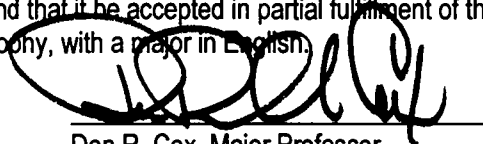


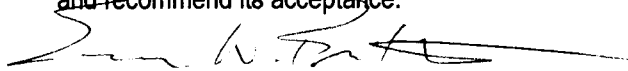
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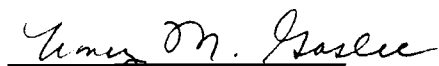


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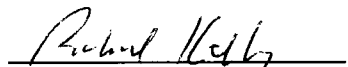
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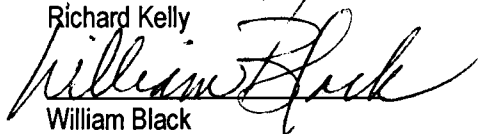
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Slaves to Fashion: Dress and the "Fallen Woman" in the Novels of George Eliot

**A dissertation presented
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English**

University of Tennessee--Knoxville

**Laurie Beth Hughes
May 1999**

For Mark and Elizabeth,
who sacrificed much

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Abstract

Mariana Valverde's article, "The Love of Finery and the Fallen Woman," explores the intimate connection Victorian moralists often made between a girl's descent into prostitution and her desire for elaborate dress. Though Valverde's analysis focuses on middle-class attempts to control working-class morality, her observation that virtue and dress were closely linked in the Victorian mind pinpoints a key association in the works of George Eliot, an author who was especially interested in investigating how women might and should live their lives.

For Eliot, the connection between a woman's failure to develop the mature quality of "moral sympathy," the ability to empathize with those around her, was often tied to an exaggerated interest in dress and appearance, an interest encouraged by women's social and financial dependence. Drawing on the writings of earlier women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller, Eliot suggests again and again in her novels that society's reluctance to educate women or to encourage their economic productivity relegates women to the position of children, creatures unable to consider the welfare of others. For Eliot, these women are "fallen," and they occupy the status typically relegated to the "fallen woman" figure in other Victorian works: they often are or become sexually promiscuous or engage in coquettish behavior and their role is often destructive.

I relate references about dress to Eliot's presentation of the "fallen woman" as presented in her novels. I assert that through these references, Eliot condemns Victorian society's acculturation of women, a process which, Eliot implies, leads specifically to women's "immorality." Eliot's denouncement of female education reflects her awareness of the social forces that limited women's ability to make moral choices. Feminine obsession with dress and appearance epitomizes these failures in both the individual and society.

I analyze the changes in Eliot's treatment of the "fallen woman" in the later novels. That Eliot moves from primarily focusing on working-class girls, who are led astray by wealthy gentlemen, to examining the issues of middle-class women who are seduced by middle-class materialism and feminine narcissism, indicates Eliot's increasing awareness of the complex forces which compelled women to "fall."

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Slaves to Fashion: Dress and the "Fallen Woman" in the Novels of George Eliot

Chapter One: Introduction

"...for there was no weakness of which she was less tolerant than feminine vanity, and the preference of ornament to utility."

George Eliot

In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach examines the pervasiveness of the image of the fallen woman in the Victorian psyche, by looking at depictions of this figure in both the visual arts and literature. Referring to Augustus Egg's 1858 trilogy of paintings titled *Past and Present*, Auerbach notes that the theme expressed in them, the "havoc wreaked by the fallen wife," "shocked its audience by animating their deepest fears of family blight" (154). In this picture of Victorian reaction, we see the force of the fallen woman figure, a force noted and exploited by nineteenth-century writers. Auerbach claims that "this groveling figure [of the fallen woman] lies at the heart of some of the most powerful literature and art the age produced" (30).

One feature of the fallen woman that Auerbach briefly alludes to concerns a possible motivation for her fall. Auerbach claims that Hetty Sorrel, George Eliot's most ostracized female, falls "because she wills to possess the social glamour and power Arthur embodies" (45). This conception of Hetty's enticement, "social glamour," encompasses a number of phenomena: freedom from work, social deference, a large home with elegant furnishings, all of which we know Arthur possesses. Yet Hetty's deepest desire is not for these particulars, but

for a much more personal item of glamour, what Mariana Valverde calls "finery." Hetty's case is not unique. Victorian moralists often linked a young girl's desire for expensive clothing to her ruin. Hetty's ambition and fall corresponds distinctively to Mariana Valverde's observations on the connection in nineteenth-century social thought between the "love of finery" and the moral degradation of the working-class woman, specifically her descent into prostitution.

Valverde's reference to George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel is appropriate and suggestive since Eliot's interest in the connection between "the love of finery" and the "fallen woman" pervades her novels. But Valverde's conflation of Eliot with other Victorian moralists overlooks some important differences in Eliot's interpretation of the morality of female display. This dissertation suggests that, in her novels, Eliot reconsiders the Victorian conception "fallenness" and its relationship to elaborate dress. As did other novelists and thinkers of her day, Eliot takes up the issues surrounding both women's vanity and women's sexual misconduct, in one way or another, in each of her novels, and she specifically focuses on "the love of finery" as inspiration of the "sexual falls" of several female characters. But Eliot's explicit treatment of the morality of fashionable dress in her novels suggests a deeper criticism than that typically offered by Victorian moralists who railed against "the love of finery." I will argue that Eliot's treatment of "the love of finery" and the "fallen woman" is infused with both sympathy for the plight of the suffering figure and with intense criticism of the society which has created her. Eliot implies that women's limited access to educational and vocational opportunities left them prey to a materialistic culture which encouraged women to sartorial self-display instead of intellectual or spiritual self-improvement. Thus, while individual women were partly responsible for their "immorality" (how much, I will discuss), society was equally responsible for failing to train them.

Before this can be demonstrated, Eliot's work on this subject needs to be grounded in its historical context. For several reasons, both the subject and metaphor of dress permeated social thought in nineteenth-century society. To begin with, tangible circumstances reinforced such a link. Michael Irwin, analyst of description and illustration in the nineteenth-century novel, points out that tangible factors contributed to the importance of clothes in the Victorian social system. According to Irwin, Victorian modesty made clothing rather than the body representative of identity, and "[i]t was quite possible that one might see nothing, technically, of a person to whom one was introduced save the area between collar and hat" (100). Though the shape of the wearer was obviously still visible, shape could be altered by dress—for women, quite a bit.¹ In addition, the clothing industry, itself, was booming in nineteenth-century England which perhaps made thinking in terms of dress and dress metaphors more important than ever.

Deborah Laycock's recent article on fashion and gender in the eighteenth century indicates another, perhaps the most important, reason that the morality of dress held such importance for the Victorians. She contends that "fashion" became associated in the eighteenth century with the rising credit economy which threatened traditional class structure, a class structure which had been partly held in place in earlier centuries by somewhat elaborate sumptuary laws. Writers supporting or attacking the new credit economy referred to women's desire for fashionable clothing as the root of the changes taking place: "More insistently,

¹ To demonstrate the way in which dress was popularly seen to determine the shape of the wearer, Valerie Steele presents a caricature entitled "Etré and Paraitre." The artist "x-rays" the apparently curvaceous body of the female subject, corseted and dressed in layers of crinolines, showing that, underneath, she is thin and small-breasted.

however, it was the fashion industry associated with women that was deemed responsible for disrupting the order maintained by sumptuary laws" (131). In the nineteenth century, a century in which class distinctions were subjected to a number of legal, economic, and political attacks, the need to maintain those distinctions through outward symbols heightened. Clothing served as an easily identifiable marker of the wearer's class and position. Women's dress gained special significance since women, particularly those from the middle class, were encouraged to represent physically and materially their husband's or family's wealth and status. This position, however, was complicated by their spiritual function as moral beacons or "angels." Appropriate dress became the outward sign of their acceptance of and proficiency in these roles.

The complex economic, social, and sexual factors which determined what dress was "appropriate" make generalities about the morality of dress in the nineteenth century particularly problematic, as Steele demonstrates; but it is safe to say that most Victorian thinkers took for granted that clothing was "an index of the mind" and "character" of the wearer. According to many Victorian thinkers, dress revealed not only a woman's sartorial interests but her moral state, as well. Steele quotes one Victorian writer: "Dress bears the same relation to the body as speech does to the brain; and therefore dress may be called the speech of the body" (132). Sarah Josepha Hale insists in the widely read *Godey's Lady's Book* that "dress and personal appearance . . . are important things. Character is displayed, yes! moral taste and goodness, or their perversion, are indicated in dress" (Theime 1).

But a crucial note of class snobbery pervades many of these criticisms. Noted fashion historian C. Willet Cunnington explains that dress was integral for Victorians in differentiating "ladies" from other women:

During [the nineteenth century] the term 'lady' became progressively more and more generous in its embrace, so that ultimately it denoted not only an inheritance but an acquired status, even including some who earned their living. But always it implied a special attitude of mind, of which correct conduct was the outward expression. This was largely symbolised by her costume, the study of which, therefore, becomes for us a guide to her mentality. (1)

Steele supports his claim:

The concept of 'gentility' played a crucial role in a society bounded at one end by a recognizable upper class and at the other by the laboring class, but which contained between these extremes a number of potentially upwardly mobile groups. . . . The rigid and complex rules governing 'appropriate' dress . . . were intended to distinguish those of genteel birth from the 'nouveaux riches' and from quasi-fashionably dressed working-class women. (138)

Simply wearing expensive dress was not enough. Because so many middle-class women were wealthier than their aristocratic counterparts ("real ladies") and thus able to dress better, extravagant display became associated with the "vulgar masses" while a certain simplicity was characteristic of "ladies." This "simplicity" only went so far, however, as those with both "wealth and status" tried to distinguish themselves from their would be imitators. Since even prostitutes could, and sometimes did, dress as "ladies," the problem of dress and status continued to be a source of great concern for Victorian thinkers (Steele 140).

