

The “Morally Ideal Woman” in *Middlemarch*

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ÖZET Viktorya Dönemi yazarı olarak Eliot, *Middlemarch* adlı romanında 19. yüzyıl İngiliz toplumunu ve bu toplumun değerler sistemini, sınıf yapısını göz önünde tutarak, anlatır. İngiliz toplumunun üç ana sosyal sınıfı olan aristokrasi, orta sınıf ve işçi sınıfı, üç kadın karakterin yardımıyla detaylı olarak betimlenir. Eliot okuyucunun olaylarla ve karakterlerle ilgili sonuçlara ulaşmasına, toplumla ilgili gerçekçi tasvirleriyle yardım eder. Okuyucu, toplumsal sınıfların değer yargılarıyla bir tanışırken, aynı zamanda Eliot’ın üstü kapalı etik öğretilerine de ulaşır. Bu çerçevede, Dorothea, Rosamond ve Mary kendi sınıflarının (sırasıyla aristokrasi, orta sınıf ve işçi sınıfı) ahlaki değerlerinin ürünü olarak resmedilmiştir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER Middlemarch, ahlaki değerler, sosyal sınıflar.

ABSTRACT As a Victorian novelist, George Eliot depicts the 19th century English society and its system of values with respect to class stratification in her novel *Middlemarch*. Three main social classes of English society- aristocracy, middle-class, and working class- are rendered in detail with the help of three women figures representing the classes. With realistic representations related to society, Eliot lets the reader reach conclusions about the events and characters. The readers are introduced to the moral values of the classes, and the implicit moral teachings of Eliot. In this frame, Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary are portrayed as the products of their classes’ moral values, aristocracy, middle class and working class respectively.

KEYWORDS Middlemarch, morality, social classes.

As a realistic novelist and as an individual living in the 19th century England, George Eliot had the opportunity to make critical observations about the social and individual developments affecting her age. Her characters in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary represent the social classes. These women are compared and contrasted with one another and with the male characters. It is suggested that women are morally stronger than men, and if the women characters are given the chance, they will have developed their already existing moral sense more, pioneering meanwhile a new understanding of morality independent of class culture.

In the 19th century paradigm, the roles of men and women were fixed: middle class men strenuously worked to earn money, whereas the middle class wives did nothing but consume the earnings of their husbands. Men were the head of their families; women were bound to them in every sense: they were to sit at home and raise their children. Except for dealing with children and household, the women did not have much to do. However, life standards of families changed along with the changes in the socio-economic structure. The general changes in social order such as “the economic factors, and the rise

of the middle classes which radically altered the means of production, the politics, the customs, and culture and literature of a nation,”¹ brought about the specific changes in the family structure.

After establishing their own standards, the middle class family life emerged. Men were supposed to work and earn money. Unlike men, the middle class women had no relation to the working life, and they were not paid much attention in terms of education, law, and politics. England was still a male-dominated society in the 19th century, and the place of women in society had been taken for granted; being wives, mothers, and helpmates were their master statuses. In the 19th century, the duties of women were as follows:

women were expected to center their lives on home and family; they were expected to conduct themselves, in modesty and propriety; they were expected to find the commands of duty and the delights of service insufficient, in fact ennobling, boundaries of their lives.²

A middle class woman was considered “the angel in the house,” and she had to direct the servants dealing with the chores, while taking care of her husband and children. However, middle class women spent limited time with their children who were taken care by a nursemaid or a governess. They spent their time with other middle class women: “Much of a middle-class woman’s day was spent in the company of other women from similar households. An elaborate set of social customs involving ‘calls’ and ‘at homes’ was established in European middle-class society.”³ Their houses were generally decorated heavily because of their efforts to imitate the houses of aristocracy. They tried to increase their social respectability by showing off. The rooms of middle class houses “were certain to be crowded with furniture, art objects, carpets, and wall hangings.”⁴ They thought their belongings would show them as if they were from the aristocracy.

When compared to middle class females, working class women and children suffered more. At home, they did all the household work on their own: cooking for the family, cleaning the house, washing the clothes, and shopping for food. These women had to keep the house running with little amount of money. They went to the markets to buy the cheapest food since most of them did not have gardens for growing their own food. Many

1. Ertuğrul Koç, *The Victorians and the Novelists from Dickens to Hardy* (Ankara: Barış Books, 2010), p.10.

2. Hilary M. Schor, *Gender Politics and Women’s Rights. Brantlinger* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.173.

3. Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations* (New York: Norton, 1984), p.746.

4. Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations*, p.749.

women working in the 19th century belonged to the working class. Unlike aristocratic and the middle class women, they had to work. They worked in factories, mines, in the houses of middle class families. Lower standards of living and shortage of money were the reasons of why they needed work. "Working class included the men, women and children who together worked in mines and quarries... cleaning women and the like."⁵ Unmarried working class women generally worked in the houses of middle class families as domestic servants. Middle class people looked upon working class women as "lesser breeds" of woman.

Eliot, aware of the social and political issues of her period, focuses on women's evolution through time. She criticises the inadequacy of female education, the ignorant marriages, the exclusion of women from science and new forms of knowledge, and legal restraints. With the characters she creates, she shows the other way in which women can succeed. For Eliot, the transformation of a heroine is "a form of evolutionary change, a world-historical moment in itself."⁶ Evolutionary acts for the social improvement are either initiated or supported by women in her novels. In the male dominated society, women had very little opportunity to prove themselves and to speak out. The women characters of her novels, however, have the potentiality to help and achieve the betterment of the society.

Regarding Eliot's attitude to the classes, she feels respect for aristocracy, whereas she disdains middle class on account of their "rising" values. She appreciates the efforts of working class people. Both capitalist patriarchal male characters and oppressed submissive female characters are found in her novels. Eliot addresses both men's oppression on women and the existence of woman problem. She herself tried hard to take part in the masculine social order; hence, she talked about gender issues in her novels. She believed that

women by virtue of their sex [could] play an important role in the progress of the human race, since they [were] by nature endowed with a larger capacity for feeling, which [had] been discovered to be intellectually and morally valuable.⁷

Eliot attracts the attention of her audience to the woman question. For Eliot, the evolution of women influence the development of the human race, and women should be

5. Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations*, p.750.

6. Hilary M. Schor, *Gender Politics and Women's Rights*. Brantlinger, p.182.

7. Lloyd Fernando, "New Women" in the *Late Victorian Novel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p.31.

given more opportunities in the capitalist system. Thus, she focuses more on women characters in her novels; particularly in *Middlemarch*, the major characters are daughters, wives, and mothers. Male characters, on the other hand, are occupying minor roles, and they are mentioned only when they are in relation to the women characters. Male figures also serve as the foils of the females, and women characters' dialogues outnumber men's speeches in the work. According to Hutton, Eliot

indulges more neutrality of feeling in relation to men than she does in relation to women. She does not regard them as beings whose duty it is to be very much in earnest, and who are almost contemptible or wicked if they are otherwise.⁸

Her novels are usually concerned with women. Rather than heroes, Eliot's novels have heroines, and women's stories are rendered. For example, her heroines Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, and Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda* do not have the opportunities for education and employment; however, they strive for the realization of their potential. They all need to make crucial moral choices when they face up challenges.

Eliot supported the idea that "Women ought to have the same store of truth placed within their reach as men have . . . the same store of fundamental knowledge."⁹ Her heroines are strong characters, and they try strenuously to get out of the borders defined for women. Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Romola in *Romola*, and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* all have dedication to life, and they have strong will and altruistic motives. "Her heroines are not merely lovers of men or objects of their adoration, as in the previous novelists [such as Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson]; they are women of intellect and feeling, capable of taking their share in the progress of society."¹⁰ For Defoe, woman is a commodity; a cargo of goods including women arrives at the island in *Robinson Crusoe*. For Richardson, woman is a virtue rewarded as described in *Pamela*; for Fielding woman is a help-mate, source of inspiration and enthusiasm for men.

Dealing with women's issues in her time, Eliot focuses on the representative individuals of different social strata, and she analyses their lives and relationships within the classes they belong to. Yet, she is in favour of the society rather than the individual. She

8. qtd. in Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.23.

9. qtd. in Josie Billington, *Eliot's Middlemarch* (London: Continuum, 2008), p.14.

