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**“From A female perspective: A Re-reading
of *Middlemarch* (1871-1872)”**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirement for an M.A. Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Abstract

In a very creative but realistic way, George Eliot takes us to a fictional world where a specific web of characters evolves in an era of rapid change and a social evolution. The current study will, hence, shed light on the *Middlemarch* large cast of female characters, who struggle against patriarchy and decline to be “others” by rejecting submission in a passive but thought provoking resistance and succeed to gain power in a world governed by male sovereignty, all from a contemporary feminist perspective.

Key words: George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Feminism, female characters

Dedication

I dedicate this humble work to my beloved mother, the source of my strength and happiness. And to my dear aunts for all their support.

To my whole family brothers and sisters and my charming little nephews and nieces.

To my Close friends and mates.

To my soul mate who believes in me

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this research paper is the fruit of my own efforts and implication, during a whole year of hard work, and learning on several academic sources and materials that I acknowledged in detail within the body of my thesis and in the works cited I section. I, furthermore, certify that this research paper has not been beforehand submitted to any other academic institution or related to another name.

Name: Khaled Ines Melissa

Date: 04/ 11/ 2020

Signature:

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General Introduction

The Victorian era, in fact, extends nearly from the years between 1820 to 1914 following approximately, but not precisely the stretch of queen Victoria's reign corresponding to the period from 1837 to 1901. Moreover, the Victorian era was characterized by a hierarchical arrangement of society, an increasing number of the voting franchise and a large empire which dominated the world. Indeed social hierarchies during this period were extremely rigid and determinative of every aspect of people's lives. Thus, in *Middlemarch* Eliot follows the period during which enclosed conservative society confronts with a growing industrialization through the portrayal of the small Middlemarch's provincial community.

Important to realize, during the reign of Queen Victoria a woman's place was naturally in the home, as the religious nineteenth-century population's life was organized according to the dichotomy of separate spheres, hence, men belonged to the public while women should be systematically in the private sphere. Indeed, the growing detachment and rupture of the home from the workplace indicates that women no longer have relation with production, particularly among professional middle and upper-class population. And above all it induces them to conform to society's prescribed roles and the set of restrictive social norms that kept them trapped in domesticity and secluded from the public life. Consequently, these women forged an identity exclusively in relation to the domestic realm.

To reinforce the idea of "the domestic sphere", many literatures during the nineteenth century from novels, newspapers, magazines and even poems wrote about home, love and marriage and were very appealing among middle-class women who delighted in reading these novels and serialised fictions that appeared in magazines. On balance, popular literary works, such as the famous poem "The Angel in the House", were not pure fiction but dwelled on the springing social, legal, economic, religious, cultural

and social values of the Victorian middle-class society. In fact, these literary products, nurtured, supported and fostered domesticity, passivity and conformity promoting these features as essentially and originally “a female domain.”

In the same way, women have always been subject to inequality, and target to oppression. While legally they owned very little rights on their bodies, family property, or their own children. Us women, never lived in an egalitarian world, and our sex has always been the “second sex.” Explaining with De Beauvoir’s word’s “The first among the blessing for which Plato thanked the gods was that he had been created free, not enslaved; the second, a man not a woman” (xxii).

As patriarchy is a powerful system, which is still affecting our lives today, I chose to go gar back to the nineteenth century and study a well-known classic, considered among the best-English novels that traces the long path of women’s struggle against the man’s rule of society. As great as it is, this book offers a clearer understanding of how females lived in a world that has always belonged to men, and in a form of passive resistance succeeded to reversal some of the constraints imposed on their lot.

George Eliot’s masterpiece, *Middlemarch* has been and for many decencies the object of different and diverse studies. Henry James’s published a Book Review of George Eliot's Novel, in *Galaxy*, on March, 1873, where he underlines that Eliot’s fiction is a reflection “all certainly of a highly imaginative sort”, and determines “her purpose is to be a generous rural historian.”

While Virginia Woolf in an article originally published in in *The Times Literary Supplement*, on 20th November, 1919, spoke of Eliot as a women writer of whom tradition will never fade. Woolf said about this particular woman that “she was the pride of all her sex”.

Lord Acton had said that Eliot was greater than Dante, while she was described in the Steedman's review article as being conscious "of the historical questions involved in writing a social and political history of provincial life". I quite agree with Beverly Park Rilett that "The virtues of *Middlemarch*, "aren't easy to summarize. The novel is so comprehensive that it contains something for everyone: layers of narrative wit and wisdom about history, sociology, science, mythology, religion, philosophy, economics, and art have kept critics excavating and theorizing for nearly 150 years" (110).

Therefore, we rely more in our analysis of *Middlemarch* on the theory of Virginia Woolf.

The problematic is: how are the female characters in *Middlemarch* portrayed under the patriarchal system of the Victorian era?

The work will be divided into two chapters: a theoretical chapter and a chapter for analysis. Thus, in Chapter we will introduce the theoretical concepts such as the feminist theory and the social context of *Middlemarch*, and chapter II is an analysis of *Middlemarch* and we will focus on the female characters. In the conclusion, we answer the problematic.

Chapter I:
Historical,
Theoretical and
Literary
Backgrounds

Introduction

For a long period of time feminism has been viewed as being bad or even evil and feminists as anti-males and against God. Yet, people do not come close enough to understand what the movement is really about: that it is in the first place, women's struggle to gain equal rights and to be the equal partners of men in society, but also, to break the silence of females about the injustices they are living simply because of their gender, class, race or sexual identity. Thus, Feminism gave a voice to every woman whose experiences go unnoticed and whose words go unheard.

Accordingly, this chapter introduces the concept of feminism from its politics, thinking, beliefs and practices to its fundamental foundations. Therefore, it gives a clear answer about "what feminism really is."

1. Literary and Social context of *Middlemarch*

1.1. The Biography of the Author

George Eliot is the pen name of Mary Ann Evans, a famous English novelist, who produced many leading classics of the 19th century, including *Adam Bede*, her first novel, in 1859, "*The Mill on the Floss*" (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt* (1866), *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and her masterpiece, *Middlemarch* (1871-1872).

Eliot was born on November 1819 in Warwickshire, a rustic area. When her father was still alive, Eliot was introduced to conformity and Christianity. However, after his death, at the age of thirty, her life took another turn; she travelled all over Europe, and then returned to settle in London.

While in London, Eliot reached the position of an editor in chief of “The Westminster Review” a very influential and preponderant journal in the vanguard of the time. Being at the centre of a literary milieu, she encountered some of the major leading figures of the epoch, and eventually started a liaison with the married Henry Lewes, with whom she lived openly without marriage, the thing that wasn’t done at that time and which was considered as shocking, disgraceful and scandalous for the Victorian society. Her lover, Lewes, encouraged her vocation for writing. Eventually, in 1856 her first serial stories entitled *Scenes of clerical Life* were published in “Blackwood Magazine”, and then, three years later, her first novel *Adam Bede* saw the light when she was forty; a great success that made of her one of the most noted female novelists of the Victorian era.

George Eliot made use of a male pseudonym to counter the clichés and stereotypes established on female authors who were associated with the imaginary and unrealistic romances. Furthermore, she wanted to attract the reader’s attention toward the depth and originality of her works in an era where women’s writings were not taken so seriously. Correspondingly, most of her novels were mainly political and somehow realistic despite the good humour and comic elements, but, also offer a deep psychological insight of the characters. In fact, she was the first author who developed this method in modern fiction.

After the death of Lewes, Eliot married John Cross, a literary agent, who was twenty years younger. She died on the 22nd of December, 1880 at the age of sixty-one, and was buried in Highgate cemetery in North London besides Henry Lewes.

1.2. Plot Summary

Middlemarch (1871-1872), also subtitled “*A Study of Provincial Life*”, that Virginia Woolf in her article originally published in “The Times Literary Supplement” qualified as

“a magnificent book” that is “one of the few English novels written for grown-up people.”

Middlemarch, hence, traces the life stories of the residents of the fictive town of Middlemarch, who aspire to realize their dreams and find their true vocation in life, but are rather driven by their idealism, passion as well as life bad decisions to their loss.

Middlemarch is supplied with a large number of characters facing diverse life events and resolved to lead a meaningful existence. Likewise, the plot of the novel is arranged in a fluent flow, and had been divided up into three or four independent but interrelated plots varying in the degree of importance, including Dorothea Brooke’s life choices, to Tertius Lydgate’s career, then the frequenting of Mary Garth and Fred Vincyand, and finally the Bulstrode’s disgrace, while thematically social class, politics, marriage, religion, the status of women in society, and hypocrisy are forming the vast conception of the story.

In the early portion of the nineteenth century England, Middlemarch, a fictional rural town serves as the main setting of the fiction, where Dorothea Brooke, the central character, a nineteen-year-old orphan lives with her younger sister Celia under the tutelage of their uncle Mr Brooke. Indeed, Dorothea is a beautiful, intelligent, passionate, and religious young woman who seeks to improve her society’s conditions through achieving noble deeds that might serve humanity.

In fact, Sir James Chettam, a handsome young landowner, titled “a baronet”, gets impressed by the charming and ambitious young Dorothea, and eventually falls in love with her. Surprisingly, she rejects his love and is instead attracted to a middle-aged reverend with the name of Edward Casaubon, as she comes to believe that he is a wise and distinguished man who is capable of great achievements and would enlarge her intellectual as well as spiritual perspectives since she is longing for knowledge.

All of a sudden, Dorothea accepts Casaubon's proposal and marries him despite her sister's disapproval. Sir James Chettam, meanwhile, develops a keen interest toward Celia who didn't remain insensitive to his advances and marries him.

Soon after marriage, Dorothea understands that her husband is in no mean interested in loving her, and that he is an unsuccessful scholar who, all along thirty years, composed notes that he has no intention to publish and will never see the light of the day. As soon as Dorothea realizes that she idealized a screw up man, her feelings toward him faded. In the meantime, she finds herself befriendng Will Ladislav, Casaubon's younger cousin, a jobless young man who counts on his cousin's financial support, in whom she finds some consolation. Quickly, Ladislav develops love feelings for Dorothea, who doesn't seem aware of his passion buried deep in his heart.

Ultimately, the friendly bond between Dorothea and Ladislav creates an extreme feeling of jealousy in Casaubon who now disdains his cousin. Subsequently, Casaubon's health collapses. He immediately amends his will so that his wife will be dispossessed of all the wealth she is about to inherit from him after his death if ever she marries Will Ladislav.

Then, a new doctor comes to Middlemarch, with the name of Tertius Lydgate. He is a young ambitious and gifted doctor who is desirous of accomplishing a revolutionary medical and scientific discovery that would serve the people of his new town, and has an idealistic approach to life quite similar to Dorothea's: they are often aiming for perfection and keep their heads in the clouds. There are other characters in the novel, such as Rosamond and Fred Vincy, the older children of the town mayor. Rosamond is a fashionable but selfish young lady trying to seduce the town's new doctor, Lydgate, and eventually marries him. However, the young couple, mainly due to

extravagant way of life as well as immoderate and excessive charges of Rosamond, fell into a disruptive debt. Lydgate is now obliged to make a loan from Nicholas Bulstrode a well off banker.

In the other side, Fred Vincy, Rosamond's brother is counting on an inheritance from his childless uncle Mr Featherstone and who has a niece that Fred loves and hopes to marry. However, with a debt that he can't refund and an inheritance which obviously didn't materialize, Mary Garth, Fred's lover, refuses to marry him as he has no stable career, and thus he is not ready for any kind of commitment. Nevertheless, Mary's father manages to redeem the hopeless Fred from overwhelming. Later, he is able to invest and purchase Stone Court, the land that he was supposed to inherit accordingly, and Mary finally gives her consent to their marriage.