For the middle-class woman who aspired to the title of "lady," dress revealed both her aspirations and her current position; through her clothing a "lady" conveyed contentment with

her own status and her worthiness to gain a higher one. Through dress, she might demonstrate her material superiority to the working-class woman, who wore very plain or second-hand clothing, and her moral superiority to aristocratic women, whose highly fashionable dress demonstrated an ornamental worthlessness. Not surprisingly, such an ambiguous display was difficult to maintain (one writer refers to it as the "Scylla and Charibdis" through which a girl had to pass) and caused considerable anxiety for women, a problem whose solution, at times, took on great moral significance as the literary and social writings of the age reflect. For example, a writer for *Peterson's* in 1861 underscores the importance of dress for Victorian "ladies":

A lady . . . is always distinguished by the unaffected simplicity of her dress, the chasteness of her ornaments, and the grace and ease of all her movements; and an elegant simplicity is real proof of taste and delicacy; and the most perfect elegance of dress appears always the most easy and the least studied. (Theime 86)

Whether all women who wore such simple dress could then be called "ladies" or whether only those of a certain class were to be so distinguished is difficult to say, but, as Judith Rowbotham notes, generalities about the effect that dress had on "ladyhood" were typical in Victorian England. Rowbotham's claim speaks volumes: "Outward appearance was the first key to judging character. For a woman to stand out from the crowd by means of dress was thus both vulgar and an indication of the act of that instinctive refinement which was considered to be part of a modest damsel of class" (40). "Damsels of class" who valued their social position, and the perceived sexual purity which that position required, needed to be concerned with "outward

appearance." Because of the difficulties associated with such an intricate symbolic display, dress became a source of genuine middle-class anxiety.

Given this kind of thinking, the Victorian's specific coupling of a certain kind of "finery" with a degree of moral laxness seems inevitable. If for no other reason, many opposed fashionable dress because prostitutes and other "kept women" often were the first to wear new or daring outfits: "The problem, as a number of Victorians saw it, was that the fashions were set by immoral women. If a woman wanted to look fashionable, she ran the risk of looking immodest" (Steele 130). Valverde notes that poor girls who belonged to pimps or madams were often so fashionably dressed that their overseers, worried that the girls would sell their clothes, had them shadowed.² Certainly, it was to the advantage of those who wished to distinguish "ladies" from prostitutes for the latter to be consistently associated with gaudy or "fashionable" clothing. Such a strategy allowed the illusion that dress might bear some true relation to status.

Fallen women were often depicted as having misunderstood, willfully or not, what was "appropriate." Very often, Victorian writers shaped answers to this particular "moral" question by examples of women's failure in regard to it. To demonstrate that "good girls" did not dress beyond their means, writers depicted "huzzies" whose desire to mimic aristocratic clothing led them into moral and economic ruin. These depictions often smacked of class-consciousness, as working-class girls were depicted as both materially spendthrift and morally licentious. Valverde argues pointedly that although an interest in clothing was considered characteristic of

² Amanda Anderson notes in her analysis of Charles Dickens' rhetoric regarding the reclamation of fallen prostitutes that a similar practice, of owning inmates' clothing to prevent their running off, was practiced at Urania Cottage, the home for reformed prostitutes which Dickens helped to run (Anderson 78).

all Victorian women, the link between a love of finery and social fall was largely class-specific.³

Valverde carefully distinguishes "finery," a pejorative term which "connoted moral flaws on the part of the wearer," from "fine clothes," dress properly associated with the aristocracy.

"Finery . . . meant clothes that were too showy, clothes that looked elegant and striking but were in some unspecified way cheap, if only because the woman wearing them was herself a cheap imitation of upper-class womanhood" (169). Steele agrees with this observation, noting that "attacks on fashion often focused on its pernicious effects on the women of the working class." She cites the author of an article entitled "Dress" as support. The author "described the room in a London prison where the inmates' clothing was kept, and concluded that the prisoners' 'love of . . . tawdry finery . . . had been the first step' to their 'degradation and misery'" (Steele 140). In examining Elizabeth Gaskell's use of dress in *Mary Barton*, Valverde points out that middle-class condemnation of "finery" reveals a deeper concern for the loss of class distinction. Noting that the novel's fallen woman, Esther, "[sheds] her coveted finery in favour of the plain garb she once despised" each time she visits the respectable Barton household, Valverde comments:

this is the hidden anxiety behind Gaskell's discourse on clothes: she overtly decried working girls' tendency to dress up in "artificial" and other signifiers of a vice they had not yet fallen into, but a covert and perhaps deeper worry was that fallen

³Interestingly, Valverde uses an example from *Middlemarch* to make her point: she says a middle-class woman, such as Rosamond Vincy, might be chastised for a desire for expensive clothes but she, at least, had the option to marry well in order to "finance" such a longing. As I will take up later, Rosamond does not and will not have this kind of financing (although she might have had if she had married differently) and this lack specifically leads to one of her problems in marriage.

women would perform the opposite operation and masquerade as virtuous wives of workingmen. (172)

This anxiety about clothing and social status was not limited to directives against the working class. While many Victorian writers aimed public warnings about the "love of finery" at the working class, they were often equally concerned about a wealthier group, the middle-class "angels" whose status as wives or potential wives might be equally imperilled by a "vulgar" desire for "finery." Whether this desire led to the woman's social ostracism, because she was considered "loose," or whether it propelled her into what writers saw as the "decadent" portion of the aristocracy, writers suggested that the woman's fate was the same: she would eventually descend, losing all value as a marriage partner. If her circumstances were desperate enough, she might even fall, just as similarly vain working-class girls were supposedly fated to do, into prostitution or being "kept." She might merely lose her "good name." George Eliot is one of these writers. Although her approach to both the "class ambition" suggested by "the love of finery" and the seemingly lower worth of the working girl's fall differs somewhat from the usual model and although her general understanding of what constitutes female "fallenness" and what fosters it suggests feminist ire at the social conventions surrounding women's clothing, Eliot's concern with the morality of dress mirrors that of many of her peers.

This concern appears throughout Eliot's life, in which she demonstrated early on an antipathy to elaborate dress. Born in 1819, Mary Ann Evans grew up in a conservative family in an era in which conservative, even reactionary, attitudes toward women's abilities and scope prevailed. This was a world which increasingly was distancing itself from the "horrors" of the French Revolution and from all that it represented. Such distancing, according to C. Willet

Cunnington, was especially apparent in the change in socialization which began in the 1820's.

He states:

The period of the '20's was one of reconstruction . . . The first and obvious thing to do was to forget the lessons learnt [from the French Revolution]. . . the Englishwoman began to discard many of those disturbing ideas which had been hovering in her mind; the attractive notion of emancipation from her fetters seemed, after all, to be slightly alarming; perhaps she could arrive at her goal by some less obvious route (*Mind* 53).

This less obvious route included a change in fashion, a move away from the classical, simple lines of the previous decades toward an emphasis on woman as "a kind of doll" (an image resisted by didactic writers of the age). The heightened use of color, yards of lace, delicate fabrics, and immense ribbon-topped hats added a picturesque quality to women's fashion – stressing the ornamental, rather than practical, nature of the wearer. The formation of a "ladylike" image was no small task and dress played perhaps the most crucial role in establishing such an identity. Such an emphasis on fashion and femininity doubtless had a profound effect on the young Mary Ann Evans,⁴ whose propensity for books and scholarly pursuits always seemed to her and others at great odds with the reigning perception of women's function. It was significantly through dress that the young Mary Ann expressed her dissatisfaction with the role society offered her.

⁴ Eliot was christened Mary Anne Evans, changed the spelling to Mary Ann (1837), then altered it to Marian (1850). Entering a union with George Henry Lewes, she began calling herself Marian Lewes (1854), officially changed in her name to Marian Lewes upon his death (1879) but reverted to a combination of older name and new, Mary Ann Evans Cross, when she married John Cross (1880). I will try to distinguish her by the name she herself used during the various phases of her life, speaking of her as a writer as George Eliot, the persona so necessary for her fiction.

From her early teens, Mary Ann was fervently religious and opposed to “pleasures of the flesh,” of which elaborate dress was included; therefore, she wore only the plainest styles and preferred black or dull materials. At this time, Mary Ann showed real interest as a worker in the local Clothing Club, a job which, no doubt, gave her a peculiar view of women’s fashion, especially its function as a highly transient status symbol. Certainly, she showed no interest in “finery,” herself. Even after rejecting Christianity, “Marian” Evans railed against wasting time on frivolities, such as fashion. During her 1849 stay in Switzerland after her father’s death, she remarked on the great attention paid to dress there, which was, she said, “even more” careful than that in England. Although, at one woman’s urging, Mary Ann sent for her best black velvet gown so that she would not be shamefully underdressed, Evans’ letters express her limited patience with such concerns (Sprague 50). According to Ina Taylor, Marian’s excuse to Bessie Parkes for not attending Mrs. Parkes’ ball demonstrates Evans’ lack of fine clothing. Marian claimed she would not attend the function:

because she [Marian] possessed nothing suitable to wear. ‘It would be a crucifixion of my own taste as well as other people’s to appear like a withered cabbage in a flower garden. At a dinner party, when people think only of conversation, one doesn’t mind being a dowdy, but it is the essence of a dance that every one should look fresh and elegant—at least as to their garments.’ (105)

Likewise, Parkes observed that "Marian always wore black velvet when she came to dine at their house even though black was the colour for matrons" (Taylor 107). Parkes also commented that Marian always wore clothes of "a certain quaint solemnity of cut" (Ashton 82). This attitude persisted until 1863 when the famous designer Owen Jones, who decorated the Lewes' home, insisted that it was high time the now famous "George Eliot" paid attention to her attire. Still true to form, Eliot comments ironically on her willingness to "dress the part" of the famous author: "You would perhaps have been amused to see an affectionate but dowdy friend of yours, splendid in grey moiré antique—the consequence from a severe lecture from Owen Jones on her general neglect of personal adornment" (Taylor 180).

Mary Ann Evans' preference for austerity may have evolved, in part, as a response to her awareness that, by conventional standards, she was plain, a fact which even her fond father acknowledged early on.⁵ Concerning Cara Bray's watercolor of Mary Ann, which "shows a demure young woman with abundant ringleted hair, a large forehead, and a nose and chin flatteringly shorter than those of the breathing original," Mary Ann remarked that Cara's "benevolence extends to the hiding of faults in my visage as well as my character" (Ashton 46). During her 1849 stay in Switzerland, she allowed a friend to re-style her hair (into the two "rolls" on either side of her head for which she is famous). Of the experience she remarked: "The Marquise took on her the office of *femme de chambre* and drest my hair one day . . . All the

⁵ The subject of Eliot's looks has received an almost disproportionate treatment over the years. Joan Bennet describes the situation most fairly when she remarks: "Evidence both in portraits and in descriptions suggests that, though she was not ugly, she was the type of woman who looks ugly to herself." Bennet goes on to say that a number of people described Eliot's "noble looks," even "beauty," after her union with Lewes, but maintains that Marian Evans "would have seen none of this magnetic charm; only the plain features." That many men saw her as charming, there is an abundant evidence.

world says I look infinitely better; so I comply, though to myself I seem uglier than ever—if possible” (Cross 216). Others, including her publisher, John Blackwood, commented that Marian had “a face like a man.”⁶ There is little doubt that her unique looks and high intelligence gave Mary Ann a distinct perspective on Victorian femininity. Forced to rely on her brains, she became acutely conscious that physical beauty and adornment brought only one kind of praise, and that often temporary. In addition, at a time when Marian Evans was industriously trying to support herself, she was increasingly aware that attention to looks and dress did not always translate into material gain for women. The sad but frequent failure of a woman’s “banking” on her beauty is a theme in more than one of George Eliot’s works.⁷

In addition to this awareness and perhaps because of it, dress served as a metaphor throughout much of Mary Ann Evans’ young years for her rebellion against social and familial restraints, restraints that she felt were solely due to her low status as a woman. The dress metaphor held special interest because of its very nature as a social signifier. Defiance of fashion seemed to serve as a kind of open statement for a lack of conformity in other matters, a revolt which led her into a great deal of controversy. Her somber dress and inattention to personal grooming early on proved a source of conflict with her conservative family, who wanted her to “marry well.” Her older brother Isaac, with whom she had a rather stormy

⁶ Henry James said Eliot was “magnificently ugly,” a “horse-faced blue-stocking” though he also found her charming and confessed he was “literally in love” with her. John Chapman remarked on her “want of beauty” about which he felt she was self-conscious. Rosemary Ashton notes both remarks.