10. S. M. Jamil Wasti, *George Eliot as a Novelist* (Karachi: Syed and Syed, 1961), p.11.

seeks to have organic unity in her novels. For her, the union of society and individual is essential; hence, she makes a criticism of the separate spheres of the men and women in the English society. Although "The female novelists before George Eliot rarely step beyond the intimate circle of domestic and social relationships,"¹¹ she goes beyond the predefined limits by denouncing the notion of separate spheres because for her, "women are to find in novel-writing a literary field peculiarly adapted to their capacities, and that the novel should be a true portraiture of life."¹² Wives, sisters, and daughters take the initiative, and support the society, whereas fathers, husbands, and other male characters have faults and imperfections. Women characters are morally superior to men in *Middlemarch*. Since they are able to change in the course of the novel, they are round characters, yet male figures remain flat. Her protagonist and antagonist in the work are also female.

Eliot deals with three main women figures from the three main classes: Dorothea Brooke, Rosamond Vincy, and Mary Garth. These women occupy different societal roles. Dorothea, for instance,

was regarded as an heiress; for not only had the sisters seven hundred a-year each from their parents, but if Dorothea married and had a son, that son would inherit Mr. Brooke's estate, presumably worth about three thousand a-year—a rental which seemed wealth to provincial families.¹³

She is from aristocracy whose male members were educated and occupied high positions in the society such as the rector of a town, doctor, and lawyer. The women, however, were not given much chance to develop themselves intellectually. They could only arrange meetings, dinners, receptions and visits which kept them busy. George Eliot lets her readers observe the aristocracy with her characters, especially with Dorothea Brooke.

Dorothea's refined taste, moral values and enthusiasm for learning set her apart from the other women in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea is a "genuine creation and a most remarkable one when we consider the delicate material in which she is wrought."¹⁴ She is the first character introduced in the novel. She has a pure beauty supported by her plain dressing and garments. She is resembled to "the Blessed Virgin,"¹⁵ and her impressive-

11. S. M. Jamil Wasti, *George Eliot as a Novelist*, p.13.

12. George Willis Cooke, *George Eliot: A Critical Study of Her Life, Writings and Philosophy* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p.127.

13. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Wordsworth, 2000), p.7.

14. Henry James, "George Eliot's *Middlemarch*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 8 (3). (1953: 161-170), p.16.

15. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.5.

ness to “a fine quotation from the Bible.”¹⁶ She is seen as “remarkably clever¹⁷ by the townspeople, and she knows the passages of Pascal and Jeremy Taylor. Despite her “narrow and promiscuous” education “first in an English family and afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne,”¹⁸ her education is inadequate as it was not systematically programmed. Dorothea “seeks to know more than her meagre education has so far allowed her, and thereby to do more than her society designates as appropriate to her.”¹⁹ She has high aspirations for self-improvement through which she can help the betterment of the society. Her theoretic mind is after

some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it.²⁰

At the very beginning of the novel, Dorothea’s willingness to achieve something great for the world is stated. She is not a girl of mediocre expectations and tries to get rid of the bondages of being a woman despite “the meanness of opportunity”²¹ in the world of Middlemarch. Though Dorothea develops plans, she has ambivalence about what to do because of her lack of certainty on the necessary actions for upheaval in the society, which could be provided with a proper education. She is trying to find a great cause for the sake of which she could make necessary self-sacrifices, but she does not know what that cause would be and how she should act. She craves to accomplish something but she does not know what and how to do it, which reflects the common problem of women at that time: aimlessness. They did not know what to expect and what to do because of the lack of opportunities and the societal oppression for women. Likewise, the social environment of Dorothea does not support her intellectual development because “women [are] expected to have weak opinions . . . that opinions [are] not acted on.”²² The common belief in the society is not in favour of women, and women’s ideas are not seen as valuable. “Open and ardent” young Dorothea’s ideas clash with the society’s notions. The rural opinion inferred from Dorothea’s eyes is that she is unusual and striking.

16. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.5.

17. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.5.

18. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.6.

19. Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Great Britain: Indiana Universtiy Press, 1962), p.172

20. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.6.

21. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.4.

22. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.7.