Nicholas Bulstrode, in the meantime, is frightened by John Raffles who would reveal his tragic past. As a hypocrite, he wants to bury the ghosts of the past that hunts him. As a result he precipitates Raffles death. Consequently, when his secrets spread, Bulstrode is disgraced, yet, Lydgate is swayed by his disgrace too. Because of the loan, he is considered as his ally and he is put under suspicion. So, under those circumstances they had both to leave Middlemarch.

By the time, Dorothea falls in love with Ladislaw. They first tried to keep their romance private to avoid Dorothea's disinheritance, but announced later their intention to get married, since she favours love over the riches she was about to gain.

At the end of the novel, Dorothea and Will Ladislaw marry. They live happily with their four sons, whereas Lydgate and Rosamod walked out of Middlemarch. Tragically, Lydgate dies at an early age, leaving his wife free to remarry a man of her own taste.

Indeed, as Patricia Meyer Spacks in her article “*The Power of Middlemarch*” underlines that “The intricacies of plot and attitude that mark the mammoth work ... teach the reader how to read. They also educate the reader about the nature of responsibility and of vocation” (65).

1. 3. The Social Context of the Novel

Middlemarch was first published serially in eight volumes from 1871 to 1872 taking place in the rural and fictional town of Middlemarch during the early decades of the nineteenth century, most exactly from 1829 to 1832. In reality, *Middlemarch* was the result of two initially independent novels *Miss Brooke* and another uncompleted text also entitled *Middlemarch* combined to form the actual fiction which is fitted out with a large pile of characters and a rich thematic collection enfolding diverse issues of the Victorian society.

In the first place, *Middlemarch* exposes past events that occurred forty years preceding its publication. Eventually, Eliot goes back to a period where religious, political, social, and scientific reforms were needed in order to reshape the English society. Indeed, while some of these changes were unwelcomed by this settled society, some others offered a window of hope and a yearning for a potential progress that would make of the world a better place. While politically, the novel’s plot follows the period where the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 has been voted, henceforth liberating the Roman Catholics from the ban of Parliament. In the same fashion, the Representation

of the People Acts also called the Reform Act was in the air promising numerous changes, and was ultimately passed in 1832, excluding, once again, women.

Furthermore, the novel captures the elaborate social world in which the residents of the provincial Middlemarch town evolve, where social hierarchies seem to very much regulate the lives of the Middlemarchers, delineating some of the most important features of that epoch when gender and class stratifications were forming different categories of people within the same society and were determinative of every aspect of the Victorian's lives.

Moreover, the political and social references in the novel, most notably the Reform Act of 1832, the succession to the throne by King William IV after death of King George IV and the beginning of the railways in as much as the first steps of industrialization of England makes of *Middlemarch* a historical novel, as Eliot's emphasise of historical events is obvious in her fiction. On that account critics like Henry James maintains that "her purpose is to be a generous rural historian," while she was described in the Steedman's Review article as being conscious "of the historical questions involved in writing a social and political history of provincial life."

2. The Concept of Feminism

2.1. Definition of Feminism

In essence, many scholars like Ruth Robins, Mary Eagleton, and Alison Jaggar define feminism as a belief that promotes social, economic and political equality between the two sexes. As a matter of fact, feminism is a set of ideologies as well as social and political movements that defend and stand up for women's rights, through denouncing sexism, oppression, discrimination, exploitation, inferiorization, and persecution of women in every sphere of life, and at the same time, aims at fighting male's dominance, power, privileges, and supremacy in many of the patriarchal societies that prioritize men over women. Correspondingly "now feminism is commonly used to refer to all those who seek, no matter on what grounds, to end women's subordination" (Jaggar 12).

In like manner, this same concept has been defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state".

Likewise, feminist movements according to George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan seek to break down "the socially constructed categories of masculine and feminine" (223), focusing on "the principle that women are human beings equal to men" (223). For this reason, they should be emancipated from "sexist bias "and "social inequality" (224), that inhibits them from flourishing in the personal, social, and political domains. Accordingly, being freed from these constraints will make a significant change in their lives. Then again, Bell Hooks, a feminist theorist and a cultural critic gave a close description of what feminism really is in her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, stating that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." At the same time, the movement is, in no means, an incitement "to go against nature - and God" or "a

bunch of angry women who want to be like men”, its rather about women gaining equal rights. Indeed, the ongoing struggle of feminism and women in general is to abolish patriarchy in our societies, where females are subjugated to men who use their authority to serve their own profits, and certainly, they are the ones who gain the most from this system of inequality.

Under those disabling circumstances women activists organized themselves into social and political movements, in order to raise awareness about the issues facing women, in addition to boosting the government and authorities to take measures in support of their cause. Consequently, feminists have initiated a series of campaigns and high mobilizations, built on political and economic activities and proceedings, to combat social hierarchies and discriminations based on sex identity which is deeply rooted in our societies. It is therefore, very complicated to eradicate assumptions and views that are ingrained for generations in our cultural, religious, and societal beliefs.

With this in mind, feminists are active to ensure a political, social, and economic change for women, guaranteeing them some of the fundamental and legitimate rights that would end their social exclusion as well as gender stratification. In fact, since the commitment and engagement of feminists, women’s living conditions and social status have improved. Effectively, after a long struggle journey, they have succeeded to secure a far-reaching recognition of their rights including: the right to vote, to receive education, to work, to own property, have equal rights within marriage, have the custody of children, have maternity leave and to be protected from any form of abuse, notably rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

In the light of the famous sayings of the American previous first lady Hilary Clinton, in the Fourth Women’s Conference in Beijing (China) on the 5th September, 1995, that

“Women’s rights are human rights” and that “however different we may appear, there is more that unites us than divides us. We share a common future and we are here to find common grounds so that we may help bring new dignity and respect to women and girls all over the world.” On the positive side, there is a massive mobilization as well as potent women’s movements and organizations that put consistent and significant efforts to expand women’s social, political, and economic opportunities so that it may equal those of their male counterparts, in this way eliminating some of the major impediments that restrain their evolution either in public or personal spheres.

Yet, still in many parts of the world girls and women are denied from basic and essential human rights, simply because of their gender. From gender pay gap and sex-based discriminations, to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, rape, child marriage but also, reproductive rights like contraceptives and abortion which are rigorously forbidden, mainly because of religious or cultural beliefs. By all means, it is ostensibly a piercing violation of their rights.

2.3. History of Feminism

The history of women’s liberation movements goes far back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where the role of women was uniquely within the limits of the home without a consistent standing in society. Motherhood and domesticity, meanwhile, were recognized as the destiny of women from every class and was regarded by society at large as being uniquely a female’s domain. While men were discerned as having a rightful place in the public sphere, women were intended for the household and domestic chores. Indeed, women devoted themselves for the undertaking and management of the house, nursing the children and the care of the family, forging this way the conventional image of the Victorian gentlewoman. However, towards the end of the era women became

exasperated with the gender stereotypes constricting their lives in every sphere, and wanted more than domestic servitude. Therefore, the feminist movements arose, opening an elaborated and devoted struggle that triggered change in the social, political and economic conditions of women. So far, the ongoing movement's struggle for women's emancipation from any form of constriction is still active and potent.

It is important to realize that women from the ancient times up to the present day are seeking for the abolition of the socially stipulated and imposed roles, as well as acclaiming the equality of the sexes. They have always complained about their inferior status that nourishes oppression and injustice. They resisted subordination in all possible manners, even through madness, which is believed to be in a sense a kind of escape from their tragic reality. They similarly defied the widespread beliefs as it was declared by Cato the elder "As soon as they begin to be your equals, they will have become your superior."

As can be seen, the debate about women extends very far back in time. The emergence of feminism in England goes remotely to the seventeenth century where the first women's voices were heard. However, earlier feminists never organized themselves into movements or applied the term feminism to their philosophy. Formerly, early feminists attest that, if men and women were given the same educational opportunities they would be equals in the intellectual realm. So, there was a strong yearn for education, which is, after all, a natural right.

In general, the coinage of the words "feminism" and "feminist" is attributed to the French philosopher Charles Fourier between 1808 and 1837, who understood very early the importance of the emancipation of women and the cessation of their legal and social subordination to men, and at the same time, the necessity for an economic independence. Yet, works of earlier feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the rights*

of women (1792), where she suggests that men and women should benefit from equal rights in terms of politics, work, and education. She also rejects the notion that “women only exist to please men” and that the former are not silly creatures but as rational as men, and it is only because of patriarchy that they remain confined in the shadows. Thus, these works from the age of Enlightenment and even before, paved the way for modern feminism. However, organized feminist movements spread extensively in Britain, the United States and France, then all over the world, only in the last two or three hundred years. The most compelling evidence is that Feminism has always existed, either in conscious or unconscious states, in collective or individual ways, and women have always struggled against social oppression.

As an illustration of the monopoly of men; toward the nineteenth century French women were still obliged to hide their hair in public, not owing to religious purposes, but to social and culture structures that made of women submissive and docile creatures. Equally, in some areas of Germany, a man could sell his wife if he wishes to. And it must be remembered that, not as far as the early twentieth century, women had neither the right to vote nor to campaign for parliament, or participate in the political matters in most of the countries around the world. They were constantly in need of a male’s assistance and attendance either a father, brother, husband or son it could be. That is to say, the husband is the only representative of the family and the responsible of the children and the house. Nothing could be done except with his permission. Unluckily, these constraints and limitations on women’s freedom still exist today in some parts of the world. It is, thus, inevitable that women should seek social justice by uniting and organizing themselves into movements in order to fight patriarchy and eradicate sexism.

3. Waves of Feminism

The women's movements in modern times, the so-called "Feminist movements", are built on four waves of high mobilization and engagement of women activists, who though having different ideologies; goals and causes protested and campaigned for the acknowledgement of women's rights and liberation, through different stratagem and moves.

3.1. First-Wave Feminism

The first organized feminist movement saw the light from the nineteenth to early twentieth century, when social, political and economic changes arose. Thereby, the first steps of elaborated feminism are referred to as the "First wave", which resulted mainly from the growth of Industrial Capitalism coupled with the western cultural and social systems which inferiorized women. Thus, the many changes in the modern western societies, altered the perception of women to their own social and legal status, and these same alterations, stimulated a protest against the groundless notion promoting the belief in "women's natural subordination to men" (Jaggar 4). Since, women for a long period of time, were according to Marxists reduced to "a question." So, organized feminism came to solve and give a specific answer to that question (Jaggar 4-5).

In general, "first wave feminism" is associated with the suffrage movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when women activists campaigned to obtain the right to vote as much as to hold a public office, with the intention to acquire a certain political potential and authority, enabling them to participate fully in the public life.

In point of fact, women from various cultures, casts and contexts gathered to work on common issues, and took critical positions about the narrow political and legal

dimensions of women. For this reason , they called for a series of reforms that would secure for women, some of the primary rights including not only the right to vote, to hold public office, to be educated, to work, to own property, but also some other primordial rights promoting above all, political and social equality of the sexes, equality of opportunity and legal equality within marriage, ensuring for women the right to disobey their husbands, to apply for divorce with the possibility of having the custody of the children after divorce, and at the same time being legally protected from any form of violence from their ex-husbands, always with the hope to suppress the female's restrictive roles in domestic or public realms.