⁷ I by no means ascribe to the theory cited by Walter Allen in *George Eliot* that Eliot’s treatment of beautiful women such as Hetty Sorrel is explained by Eliot’s resentment of them. Joseph Warren Beach’s claim that “This great bluestocking . . . this scholar with a face like a horse” cannot sympathize with a creature “so pretty as Hetty Sorrel” is likewise highly speculative and critically useless. If for no other reason, Eliot’s sympathetic treatment of Esther Lyon indicates the author had no inherent bias against pretty women.

relationship, complained of this behavior. As biographer Ina Taylor puts it: "she in defiance went around determinedly ignoring her appearance and placing absurd emphasis on being scholarly, which [Isaac] knew would deter any man from proposing to her" (36). The latter suited Mary Ann Evans just fine, having seen only too well from her sister Chrissey's miserable life what role marriage usually offered to wives.

How much Eliot was influenced by the diatribes against fashion produced by the didactic writers of her age, who also attacked "silliness" and "vanity," is uncertain, but her response "the love of finery" and "the fallen woman" was, in part, colored by the interest of her contemporaries in the same connection.⁸ Eliot's admiration for Thomas Carlyle had some effect on her fascination with the dress metaphor. The "re-tailoring" of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh haunts Eliot's work, as she struggles to clarify the connection between dress and virtue, particularly for women. Eliot read works like Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* and *Mary Barton*, Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*,⁹ and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and was influenced by the depictions, both realistic and symbolic, presented of the "myth" of the fallen woman (Auerbach 29).¹⁰ Likewise, the similarity of the "fallen woman" in Eliot's *Adam Bede* to Sir Walter Scott's Effie Dean in *Heart of Midlothian* can surely be attributed to the young Mary Ann Evans' fascination with that work, as Knoepfmacher has pointed out (123-24). Furthermore, many of these writers were interested in the widely-accepted connection between

⁸ For a view of Charlotte Brontë's use of plain dress to express virtue and autonomy, see Jennifer Oldfield.

⁹ Gordon Haight remarks of the "elopement" of Marian Evans and George Lewes that "the storm of horror it produced matched the revulsion from the 'fallen woman' which Dickens was exploiting so profitably in Mrs. Dombey, Little Em'ly, and Lady Deadlock" (166).

¹⁰ Eliot was actually reading *Cranford* while she wrote *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Mary Barton* as she was writing *Adam Bede* and said that her works had "some affinity with the feeling" expressed in Gaskell's novels. . She likewise corresponded at some length with Dickens, who appreciated her realistic depiction of Hetty Sorrel.

a woman's fall and her desire for "fine clothes." Effie Dean consciously attempts to dress like a lady, and finally succeeds, although with little happiness. Hawthorne's careful use of dress to suggest moral character in *The Scarlet Letter*, though in many ways inverting traditional stereotypes, undoubtedly affected Eliot's use of this metaphor.

In addition, some of Eliot's friends and acquaintances actually wrote on the relationship of women's dress and immorality. Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose work, according to Ruby Redinger, "helped determine [Eliot's] own first approach to fiction" (46), wrote an 1858 article attacking "the *outré* unnatural fashion [that] comes from the most dissipated foreign circles." Such fashion "reflected all too accurately the character and lifestyle of immoral women." Stowe's particular criticism of these fashionable women, as those for whom the home and the affections have no special draw, suggests a point of view with which Eliot would have agreed:

A certain class of women in Paris . . . make the fashions . . . They are women who live only for the senses . . . They have no family ties; love, in its pure domestic sense, is an impossibility, and their whole intensity of existence, therefore, is concentrated on the question of sensuous enjoyment, and that personal adornment which is necessary to secure it. (Steele 131).

Eliot's long-time colleague John Chapman, editor of the *Westminster Review*, wrote a series of articles "opposing 'regulation' of brothels"; in these, he "mentions 'love of dress' as a cause of prostitution" (Valverde 178). Jane Carlyle, to whom Eliot sent early copies of all her books,

once complained, upon examining a "formal" picture of her housemaid that "working class people wore inappropriate fashionable dress, and she rejected a photograph of the servant, Mary, on the grounds that '[t]he crinoline quite changes her character and makes her a stranger to me'" (Steele 75). Eliot's "rival" Eliza Lynn Linton, whose views Eliot was well aware of, especially criticizes the dress of the "girl of the period" in her famous essay, out of special concern that "young women were imitating the dress, manners, and appearance of 'the queens of the demi-monde'" (Steele 128).

Eliot's attitude concerning female "display" and her views about other writers' treatment of that subject may be inferred from three important articles that were written just before her decision to produce fiction. In "Women in France: Madame de Sablé" (1854), Eliot contends that well educated women, like Madame de Sablé, are "not the less graceful, delicate, and feminine, because [they] could follow a train of reasoning, or interest [themselves] in a question of science" (Pinney 80). Eliot contrasts such women with the "wall of stupidity" exhibited by more "shallow" women. In a way which anticipates her later interest in women's "love of finery," Eliot uses the metaphor of dress to suggest the connection between these intellectual women of the seventeenth century and those of nineteenth-century England. Of the contrast between seventeenth-century French women and their eighteenth-century French counterparts, Eliot notes the "former have more exaltation" while the latter have "a richer fund of ideas." This difference is seen in their comparative approach to old age: "The women of the seventeenth century, when love was on the wane, took to devotion, at first mildly and by halves, *as English women take to caps*, and finally without compromise; with the women of the eighteenth century, Bossuet and Massillon had given way to Voltaire and Rousseau; and when

youth and beauty failed, then they were thrown on their own moral strength" (my italics 61). In this contrast, Eliot's juxtaposition of French women's religious or intellectual "devotion" with English women's "tak[ing] to caps" suggestive the correlation Eliot will later establish between women's "mis-education" and their "love of finery."

Eliot relates a similar view in "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft" (1855). In expressing admiration for these earlier writers, Eliot notes that both assert the need for women's education, the "one point on which they both write forcibly" (Pinney 201). Like Eliot, Fuller and Wollstonecraft addressed their pleas to a largely male audience and adapted their reasoning accordingly. As Fuller and Wollstonecraft show, men will benefit from having educated wives. Eliot clearly supports Fuller's view that men's conception of women as "the bloom and ornament of life" leaves men vulnerable to "ignorance and childish vanity" which such "ornamental" women possess (Pinney 202). Uneducated women exercise the "petty power" of "selfish coquetry" because they cannot "look beyond the moment." Wollstonecraft thinks similarly: "these weak women under the influence of childish passions and selfish vanity, *will throw a false light over the objects which the very men view with their eyes who ought to enlighten their judgment*" (Pinney 202). Eliot, likewise, agrees with Wollstonecraft that women's education does not prepare them to be the "moral beacons" that men wish them to be. As Eliot notes, "[Fuller's and Wollstonecraft's] ardent hopes of what women may become do not prevent them from seeing and painting women as they are" (Pinney 205). Eliot's treatment of fallen women in her novels bears out Wollstonecraft's statement concerning women's lack of "humanity": "Women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men . . . but the clinging affection of ignorance has seldom anything noble in it,

and may mostly be resolved into selfishness" (Pinney 206). This statement prefigures Eliot's conception of the connection between fallenness and "the love of finery": if women are encouraged to be vain and selfish, they will only develop "clinging affection," just the type of emotional attachment which will lead them away from the more permanent "marital" love which Eliot believes men and women need.

In 1856, Eliot wrote "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" in which she attacks what she saw were the careless literary habits encouraged in and practiced by most women writers. In this article, Eliot not only reveals her distaste for the kind of unrealistic fiction these writers produced; she suggests the vanity and immorality which such unrealism promotes in women. In categorizing the types of "silly novels" which she sees "ladies" producing, Eliot first focuses on the "mind-and-millinery species," a type that includes several romanticized aristocrats, a few less noble figures, and a "crowd of undefined adorers" all pining for "an heiress" who is idealized in every sense: "Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues . . ." (Pinney 302). Eliot's careful parallels between the "heiress's" outward appearance and mental/spiritual talents are especially revealing, as she criticizes this "ideal woman in feelings, faculties, and flounces" (Pinney 302). Jeering at this "Creuzer in crinoline" who "read[s] the Scriptures in their original tongue," Eliot comments ironically that the heroine's "intellect has probably been early invigorated by an attention to costume and deportment" since the "heiress" clearly has been given no other training. As she follows a line

of thought that was to reappear in several novels, Eliot suggests here the absurdity of connecting fine dress with fine morals or fine intellect.

Just as bad are the "white neck-cloth" species of novels which serve "as a sort of medicinal sweetmeat for Low Church young ladies" (Pinney 317). While such novels may through words or examples condemn "worldly vanity," their heroines are scarcely, if at all, less picturesque than those of the "mind-and- millinery" species. The behavior of these heroines is much like that of "a worldly woman recently converted": "she is as fond of a fine dinner table as before, but she invites clergymen instead of beaux; she thinks as much of her dress as before, but she adopts a more sober choice of colours and patterns; her conversation is as trivial as before, but the triviality is flavoured with gospel instead of gossip" (Pinney 319). Again, Eliot's criticism of the "love of finery" (even when the definition of "finery" is itself "converted") is a central point.