Rosamond Vincy, on the other hand, is the representative of the middle-class women. She is the daughter of Mr. Walter Vincy, the mayor of Middlemarch, and a middle-class manufacturer. She is held up as the best example of her class by her school teacher because she has developed herself in terms of social graces and manner. She gives importance to furniture, clothes, jewellery, trinkets and the other ornaments, for she desires to live in a "romantic" world. She is after rising in the class ladder, hence she waits for the right man to come and marry her. She marries Dr. Tertius Lydgate as he is an outsider, and he has good family connections. Even after marriage, she needs constant attention of male suitors, and she enjoys being flattered. She is the product of Victorian bourgeois society; through her the reader traces how a society affects an individual. As Marx and Engels state,

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour . . . we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at corporeal man, rather we proceed from the real, active man . . . Consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness.²³

In the town of Middlemarch, people are classified in accordance with their material lives, which in turn affect their spiritual lives. Hence, like the other characters, Rosamond's mercenariness is moulded by her environment, and she is the product of her class.

Mary Garth is the oldest daughter of the Garth family from working class. Her personality traits, especially her being fair, are mentioned frequently in the novel. She is twenty two years old, and single. She has an ordinary appearance, with "a broad face and square brow, well-marked eyebrows and curly dark hair, a certain expression of amusement in her glance which her mouth keeps the secret of". When angry "she would not raise her voice, but would probably say one of the bitterest things you have ever tasted the flavor of," and when she encounters a kindness "she would never forget it."²⁴ With these examples, her personality traits are revealed. She is not as ambitious as Rosamond; rather, she is a plain girl of humble expectations. She works to support her family financially. Mary and her family have the moral virtues that the middle class people lack. They are honest, fair, and hardworking.

23. qtd. in Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p.4.

24. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.332.

Eliot's view of life affects the development of the characters in *Middlemarch*. To Eliot, "morality is resolved into sympathy,"²⁵ and

there is no isolation of human lots. No life but is bound by numberless ties to every other, none so paltry and remote that it has not its share in the common history and its genuine interest to all sympathetic souls.²⁶

Her ideology is compatible with the idea that

Nothing . . . exists in isolation including our social life. Everything must be understood to exist in dynamic historical process. . . Everything is interrelated and exists in dynamic relationship with a variety of social forces.²⁷

Hence, she is not relentless towards her characters. She evaluates the events in cause- effect relationship by giving the background information, so that the readers come to sympathize with the characters. When a character commits a mistake, the readers know why he/she behaves in that way, and understand the underlying reasons of his/her attitude. In other words, the readers of Eliot make their decision about the characters based on those characters' experiences in a society.

Eliot lived in the Victorian age, and "the Victorian age lacked that supreme moral consciousness in which greatest ages of human history express themselves. Honesty was best only as a policy. Vulgarized by expanding prosperity, the age judged everything by quantitative standards."²⁸ Thus, she felt the necessity of implying what is true and what is not through her novels. Either implicit or explicit, the audience find the moral teaching of Eliot. Similar to her other novels, *Middlemarch* also includes moral lessons, for she wrote her stories "to impress moral conclusions derivable from them upon the minds of readers."²⁹ Although there are messages which can be received through novel, they are hidden in between the lines because Eliot is neutral towards her characters and the situations they are in. She does not take side with her character, and "she neither praises nor condemns them for their moral or immoral behaviours."³⁰ The classes the people belong to are the determinant factors in their attitude, behaviour, and viewpoints.

25. John M. Robertson, *George Eliot: Moralism and Thinker* (Edinburgh: Folcroft, 1972), p.7.

26. John M. Robertson, *George Eliot: Moralism and Thinker*, p.9.

27. Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2007), p.202.

28. S. M. Jamil Wasti, *George Eliot as a Novelist*, p.16.

29. S. M. Jamil Wasti, *George Eliot as a Novelist*, p.40.

30. Ertuğrul Koç, *The Victorians and the Novelists from Dickens to Hardy*, p.137.

The women had hardly any legal rights at the time the novel depicts which is the early 19th century. In this sense, Dorothea exemplifies the aristocratic morality. In an age when money has the highest value, Dorothea ignores it. Though she is wealthy, she does not have the sole control of her belongings because any property or money women owned when single became the possession of their husbands on marriage. Dorothea and Casaubon's case exemplifies the situation: "as Mrs. Casaubon, she is bent to her husband's wishes and prejudices; as his widow she is amusingly but firmly hectored by her brother-in-law, sir James. She has no property on her property."³¹ When Casaubon dies, the codicil in his testimony comes up saying that whatever she has is all to go away from Dorothea if she marries will. Even after his death, Casaubon tries to control Dorothea. She is offended by the insulting codicil about her relationship with will; however, she does not act with the fear of losing money left from her husband. Money is of no significance for her; nevertheless, Casaubon tries to punish her through money.