Actually, due to women's legitimate struggle to obtain their rights, and to the feminist commitment and engagement, which has proven to be effective, since "The Custody of Infants Acts" was passed in 1839 in the U.K (Wroath 114), giving for the first time to women the right to have the custody of their children. Identically, "The Married Women's Property Act" of 1870 had been introduced and broadened in "The 1882 Act" (Wroath 135). Equally important, the suffragettes in Britain wrenched the right to vote in "The representation of the People Act" of the 1918, allowing women over 30 who owned a property to vote. And later, in 1928 it was expanded to all women over 21 (Fraser, Hugh and Sir 251).

That is to say, by the mid-twentieth century, most of the first wave's demands and requirements had been added to the constitutions of the United States and many of the countries of western Europe. In essence, "First wave feminism" is a quest for women's rights, more specifically "legal and political rights."

3.2. Second-Wave Feminism

By the turn of mid-twentieth century, women were certainly still denied fundamental and significant rights. For the most part, the expansion and increasing of unmanageable issues such as divorce and single motherhood on one hand, and the birth of new social movements on the other hand, together with the publication of leading and forerunner books, more specifically, *The Second Sex* (1949) by the French philosopher and women's rights activists Simone De Beauvoir, railing against women's oppression, injustice and biological, psychological and economic discrimination, and which is considered as a precursor of women's liberation movement. As much as Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in which she expressed the anxieties of white, middle-class American women careerless, without professions or true vocations and trapped in domesticity, triggered white middle-class women's irritation and disapprobation of gender roles as well as gender stratifications, leading to the resurgence of the feminist movement in early 1960s.

In fact, second-wave feminism is widely known as the "women's liberation movement" and is considered as the most powerful and important version of feminism mainly in modern western societies. Since the women's liberation movement is in the forefront in advocating an elaborate investigation of women's oppression, in addition to offering a new view angle and a wide range of perspectives which are likely to emancipate women.

Actually, this wave excels in the plenitude and fullness of its concerns, and exceeds all previous waves in the scale of its critiques about gender roles, heterosexuality and femininity, provoking as a result "A cultural chock." In reality, in the first two decades of its existence, particularly the years from 1972 to 1982, the movement reached

its glory days, when second-wave activists engaged to fight oppression, restraints on women's freedom, gender discrimination and the raising nuisance of injustice.

As has been noted, there is a kind of continuity of former projects, goals and claims, not yet achieved by preceding feminists. But in either case, it is different from previous forms of feminism. While the first-wave is a quest for equal rights notably, in legal and political matters, contemporary feminism is meanwhile a quest for women's liberation. That, correspondingly, it accentuates criticism on patriarchy as a system of injustice which should be abolished in order to be liberated, and at the same time they call for unity between women that need "Solidarity instead of competition, assisting the weak instead of marginalization, responsible participation instead of indifference." (Marceline 1).

To emphasize, the vanguard origin of the assigned title to the movement, constitutes in the incorporation of "Black liberation, gay liberation, third world liberation" (Jaggar 12). And these unusual inclusions explain why second-wave feminism is recognized as being "women's Liberation movement." In this way, we comprehend that the movement is concerned by wider issues that affects humanity, beyond that just of women including all oppressed minorities. Indeed, Alison Jaggar in her book entitled "*Feminist Politics and Human Nature*" explains that these inclusions make a relevant particularity of this movement that aims after all at "advancing the position of women" (5), and above all saving individuals from larger oppressive restrictions on their freedom.

In the light of liberation, contemporary feminists seek as well freedom, equality and justice. Accordingly, this would be achieved only through engaging into political struggles. So, in the first place, as Alison jaggar maintains, they ask for the "control of their bodies," to dissolve "sexual objectification of women and girls," in addition to having access to "reproductive rights." Jaggar further argues that "the male culture that

defines women as sexual objects of male pleasure” (260), is in fact, the one to be blamed since “forced motherhood begins with sexual coercion” (260). Hence, second wave-feminism fights “the patriarchal stereotype of women as sexual objects” (260), and the continuous identification of women in those terms. Condemning, as a result the beauty industry which is determined as being a “symbol of the sexual objectification of women”; prostitution as a “symbol of women’s enslavement to men” and pornography as a “symbol of violence against women” (283).

It must be remembered that the second wave grew along with other social movements like civil rights movements forming a circle of oppressed minority. Due to the raising consciousness that the female body is objectified and the increasing impulse toward beauty culture in order to fit in the desires of the patriarchy, as well as a strong rejection of “the cult of domesticity” which stipulates that women should be kept home, feminists reacted and opposed the degrading assigned images to women and Related their subjugation and oppression to patriarchy, capitalism and normative heterosexuality. Second-wavers also attest that “women’s struggle is class struggle,” and made considerable efforts to show that gender, class and race oppressions are Firmly connected.

Additionally, married women were still deprived of legal rights. Hence, they campaigned and insisted on “reforms of family laws” which gave preferential treatments to husbands who dominated and subordinated their wives. For instance, during the 1960s French women could not apply for a job without the permission of their husbands. Subsequently, second wave feminists most known for their activism such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Alice Walker and Nikki Craft continued to protest against these unjust restrictions on women’s freedom, insisting on the acquisition of rights such as: Paid maternity leave, payment for the house wives, abolition of marriage, ban of

the housewife role, criminalizing marital rape and erasing gender role either in public or domestic spheres.

Thus, “In raising such issues, contemporary feminists are giving a new focus to political philosophy, rather than simply new answers to old problems, they seek to demonstrate that “the problems themselves have been conceived too narrowly.” (Jaggar14). Moreover “It is beginning to suggest alternative ways of conceptualizing social reality and political possibility.” (Jaggar 13). With this in mind, they therefore proclaim that “the personal is political”, a slogan coined by the feminist activist Carol Hanicsh which became afterwards symbolic of the second-wave.

In point of fact, the slogan really reflects the core and essentials of the movement. Given these points, we can understand why “the personal is political”, since being under a patriarchal system, women share certainly common issues and experiences, that they should share with each other in order to demystify the oppression they are experiencing and to designate their oppressors. And, thus, we understand that what they once considered “personal problems” are in fact an affliction that all women live. As such, the depth of contemporary feminists concerns, devised their work and mission through engaging into some political struggles and actions while others decided to engage in different political, dimensions. In this slogan, there is, in reality, a kind of recognition that men have a larger power and exert control over women on every ground, that means the “political” is not separated from the “personal” sphere of life, since “all relations between men and women are institutionalized relationships of power ... It reveals how male power is exercised and reinforced through such “personal” institutions as childrearing, housework, love, marriage and all kinds of sexual practices, from rape through prostitution to sexual intercourse itself” (101). That lead, in fact, to women’s inexorable and persistent oppression.

Again, the considerable acquired experiences of contemporary feminists offered a new understanding about women's oppression as well as a varied approach that allow analysing and assessing women's experiences and conditions, and as a result generate a distinctive insight and perspective about "women's liberation". In other words:

some feminists work in universities some are active in left groups or in community organizing, some are black, some are lesbians. The variety of work and life experience of contemporary feminists results in a variety of perception of social reality and women's oppression. This variety is a source of strength for the women's liberation movement." (Jaggar 14)

For the most part, earlier feminists' interest revolves around questions of equality and equal rights, meanwhile oppression and liberation form the cornerstone discussions of the second-wave. Usually, belonging to different social standing or geographical locations and even different ethnic groups, some women endure oppression with more severity than others. Therefore, women's perception and experience of oppression may considerably differ from one another. Likewise, some feminists share unfiltered opinions and have no doubts that women are oppressed by men, while some others assure that women's oppression resulted in reality from the capitalist system, but it is seemingly encouraged by men. However, other feminists held distinct opinion and proffer that "Both men and women are oppressed by the sex-role system." (Jaggar 14)

In like manner, oppression, injustice and sexism are strengthened by the patriarchal system. It is thus clear that the problem is the patriarchal thinking and conduct which us, females and males from an early age are brought to accept and support, meaning that "females can be just as sexist as men" (Hooks 2). As a direct consequence of patriarchy, come up male dominance, because of a certain impression that promotes the belief in men's superiority, women are subject to exploitation, oppression, violence and control. However, Second-wavers consider that men are also affected and somehow harmed by

this system, since not all of them are intended or capable of being patriarchs, but also it is exorbitant to maintain this system alive as it requires sky-high efforts from manipulation, tyranny to authoritarianism and repression. On the other hand, men fear to give up patriarchy for all the profits they are making on behalf of this system. Hence they fear feminism because it is the promise for change. Indeed, feminism stands on equality and justice and places men and women on an equal footing, moreover the feminist politics aspire to liberate both male and female from the captivity of patriarchy, but also from the bondage of racism and classicism. Thus:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitisms, imperialism. But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice. Living the truth that we are all “created equal.” (Hooks 4)

Though the movement during the many years of mass mobilization and engagement succeeded to reach much of its goals, it knew a high conflictual and fragmented phase. And on the, negative side, the second as the first wave were charged of taking into notice far more white, upper and middle-class women experiences, whereas lesbians, working class women and women of colour felt side-lined. However, second wave claim to take into account all women’s voices. As a matter of fact, “a full adequate theory of women’s liberation cannot ignore the experience of any group of women” (Jaggar 17). Which means that race and ethnicity should be incorporated to gender and class studies of oppression which forms according to Patricia Hill Collins “A matrix domination.” Hence,

the second wave theory of “women’s liberation” cannot be considered as complete. In the long run the criticism against the two branches of the movement encouraged the apparition of other forms of feminism such as intersectional and black feminism.

3.3. Third-Wave Feminism

While it was obviously understood that feminism was evanesced or dissipated, which reveals a strong and clear urge to oust “women’s activism”, by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, new feminism emerged as a significant opposition to postmodern and universal issues, such as rape, incest, and prostitution, as well as culturally related nuisance like female genital mutilation and child marriage.”

Moreover, despite of the raising complications and obstacle of homophobia, racism and classicism, the movement is still working and potent. And this new stage of feminism is referred to as “Third wave.” Generally speaking, the beginning of the movement was announced by Rebecca Walker, Alice Walker’s daughter in the 1990s, intending mainly to fight gender inequality, sexism and gender based discriminations in patriarchal societies.

Eventually, with coeval and contemporary activists, the movement has changed shape, stratagem as well as its way of protest. To be sure, the twenty-first century societies are framed by the ideologies, judgments and philosophy of the movement’s two preceding waves. However, by accusing the earlier feminists of prioritizing the white, upper and middle-class women’s experiences and notions of femininity, the third wave feminists attempt to find a place for non- white perspectives and race related issues, and concerns besides to internal discussions between those who assent the inclination to psychological differences between men and women and those who do not only reject this notion and proclaim that gender roles are socially constructed but also refuse the classical images of women and conformity, in addition to social, cultural and psychological conditioning

which enhances social divergence. For this reason, feminism is “infiltrating our consciousness with the simple premise that women are as capable and valuable as men.” (Freedman 18)

Indeed, the third-wave is mainly against social hierarchies and classes of women putting all groups on an equal footing, in a system which promotes diversity. Unlike in the second-wave, the concept of sisterhood is not just theoretical, blacks, whites and lesbians are sisters. And this fosters union between the different and various categories of women.

In fact, third-wave feminists assert that this new form of feminism is all-inclusive and encourages “social diversity “much more than earlier waves and celebrates the variance of class, race and sexual orientation refusing the inflexible structures and the conviction in a “universal, womanhood, body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity” (Heywood xx). Again, it was described by Heywood as “a form of inclusiveness.” That is to say, this wave “respects not only differences between women based on race, ethnicity, religion and economic standing but also makes allowance for different identities within a single person” (Heywood XX). But it also “allows for identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism” (Heywood xx). Which means that your class, race or sexuality no more defines your social identity one can be bisexual, biracial or even interracial, multicultural or having several identities, your experiences as a woman must be emphasized. We can thus grasp that this movement gives prominence to diversity, individuality and non-judgemental method, privileging action over theory construction.

