time to give the answer. She lays awake almost the whole night to consider if she should promise to her husband. Her hesitation once again demonstrates her conflicts in self-repression and self-consciousness.

After Casaubon’s death, Dorothea is quite clear about her yearning for will’s love. When Will came to say farewell before leaving, instead of confessing her love to Will, Dorothea says that she encourages Will to leave and make himself of some mark in the world. Will feels nothing but irritation and disappointment. Dorothea conceals her feelings for Will and tortures herself and her lover as well. A detail well shows Dorothea’s self-depression. When Sir James visits, Will bids his farewell. Dorothea put out her hand and said her good-by cordially. “The sense that Sir James was depreciating Will, and behaving rudely to him, roused her resolution and dignity: there was no touch of confusion in her manner. And when Will had left the room, she looked with such calm self-possession at Sir James...” (Eliot, 1994, p.330). Until then, Dorothea’s self-depression overweighs her feminine consciousness.

On an occasion, Mrs. Lydgate makes it clear to Dorothea that Will loves no one but her, Dorothea finally bursts out her repressed feeling and fires her desire for love and happiness. After so many years’ repression, Dorothea finally follows her heart and makes a decision out of her desire. Dorothea frees herself from some odious provisions in Casaubon’s will and she gets married to Will as she wishes. Some critics refer to the second marriage as no better than the first one. For Will Ladislav, seen by her family as low-bred, is always regarded as a vaguely artistic fellow. Well educated as he is, he is not much gainfully employed. That Dorothea gives up inheritance marries Will even arouses disappointment in Dorothea. Henry James, in his comment on the book, referred to Will as “insubstantial”. Some feminists, like Florence Nightingale, are much annoyed that Dorothea didn’t devote her post-Casaubon life to social work. George Eliot shows us the growth, especially the psychological development of a young lady like Dorothea. When the girl finally realizes her demerits in education and personality, she should go back to the family life and become one of the angels in the house. That’s out of readers, especially the feminists’ expectation.

It’s natural that feminists wish that Dorothea would renounce marriage and motherhood altogether, and pursue her social values, such as to be a freelance intellectual and novelist like George Eliot herself. However, since the beginning of the novel, George Eliot tends to show us the growing pains of a handsome ad wealthy lady with meager education. Dorothea’s ignorant pursuits, inadequate education, demerits in personalities endow the image with much vividness and vitality. In the end, Dorothea gets her happy life. Some feminists criticize that Dorothea compromises with realism, and the originally ambitious young lady goes back to family life and becomes one of the ordinary housewives. However, there is no denying that Dorothea, after so many frustrations, finally has a clear idea of who she is and what she really wants. What’s important, Dorothea becomes a psychologically independent human being.

## IV. CONCLUSION

George Eliot's feminine assertions have been a hot issue in the literary studies. As Elaine Showalter points out, the feminist literature didn't start until George Eliot's death in 1880. Apparently, it's unreasonable to label George Eliot as a feminist. More likely, George Eliot is a female writer with feminine concerns. Her concerns for women is not as radical as feminist expected. Instead of setting women and men on two extremes, George Eliot is likely to judge them from the same standards, to be a human being. Instead of depicting women as victims of the patriarchal society, George Eliot doesn't hesitate to disclose women's weakness and ignorance. For George Eliot, no matter it is a man or woman, what counts most is their qualities of being a worthy man. Thus, in a sense, Eliot believes that women are equal to men in terms of religion, education, ideology, etc. Consequently, George Eliot's feminine views are beyond the limits of sexual discrimination, thus contain the universal connotations.

George Eliot's feminine views are a combination of tradition and modernity. As a Victorian writer, George Eliot expresses her concern for women's sound growth ahead of the advent of feminism. From her novels, it can be seen that Eliot attaches much significance to women's education. George Eliot was advanced in supporting women's education equal to men and condemned the artificial education women received.

Besides education, George endorsed women's pursuit for social values. Although confronting difficulties in realizing their pursuit, Dorothea is the exemplary model of avant-garde for vocational rights.

As for love and marriage, George Eliot is unique one, both in her life experiences but in her remarkable works. In *Middlemarch*, for the two marriages, Dorothea discards the standards of property and social status, chooses Casaubon for his knowledge and Will for love and passion. Clearly, the heroine doesn't confine herself to the social values of choosing partners in Victorian era. Thus, it's fair to say that the George Eliot is a female writer with modernity of feminine awareness.

At the same time, Eliot expresses conservative opinion on feminine assertions. Eliot doesn't support the idea that women pursue the individual quest at the cost of sacrificing the feminine qualities. Instead, she praises the traditional womanly qualities and advocates that women should preserve qualities such as tenderness and submission. Women's education, in Eliot's opinion, if inadequate and shallow, will do harm to women. Women's lack of sound and formal education doesn't enable them to get involved in political decisions. Of course, it is by no means to say that George Eliot depreciates women's role in society. On the basis of reality, George Eliot is but to expose the truth to people. For Eliot, the difference between men and women doesn't lie in the sexual identity, thus the standards to judge men and women should be based on the qualities of being a worthy human being instead of anything else. To some extent, George Eliot's views on religion and feminine assertions are consistent with her cherished values of humanity.

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