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea is the trusted and honest figure; she stands by the ones needing help as an unprejudiced supporter. For instance, she supports Lydgate's cover-up when he is engulfed in a scandal. Mr. Bulstrode, a wealthy banker, has secrets related to his past relationships and the illegal means of acquiring his wealth. When an old friend of him, Mr. Raffle, comes to *Middlemarch*, and blackmails him, Bulstrode seeks ways to get rid of him. Mr. Raffle falls ill, and Bulstrode requires Lydgate's help. Lydgate has financial problems at that time, and he borrows money from Bulstrode. Meanwhile, Mr. Raffles dies under the care of Lydgate. When the townspeople hear this, they think that Lydgate has taken bribe from Mr. Bulstrode. Although the men of *Middlemarch* rely on the rumours, Dorothea believes in Lydgate's innocence, and she fights against the male dominated society's hypocrisy and immorality. She wants to find out the truth due to her indignation for injustice. She asks Mr. Farebrother who seems to believe in the suspicion, "what do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?"³² and adds "I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in my trouble, and attended me in my illness."³³ In a way, she invites him to support Lydgate in such a situation. Most of the men in *Middlemarch* are morally weaker than Dorothea, and

Eliot portrays the main male characters of *Middlemarch* as moral weaklings and repeatedly manipulates her plot to exact vengeance on them, while at the same time portraying her female characters

31. Catherine Neale, *Middlemarch: Penguin Critical Studies* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.152.

32. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, pp.603-604.

33. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.604.

as victims of a male dominated system who somehow triumph inwardly even as they practice submission and renunciation in their limited society.³⁴

Mr. Bulstode's illegal ways of gaining money, Mr. Featherstone's illegitimate child, Mr. Vincy's indifference to his children, Mr. Casaubon's efforts to disinherit and limit Dorothea, Fred's bad habits such as gambling, Mr. Tyke's taking the position of chaplain though Mr. Farebrother deserves the position, are the examples of male competitive behaviour, demonstrating meanwhile that capitalist social structure and ideology have already permeated to the norms of all classes.

Mrs. Bulstrode is depicted as a morally strong character compared to her husband who is one of the embodiments of the male dominated society's corruption. Nicholas Bulstrode seeks power through money, and gains it by immoral means. His past is not known by Middlemarchers, for he is "a man not born in the town, and altogether of dimly known origin."³⁵ He is respected by Middlemarchers, because he has not done anything wrong in the town. Nonetheless, he causes the death of his blackmailer John Raffles, who threatens him to reveal his unpleasant past and destroy his reputation. Although Harriet is devastated upon learning the reality, she does not desert her husband like Dorothea.

Although Dorothea realizes that Casaubon is not the man she has dreamed of, and his study "the key to all mythologies" is "labour all in vain,"³⁶ she still has sympathy towards her husband. In that time duty meant morality, and Dorothea has a strong sense of duty, which does not let her leave Casaubon. Her performing duties as a wife to Casaubon is the proof of her morality. She is rather empathetic towards his behaviours.

She was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception; and now when she looked steadily at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness.³⁷

This devotion and tenderness results from her morality, for "Dorothea's moral sense compels her to obey moral law, which is absolute within the limits set by experience."³⁸

34. Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, *George Eliot: Mary Ann Evans's Subversive Tool in Middlemarch* (University of North Texas, 2002), p.272.

35. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.79.

36. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.185.

37. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.301.

38. K. K. Collins, G. H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and The Moral Sense, *Victorian Studies*, (2002), p.482.

After the honeymoon, she realizes that she has been disillusioned. She also comes to know and understand her husband better. However,

Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colorless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight.³⁹

Though Casaubon sets limits to Dorothea, such as not seeing will, she tries to fulfil her duties as a wife. When she learns that he suffers from health problems, she seeks the advice of Lydgate to comfort and ease her husband's life.