Actually, despite the assumed presupposition that the third-wave is a kind of revolt against the convictions and views of second wave, opposing daughters against mothers, in reality third-wavers do not totally contradict their predecessor’s ideas, but reject the

rigidity and inflexibility of the movement that “Doesn’t allow for individuality, complexity or less than perfect personal histories “, and argues that:

Forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad, this way of ordering the world is especially difficult for a generation that has grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist and otherwise afflicted. (Walker 22)

Though having an equivalent political scheme, third-wavers accuse their mother’s generation of being anti-male, anti-femininity and anti-sex. Identically, Naomi Wolf describes it as “sexually judgemental, even anti-sexuality”, “Judgmental of other women’s sexuality and appearance”, as well as “Self-righteous” (14-15). Then again she adds that second-wave feminists incite women “to give up heterosexual privilege by not marrying, instead of extending civil rights, to give up beauty instead of expanding the definition”, it “believes that sensuality cannot coincide with seriousness”, and “fears that to have too much fun poses a threat to the revolution.” (Woolf 15)

Whereas the new feminists consider males as equals, enjoy sexual desire reaping sexual pleasure, and embrace fully their femininity by readopting standard beauty products from lip-sticks and eyelashes to high-heels, as it was stressed by third-wave feminists “it’s possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time.” They feel themselves self-accomplished and are conscious of the equality of the sexes, in contrast to their predecessors who had to prove themselves. Besides, they adopt the philosophy of non-judgement of other women’s sexuality, and distinguish themselves as being “pro-sex”, ending this way “the devastating split that pitted feminists against each other” (Snyder 188). Hence, this wave centres attention more on the freedom of choice that all women should be blessed with as the feminist scholar Jan Breslauer declared in the famous magazine *Playboy* “this boob job is empowering ... I know the party line on breast

augmentation that women who have surgery are the oppressed victims of a patriarchal culture ... however, feminism is about having control over life and one's body" (Snyder 189). As much as Astrid Henry's reflection that this aspect "enables younger feminists to present their wave as more progressive and inclusive than that of their predecessors" due to their ability "to make their feminism anti-racist from its inception." (Henry 126)

To point out, third-wave feminists do not pursue or devote their efforts on distinct and unfamiliar issues, or provide novel resolutions and answers to old problems. In other words, instead of going against or repudiating their mother's generation claims and faith, they decided to develop and conceive their own version of feminism, which goes along with the new societal circumstances and background in addition to the complex obstacles and challenges they encounter. Since they are aware that "every generation by definition confronts a new historical context" (Snyder 178), Claiming, in turn, their distinctiveness from earlier waves, but emphasising at the same time the crucial and pertinent contribution that this wave is making for the women's struggle.

Furthermore, third-wave feminist's activists insist on having a wider political perspective, since they have "No party line", and "to focus on more than women's issues "(Heywood 366). Heywood, thus, affirms that the movement stands up for larger series of issues other than gender issues and gender activism, it rather integrates economic, environmental and political causes in order to achieve social justice.

Likewise, the third-wave refuses the generalization of women's life experiences and assures that there is an inconsistency between the "dominant discourses" and "the reality of women's lives. As gender identity, race and class structure women's lives in different shapes, otherwise putting personal and individual experiences above usual shared experiences, and universal, plural identities above a common identity. Indeed, third-

wavers reject the notion of a single womanhood and promote the belief in the multiplicity of identities emphasising women's different experiences because every woman's background or circumstances differ from another. Correspondingly, putting women in a partnership to reject the assumption of women's passive roles and men's dominance within social structures. Destroying this way, the classical images of women and conveying that "there is no one way to be a woman." (Snyder 11)

On balance, women's comprehension of feminism and the methodology of activism, as well as their involvement in women's cause depend mainly on the social context and milieu where they are brought to be than on the years of their birth. At the present time, second wave feminism still represent women worldwide and gets along with third and fourth waves.

3.4. Fourth-Wave Feminism

In around 2012, a fourth wave was identified, using social media and technology as a main platform to strengthen their claims and to voice the continuing injustices against women. They seek to be heard and to re-establish justice for women. Thus, the web reports the struggles of women and girls in postmodern societies to fight and clash violence, misogyny, sexism, discrimination, gender inequities and body shaming but above all to criminalize sexual assault in workplace and streets, sexual violence from rape culture to abuse coupled with murder against women. Today's feminists activists and protestors try to raise awareness among men and women worldwide, encouraging them to stand for women's cause and to take notice of how oppression, inequality and discrimination based on class, gender and race affects their life experiences on a negative way. In the same fashion, they attempt to root out the shame, stigma or self-blame that snatch the victim status to women and consider them as blameworthy.

Accordingly, the new feminist generation campaigns and protests, call for the adoption of a set of political solutions and measures that would ban many of the issues facing women today. In particular, pressing on issues such as pay gap, child care costs, economic deficiency of women, domestic abuse and violence in addition to highlighting some other issues that have remained for too long in the shadows involving teenage pregnancy discrimination, racist and sexist stereotypes, pornography, beauty industry that all over sexualized female body. Hence, the fourth-wave feminism is active to break the silence of women and enable them to reveal the injustices they have lived. In this case, as Jessica Bennett in her article entitled *Behold the Power of Women* affirms about the fourth-wavers activism “they don’t just have a voice they are forcing institutions to listen.”

Moreover, EstaSolar, the president of a group called *Future Without Violence* declares that “If we remain silent, our silence will breed even more fear”, highlighting the fact that “There is no excuse for domestic violence”. Thus, women nowadays are using social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and websites to “make their voices heard “and to share their stories as Jessica Bennet exposes since “Social Media has created space for people of all kinds, to express themselves and to see their voices amplified.” But also, feminist voices have been heard through slogans, poems and even songs that defy patriarchal power and sexist assumptions. Indeed, women are nowadays taking their place on stage and being heard. Like the L7 musical band’s song named “shit list”:

When I get mad
I get pissed
I grab my pen and
I write out a list
Of all the people that
Won’t be missed

You've made my shit lit. (Sparks)

Again, the fourth-wave created a large, collective, powerful and universal online movements as well as campaigns including the #YesAllWomen, Everyday sexism project, Daughters of Eve, Counting dead women project, 2017 women's march, Free the Nipple, One Billion Rising, South Black Sisters to the most known movement #Me Too.

Luckily, the majority of women and even girls today consider as the equals of men, and are scandalized whenever they are not regarded as such, and they feel highly at ease when replying sharply for the violation of their rights.

Indeed, the evolution in the language of contemporary feminism, provides a clear insight on the political circumstances following its emergence, and offers a wider frame of reference of women's conditions and situation which are in constant change. For this reason, feminist, movements, demands and claims progress in order to serve the current needs of women.

Conclusion

When looking in retrospect, we find out that women's history is full of restrictions grounded on both their gender and class. Women were not only denied from basic rights, but also imposed upon them a prototype to follow in order to conform to the requirements of the patriarchy. Feminism, hence, came to dissolve women's discrimination, sexism, oppression and subordination to men. It is, thus, common to speak of three major feminist movements in modern times. However, a fourth wave has emerged from 2012 onward and gets larger and bigger. And it is commonly known that there is not only one ideology or philosophy within the movement, there are several points and counter-points that interact.

Still, it is important to realize that feminist campaigns protests are the pillar of women's political, social, cultural and economic change worldwide.

Chapter II:
Female Characters
in *Middlemarch*

Introduction

The present chapter throws light on the Victorian novel *Middlemarch* and provides a closer look on the text, in terms of context, characters and style of writing. Indeed, going far-back to a time when gender was still regarded as typically a biological factor determinative of every aspect in an individual's life, from physical appearance to general behaviour. And to a society arranged hierarchically, where gender, religion and class shape very much people's lives, as well as define individual's identity and standing in society. Guided by the assumption that men and women are divergent and contrastive; each is meant for different things, dichotomizing both sexes to a physically strong, independent and sex centred males conversely to a weak, dependent aiming for reproduction females. *Middlemarch* is, thus, illustrative of all those aspects. And by giving a twenty-first century re-reading of Eliot, we can draw that oppression, sexism and injustice are strengthened by the patriarchal system.

Hence, in the light of Jean Francois Lyotard, saying that our lives are not shaped by "grand narratives", but by diverse "petit récits" that interacts and interweaves with systems of inequalities, and sometimes with a degree of hostility with each other, *Middlemarch* changes our impression about feminist thought.

1. The narrator's Voice

As a matter of fact, the narrator's voice is given a larger importance in Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*. Indeed, I shall agree with K.M Newton "it is important to study the role the narrator plays in the structure of her novel" (98). Like so, with a reliable narrator all-knowing of the character's minds and hearts, effectively explains why and how these characters behave, think or act. Thus, the intrusive narrator's perspectives, sight and

judgements inspire reliability, accuracy and reality in the reader's mind and induce this latter somehow to accept the narrator's interpretation, depiction and analysis of both characters and events. However, the reader is unrestrained or limited to the narrator's views, and is still offered a margin of liberty to differ or form independent opinions, prospect, views or judgements separate from those of the narrator, since "interpretations are at least partially dependent on the reader's evolving priorities and values." (Rilett 118)

Furthermore, considering the interpretation, delineation and description of the narrator as a truthful representation of the world which remained faithful to reality, that organizes the novel both thematically and artistically but also gives a natural temporality, as if there was no time interval at all, allowing the novel, this way, to be associated and correspond to various ranges of readers across time. Thus, reading *Middlemarch* cannot be time-based solely upon the author's own epoch or on the cultural context from which it emerged, it is instead read and interpreted according to the reader's specific time frame. Then, even if the narrator occupies a central role in the narrative, and exerts a kind of power, yet the reader may resist this power by interpreting the author's perspectives within his own time frame. As K.M Newton in his book entitled: *George Eliot for the Twenty-First Century: Literature, Philosophy, Politics* affirms "even if the narrator's active role is central to the novel's form and contents to exert a power that readers should expect, interpretation will never be final, though there may be continual (and productive) debate as to how far readers should go in qualifying or resisting, for example, the ethical perspective of the author." (94)

On balance, the narrator appears to be a wise speaker who has a strong grasp of reality, knowing everyone and everything in the novel, which is manifested in the main by her awareness of Bulstrode's hypocrisy or Dorothea's real value unknown even to the dearest to her heart (her husband, uncle and sister). Hence, the narrator's active part in

unbiasedly reporting, disclosing and detailing what is happening with the characters or taking place in the novel, helps in turn to better understand the fiction, since without the narrator it would have been hardly imaginable being able to fully understand what it meant to be an oppressed woman or to relate gender and class as interlocking systems of oppression. At last, we comprehend by way of the narrator's voice the faulty perception that gender issues and class differences are disconnected from the human tragedy.

In essence, referring to the small community of Middlemarch by the metaphor of the web which has been recognized by the narrator as being inextricable from the vast web of humanity, stating "I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not depressed over tempting range of relevancies known as the universe" (117). On the whole, the narrator explains that humanity is a web which connects and weaves together, and the Middlemarchers are certainly part of this web. Likewise, as Beverly Park Rilett in her review chapter dedicated to *Middlemarch* entitled: *What do I think of glory?': Reading and Re-reading George Eliot's Middlemarch* originally published within a book entitled "*My Victorian Novel*", where she underlines that "Eliot's presentation of her major characters is nuanced; she offers readers multiple ways of understanding their behaviour not only in relation to their individual temperaments but also in relation to the social web that connects and affects them all" (112), that induces, in fact, the reader to sympathise with them. Further, the narrator aims to show the universalities of human sufferings, tragedies and issues exemplified by the young Dorothea's emotional affliction. For my part, I present the novel's narrator as "a social-scientist" who examines in-depth the Middlemarch society and, in effect, the entire world as a mere experiment. And subsequently, presenting gender inequality as an oppressive system that promotes injustice, discrimination and persecution. On that

account, we can draw the inference that Eliot in her novel, seeks above all to eradicate these urgent human problems, making, thus, of the world a better place.