While Eliot is contemptuous of these "silly novels," she hints that this kind of fiction could be useful if it were realistically written.¹¹ Eliot saw the writer as "influencing the moral taste, and with it the action of the intelligence" (Pinney 440). Certainly, as critics from F. R. Leavis¹² on have noted, Eliot's fiction is didactic, and in many respects she did not reject the conventions of

¹¹ Biographer Ruby Redinger comments on the following from Eliot's "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists": "The real drama of Evangelicalism—and it has abundance of fine drama for any one who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it—lies among the middle and lower classes . . . ' It is probable that when she wrote this remark she was the only person in England with the requisite genius and knowledge to produce such a work of fiction. She shortly was to do just that in the third and most powerful of the Clerical Scenes, 'Janet's Repentance.'"(102).

¹² F. R. Leavis' comment that two of Eliot's stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life* "might have appeared in any Victorian family magazine" suggests further the connection between Eliot's early writing and the "white neck-cloth novels" she attacked. U. C. Knoepfelmacher suggests the dilemma of Eliot's "moralizing": "Like John Ruskin, whose realism [Eliot] had praised in one of her reviews, the writer wants to be faithful to the details of actuality, and yet at the same time be allowed to moralize or interpret these same details" (27).

earlier didactic writers but embraced and extended them (Spittles 46). These didactic writers were often opposed to "artificial beauty," and they stressed through their moralizing tales the importance of "character," "virtue," and "transparent sincerity" in constituting true beauty (Steele 124). Some writers even argued that "artificial beauty" not only constituted a "falsehood," but was also actually unattractive: "there is no such thing as Artificial Beauty.... there is such a thing as Artificial Ugliness" (Steele 125). On several occasions Eliot, in a similar vein, reverts to "Nature" as the ultimate creator and judge of female beauty.

Although Eliot seems to have felt, as Lewes did, that "unessential details" such as "coats and waistcoats" could merely function to "delight the tailor-mind," she did use details of dress as part of what Alison Booth calls a "philosophical and idealized realism" (112). Several of Eliot's other critics have noted her precise references to clothing as both descriptive detail and metaphor. Barbara Hardy has noted Eliot's careful use of scenes of dressing and undressing serve as mechanisms of structure in her works. Through such scenes, George Eliot presents action as "organized" in a pattern of contrast and coincidence (*Novels* 115). Ann Hollander affirms that Eliot pays observant, even meticulous, attention not only to fashion, but to individuals' attitudes toward the fashions they wear: "Eliot therefore took pains to be precise, not just about details of costume, which indicate date, but about the phenomena of personal perception and the aspects of self-awareness that are felt in terms of dress at a particular time in history" (433). Natalie Houston's recent article underscores Eliot's reliance on "material history":

Clothing . . . functions both as symbol and as part of the accumulation of material particulars central to realism. Yet clothing also functions as history *per se*, as part of the web of 'public life' that impinges on 'private life.' Eliot uses the history of fashion

as a model of cultural change because it differs significantly from other historical signals such as dates, Reform legislation, or railway travel. It is gendered, fluid, and intimately experienced. (26-27)

Bonnie Zimmerman, examining jewelry as metaphor and cultural symbol in Eliot's novels, also notes the use of dress in Eliot's work: "The ornaments—to use one of George Eliot's favorite words—of female life, like the other 'frillery' of clothing, embroidery and netting, provide metaphors through which George Eliot consistently contrasts the role of woman as vain and egoistic sexual object with her role as wife and mother" ("Radiant" 212). Joseph Wiesenfarth notes that Eliot's careful research on antique gems allowed her to use these to reveal important insights about character, symbol, and theme ("Antique" 55-63). Lori Hope Lefkowitz examines Eliot's elaborate depiction of jewelry as part of Eliot's exploration of "artful/artistic" beauty in *Middlemarch*.

Eliot's understanding of the importance of dress as a social symbol can be inferred from an analogy which dominates Eliot's "Leaves from a Notebook." In this essay, Eliot affirms that writing is different from other kinds of manufacturing since it can so easily be overproduced and badly, at that. The manufacturer of calicoes can hardly go wrong since his material, a plain fabric, can hardly be overproduced because it is so practical. Consumers will only use this product to satisfy "their real wants and no more" (Pinney 439). But the "man or woman who publishes writing" is likened to the "setter of fashions in furniture and dress" who *can* harm society because his or her productions can hardly "leave the garniture of persons and houses unaffected by his industry" (Pinney 440). However Eliot's censure of "silly" writing may be interpreted, Eliot's attitude towards the clothing she uses as a metaphor is clear: "fashion" as

opposed to necessary clothing ("calicoes") affects individual and communal virtue, just as good or bad writing affects public morality.

This consequence occurs for at least one important reason, a reason that determines in part how Eliot defines "fallenness": "the love of finery" reflects vanity and egoism, which prevent the growth of moral sympathy. It also grows, in part, out of class ambition, a precept Eliot resisted, again for its links to egoism, its implication of class revolution, and, perhaps most importantly, its use of women as ornamental signifiers of that ambition. Each of these elements figures in Eliot's understanding of female "fallenness."

Defining the term "fallen woman" in light of Eliot's work is not easy. That the phrase might be rightfully applied to such disparate characters as *Silas Marner's* Molly Cass and *Daniel Deronda's* Gwendolen Harleth indicates the nature of the problem.¹³ Majorie Garber's use of the phrase "category crisis" to refer to "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that...permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another," seems applicable here. If "category crisis" applies to the "function of the transvestite in culture," it applies to Eliot's use of the "fallen woman," a figure who traditionally stood on the border between Victorian angel and monster, between domestic woman and public woman.¹⁴ Eliot's re-defining of the term "fallen" to encompass women who had not literally had sexual affairs demonstrates that she saw moral "fallenness" as a broader category which encompassed a

¹³ The inclusion of characters who have not, in the Victorian sense, "fallen," but who are instead "falling," follows a pattern established in Beth Kalikoff's "The Falling Woman in Three Victorian Novels." Kalikoff argues that by studying "falling" women, novelists such as Eliot were able to focus on the moment of temptation—always a spiritual as well as a physical crisis—as often one of difficult if not impossible alternatives for women who sought both "goodness" and complete self-realization in a repressive culture.

¹⁴ This definition of the "fallen woman" is consistent with Amanda Anderson's view of the prostitute in Victorian literature.

variety of female behaviors, many of which (such as marrying for convenience) were not only sanctioned by Victorian society but encouraged by it. Indeed, sexual fallenness is a condition Eliot rarely "punishes," at least for its own sake.

Eliot's own position as a "fallen woman" may also have given her a unique perspective on whether a sexual union outside of marriage truly constituted immorality. Nina Auerbach cites Eliot's letter to Barbara Bodichon, written after the publication of *Adam Bede*, in which Eliot remarks "I am a very blessed woman, am I not? To have all this reason for being glad that I have lived, in spite of sins and sorrows—or rather, by reason of my sins and sorrows" (183). Auerbach says this remark indicates that "George Eliot" was literally "alchemized into gold" when the "austere bluestocking became the fallen woman" (183). That Eliot's union with Lewes promoted her writing is clear. That the "sins and sorrows" Eliot speaks of include her union with Lewes is a bit questionable. Auerbach's reading both refutes and echoes an earlier one by V. S. Pritchett: "George Eliot was punishing herself and Hetty has to suffer for the 'sins' George Eliot had committed, and for which, to her perhaps unconscious dismay, she herself was never punished" (92). Whether one sees Eliot as aggrandizing her "fallenness," as Auerbach does, or resisting it, as Pritchett does, the tie between Eliot and the "fallen woman" remains constant. That Eliot saw some "sins" as more damaging than sexual immorality is clear from her famous sneer that women who want "ties" that are "easily broken" do not do "as she has done" [live openly with a married man]. "They get what they desire and are still invited to dinner." Again and again, Eliot presents

marriages or potential marriages that are not based on love and equality as disastrous, even perverse.

As I perceive it, the term "fallen" may be appropriately given to three fairly different groups of female characters: those who are literally sexually licentious, those who are not, but might be, and those whose moral natures are simply shallow and undeveloped. In general, class divides the first two groups and in a manner that seems directly transmitted from Victorian conduct books. The working-class girls, who actually experience affairs, suffer the fate of prostitution or being "kept" while those from the middle or upper classes "fall" much more metaphorically.¹⁵ Only a few of Eliot's characters qualify as "fallen" in the traditional Victorian use of the term, and several of these are largely undeveloped: the unknown "Lucy" from "Janet's Repentance," *Adam Bede's* Hetty Sorrel, *Silas Marner's* Molly Cass, *Romola's* Tessa, *Felix Holt's* Mrs. Transome, and *Daniel Deronda's* Lydia Glasher. Each is involved in an illicit relationship, and most bear illegitimate children. Each woman faces characteristic punishments

¹⁵ The issue of class in Eliot's works is somewhat of a problem for the critic. Critics like Margaret Homans argue that Eliot, in essence, makes all "working class" characters essentially "middle class" by ascribing "middle-class" values and virtues to them. Mason Harris attacks Eliot's tendency to do this in *Adam Bede*. According to Harris, Eliot forces Hetty Sorrel to uphold a middle-class sense of "respectability" while constricting her to a working-class socio-economic position. Beth Kalikoff observes that Eliot, like Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell, uses the "lower caste" status of her heroine, in particular Maggie Tulliver, as "erotic intoxicant for [her] socially superior pursuer—even perhaps for [Maggie herself]" (358). In this sense, Kalikoff seems to agree that *The Mill on the Floss*, like the popular "fallen woman" novels of the Victorian period, is essentially a middle-class work in which the seeming poverty and social inferiority of the heroine is included to add sexual tension, a sense of forbiddenness. While there is much to be said on the subject of Eliot's seemingly conservative approach to class in her works, the critic should not ignore Eliot's ironic distance from her subject, seeing acceptance of middle-class values where, often, it does not exist. As Nancy Cervetti notes concerning "Amos Barton": "Through [Eliot's] use of tone, imagery and narrative structure, Eliot—in writing 'some things as they have been or are'—is writing by strong implication some things that should not be" (350). Even in her conventional (and realistic, Eliot would have argued) handling of lower-class fallen women, Eliot implies criticism of the socio-economic system which maintains convention.

meted out to fallen women, bearing out the largely class-specific judgments typical of Victorian moralists and writers, if not necessarily typical of those doled out in "real life."¹⁶

While these characters represent the only conventionally "forsaken" women, two other groups of women characters exhibit the kind of weak, superficial, and vain personalities which mark them, for Eliot, as (equally) morally "fallen," as well. The first of these exude an air of "potential licentiousness," which often opens them up to criticism from other characters or from the narrator. For example, although Rosamond Vincy does not have an affair, her flirtations with Captain Lydgate and Will Ladislaw are circumspect and become the subject of malicious gossip and misinterpretation. The same is true of the quasi-amorous relationship between Amos Barton and the Countess Czerlaski. The combination of latent sexual immorality and undeveloped moral sympathy makes these women especially corrupt. To a lesser degree, Catarina Sarti, from "Mr. Gilfil's Lovestory" and *The Mill on the Floss's* Maggie Tulliver must be judged by this standard as each allows her reputation, and worse for Eliot, her sense of duty to be tarnished by illicit love. In the final group of characters, the element of sexual licentiousness is absent but the implication of superficiality and moral weakness remains, and to a degree that this group often garners the narrator's and Eliot's bitterest criticism. In all cases, these "fallen women" reflect an interest in dress and personal adornment. They place an inordinately high value on physical beauty and little or no value on moral goodness. They lack the moral sympathy which Eliot continually stresses is necessary for the mature woman to fulfill her social role. As with the mythic fall of the adulterous

¹⁶ This last statement may seem to unnecessarily complicate the issue, but Valverde (as well as one important social writer she relies on, Henry Mayhew) demonstrates that a number of kept women and prostitutes went on later to

Victorian woman, their weakness leads to dire and often permanent consequences, exhibiting the truth of Adam Bede's comment that "there's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for."