Eliot depicts Dorothea as stick to the moral code of her time. However, her being ethical in her marriage does not prevent her being disillusioned. For she marries Casaubon with the hope of being more "educated," she lives in a dream world she herself created in her mind. She faces up to reality in the honeymoon, but continues to be Casaubon's wife. Dorothea marries after his death and gives birth to a child. Her lofty aspirations come to a standstill point, which testimonies that Dorothea is far from reality and she does not know what she really wants. Through her marriage she becomes more reasonable and more mature.

The representative of the middle class, the Vincys attach importance to worldly pleasures. Mrs. Vincy deals with furniture, clothes, and plate. When their son Fred refuses to continue his clergyman education, Mr. Vincy gets angry because he has spent so much money on Fred's education. He does not ask what Fred wants, he just sends Fred to a school he himself likes. He does not support his son and daughter when they are in debt. Raised in such a family, Rosamond thinks "if [I] had known how Lydgate would behave, [I] would never have married him"⁴⁰ when her husband is burdened with debt. Instead of asking Lydgate about the matter and helping him, Rosamond thinks: "[I] had innocently married this man with the belief that he and his family were glory to [me]!"⁴¹ She does not feel sympathy for her husband who needs support; she just feels pity for herself, for she is an egoist. When the Lydgate couple are at bad terms, Dorothea helps them. She goes to visit Rosamond and asks her "how can we live and think that any one has trouble—piercing trouble—and we could help them, and never try?"⁴² to persuade her to be more

39. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.227.

40. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.490.

41. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.622.

42. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.653.

supportive to her husband in his hard times. Rosamond has limited moral values compared to Dorothea. That is why; Dorothea goes to their house and gives advice to her.

Eliot compares Rosamond's values with Dorothea's, for the reader to spot the differences between these characters with an attribution to their classes. Their classes determine their values and behaviour. Although both Dorothea and Rosamond get disillusioned, their behaviour is not identical. Rosamond thinks of a separation right away; however, Dorothea stays with her husband in his hard times. By so doing, Rosamond reveals her moral cowardice, whereas Dorothea has the moral courage to resist the masculine doctrines.

Mary Garth is the virtuous daughter of the working class Garth family presented as the heart of the novel in terms of morality. Mary "rather than Dorothea, is closest to the moral centre of the novel."⁴³ She does not interfere in the affairs of others. For instance, she refuses old Featherstone's attempt to involve her in altering his will because "honesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue."⁴⁴ When he insists, she answers "I cannot touch your iron chest or your will. I must refuse to do anything that may lay me open to suspicion."⁴⁵ Featherstone offers a sum of money to her for changing his testimony, which will make her rich and her beloved Fred inherit his money. Yet, Mary declines because money is not as valuable as morality. This scene is a "testimony of the ultimate impotence of cash over those who have a higher standard within."⁴⁶ Having moral values supersedes money in the case of the Garth family.

Mary's strong sense of morality is also illustrated in her selection of vocation. Though she and her family need money, she does not want to earn money through a job that she cannot perform properly. While conversing with Fred she says that

I have tried being a teacher, and I am not fit for that: my mind is too fond of wandering on its own way. I think any hardship is better than pretending to do what one is paid for, and never really doing it.⁴⁷

She wishes to earn money honestly, and in a decent way. Similarly, her mother also refuses to be "a useless doll"⁴⁸ like the middle class women of Middlemarch. Mrs. Garth

43. David Daiches, *George Eliot: Middlemarch* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p.29.

44. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.93.

45. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.262 .

46. Simon Dentith, *George Eliot* (Great Britain: the Harvester Press, 1986), p.87.

47. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.113.

48. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.201.

is a modest woman "while her grammar and accent [a]re above the town standard, she [wears] a plain cap, cook[s] the family dinner and darn[s] all the stockings,"⁴⁹ though she has been educated. The father is also admirable, for he is "one of those precious men within his own district whom everybody would choose to work for them"⁵⁰ because he does his job well. Caleb Garth is such an honest man that when he learns the truth about Mr. Bulstode's past, he quits working for him although he needs money.