Another key point is that, the narrator sets herself in the position of a knowledgeable historian, having not only a profound psychological insight on the novel's characters but also full details about the occurrences in the small town of Middlemarch. Indeed, the narrator relates herself, in the first place to Henry Fielding, presenting him as a forerunner of the novelistic tradition that she carries out. Declaring "A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself" (117). Accordingly, just like Fielding, Eliot's narrator designates herself a historian saying "Fielding lived when the days were longer for ... we belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house" (117). Eliot is, thus, a historian in the manner Fielding has been. Indeed, by bringing us back, I mean around one hundred twenty years prior to Eliot's novel, he invites us in turn to meet up with his epoch. So does Eliot's novel, providing us with the history of "provincial life".

In short, Eliot mentions Fielding as a great historian, whose tradition influenced her work. In the same way, Eliot's narrator interacts with her readers all in a personable tone displayed in her using first-person pronoun: "I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven." (117)

I take this short and above passage, in fact, as an evidence of the narrator's wisdom, good nature and intelligence trying to give significance and meaning to her work, or shall I say "women's work" which has been for so long considered of so little importance. At the same time, it is apparent that the narrator feels close and sympathizes with her characters, exhibited in her trial to save them from severe judgements by readers

and often through using a subtle irony to reversal our impression. On this point, her indulgence towards a character like Mr Casaubon widely criticized by other characters confessing to her readers “For my part”, “I am very sorry for him” (232), supports our statement. In point of fact, the opening of chapter Forty, where she begins by saying that “it is often necessary to change our place and examine a particular mixture or group at some distance from the point where the movement we are interested in is set up” (329). Of course, means that it is wiser to examine things at close quarters rather than from a distance, hence, this closeness is exhibited in her declaring “The group I am moving towards is at Caleb Garth’s breakfast-table” (329). As it happened to be, the narrator feels somehow close to the Garths. In that, by moving towards them, the narrator in my sense intends to give a deeper-insight about this family that she highly esteems. But also, as Eugene Goodheart argues, it reveals “a desire to allow all voices, especially those of the repressed, to express themselves. From their different perspectives” (555). However, a question imposes itself, who happens to be the narrator?

Veritably, one of the most important voices in the novel is the narrator’s voice, her perspective, in fact, was given priority. While other novels narrator’s gender is often unfixed or unspecified, as such, it returns us by default to suppose that he is a male. But I could say that it is not the case of *Middlemarch*. So, who is the narrator? Scholars and readers of *Middlemarch*, in reality, couldn’t agree about the novel’s narrator’s identity. However, after having read integrally the novel, as well as basing on the evident results of my analysis of *Middlemarch* I attribute the narrator’s voice to Eliot herself. Furthermore, leaning on Edward Dowden’s suggestion that “the narrator should be seen as the author’s second self”, confirms my point of view. Since the narrator is, to a great extent, knowing of the character’s complex ideas, reflections and feelings of their moral qualities, their positive or negative traits and is able to give every detail about the story, standing as an

observer and knowing watcher, which distinguishes the novel's narrator as "an omniscient narrator." This fact, hence, strengthens the association of Eliot with her own narrator, for, she is the unique person able to hold "an omniscient" knowledge of her fictional world. The narrator, of course, knows the whole story from the very beginning as she starts narrating, but she chooses to reveal at first only partial details in order to maintain uncertainty, mystery and secrecy. Setting herself consciously, then, in a particular literary tradition that the narrator acclaims in the opening of chapter fifteen "a historian", referring to herself.

Besides, the narrator carries Eliot's strong sense of morality and perspectives reaffirmed all along her writing as it was mentioned by Beverly Park Rilett in that Eliot affirms that "art should generate a sense of sympathy in our fellow erring humans" (114). Likewise, Eliot's philosophy in *Middlemarch* is further displayed through her sentiments and ambition for social justice and social equality as well as her aspiration to make of the world a better place. For that Eliot writes "What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other" (603-604). In fact, by transmitting the life experiences of a "specific web of characters" she, thus, recognizes the complexity of human being's existence and reality, for that reason she reminds that "the fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers may find their long-awaited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval" (684).

In addition, the narrator is not afraid of showing her critical stance towards some of the novel's character's attitudes, and exposes their hypocrite frame of mind. Since, it is apparent that both men and women of *Middlemarch* gladden and find amusement about other's misery, distress or agony and point up their sins, as it happened, the "gossip about Bulstrode spread through *Middlemarch* like the smell of fire" (591). In fact, the narrator's

depiction of the Bulstrode's scandal emphasizes her point, highlighting the mean-spiritedness, bitterness and the ignorance of the Middlemarchers who, meanwhile, think of themselves as being of principle, upright and religious people but it only brings to notice their hypocrisy.

In like manner, the narrator in chapter fifty-six further denounces the ignorance of the inhabitants of the small town of Middlemarch as an affirmation of provincial ignorance stating that "the human mind in that grassy corner had not the proverbial tendency to admire the unknown, holding rather that it was likely to be against the poor man" (465). Nevertheless, their attitude is justified. Indeed, the unknown becomes frightening when hardship and misery is all what we know of life. Hence, fearing change becomes legitimate. Also, the narrator reveals that Reform was highly distrusted recounting that "Even the rumour of reform had not yet excited any millennial expectations in Frick there being no definite promise in it ... Reform seemed on a footing with the bragging of pedlars, which was a hint for distrust to every knowing person" (455). Yet, it is clear that the narrator is in favour of reform, and wants to entail a change in society. And here, I think that the interests of the narrator intersect with those of Eliot as she was conscious that the current society requires reforms in every sphere and by current I refer to (the novel's early setting from the late 1820 and early 1830 to the time of its publication in the 1870s). For this reason, the character of Lydgate who craves for reform and aspires to somehow revolutionize the medical field gives credence to our belief in that Eliot supports change and, of course, for the well-being of the nineteenth century population and I can add for the entire world's population too. Further, in chapter fifty-four the narrator reflects on Will's complex thought observing that "Will never quite knew how it was that he saved himself from falling down at her feet ... He used to say that the horrible hue and surface of her crape dress was most likely the sufficient controlling

force” (446). But I shall argue, to whom this statement was referring? And to whom he used to say that? Is it referring to the narrator or to Eliot herself? I can say that it is intended for both, as the narrator, in reality, in that precise statement is making allusion to her person including Eliot. In implying that there is a kind of gap separating the moment of the reflection and that of writing signifies that the narrator was knowledgeable about her characters and their fates during that forty-years space, and that now she is reporting the story in retrospect, who, then, knows her characters better than Eliot?

As there are too many affinities between Eliot’s standpoint and philosophy with the narrator’s voice that can’t be ignored, and we observe Eliot’s strong moralism echoed in the voice of the narrator as well as her constant reflection to herself linked to that of the author throughout the novel, we can, thus, officially approve that the voice of the narrator is that of Eliot herself.

Another point about the novel’s narrator, is that she exhibits a sense of humour and often depicts her characters with irony and comments on their behaviours or reflections in a sarcastic tone though being somehow indulgent. As when making remarks on Casaubon’s recent presentiment of being not very well-liked noting that “a strong reason to be added, which he had not taken explicitly into account – namely, that he was not unmixedly adorable. He suspected this, however, as he suspected other things, without confessing it” (346). The irony in this passage, in fact, lies on Casaubon’s belated suspicion that he was neither adorable nor liked, a thing that is plain and, likewise, a shared opinion that he should have guessed earlier. Actually, the simple use of the word adorable to describe the uncaring and selfish Mr Casaubon is a paradox on itself. It is, thus, certain that Eliot has satirical penchant, this tendency and faculty of making satirical comments and comic reflection as a gentler way of laughing at human foibles.

2. The Depiction of Female Characters and Gender Roles in the Novel:

With a large cast of characters, women in *Middlemarch* have a substantial role; they are as well the centre of the novel's plot. In view of, the fictional town of Middlemarch during the first half of the nineteenth century, when conventional and stereotypical gender roles were rigidly and tightly binding, women were painted in a standard and idealistic portrait often with a stipulated and prescribed norms, restricting this way their freedom of choice as well as narrowing their liberty of action. As it happened, women were constricted by the dichotomies that prescribed to each sex its place and role in society and thus men in the public life of business and socialization, while women to the domestic life of household and the care of the family.

The opening lines of the novel, in fact, more precisely in "The Prelude", Eliot begins by describing St Theresa's idealism and her "passionate ideal nature demanded an epic life." In like manner, she praises St Theresa's deeds for the human well-fare specifying that she lived three hundred years prior to the novel's time. On the other hand, Eliot affirms that St Theresa was not one and only one, but rather "Many Thesas have been born" who for their part couldn't achieve an epic life and meet public recognition, merely because of "the meanness of opportunity," due to the social conditions that inhibited them from flourishing, as they "were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul." Likewise, she invites us in a clever subtle way to reconsider the set of habitual and conventional portrayal, representation and characterization of women because "the limits of variation are wider than anyone would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse" (4). Correspondingly, she writes "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 centring in some long-recognizable deed” (4). Referring, of course, to Dorothea.

In the following page of the novel, comes the first chapter where Eliot had inserted a particular verse of poetry of “Beaumont and Fletcher” which translates the potent and prevailing gender issues of the day, stating “Since I can do no good because a woman / Reach constantly at something that is near it” (5). We are, then, immediately introduced to the older Miss Brooke who had “that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress” (5). Singularly, Dorothea a young and plain girl who is compared to St Theresa and even to “the blessed virgin” (5). Justifiably, one might be astonished of the comparison of the *Middlemarch* protagonist Dorothea Brooke to these pure women, but over the course of reading the novel the similarity becomes apparent. Without doubt, when we get deeper in knowing Dorothea’s character we learn that “This young creature has a heart large enough for the virgin Mary” (632).

Dorothea, equally, is devotedly in the service of others and ardently aiming to change the life of people for the better as she expresses “I should like to make life beautiful – I mean everybody’s life” (182). It is, further, manifested in “the infant school which she had set going in the village” (8). Just as St Theresa, Dorothea seeks to lead an epic life and desires to achieve something important for the good sake of humanity. This idealistic, ambitious and virtuous young woman of only nineteen, whose ardent and stubborn character intersects with her sincerity and good nature. She is earnest of accomplishing meaningful deeds that would do good for people around her, as well as helping the less fortunate. That being so, Dorothea’s philanthropic and compassionate nature drives her to use the money she possesses for helping others as when she gave a financial aid to finance her friend’s hospital Lydgate; affirming “what are we doing with our money ... My own money buys me nothing than an uneasy conscience” (307). As

demonstrated, the novel begins with the achievements of St Theresa, and conversely ends with a passage about Dorothea's "but the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (688). This passage is, in fact, the final of the book, suggesting that both St Theresa and Dorothea have been highly effective in helping others each in her own way. Despite remaining in the shadows and not granting the public recognition, Dorothea's accomplishments still matter as she managed to help people around her and affect positively their lives, her boundless quest for social justice and social change as well as her moral depth make of her "a provincial St Theresa".