By defining the "fallen woman" in this broad way, my understanding of Eliot's use of this figure differs from Auerbach's. Essentially, Auerbach argues that this "mixture of innocence and experience" is a dynamic expression of woman outside the boundaries of Victorian conventions. While such a reading certainly covers some aspects of the personality assigned to a character such as Hetty, Auerbach's reading ignores that for Hetty and for all of the others whom I label "fallen," one Victorian convention, the love of dress and appearance, remains a constant. Eliot's use of the metaphor of dress, with all of its most superficial implications, indicates that it is the conventionality of the fallen woman, her inability to break away from the society, which "prostitutes" her and which constitutes her fall.

My position, that "fallenness" in Eliot's works must be defined broadly, departs from Auerbach's examination of a more narrowly defined category of female character. Borrowing somewhat from Amanda Anderson's recent exploration of "fallenness" in Victorian culture and literature, I insist along with her that "the category of fallenness can be understood only if one is careful not to reduce it to female sexuality"; rather, "fallenness took on a life of its own" in Victorian culture (14-15). I will argue that in examining the fallen woman in Eliot's work, the reader must look beyond mere sexual transgression to what Anderson calls "victimization," defined as "self driven or fractured by external forces." I disagree with Anderson's point that this definition specifically excludes an "egoistic woman" such as Rosamond Vincy from the category of "fallen." She

economic and social success. Sally Mitchell also takes up this issue, as well as discussing the nature of class and the

indicates that the "fallen woman" cannot "retain a resilient agency" as Rosamond, who is merely an egotist, does.

This observation ignores Eliot's perception of "egoistic" women as culturally determined. Though Eliot, as Anderson observes, "castigates" Rosamond for her vanity and selfishness, implying Rosamond's ability to make a moral choice, Eliot always qualifies the doctrine of free will, especially as it concerns women's lives.¹⁷ My emphasis on dress will show that Victorian "dress codes" form a social discourse which Eliot saw as often overpowering individual will and choice.

Biographer Ruby Redinger addresses the "determined" nature of women's relationship to culture and, by implication, the nature of the "fallen woman" in Eliot's fiction when she examines Eliot's complex attitude toward the feminist movement. Eliot was intensely aware of the physical hardships which women faced in the nineteenth century and commented that "as a fact of mere zoological evolution, woman seems to me to have the worse share in the existence." This "harsh fatality" of existence "can be mitigated only by 'love in the largest sense'" (Redinger 359). The goal of society should not be to create laws which would eliminate men's and women's differences, but to bring about "a more clearly discerned distinction of function (allowing always for exceptional cases of individual organization) with as near an approach to equivalence of good for woman and man as can be secured by the effort of conditions" (359). What I will call "fallen women" are those that, by a combination of personality

fallen woman.

¹⁷ One discussion of the problem of free will comes in Olive Ledlie's "Determinism vs. Free Will in *Adam Bede*," in which she insists that characters and plots are so constructed that no individual really has any free will. Eliot herself tries to reconcile the tension between free will and psychological/cultural determinism in her comment in *Mill* that "'Character is destiny.' But not the whole of our destiny." U. C. Knoepfelmacher explores this issue, arguing that Eliot labored to

and circumstance, are caught up in the "harsh fatality of existence" and whose moral education makes them either lack "love in the largest sense" or fail to "clearly discern" their proper role. Because of these omissions, they become "victimized by both man and nature" and allow their "fate to be shaped" and "[crumble] before it" (359), such as Hetty Sorrel and Mrs. Transome do. In viewing the "fallen" woman in this fashion, I define "fallenness" in a way that is similar to Gilbert and Gubar's use of the term. They see that "[f]or Eliot, the fallen state of consciousness, the secret wound of the female, is not only a subject but also a bind related to the paralysis of self-loathing which is initiated by acceptance of patriarchal values that contradict the woman's inescapable, if unarticulated, sense of her own primacy" (466). In acquiescing in a view of themselves as objects for display, as embracers of "finery," women experience this "fallen state of consciousness," an experience which is both an extension of and separate from any particular sexual "fall."

For Eliot, the central problem with such a "fallen state of consciousness" is not its effect on the individual (though this is important), but its effect on the community, particularly as that effect is determined through motherhood. Eliot's philosophy, derived in part from her reading of Comte, Feuerbach, Wollstonecraft, and Mill, rested on the assumption that women's "maternal" feelings, at least properly trained, made them particularly able to be the moral guardians of society through a regulation of family and home. To quote Frederick Harrison, a friend of Eliot's and an ardent disciple of Comte, "[the] true function of woman is to educate, not children only, but men, to train to a higher civilization, not the rising generation, but the actual society. And to do this by diffusing the

create a "philosophical art" which would at once demonstrate the flux of historical time and the permanence of Universal

spirit of affection, of self-restraint, self-sacrifice, fidelity and purity" (Harrison 445). Only by attention to this duty, by taking it and themselves seriously, can women "approach to equivalence." Not only does this philosophy encourage a certain selflessness, but also it prohibits vanity and promiscuity, both the "fallen woman" and the "love of finery" as, inherently, "impure" and "unfaithful." Not surprisingly, Eliot's women are punished for a failure to confront "egotism," which Redinger notes threatens nearly all Eliot's major female characters, and for a failure to overcome selfish desires for "frillery" (42).

In the suffering that the fallen woman experiences in Eliot's works, Eliot demonstrates the complexities of the "law of consequences" which the narrator of *Adam Bede*, as noted by Felicia Bonaparte, describes so well. Eliot's conviction that certain (moral) actions necessitate certain (moral) outcomes implies that not only may individuals suffer for their personal wrongs, but that they may well suffer for the wrongs which others have committed or which society itself effects. In speaking of Arthur Donnithorne's belief that he will personally suffer for the sins he commits, the narrator notes: "Unhappily, there is no inherent poetical justice in hobbles, and they will sometimes obstinately refuse to inflict their worst consequences on the prime offender in spite of his loudly expressed wish" (127). The fallen woman, as Eliot notes in both her first and last novels is far more likely bear the penalty for "misconduct" than was her male companion; in that fallenness was linked to "the love of finery," women were far more likely to suffer from the constricting image of ornamental femininity than were equally vain men.

Law (which would imply free will).

In this study of fashion and the fallen woman in Eliot's works, I will relate references to dress to Eliot's presentation of the "fallen woman" figure, as presented in her works. I will assert that through references to women's dress, Eliot's condemns Victorian society's acculturation of women, a process which, Eliot implies, leads specifically to women's "immorality." Eliot's bitter denouncement of female education in the nineteenth century reflects her awareness of the social forces that limited women's ability to make moral choices. Feminine obsession with dress and appearance, where it actually exists, epitomizes these failures in both the individual and the group.

In this assessment, I will make use of an observation in Majorie Garber's analysis of cross-dressing in literature and society. Of the power of dress regulation, she comments that "dress codes function in the social world and the world of social hierarchy as structures that simultaneously regulate and critique normative categories like rank (or its civilian counterpart, class) and gender." It is my contention that Eliot's "dress code" worked in a similar way, that it sought to determine how women should dress and behave while criticizing a social system that would make such restrictions of any importance. Eliot's dress/morality connection indicates her attempt to "regulate" middle-class (or working-class) women's character through the prescription of moral education and material renunciation, but it also indicates a "critique" of the society whose very notions of womanhood necessitated feminine "materialism" and display.

In addressing these issues, I will note, following Hollander's observations, not only items of dress and adornment, but references to the way these women wear these items and, where appropriate, how they seem to feel about their appearance. If, as has often been maintained, there is a language of dress, then, like Alison Lurie, I include as part of its vocabulary "items of

clothing . . . hair styles, accessories, jewelry, make-up and body decoration" (4). Also, I will look at more general references to the supposed "beauty" of the fallen woman or her antithesis, the "angel," to note Eliot's perception of the term "natural beauty." I should note carefully that I will not attempt to look at the subject of "Beauty" in a larger sense, a subject outside the scope of this project, but only at images of "natural" versus "artificial" beauty which confirm Eliot's attitude toward female dress and ornamentation.

Finally, I will analyze the changes we see in Eliot's treatment of the fallen woman especially in the later novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. That Eliot moves from primarily focusing on working-class girls, who are led astray by wealthy gentlemen, to examining the issues of middle-class women who are seduced by middle-class materialism and feminine narcissism, indicates her increasing awareness of the complex forces which compelled women to "fall." At the same time, Eliot's more complex treatment of the relationship between individual will and social determinism in her later works suggests a greater awareness of women's potential for change. Esther, Dorothea and Gwendolen all have moments in which their choices not to be "fallen" are associated with a rejection of "finery"; understanding Eliot's broader definitions of the terms "fallen" and "finery" bears out the triumph of each woman over the social forces that seek to entrap her. Eliot's juxtaposition of various definitions of "fallenness" in her final novel and her consequent handling of each type of "fallenness"—the redemption of the egoistic "fallen" woman, Gwendolen, the vindication of the "kept mistress," Lydia Glasher, and the absolution of the "fallen mother," the Princess Halm-Eberstein—support the view that Eliot's new awareness stimulated a comparable hopefulness that women, if not society, could change.

Chapter Two: *Scenes of Clerical Life*

My irony, so far as I understand myself, is not directed against opinions—against any class of religious views—but against the vices and weaknesses that belong to human nature in every sort of clothing.