The Garths are poor; however, "they [do] not mind it"⁵¹; they have other virtues than money. When they lose the sum of money they saved because of Fred, none of them gets unhappy, for they do not base their expectations on money. In the early 19th century, the working class people were exploited by the middle class people in every sense; thus, incurring losses was normal for them. Likewise, for Garth family, money does not matter, and life goes on without it; they do not make any changes in their life just because they have lost the money. Nor their attitude to Fred changes, Mrs. Garth has "a motherly feeling, and [has] always been disposed to excuse his errors."⁵² They even do what his father does not do for him: they support him and help him establish a job and lead a settled life.

The Garth family represents a strong positive version of working class values such as self-respect, hard work, thrift, modest worldly success, and this family "establishes the criteria to which most other actions are referred."⁵³ Either they are poor or rich; they do not change, for they possess moral virtues that are deficient in middle class people. The readers have the chance of making comparison between the middle class people and working class people, and comprehend the differences in terms of morality with the help of *Middlemarch*. For instance, when Lydgate gets into debt, Rosamond leaves him; whereas Mary and her family accept Fred in any case.

Mary never experiences the disillusionment that Rosamond and Dorothea undergo, for she is a realist person. She knows what she wants, and she tries to achieve her aims with her limited opportunities. She is not after showing off her beauty or knowledge; she makes great effort to realize her objectives. She survives with her labour in the world of men. She is reasonable from the beginning to the end; however, Dorothea comes to reason after some certain events whereas Rosamond lacks the reasoning abilities even after her experiences. Hence, the class consciousness, classical education, or the class do not play a role in being reasonable.

49. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.201.

50. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.208.

51. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.208.

52. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.201.

The characters are faced with a moral dilemma in the works of Eliot. Their choices shape their lives. Through their mistakes in life, they reach the better frame of mind. Their altered worldview is associated with “a perspective on life that widens as the heroine escapes what the novelist depicts as the ultimate imprisonment.”⁵⁴ Dorothea, for instance, awakens from moral stupidity, and the growth of her consciousness is observed throughout the novel. Dorothea commits a mistake by marrying Casaubon. When she realizes that he does not satisfy her lofty aspirations, she learns from her mistake. Eliot comments on her situation: “we are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves.”⁵⁵ Fortunately, Dorothea begins to emerge from that chaos in the early phases of her married life. Another aspect of Dorothea’s moral development is her willingness to achieve something great for the good of all. “Successful moral development is presented as self-subordination, the replacement of self concern with a concern for others,”⁵⁶ hence Dorothea’s character is morally strong as she has concern for others.

Unlike Dorothea, Mary is depicted as a flawless character, who has never done anything wrong. She has positive characteristics such as being faithful, reliable, frank, forgiving, honourable, and kind-hearted. She also considers the well-being of other people more than herself. Mary’s existence in the novel provides the readers with criteria to compare and contrast her with the other characters. She is the one to be taken as exemplary figure: through her, the idealized image of woman in terms of morality is emphasized.

Mary has a strong sense of responsibility; she does her best in the duties she has overtaken, which results in maturity. She is the most mature woman of all the main women figures in the novel. Both Dorothea and Rosamond are associated with the image of “child,” for they are not mature enough and Rosamond is selfish like a child. Dorothea slowly matures in the course of her marriage; nevertheless, Rosamond does not change as she does not widen her perspective on life.

Mary is supportive in hard times, whereas Rosamond prefers to avoid being with losers in life. In such cases, she reveals her actual self: an egoistic woman. “The most important form of error, the distortion which not only the narrative conventions but the

53. David Daiches, *George Eliot: Middlemarch*, p.57.

54. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.517.

55. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p.175.

56. Peter K. Garret, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), p.178.

structure of the novel works to correct, is the imposition of a single center,"⁵⁷ characters such as Rosamond, Casaubon, and Bulstrode are the victims of their egos. Their perceptions are flawed because of egocentrism. In short, Eliot gives the reader a chance to compare and contrast the values of three different women from the main classes of the society. As an aristocratic woman, Dorothea is moderate; the middle class woman Rosamond represents the immoral characteristics of her class, and working class woman Mary is perfectly moral in her behaviour.

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57. Peter K. Garret, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel*, p.152.