In fact, we have been initiated early in the novel to Miss Brooke's vocation, which consists in designing plans allowing to build finer cottages for the tenant farmers residing on her uncle's land that would, of course, make life easier for these poor tenants. To be sure, Dorothea is a skilled, intelligent and accomplished girl able to make good plans for buildings, truly "a kind of work which she delighted in" (8). Even people around her could recognize that talent of her for plans, as it was exclaimed by Sir James Chettam "you had the best notion in the world of a plan for cottages" (25), and yet, it was "quite wonderful for a young lady he thought" (25). These constrictions, in fact, based on gender restricted her from fully prospering in her social life in addition to inhibiting her from successfully performing her vocation, that she might have been by then a competent architect, as she recognizes herself "I shall think I am a great architect, if I have not got incompatible stairs and fire places" (12). Instead of being an architect, she is now not even sure if she had designed compatible stairs and fire places quiet sad for such a brilliant girl and a bright mind. Indeed, "Poor Dorothea" as the narrator often remarks, she aspired

for far more than could be allowed for a woman at that time. Hence, this sends us back to the lines of verse that Eliot chose to include in her first chapter and signifies that Miss Brooke as saintly as she could be, it was impossible for her to achieve something greater because she is a woman.

Still, Dorothea's ardent spirit and strong personality of a stubborn kind makes it hard for her to conform to the set of gender restrictive norms imposed on her gender, as women's work at her time was undervalued and marginalized their contribution in the society was unimportant and turned most importantly around the domestic sphere, in that Dorothea wanted to set herself out of her society's expectations on females. For that, Eliot comments:

For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she do? – she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgements of a discursive mouse. (23)

As shown, Dorothea's repressed desires and impulse to be something greater than the role that her society has prescribed for her, always requesting of females, characteristics and mannerisms more suitable for their gender, which of course, naturally embodies feminine qualities of sensitivity, beauty and docility alienated her from herself. On that account, we can refer to Dorothea as a character oppressed by her gender as well as the gender roles of her society that reinforces the social, political economic and psychological subjugation of women and keeps them trapped in domesticity and passivity, justifying it, for the most part, as being more appropriate or suitable for a woman.

We learn in the novel that Dorothea and her sister Celia were orphans living under their uncle Mr Brooke's tutelage, however this latter had been widely criticised by the Middlemarch community "for not securing some middle-aged lady as a guide and companion for his nieces" (8), as it was considered to be the main force behind Dorothea's peculiarities of character and bad temperament. As a result, she was seen as embodying "masculine traits," in that manner, Eliot's sarcastic comment covering Dorothea's defiant personality which the neighbourhood considered as being unusual and odd for a woman arguing "how could Dorothea not marry? – a girl so handsome and with such prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love for extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer, or even might lead her at last to refuse all offers" (7). As, such a wife "might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of the income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship" (7). We can understand up to this point that the nineteenth Victorian society, and most particularly the provincial societies were based on unequal relationship between men and women, favouring the male point of view and promoting their perspectives in the behalf of women who in their turn were "expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on" (7). Eliot through this passage underlines the unjust favouritism towards men and the ruling of society according to male values. But, the character of Dorothea transcends those norms and is rather a strong woman with strong opinions that she defends with in ardent and committed ways.

To a fault, women in the nineteenth century England were deprived of a higher education, mainly because of social impediments which prevented them from going to college. Indeed, this issue had also been raised by Virginia Woolf, denouncing the fact

that, women were given a lesser education than men, and are subject to unfavourable conditions compared to their male counterparts limiting this way their opportunities in life. We can relate this fact to Dorothea's situation who couldn't make of her vocation in which she had great delight, or despite of her intellectual potential and creativity a life-career and achieve self-fulfilment, as professional careers at that time were exclusively a male's domain, obstructing her, this way, from accomplishing an important achievement on her own. As a result, she is induced, to seek for complete knowledge in a marriage with a faded scholar of an advanced age thinking naively that it would end her struggle against the narrow teaching imposed upon her by the simple fact of being "a woman." Hence, thinking of her that by marrying an older and learned man she would certainly "learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by" (23). As a twenty-first century reader, I could say that these unjust social constrictions that hindered women as brilliant as Dorothea from succeeding independently in life is such a pity.

Therefore, Eliot condemns "this meanness of opportunity" emphasizing that it is "a tragic failure" (3). As these ardent women such as Dorothea "with dim lights and tangled circumstance tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness" (3). Hence, in a patriarchal society, the aspirations of women are considered merely "a common yearning of womanhood" throwing their dreams into oblivion and considering their desires as valueless, as Eliot affirms "Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and a common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as laps" (3). This reveals, in fact, not only the set of social restrictions ordained on women, but also that in the patriarchal setting of *Middlemarch* that tends to underrepresent women's work and contribution in society. To be sure, it is grounded in the dichotomy of Public/private sphere where according to George Ritzer and Michael J.

Ryan the “patriarchal ideology divides women’s work into public and private sphere and assigns to women responsibility in the private sphere” (223). On that wise, Eliot’s condemnation of the patriarchal dominance over women and the social norms restricting women from greater deeds signals the novel’s concern with gender issues as well as her alignment with the feminist perspective of gender inequality.

On the other hand, Karen Chase maintains that “the novel is rethinking sexual identity” (65). In the sense that, with the characters of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw the masculine and feminine traits are intermingling. Will is somehow distinguished as embodying feminine traits, while Dorothea is differentiated through masculine qualities. Will’s feminine characterization, lies in his effeminate mannerism he enjoys music and art, and appreciates the company of Rosamond at the point of becoming “necessary to her entertainment by his companionship in her music” (Eliot 382). Yet, with a character like Will who “doesn’t care for prestige or high pay” (Eliot 380), and is not ready for the practicalities of life, being neither responsible nor autonomous as it is his older cousin Mr. Casaubon who provides him with an allowance, and as Eliot describes him “a sort of gypsy” who “had a feeling of romance in his position” (Eliot 380), displays that “He is not shut up in his own masculinity” and that “he is kin to women, not polarized against them. Ladislaw’s position, outside money, inheritance, sharing the awkward financial dependency more often associated with women, does have the effect of reinforcing his feminisation” (Beer 159). Dorothea, for her part, is depicted as “very much with the air of a handsome boy” (Eliot 17). In that, Karen chase further explains through the characters of Dorothea and Lydgate how they transcend the sexual identity of their times:

Indeed, Dorothea and Lydgate are the two characters in whom the term “ardour” takes deep root, and in both cases it suggests a form of psychological energy that sublimates sexual energy and that can carry personality beyond the usual restrictions of gender.

Dorothea's ardour takes her beyond the region of feminine domesticity, much as Lydgate's ardour lets him escape the commonness of preoccupation with blood, furniture and women. (66)

Moreover, Dorothea Barrett suggests that Eliot's characters are androgynous, that is:

The androgyny imagery – the description of women by comparing them to men or to the masculine – contributes to monumentality by suggesting physical largeness and strength but also by suggesting that this heroine is not limited by her gender. Here George Eliot moves out of the realm of physical metaphor and suggests greater scope in qualities of mind, such as intellectually, strength of will, or bravery, in which greatness is traditionally supposed to be restricted to men. But most importantly, androgynous imagery helps in the representation of heroines as fully human agents, in the evaluation of whom gender is not nearly as central as humanity. (26)

That being so, the text does not dichotomise masculinity/femininity basing on the gender binary of male/female categories, but it rather combines masculine and feminine traits in an androgynous manner. And this aspect is illustrated by Dorothea's depiction which transcends the typical idle gentlewoman that is identifiable in the Victorian literature, we notice her character acquiring male's great qualities of mind, whereas Will Ladislaw's refined mannerism were discerned as a perfect feminine peculiarity. Lydgate, for his part, goes beyond the imagery of the gentlemanly preoccupations in wealth and women.

Be that as it may, Dorothea hates the life of a gentlewoman and wants more action in her life displayed in her saying "I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things" (Eliot 447). It is, thus, clear that she abhors being trapped in domesticity and rejects categorically the passive role of women as she wants them to do better things and be more active in shaping their lives. And was attributed masculine features.

In that, we can conclude that Eliot is criticizing the gender roles of her time and is aiming at destroying the classical images of women, implying that these latter can be as effective in the social life as men, and they can be doing significant things and achieving great deeds. In that reversal of roles, Eliot is here opposing the male's monopoly of both authority and truth, as she countered and challenged the male constructed dominant discourses which fosters stereotypical binary oppositions affiliated to each sex of male/female, active/passive, mind /Body rational/ irrational, subject object. Then, here, it is no more the case of Dorothea, she is not the feminine figure, or a passive and irrational character, it is rather, Will Ladislaw's characteristics. Hence, the case of Will Ladislaw and Dorothea can be viewed as a kind of progress beyond the feminine and masculine traditional roles.

Celia Chettham the wife of Sir James Chettam Née Celia Brooke, in contrast, was depicted as a childish and silly young lady, whose aspiration in life turn first and foremost around matrimony. In fact, Celia's innocent looking drives her to be far more appreciated by the Middlemarch community than her sister Dorothea, whose deemed too ardent and "looked very little like a devotee" (Eliot 7). Indeed, Celia had that feminine essential qualities of sensitivity, docility, and coquetry which were very appealing for the nineteenth century Provincial societies. Like that, Eliot reflects "The rural opinion about the new young ladies, even among the cottagers, was generally in favour of Celia, as being so amiable and innocent-looking, while Miss Brooke's large eyes seemed, like her religion too unseal and striking" (7). As shown the knowing and worldly-wise younger sister is discerned as being more conforming to the society's ideals of womanhood.

Be that as it may, Victorian ideals of womanhood lie on an angelically pure, virtuous and pious woman, constantly devoted to the care of her family, husband, children and household and whose life revolve essentially around religion and moral behaviour.

Women, hence, should accept their place in the sexual hierarchy and carry their duties towards their husbands, home and God with patience, uprightness and respectability. Likewise, sympathy, delicacy and sensitivity were identified as being superior feminine qualities that value, appraise and keep females in high esteem in the eyes of society. To be sure, Celia incarnated all those aspects that made of her a perfect and exemplary young woman.

That being so, Beverly Park Rilett described Celia as being “more practical”, “who unabashedly wants and seeks pleasure in her life and doubts that female self-sacrifice is necessarily a virtue” (111). So far, Celia was usually spoken of as having more “common-sense” (Eliot 5), by comparison to Dorothea’s theoretic mind “yearned by its nature”, as “she was enamoured by intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects” (6). Celia, for her part, thought of her sister as being “inconsistent”, as for her choice to marry the much Older reverend Casaubon, of whom she exclaimed “How very ugly Mr Casaubon is!”, this detail, hence, reveals Celia’s artificial conception of people and the world, but we cannot say that she is totally wrong about her judgement of him though! However, Dorothea met this poor opinion of her sister in a man for whom she has a growing interest by replying “it is so painful in you, Celia, that you will look at human beings as they were merely animals with a toilette, and never see the great soul in a man’s face” (16). Yet, Celia doubted him having a such quality voicing “has Mr Casaubon a great soul?”, a remark that the narrator comments as being “not without a touch of naïve malice” (16).