George Eliot

Eliot's exploration of the "fallen woman" figure begins in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, her first work. Like her first two full-length novels, much of the material in *Scenes* is based on real events Eliot recalled from her childhood in Warwickshire. Perhaps because of this personal element, each of these works reflects a close attention to personal details, such as dress. In these stories, Eliot enacts what Booth calls the "new science" which Eliot saw as necessary to interpret the common details of life which the novelist wishes to describe. According to Booth, Eliot insists that "no one should assume fashion is trivial because women are concerned with it"—in fact, she implies just the opposite. In examining the moral development of women and in examining the often frustrating complexities of gender relations, the author must pay attention to the "frippery" of women's lives. Although "Mr. Gilfil's Love-story," set in 1773, takes place in an age Eliot could not know, both "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance" were drawn from her own memories, which included, for the observant Mary Ann Evans, recollections of the dress and appearance favored by women in that era. Perhaps because these memories are so vivid for her, Eliot's emotional response to the issue of "finery" is especially strong, particularly in "Amos Barton." In addition, as Nancy Cervetti notes, this work is close in chronology to

Eliot's Evangelical days and reflects the influence of that period of her life.¹⁸ As such, it retains a flavor of this Evangelicalism, especially in regard to "frippery," although Eliot is concerned with a more complex explanation for women's relationship to fashionable dress.

The narrator's tone toward the "fallen women" in *Scenes* establishes much of the tone and attitude Eliot will take towards morally undeveloped women in all her works. Through the contrasting figures of the Countess Czerlaski and Milly Barton, Eliot reveals the damage to society that one morally "fallen woman" can cause, a theme she extends in her next work, *Adam Bede*. The issue of women's (mis)education which Eliot alludes to in "Mr. Gilfil's Lovestory" presages similar concerns in *Middlemarch* and *Felix Holt*. In "Janet's Repentance" Eliot introduces a new kind of "fallen woman," the repentant sinner whose moral worth shines far beyond that of her conventional neighbors, a figure which Eliot perfects in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*.

The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton

Although some critical attention has been paid to the principal female characters of "Amos Barton," Milly Barton and Countess Caroline Czerlaski, the vast majority of criticism has examined "Amos Barton" either as "prentice work," as Leavis calls it, as an example (good or

¹⁸ While Cervetti's point is that *Scenes* reflects one "site of discursive experience," one where Eliot demonstrates resistance to "the Pauline Injunction" regarding women's subjection, one need not assume that the work reflects resistance to all religious injunction. As often as not, as many of the narrator's comments in the early novels testify, Eliot simply transforms Christian "dogma" into their counterparts in her "religion of humanity." This is certainly the case with the strictures regarding "finery," which Eliot seems to accept because these concern the abnegation of selfish desires.

bad) of Eliot's formal techniques (as pastoral or as tragedy), or as primarily Amos' story.¹⁹

These approaches offer little help in elucidating the significant role these characters play in furthering the plot or magnifying the themes of this work, especially when one considers Sir Leslie Stephen's claim that "the interest [in *Scenes*] really centres [sic] in the women whose fate is bound up with the acts of the clerical heroes; it is Janet and Milly Barton in whom we are really interested" (141). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar agree, asserting that the drama of the men "depends upon quite extraordinary women" (484). Their brief analysis goes some way to redressing the imbalance of critical attention. Their assertion that the plots in *Scenes* "reveal a striking pattern of authorial vengeance in the service of female submission that informs Eliot's later fiction" introduces the idea that Eliot's earliest fiction expresses many of the same social criticisms apparent in her later work (484). But their analysis, focused as it is on the suppressed anger encompassed in the renouncing heroines, ignores an array of equally interesting and important secondary female characters. Though Milly's superiority, however unrealistically presented it may be, over Amos Barton is discussed, her connection to other women is overlooked. If she represents the "angel in the house," what can be said of the "demon," the Countess Czerlaski, or other similar figures in *Scenes*? Only by understanding the relationship of secondary characters like the Countess to the heroines, by clarifying the way

¹⁹ For an examination of *Scenes* as "prentice work," see F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition*; see also Daniel P. Deneau in "Imagery in *Scenes of Clerical Life*"; Janice Carlisle's *The Sense of an Audience: Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot at Mid-Century*; Ruby Rediner's assertion that "this first Clerical Scene is not so much a story as a somewhat belligerent illustration of what its author thought realistic fiction should be" appears to reflect this same spirit (305). U. C. Knoepfelmacher in *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism*, despite a discussion of Amelia Barton, focuses primarily on the success of the novel's realism; and Barbara Hardy in *The Novels of George Eliot* sees "Amos Barton" as primarily exploring the possibilities of the "unheroic tragedy" of Amos, himself. Derek and Sybil Oldfield,

in which dress and appearance are used to reveal Eliot's deepest criticisms of female vanity and the society which perpetuates it, can the fullness of Eliot's vision in her first work be comprehended.

Eliot's sharpest attack on the dangers of "a love of finery" is presented through the character of Countess Czerlaski, the widow of an impoverished aristocrat, with little money and no real social stature of her own. Coming to Milby to find a suitable middle-class husband, she enters into a friendship with Milly Barton, wife of the local clergyman, to further this plan. Armed with fashionable dress and manners, she attempts to dazzle the citizens of the town with her superiority. The unreality of her dream reflects the insufficiency of her understanding, an insufficiency that is embodied in her preference for fine clothes.

The Countess's fascination with dress, her own and others', reveals her egotism and moral shallowness and indirectly results in the death of the heroine, Milly Barton. The "undeniably beautiful" Countess's destructive self-absorption is revealed through her preoccupation with her appearance, a fact that Eliot exemplifies through the "spilled soup" scene. The Countess's reaction to her butler's ruining Milly's "newly turned black silk" is to be "thankful that her own delicate silk had escaped"; she nevertheless "[throws] out lavish interjections of distress and indignation." Measuring Milly's calm reaction to the incident only in relation to the Countess's valuation of Milly's inexpensive gown, Countess Czerlaski placates: "Dear saint that you are...you don't mind about these things, I know. Just the same sort of thing happened to me at the Princess Wengstein's one day, on a pink satin. I was in agony.

though recognizing that "George Eliot's three great strengths . . . are all already to be found" in *Scenes*, still describe

But you are so indifferent to dress..." (29). The Countess has, of course, misread the situation entirely: Milly's dress, though shabby, is her best, and she does "mind," though she is too considerate of the Countess to say so. She feels "a little inward anguish, but no ill-temper" and laughs, saying "as her silk was not very glossy to begin with, the dim patch would not be much seen"; conversely, the Countess's "careful" reluctance, in spite of lavish interjection[s] of distress," to "[approach] the gravy-sprinkled spot on the floor with her lilac silk," and her butler's comment, "what tantrums she'd ha' been in arter the visitors was gone," if he had ruined the Countess's dress, underscore her egotism, hypocrisy and frivolity (30).

Eliot further suggests the contrast between the Countess's narcissism and Milly's selflessness through their different styles of dress. Milly's "black silk," her only good dress, clearly characterizes her serious but dutiful nature. (Black silk was often the recommended fabric for women who could only afford one good dress.²⁰) The Countess wears fashionable clothing including "delicate colors," a "black lace veil," a "black lace pelerine," and "rich silk of a pinkish lilac hue," and her clothes take up two closets at the vicarage. The Countess's clothes are also fashionable. She can wear "very stiff balloon sleeves...without which a woman's dress was naught in those days," while Milly only has "romantic visions" of "put[ting] on really handsome, stylish things" (27).

Eliot illustrates the Countess's general artificialness by juxtaposing the Countess's "theatric" attitude toward dress with Milly's "unconscious" beauty. If Milly is sentimentalized as

them as "faulty" and criticize Eliot's depiction of the major female characters as "sentimental."

²⁰ Valerie Steele refers to one article, "How to Dress as a Lady on £15 a Year, by a Lady," which describes precisely how to do this.

a "semi-angelic creature who can even impart 'elegance' and 'distinction' to her ordinary clothes," as U. C. Knoepfmacher suggests, her "perfection" is judiciously contrasted with the (believably) selfish Countess.²¹ In accordance with Eliot's approval of "natural beauty," Milly "made the limpest dress look graceful, and her old frayed black silk seemed to repose on her bust and limbs with a placid elegance and sense of distinction" (15). Unlike Mrs. Farquhar, a plain but still vain woman in a *gros de Naples*²² dress, Milly's clothes do not have "the uneasy sense of being no fit"; she makes even the "heavy and hideous" hats she wears seem "miracles of successful millenary." Conversely, the Countess's "drapery" is "well-chosen," and she hugs Milly with "careful elegance." The Countess's habit to "always [wear] delicate colours in an evening" is presented as a calculated maneuver while Milly's fondness for dress is said to be "a pretty woman's weakness," and we are admonished not to "love her any less for it."

The Countess is generally perceived in terms of the clothes she wears or the appearance she makes, Eliot's commentary on both the Countess's and society's concern with appearances and the contribution such a social system makes to women's moral ineptitude. Even though the townspeople's criticism of the Countess is justified, their basis for judging her (on her appearance) is presented as weak, at best. The lisping Mr. Farquhar rationalizes that "you have only to look at that woman to thee what she ith,--throwing her eyth about when she comth into church, and drething in a way to attract attention" (32). Mrs. Phipps implies that the Countess "dress[es] for effect" and has "that style of appearance which was calculated to

²¹ Knoepfmacher criticizes Milly's depiction, claiming she is "the first and most sentimentalized of George Eliot's portrayals of ideal womanhood" (49). He apparently finds her "radiance-in-rags" image unconvincing because it is presented too uncritically. He does acknowledge, briefly, that Eliot's clear intention is to juxtapose Caroline Czerlaski's pretensions with Milly's capacity to embrace reality.

²² C. Willet Cunningham describes this fabric as an expensive Italian silk.

²³ Barbara Hardy in *The Novels of George Eliot* calls the town's misinterpretation of the Countess's visit to the Barton home as the "narrative pivot" of the story: "The gossiping villagers mistake for illicit passion what is at worst some

create a sensation." She is described as "that well-dressed lady" who has "by no means such fine taste and insight in theological teaching as in costume." To Nanny, the maid, she is "a personage always 'drawed out in fine clothes,'" and while Mr. Ely agrees that "she is certainly a handsome woman," he complains, "she puts on the grand air a little too powerfully" (32).

But the Countess, as the narrator demonstrates, is not the only vain individual in Milby. The narrator's ironic commentary on Milby's judgment of Countess Czerlaski reveals the townspeople's own moral short-comings, as well. Unimpressed by or probably jealous of the Countess's beautiful clothes and looks and her social pretensions, the Milby citizens socially reject the Countess, though on the completely unfounded ground that her superb beauty and talents must hide a suspicious past.²³ Milby society, in this sense, shares the Countess's egoistic absorption in dress and appearance. The narrator comments on their pretense that their moral disapproval compensates for the realization that she is more fashionably dressed than they:

Miss Phipps was conscious that if the Countess was not a disreputable person, she, Miss Phipps, had no compensating superiority in virtue to set against the other lady's manifest superiority in personal charms. Miss Phipp's stumpy figure and unsuccessful attire, instead of looking down from a mount of virtue with an aureole round its head, would then be seen on the same level

and in the same light as the Countess Czerlaski's Diana-like form and well-chosen drapery. (33)²⁴

It is this kind of thinking, the narrator suggests, that has helped form the Countess's vanity. Society's tendency to avoid "enter[ing] into all the circumstances" of the Countess's existence mirrors her egotism, and the personal vanity of women like Miss Phipps and Mrs. Landor, who pride themselves on their "penetrating observation," mimic the Countess's self-satisfaction and pride. The narrator further indicates that, in reality, the Countess is not very different from most Milby citizens:

It is true, the Countess was a little vain, a little ambitious, a little selfish, a little shallow and frivolous, a little given to white lies.—But who considers such slight blemishes, such moral pimples as these, disqualifications for entering into the most respectable society! Indeed, the severest ladies in Milby would have been perfectly aware that these characteristics would have created no wide distinction between the Countess Czerlaski and themselves. (35)

Through these comments, Eliot makes it clear that society's failure to *educate* women, its tendency to foster littleness and vanity in women, is the source of many of their faults. This flaw is compared with their inability to appreciate reality or realistic fiction:²⁵

difficulty in putting up with an expensive guest. It is an ironically large gulf between reaction and event, or supposition and truth, and in its effect it is not unlike Catherine Morland's response to *Northanger Abbey*" (23-24).

²⁴ Ironically, the Countess fails by being too dazzling, a theme Eliot pursues with later characters like Gwendolen Harleth and Rosamond Vincy.

²⁵ In her brief analysis of *Scenes*, Gillian Beer comments specifically on this passage: "The women characters [in Milby] are contrasted with class-ridden women readers who fail to read them truly" (55).

'An utterly uninteresting character!' I think I hear a lady reader exclaim—Mrs.

Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction; to whom tragedy means ermine tippets, adultery, and murder...(36).

The Countess, like other women, is "fallen" because she accepts the narrow mindset offered to her. Nevertheless, Eliot fully understands the Countess's predicament. The narrator's sympathetic tone regarding the Countess's husband-hunting suggests that although Eliot does not approve of "financial marriages" in general, she realized that society offered few alternatives to women.

Eliot's presentation of the Countess's idleness and frivolity, in contrast with Milly's purposeful industry, further characterizes the Countess as morally bankrupt and this contrast is reported in relation to dress. Specifically, the way each woman responds to the duty of sewing characterizes her worth as a useful individual.²⁶ Milly, whose "neat" fingers "are never empty," constantly mends the family's clothes or sews new ones (a reference to her sewing is made in nearly every scene in which she appears), even when she is pregnant and ill. The fact that Milly's dress is "newly turned" emphasizes her skill with the needle. Though Milly "playfully undervalu[es] her skill in metamorphosing boots and shoes," we are told of the "respectable" slippers she has "neatly covered" and the "piece of calico or muslin" which she turns into "a mysterious little garment with all sorts of hemmed ins and outs." Even her husband is more extravagant than she since, with a borrowed "extra eight sovereigns," he gives in to "an

²⁶ It is perhaps significant that, according to the Haight biography, Eliot only mentions sewing once in her correspondence and diaries (178).

irresistible temptation to order a new great-coat" while Milly steadily plots on acting as her husband's tailor if he will "leave off tight pantaloons" and wear "ordinary gun-cases" instead.

In contrast, the Countess only does "mek work" and has a maid (who also "wear[s] a better dress than Mrs. Barton's") to sew for her. Since the Countess's "dress and her maid" form "a considerable item beyond her own little income of sixty pounds per annum," we are prompted to see Countess's enjoyment of these luxuries as especially dissolute. When Milly's dress is ruined, it is the Countess's brother rather than the Countess who presents Milly with material to make a new one. When Milly is ill and the Bartons in desperate poverty, the Countess's visits, unlike those of other friends, provide Milly with nothing that is valuable or useful:

It may seem remarkable to you that she neither thought of taking away any of the children, nor of providing for any of Milly's probable wants...She put a great deal of eau-de-Cologne on Mrs. Barton's pocket handkerchief, re-arranged her pillow and footstool, kissed her cheeks, wrapped her in a soft warm shawl from her own shoulders, and amused her with stories of the life abroad. (39)

Eliot uses the perfumed handkerchief to represent all that is superficial and thriftless in the Countess. Like expensive colognes, she seems sweet but offers little substance. Like a lady's handkerchief, she is showy rather than useful. The "soft warm shawl" she offers seems helpful but hardly enough. The Countess's uselessness continues magnified during Milly's difficult pregnancy. When she later resides with the Bartons, Countess's sole contribution to the household economy is to *begin* "to embroider a cap for the next baby" (50). In addition, her informal tendency to treat the Bartons like her servants actually speeds their economic downfall, as well as the decline in Milly's health. The neighbors maliciously gossip that Mr.

Barton, instead of helping his wife, is "handy in assisting [the Countess's] toilet," and that he "laces her boots, and so forth" (44). They rightly criticize his actions, saying "an' there's that poor thing a-sewing her fingers to the bone for them children,—an' another comin' on. What she must have to go through!" (44). By the time the Countess leaves, the Bartons are broke and Milly is dying. As with the actions of so many of Eliot's fallen women, Countess Czerlaski's harm remains even after she is gone: "The Countess had left, but, alas! The bills she had contributed to swell still remained; so did the exiguity of the children's clothing, which also was partly an indirect consequence of her presence." (55).

Countess Czerlaski remains one of Eliot's bitterest indictments against frivolity and egoism, as characterized by a womanly fascination with "finery." Likewise, the story suggests, the citizens of Milby are culpable for their complicity in Milly's death: their ostracism of the Countess and their corresponding prejudice against the Bartons leads to many of Milly's problems and cuts her off from those who could (and should) help her. Amos Barton's opposing tendency, to think the Countess better than she is because of her looks and manners, yields him an even greater share of the blame, and he suffers because of his adherence to a false notion of feminine value.

Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story

In "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story," Eliot continues the close association between clothing and the fallen woman, focusing on two "fallen" women who pay the price for misplacing their affections. Both Caterina Sarti and Beatrice Assher are in love with Captain Anthony Wybrow, who has

encouraged them both, but Miss Assher's fortune and social position, as well as his uncle's approval, influence the Captain's decision to marry her. Insincere and duplicitous, the Captain courts Caterina, a family dependent, only in deserted rooms and hallways. Caterina, naturally jealous and devoted, is devastated by news of his upcoming marriage and is incensed at the Captain's continued advances and casual unconcern for her feelings. The equally jealous Miss Assher, sensing some undisclosed relationship between the Captain and Caterina, threatens to break off the engagement unless the Captain reassures her of his innocence in the matter. The Captain's insolence at last pushes Caterina to consider murdering him, though fortunately he dies just before she makes the attempt.

Criticism of "Gilfil," in particular of Caterina, has from the outset been highly divergent. Eliot's publisher, according to Redinger, was "puzzled and disturbed" by the story, in particular by Caterina's passionate nature and murderous intentions. Derek and Sybil Oldfield insist that the story is merely "sentimental melodrama" and that Caterina lacks "fictional life" (8-9). Other readers have found her and her "melodramatic" tale more sympathetic. F. R. Leavis finds the story "charming in a rather slight way" while U.C. Knoepfelmacher asserts that "Gilfil" "exposes, rather than glosses over, the earlier contradictions evident in George Eliot's brand of realism" (63-64). Acknowledging Caterina's status as an ultimately mature adult, he notes that with Caterina's regeneration, "Sir Christopher's decorative songbird has become a woman at last" (70).

Gilbert and Gubar are less receptive to Caterina's transformation, seeing it, like Milly Barton's death, as indicative of "a model for female submission." They argue that her status as "*objet d'art*" in Sir Christopher's household marks Caterina's existence and that she ends by

being "fully possessed by her husband" (487). Andre L. DeCuir suggests a similar conclusion, arguing that Eliot wished to indicate the destructive repression of women embodied in English culture. Caterina, free only in her native Italy, which represents unbound feminine artistry, is crushed by the English culture which seeks to control and subdue her. In the end, Caterina's music, though it revives her for a time, is "drowned out" by English "cultural codes" (74).

Though the readings offered by Gilbert and Gubar and by DeCuir are perhaps the most suggestive in terms of women's issues in Eliot's work, their critiques and that of all of the critics ignore the crucial presence of Beatrice Assher, whose words are the final catalyst for Caterina's attempted murder. The criticism offered by Gilbert and Gubar hints that Eliot wishes to critique Caterina's "objectified" status and "spiritual [intellectual] poverty," they miss the full social criticism which Eliot implies by her treatment of the two women and by the tragic ending which marks Caterina's sad existence. In addition, by presenting Caterina as completely victimized by an oppressive culture, Gilbert and Gubar and DeCuir disregard what Eliot saw as the important role of choice. In that Caterina participates in her oppression, Eliot will hold her responsible.

To express both the cultural and personal elements that render Caterina's tragic end, Eliot couches much of the misunderstanding and betrayal in this dark morality tale in terms of the personal vanity of the female characters. Each demonstrates distinct moments of vanity and

superficiality, attending to her looks but not her conscience, and each endures the consequences of her narrow perspective.²⁷

Our first glimpse of Caterina Sarti (the late Mrs. Gilfil) comes by an examination of her bedroom, years after her death, an examination in which details of "pretty triviality" demonstrate a youthful vanity. In a tone at the same time indulgent and revealing, the narrator carefully juxtaposes ordinary articles such as the "black lace handkerchief" and "two gowns, of a fashion long forgotten," with the significantly colored "tiny red slippers," and the "cherry-coloured bow," which suggest frivolity, even illicit sexuality; however, we clearly meant to see this ostentation as chastised. In a description of Caterina's portrait, the narrator says: "the lady had her dark hair gathered away from her face, and a little cap, with a cherry-coloured bow, set on the top of her head,—a coquettish head-dress, but the eyes spoke of sadness rather than of coquetry" (75). This faded quality is stressed later in Mrs. Patten's account of Mrs. Gilfil's first Sunday at church; when asked if Mrs. Gilfil had worn her "weddin clothes" (usually the bride's finest), Mrs. Patten replies: "Nothin partickler smart—on'y a white hat tied down under her chin, an' a white Indy muslin gown" (76).