In the light of Celia’s character, whom we’ve seen as embodying the ideally feminine traits and is portrayed as the perfect opposite of her sister, actually, reinforces sexual stereotypes of a superior man and inferior woman. Since, Celia is quite content with her role as a gentlewoman, she does not have any goal in life or a vocation beyond

that of being well-married. She, ends up, indeed, marrying a man of her rank, a wealthy land owner possessing the title of a baronet, that her sister previously rejected. Being well-born, and being well-married and having a high social standing, Celia doesn't aspire for more or even tries to do something important in life, even with a good social position it never occurs to her that she could achieve greater deeds for herself and for people around her. She doesn't even share Dorothea's yearning for noble deeds though, having the ability to improve other's lives as she had money and her husband has lands and there were many poor people who inhabited and worked that land. As a landlord at that time made their money by renting cottages and lands to tenant farmers, who farmed the lands. She, as expected, hides behind her husband and takes no social responsibility, as she is only a female, what ought she do above the limits of wifedom and motherhood? Indeed, it is what Eliot ironically suggests, implying that she is a passive and dependent woman who doesn't try to have a relevant role in society and shape her life more, in order to do something on her own and be independent. So, as her husband the baronet often thought "A man's mind – what there is for it – has always the advantage of being masculine – as the smallest birch-tree is of higher kind than the most soaring palm – and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality" (17). And this short passage, I believe, supports our statement on the Victorian state of mind who believe in a superior man and inferior woman.

Women, indeed, were kept home and regarded as predestined for motherhood, since domesticity and maternity were judged by society as a whole to be the main object of female's emotional fulfilment and their major achievement in life. And the acknowledged identities were those of a mother, daughter, sister, wife, or widow, solely in relation to a male figure a father, brother, husband or son it may be, they were constantly in need of the tutelage of their male partners and could not rely on themselves. Equally,

when their husbands were running a small business or a prosperous affaire, women's contribution was never required or even needless and profitless, their assigned mission, in the meantime, was to choose the furniture of the house, the clothing of the children and their schooling, in addition to decide on the external appearance the family would convey. After all, the state of passivity and dependency of the "woman" during the Victorian period influenced their life choices and experiences in the home, in the street as well as in the workplace. We can, absolutely, relate this to Celia's situation who forged an identity uniquely in relation to male figures first as the niece of Mr Brooke then as Chettam's wife. Her suppressed identity, thus, maintains and encourages the binary oppositions of the sexes, as a female she accepted to be passive while her husband is active in shaping their lives, he is independent and she is dependent on him, he is the subject and she is the object of her man's desires, and while he appeared to be a powerful man with a high standing in society she only has what this latter procures, she accents, thus, to her assigned identity as only a body when her husband represents the mind. Without doubt, Celia is a female who exists only as shadow of her male patriarch and within the limits of what her society has prescribed for her. Though the society of the time idealized her, Eliot for her part, seems not to approve Celia's character and criticises her passivity as well as her acceptance of the society's expectations of women, she is often described as being foolish and silly and is reflected on in derisory terms for not defying conventional structures and countering the dominant patriarchal ideologies of her time that would drive her to perform significant accomplishments. In view of, female subjectivity, Kristin Brady throws light on the Victorian gender stratification that is;

From a nineteenth century equation of women with her reproductive organs that was based on a scientific model of incommensurable sexual difference. Such a definition, which admitted no commonality between genders, naturalized – and thus justified – the already existing social and cultural differences between the

sexes. If women were the heart (that is to say, uterus) in relation to the man's head (that is to say, brain), then the separate spheres of the man's public world and the woman's domestic world were merely social manifestations of essentials, natural difference. To unsettle these oppositions was to tamper with nature itself. (2)

Rosamond Vincy for her part, the elder daughter of the town's mayor is the beauty of Middlemarch, a gorgeous young lady of "a nymph-like figure and pure blondness", a highly accomplished woman who is admitted to be "the flower of Mrs Lemon's school" (Eliot 79). Again, Mrs Lemon herself "had always held up Miss Vincy as an example", "no pupil, she said exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional" (Eliot 79), therefore, Eliot comments "The first vision of Rosamond would have been enough with most judges to dispel any prejudice excited by Mrs Lemon's praise" (79). Like so, this young blossoming flower meets the Middlemarcher's admiration, certainly with "a hair of infantile fairness, neither flaxen nor yellow ... with eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings ... and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner ... Only a few of children in Middlemarch looked blond by the side of Rosamond, and the slim figure displayed by her riding-habit had delicate undulations" (92), making of her an example of femininity, and having all the virtues of a perfect female.

In fact, "most men of Middlemarch, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called her an angel" (Eliot 93). Really, with that kind of beauty of the rare sort, "her excellent taste in costume", as Eliot states "made only part of her charm." Whereas, the education she received from Mrs Lemon's finishing school, one of the most important in the country where "the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female – even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a

carriage” (Eliot 79), drives her to be every man’s ideal of womanhood. Nevertheless, this lady is somehow obsessed by class and is exceedingly preoccupied by means of elevating her social status, taking aristocratic airs, and requesting of life to be more than the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. Rosamond, indeed, as Beverly Park Rilett underlines “knows exactly the kind of life she wants to lead – comfortable, respected, and far from Middlemarch” (109).

Yet, by deepening in the reading of the novel, we understand that Eliot does not approve Rosamond’s character, for being so selfish, pretentious and artificial only caring for her own person. While Ruth Robbins in a whole chapter entitled “*Will the Real Feminist Theory Please Stand Up?*” dedicated to the feminist theory initially published within Julian Wolfreys book entitled *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary* underlines that Rosamond’s education consists almost entirely in “learning the deportment of femininity” (52). However, Ruth also conveys that Eliot tends to imply that sympathy “cannot be taught in Mrs Lemon’s school,” a thing that shows the author’s disagreement with Mrs Lemon’s teaching. Further, always, according to Ruth Robbins Rosamond “has acquired knowledge but has no idea what to do with it; has learned to speak well but has nothing to say”, describing her as being extremely selfish which in her sense “nearly destroys her husband, for she is incapable of sympathy with his intellectual pursuits” (52). Indeed, we can deduce that Rosamond has only “been taught to catch a man” (Robbins 52).

Notwithstanding, if we follow Robbin’s criticism of Rosamond we should understand that she might be the novel’s antagonist, while Dorothea is the protagonist. However, Eliot does not make of Rosamond a villain. She is even inspiring sympathy and compassion according to the author’s comments which justify some of her conducts as the only solace for a woman who doesn’t have the faculty to change her own situation and

fate as she is neither well born nor from the favoured gender, hence Rosamond is a character oppressed by both her gender and her class. In fact, what I as a twenty-first century reader have to say for her defence is that we mustn't forget that women during the Victorian age were denied from education and vocation, since motherhood was believed by the time's society at large to be a natural and biological female state, so they fear if these latter are educated, they will no longer desire to be mothers, and, thus, not only the family but all the human race is likely to be endangered. Indeed, these social constraints inhibited Victorian women from flourishing in the public domains. This is in my sense what pushed women like Rosamond to try to elevate their social ladder by marrying some powerful men, and gaining power in their turn via their husbands. So, the only mean to achieve this state is to have a gentlewomanly education. Likewise, we have to emphasize that at that time a woman couldn't achieve power on her own. Hence, this can justify Mrs Lemon's teaching and training for young ladies that would certainly allow them to have a better position in society, by way of catching a man that can afford that.

Though, Rosamond's education, is certainly a flawed one as it doesn't introduce her to the practicalities of life and doesn't learn what she really needs in order to be an effective member of society, yet it is what granted her the entrance to the aristocratic world, and secured her the life she wants. Just the same, it is that exquisite manners and that propriety of speech, that delicacy, that innocent looking and exceptional musical execution offered by her education, that first attracted Lydgate, "She is grace itself" he says to himself, "She is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: She ought to produce the effect of exquisite music" (Eliot 77).

If truth to be told, Victorians hold women to be "natural home-makers and home-breakers", meaning that a woman who follows the moral standards and the code of behaviour, who completes her duty towards her home and society at large and whose

commitment for her husband and children is never-ending, and is lively at the service of others is, in effect, nothing but a manifestation of her moral superiority. Whereas a woman who leads a life of leisure, pleasure and immorality, and doesn't perform her role as a helpmeet and a domestic manager, who is not devoted for the well-being of her family, is deemed immoral and sinner since she goes beyond the society's moral values and transcends the law of God. I expect that this aspect turned Rosamond for a disagreeable character and harshened judgements about her behaviour while, in my sense she is only trying to defend what is the dearest to her, I mean her personal comfort as well as her happiness. Though today, it might seem a natural order of things. yet I am pretty sure that many women would have been charged as guilty for seeking first their own interests before that of their husbands, as Rosamond.

As expected, Dorothea Brooke is an ideal of womanhood in Eliot's novel and a symbol of moral superiority, while Rosamond appears as embodying those seductive and appealing womanly sexual virtues and is deemed a perfect spectacle of femininity. Despite that the author exalts Dorothea's qualities of mind over Rosamond's feminine and sexual attributes that Eliot refuses, but as Kathleen Blake argues the narrator is not as harsh as it seems toward Rosamond. Still, if we compare Celia Brooke to Rosamond Vincy, we find out that both of these ladies are somehow mocked and depicted as silly and childish, nonetheless, Celia is far more appreciated. Now a question that imposes itself, is Celia really better than Rosamond or she is approved because she is well born and comes from an aristocratic milieu? Or she is far more appreciated because she doesn't disappoint the expectations of her husband unlike Rosamond who refuses to satisfy his desires and dreams at the expense of her own, and doesn't bend on her knees to obey his will at the behalf of her own happiness? Well, opinions may differ on this point, even among critics, some may see in that a quality in Rosamond's strong personality, which I myself join in,

while others may think it very egoistical. Yet, what I at least can confirm is that, due to her education and her refusal to submit to her patriarchal oppressor (her husband Lydgate) Rosamond ends up quite content with her life.

I also find in the deprecation of Rosamond's feminine traits from her handsome looking and exquisite manners to her playful habits and lack of seriousness a kind of denial of sexuality a thing for which the Victorian era was distinguished. Indeed, this total rejection of sexuality, entailed a sexual stereotype, involving most particularly, respectable and reputable middle- and upper-class women who were delighted, proud and satisfied about how slightly they knew about their sexuality and even on their own bodies. With this in mind, the nineteenth century society got along with the sexual double standard, that was eventually never disputed before the end of the century, stereotypically stipulating that women were exempted from sexual desire, they adhere, consent and have recourse to sexuality only to please their husbands, who needed and required sex. Although this may be partially true, however, the sexual double standard completely ousts and erases "female sexuality", fostering instead "female passivity." But, I could say that Rosamond's character defied all stereotypes, and in reverse claimed an active sexuality and even an appetite for pleasure and amusement without self-restraint going, thus, beyond what was allowed for women at her time, a thing that condemned her as immoral.

Another female character in *Middlemarch* is the young Miss Garth. Mary Garth, on the contrary of the town's beauty Rosamond is a young lady who had "the aspect of an ordinary sinner; she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues" (Eliot 93). Yet, this girl as plain as she may be, stands as the moral figure of the novel. In truth, Eliot, reflects on Mary's character that "Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty" (93), in a sense that her ordinary

appearance according to the author, doesn't make of her an inferior woman. Besides, she is unencumbered by class pretensions, or have in view aristocratic expectations. Mary, indeed is not presented as an idle gentlewoman whose priority in life is to gain wealth and social status in difference to Rosamond. Mary's family, though, not literally poor, is in strained circumstances they belong, in fact, to the lower middle-class. She is, therefore, constrained to work in order to give a financial aid for her family.

Like so, Mary is depicted as a girl who works for her bread, obliged by circumstances to work at an early age which in my opinion achieved her somehow independence and self-reliance in contrast to other female characters. To be sure, instead of being a burden as a passive female, Mary chooses to make a huge contribution in the financial matters supporting her family and helping both her father and mother in assisting her siblings. For that reason, Mary's moral superiority is very much admired by the narrator, as she is in the least hypocrite or artificial, complimenting her inner moral goodness by delineating that "honesty, truth telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue" (Eliot 93).

Moreover, "she never tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behalf" (Eliot 93), this passage exhibits, in fact, Mary's strong sense of moralism and her truth telling virtue that makes of her a unique character who is not afraid to offend when truth is required. She is, thus, the voice condemning the hypocrisy and artificiality of the Victorian society, and the unequitable social stratifications from gender to class hierarchies that produces an unjust layering of society, extremely biased and preferential, that fosters, as a result, unjustifiable inequalities at large.

Mary is, indeed, the plain girl who detested the idleness and pretentiousness of the aristocracy, and especially of gentlewomen just as Eliot did, and always criticised the

passivity of these women. She is, thus, plenty satisfied with her life as a governess without much focusing on her economic precarious state, she enjoys her active role and her contribution as an effective member of society. Undeniably this young girl of only twenty-two of age has a strong personality, and not in the least limited by the boundaries of her gender. Her strong character is advocated in her affirming “There is no question of liking at present ... I am not magnanimous enough to like people who speak to me without seeming to see me” (Eliot 94).

Nevertheless, this sharp character, made of Mary a less pleasant lady than Rosamond will ever be, except for those who really knew her admirable qualities of mind. As, for the Victorian society, a marriageable lady should not “interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection” (Eliot 6). For her entourage, Mary is a bit rebellious for a young lady, that should be instead submissive, spiritless and compliant to her prescribed role. Mary’s resistance to the set of Victorian norms submitting women to the authority of the patriarchy is not really approved among members of the Middlemarch community, she is, thus, not the perfect woman in the eyes of the Middlemarchers. On that wise, Mary is perceived as a forceful character, since “If you made her a smile she would show you perfect little teeth; if you made her angry, she would not rise her voice, but would probably say one of the bitterest things you have ever tasted the flavour of; if you did her a kindness, she would never forget it” (Eliot 336).

As such, Dorothea and Rosamond according to Nicole M. Coonradt in her article entitled “*Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters in George Eliot’s Middlemarch*” exemplify “two extremes of female Victorian feminine types” (16), while Mary is somehow situated in the middle of this trio of female characters. It is, thus, preferable that we examined this trio of female characters vividly present in Eliot’s text, in

order to better understand their role and depiction in the novel which somehow reflects the main ideologies that the Victorian society held of women, as well as the positioning of these same women within their own society, especially if the various and different aspects of female characters in the novel, might be considered as a realistic portrayal which stayed faithful to reality. Likewise, considering Mary as the “golden mean” or “happy medium” (Coonradt 16), is giving Mary according to Coonradt “greater significance than usual not only in how readers view her, but also as Eliot likely intended for us to view her”(16).

Actually, many critics find affinities between Dorothea, the central figure of the novel and Eliot herself. As Coonradt specifies “critics have often connected Dorothea with her creator” (16), and considered Dorothea’s persona as a reflection of that of Eliot in a sense that we can see some of the similarities scrolling before our eyes from the similitude of their dark beauty to the intellectual likeness between Eliot and her created character, in a way that both of them “wished to be wise” and each has gone through a process of self-education. Yet, I in another side, find parallels between Mary Garth and Eliot. According to my own analysis of the novel, I find more affinities between these two than between any other characters. Connecting Eliot to Mary is far from being insignificant, as “evidence will demonstrate, that Mary makes a much better choice for a parallel study specifically in her role as early Victorian writer” (Coonradt16).

Indeed, in reconsidering what has beforehand been passed over, Mary is, in fact, the merging of two opposite societal types resulting from Dorothea and Rosamond. She is sympathetically depicted all along the story, presented as an honest, hardworking and compassionate person, never resolved to gossip or give attention to other’s opinions just as Eliot. Mary, in the same way as our author might be a foreground for a better future for women, having a hand on an eventual reform for women’s conditions especially in her role as a female writer, since at the end of the novel we learn that she ends up writing

children stories. This may underline too an affinity between Mary and Eliot, though it is a bit decreasing in importance for Eliot's part, but it is still an improvement for women as they are now having a vocation and a life career, which is a kind of empowerment.

Furthermore, we come to notice in Mary's personage Eliot's sense of humour, they never take things too seriously even in raising crucial issues for humanity. Using a subtle irony and satirical picturing of the sad reality of human life, they thereby, laugh at human foibles, and eventually at themselves, a thing evidenced in our narrator's comment on Mary that "when she was in a good mood she had humour enough to laugh at herself" (Eliot 93). However, Mary is a neglected character, no one seems to really notice her even among critics she doesn't seem to be the core of discussions in contrast to Dorothea and Rosamond. Hence, is she so plain that we think she doesn't deserve to be discussed? Well, for my part, it is the complete opposite, I should like to bring her to light, and attract attention on this beautiful creature, Eliot's brilliant creature who stands in opposition to the novel's other noticeable women. I, accordingly, absolutely assent to Coonradt claim of giving more importance to Mary's role as a significant ingredient in order to understand Eliot's work, since "we can understand better Eliot's realism, as Mary demonstrates the realistic success of an early Victorian woman" (Coonradt 18). Thus, in my research work I should offer space to discuss Mary's feminist callings by the side of other feminist characters, for as Hilda Hollis in a recent article explains "Most critics today would exercise extreme caution in understanding Dorothea, or even Mary Garth, in *Middlemarch* as a mouthpiece for Eliot's view of women's role (157). It is, thus, through Mary's personage, that Eliot's personal concern with female authorship is the most palpable. And for all those reasons Mary "deserves greater scholarly attention than she has previously been accorded" (Coonradt18).

In that fashion, Eliot as a female author writing under a male pseudonym, pays a great deal of attention to women and women's roles under a patriarchal climate. Her stance, though sometimes not really explicit, is in favour of women, not of course in a doctrinaire, biased and intolerant way, but in a subtler and intelligent scheme, denouncing the ongoing injustices and certifying that present conventions and traditions are flawed, faulty and unsuitable and, therefore, need change. In her cutting remark that "A man's mind – what there is for it – has always the advantage of being masculine" (17), is a clear criticism of the masculine privilege. Though, elsewhere it is more implicit, but she often held pro-women statements and a "revendication" for their rights, maybe not in the way her feminist detractors wants her to, but I can distinguish a real interest for women's conditions in her writings. In a thought-provoking manner Eliot is requesting justice for women, and carries feminist thought.

Conclusion

Indeed, feminism is an idealist approach in a sense that it shapes a naturally more unbiased world. But, it remains always in touch with reality. It suggests that the world should change, and, certainly, could change if we could think of an in-depth, all-embracing way of taking over present ongoing and urgent problems. We need, thus, rethinking old problems (Whether Dorothea for example, is the only central figure of the novel? and is she showing Feminist yearnings and pursuits? Or simply is she the unique character presenting a yearning for change?) or to other more definite, direct and explicit problems existing in the real world, in order to find out new responses, all-inclusive, I mean of the different categories of people present in our societies today.

General Conclusion

Middlemarch is a work of great realism which faithfully portrays past events that occurred forty years preceding its publication, and goes far back to a time where fixed and dominant systems organized, structured and shaped society in a rigid conservatism. Hence, the position of women during this era was quite uneasy as they experienced many restrictive norms and conventions that narrowed their social independence. Indeed, with a high example for women like Queen Victoria, labelled “the mother of the nation”, who appeared as an icon of domesticity and femininity during the nineteenth century, presenting the “home” as a domestic, intimate, safe, and cosy space. Created, as a consequence, a nation worshipping the idea of a feminine figure whose life revolved most of all around respectability, motherhood and family.

As a matter of fact, most of Victorian male novelists depicted a perfect world in which submissive, passive and dependant females lived happily under man’s control, in truth, as the feminist-reformer of the seventeenth century Poulain de la Barre, advocates “All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit”. Yet, Eliot in her novel reversed the stereotypical depiction of women, and contradicted the demeaning treatments and marginalization of female characters. She, in fact, pictured active women, aspiring for more than the restrictive prescribed roles their society imposed, and transmitted the anxieties these women live because of the social constraints that inhibited them from expressing themselves through creative outlets. Being denied from a higher education, and likewise, a real vocation these women are victims of the unjust gender inequalities from oppression, discrimination to sexism and various limitations on their freedom of choice. But in my sense, what makes of *Middlemarch* a unique novel and of Eliot a forerunner novelist that transcends her own time is her ability to show that women can be not only active resisters to their oppression

and subordination, but can also undermine and even break male dominance and struggle effectively against patriarchy, by way of deifying and not submitting to their oppressor's will.

In the colourless and narrowed world in which most of female characters live, they are reduced to "others", since, "everywhere, at all times, the males have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation... and Legislators, priests philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth" (De Beauvoir xiv). Nevertheless, *Middlemarch* countered the idea of an inferior women and a superior man, and in a thought provoking manner advocating the same rights and position as men. Eliot is requesting justice for women, and joins De Beauvoir in denying the status of "others", for they just as men, should be regarded as human beings. Likewise, Eliot's novel is concerned with social problems that create inequality and unhappiness, and what the novel suggests above all, is the necessity to eradicate "gender inequality" and "gender based oppression" as well as all sorts of social constrictions on women in order to emancipate these latter from their oppressive liberty, for the sake of social justice.

Indeed, it is crystal clear that Eliot sees in women's subordination to the patriarchy an urgent human problem that can affect us all as humans, and developed a philosophy that provides outlets for women, to escape their oppressive world, and hence, achieve social equality. Furthermore, *Middlemarch* denounces the hypocrisy of the Victorian society, which establishes a flawed definition and characterization of an "accomplished woman" that spotlighted the idea of an "eternal femininity." In *Middlemarch*, thus, we can recognize the universalities of women's sufferings, which are not disconnected from the human tragedy, as every woman, in each corner of the world, whatever her background can, certainly see herself echoed in one of Eliot's characters and, I shall add, identify her

own affliction within the occurrences in the novel. By the metaphor of the web, the characters of the fiction are related to the great web of the world and, hence, in giving a more active role for her female personages, Eliot implies, in turn, that women should have a greater role in society that would certainly make of the world a better Place. Accordingly, if we accept the suggestion that what all feminist theories have in common is a focus on women, then *Middlemarch* is assuredly a successful feminist work. Tackling *Middlemarch* from a feminist perspective proved that Eliot paved the way for a more structured feminism, and I recognise in her works the claims of the second-wave feminists. For all that, I can say that George Eliot is a whole world that can inspire many future pieces of research.

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ملخص

بطريقة ابداعية ولكن واقعية تأخذنا جورج إليوت إلى عالم خيالي أين تتطور شبكة من الشخصيات في فترة من التغيرات السريعة والتطور الإجتماعي. هاته الدراسة الحالية ستسلط الضوء على نموذج واسع من الشخصيات الأنثوية في ميدلمارتش والتي تناضل ضد الأبوية وترفض أن تكون آخرين برفض الخضوع في مقاومة غير فعالة ولكن فكرية و التي تنجح في ربح السلطة في عالم يحكمه سيادة الذكور و الكل من منظور نسوي معاصر.

كلمات مفتاحية: جورج إليوت - ميدلمارتش- النسوية – شخصيات أنثوية

Résumé

D'une manière créative mais réaliste, George Eliot nous prend à un monde fictif ou un réseau de personnages évolue dans une ère de changements rapides et une évolution sociale. L'étude en cours va mettre en lumière le large panel de personnages féminins de *Middlemarch*, qui luttent contre la patriarchie et refuse d'être des « autres » en rejetant la soumission dans une résistance passive mais réfléchie et qui réussissent à gagner le pouvoir dans un monde gouverné par la souveraineté masculine, le tout d'une perspective féministe contemporaine.

Mots-clé: George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, féminisme, personnages féminins