Eliot stresses the role played by Caterina's love for "pretty things" in her spiritual "unfitness" by linking Caterina's moments of vanity with her greatest moments of moral failure. When Anthony announces his return to Cheverel Manor with Miss Assher, Sir Christopher insists Caterina have a new dress. Instead of contemplating how to encourage Anthony to "do

²⁷ The fate meted to Caterina is harsher than that allotted to other female characters. Lady Cheverel's and Beatrice Assher's wealth and social status allow them access to sources of social power which Caterina, displaced orphan, does not have. The class bias inherent in this unevenness reflected, no doubt, the same one Eliot saw re-enacted in

what is right," she desires "not to look unattractive," and finds it "easy to attend her toilet." She "put[s] on her gray silk gown and her cherry-coloured bow with as much care as if she had been herself the betrothed, not forgetting the pair of round pearl earrings which Sir Christopher had told Lady Cheverel to give her, because Tina's little ears were so pretty" (106).

This absorption in her own looks causes her to be particularly aware of Miss Assher's superior beauty: "The first *coup d'œil* was dazzling; and as she stood looking down with a gracious smile on Caterina, whom Lady Cheverel was presenting to her, the poor little thing seemed to herself to feel, for the first time, all the folly of her dream" (107). The "dream" is deceptive, as is Caterina's desire, by singing well, to compete with Miss Assher. The "little triumph" Caterina experiences when she "reduces" Miss Assher to "grimacing admiration" lasts only long enough to intensify Caterina's humiliation when she sees Captain Wybrow beside Miss Assher "seated...in the most lover-like position." Running to her room, Caterina laments "I cannot bear it," and significantly rips apart a muslin kerchief lying nearby.

Clothing and appearance aid in characterizing the young Caterina's undeveloped morality. The narrator's additional juxtaposition of the married Caterina's "little cap," with the "unfinished baby-cap" she apparently has been sewing at her death implies Caterina's essential childishness, a quality which Eliot often assigned to her fallen women to suggest their immature moral development. Caterina is again and again described as having a "small stature," "the tiniest of full-grown feet," a "small neck and face," a "little figure in white," and "little ears." Sir Christopher, her guardian, refers to as "the little black-eyed monkey," for whom "it doesn't take

sexual politics all around her. Eliot's commitment to realism, thus, forces her to enact much harsher penalties on

anything much larger than a pocket-handkerchief to dress." The narrator, somewhat ironically, calls her "the little minx," on more than one occasion, and many characters remark on Caterina's general physical weakness and smallness. Even Anthony tries to laugh off Miss Assher's perceptive suggestion that there is some flirtation between Anthony and Caterina by saying:

My dear Beatrice, now do be reasonable; do ask yourself what earthly probability there is that I should think of flirting with poor little Tina. Is there anything about her to attract that sort of attention? She is more child than woman. One thinks of her as a little girl to be petted and played with. (122)

Caterina's vanity and egotism mimic those of Miss Assher, an even less morally developed character. The first narrative description of Miss Assher seems to link her, in terms of dress and manner, with some of Eliot's most exemplary heroines. Tall and graceful, dressed in black crepe mourning, she gives the impression of a "splendid beauty." Mr. Bates remarks that she has "a beautiful colour" and that she "looks faine and handsome o' hossback,—sits as upraight as a dart, wi' a figure like a statty!" (118). However, several small clues indicate the narrator's true perspective. Only the "first" view of her is "dazzling," and she only "seems" beautiful. Her demeanor, like the Countess Czerlaski's, is studied and calculating. She does not possess "natural" beauty but relies on "artificial" attractions. She carries "herself with an air of mingled graciousness and self-confidence." And she produces "an *impression* of splendid beauty, in spite of commonplace brown eyes, a narrow forehead, and thin lips" (107, my italics).

Her whole personality indicates artfulness and theatricality. She smiles "with the elaborate graciousness of a person who means to be thought charming, and is sure of success." Her "smiling affability seems to say, 'I am really not at all proud, though you might expect it of me'" (109). Caterina astutely discerns that Miss Assher only talks to her so that Caterina will "admire her good-nature."

Others observe that Miss Assher is not as affable as she looks. Mr. Bates comments: "Misthress Griffin, the maid, says as [Miss Assher's] rether tatchy and find-fautin' about her cloothes, laiike." Lady Cheverel suspects "that the fair Beatrice had a sharp and imperious temper." Beatrice's mother, Lady Assher, confirms this as she comments that "maids are so very troublesome, and Beatrice is so particular, you can't imagine . . . That very gown she has on,—to be sure, it fits her beautifully now,—but it has been unmade and made up again twice" (110).

The vanity and superficiality of Caterina and of Miss Assher are underscored by their falling in love with Anthony, a sensual, selfish cad, who spends too much time gazing at his profile in the mirror. Because each woman is influenced by his looks and dress, each is capable of believing his lies and of presuming his goodness. Caterina's original love for Anthony comes from admiring him as "a beautiful boy with brown curls and splendid clothes," demonstrating a lack of insight which will plague several Eliot women. Although originally suspecting that Anthony is Caterina's lover, Miss Assher allows herself to be convinced otherwise by Anthony's lies and a superficial judgment of herself and others. When he tells her "One has a brotherly affection for such a woman as Tina; but it is another sort of woman that one loves," she accepts his statement: "These last words were made doubly significant by a

look of tenderness, and a kiss imprinted on the hand Captain Wybrow held in his. . . . It was so far from probable that Anthony should love that pale, insignificant little thing, –so highly probable that he should adore the beautiful Miss Assher” (122). The fact that she is captivated by his good looks, makes her believe others are, too: “On the whole, it was rather gratifying that other women should be languishing for her handsome lover; he really was an exquisite creature” (122).

Ultimately, both Caterina’s pride and jealousy and Miss Assher’s vanity and egoism lead to their sad conclusions. The initial signs of catastrophe occur as each woman surveys the beauty of the other. Caterina is dazzled by Miss Assher, and Miss Assher thinks, “This Miss Sarti seems a stupid little thing. Those musical people often are. But she is prettier than I expected; Anthony said she was not pretty” (109). These kinds of superficial judgments cloud each woman’s perception of the other’s merits and difficulties; each woman allows herself to be captivated by appearances and trivialities. Each woman is incapable of the “sympathiz[ing] with individual suffering and individual joy” which Eliot felt was the mark of moral progress. The result is tragedy.

Eliot demonstrates society’s culpability in this tragedy by remarking on the materialism and vanity of the Cheveral and Assher families and by noting their failure properly to tend to Caterina’s moral education. Sir Christopher’s insistence that Anthony marry Miss Assher, a woman of birth and fortune, and his insensitivity to the feelings of those involved underscore his final judgment of himself as “stone blind.” Lady Cheveral, while presented as “uniformly beneficent” is never “kind”; she has an “expression of hauteur and a “cold grey eye.” In addition, she indulges in pettiness and vanity in her reception of Lady Assher, Sir Christopher’s

old flame. When Lady Cheveral learns of the Assher's visit, she "was further sobered by a little jealousy at Sir Christopher's anticipation of pleasure in seeing Lady Assher, enshrined in his memory as a mild-eyed beauty of sixteen, with whom he had exchanged locks before he went on his first travels" (105). Although able to control her feelings, Lady Cheveral "couldn't help hoping that [Sir Christopher] would be disappointed in Lady Assher, and rather ashamed of having called her so charming" (105). This kind of envy mirrors Caterina's envy of Miss Assher, an envy which in Caterina, who does not possess Lady Cheveral's "habitual self-command," virtually destroys her.

The narrator remarks on Caterina's lack of self-control on several occasions, as evidence of her poor moral education. The narrator remarks ironically on the difference between Sir Christopher's methodical refurbishing of his estate and the somewhat undisciplined tutelage offered to Caterina: "Unlike the building, however, Caterina's development was the result of no systematic or careful appliances. She grew up like the primroses, which the gardener is not sorry to see within his enclosure, but takes no pains to cultivate " (99). Like the "primroses," it is implied, Caterina is pretty and mildly ornamental but not useful or valuable. Like them, Caterina's future is treated as an afterthought, far behind the interests of Anthony or Maynard. The narrator's suggestion is that in treating women like pretty children, society greatly impairs their spiritual growth:

[T]here was always some one who had nothing better to do than to play with Tina. So that the little southern bird had its northern nest lined with tenderness, and caresses, and pretty things. A loving sensitive nature was too

likely, under such nurture, to have its susceptibility heightened into unfitness
for an encounter with any harder experience (98)

Caterina's "unfitness" and "susceptibility," closely linked to her desire for "pretty things," combine to ruin her life.

But her few months of joy as Gilfil's wife reflect the beginnings of a "new chord" in her existence. Though her "fall," like that of other Eliot women to come, damages her too strongly for complete recovery, in the short space of her marriage, she undergoes a moral revolution which alters her love of "finery" forever. According to Redinger, "Tina's tragedy is in effect a dramatic statement of the conviction George Eliot had expressed to the young John Sibree in 1848: 'The intellect by its analytic power, restrains the fury which [the passions] rush to their own destruction, the moral nature purifies beautifies and at length transmutes them [sic]'" (324). Tina's "moral nature," though entirely reliant on Gilfil's goodness, strengthens under suffering. Gilfil can happily anticipate Caterina's approaching motherhood as the final step toward her future happiness: "A mother dreads no memories—those shadows have all melted away in the dawn of a baby's smile" (164).

But Caterina never becomes a mother, and the tragic conclusion has bearing on Eliot's perception in these early works of the fate of the "fallen" woman. The narrator, in describing the old Maynard Gilfil in the "Epilogue" of the story, laments that Mr. Gilfil's early experiences with Caterina have permanently changed him:

But it is with men as with tress: if you lop off their finest branches, into which they
were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough

boss, some odd excrescence; and what might have been a grand tree expending into liberal shade, is but a whimsical misshapen trunk. (166)

This comment reflects Eliot's view that "circumstances" as well as character determine an individual's existence. Caterina's life, moulded by scant, misdirected education and narrow experience, is "too deeply bruised" to withstand the strain of Anthony's death and her marriage to Gilfil. Like the "delicate-tendrilled plant" she resembles, she dies "in the struggle to put forth blossom." The fallen woman, who passionately loved another woman's fiance and whose egoism led her to attempted murder, never develops an intellect capable of restraining her passions and, thus, experiences all of the consequences of "sin and sorrow."

Janet's Repentance

In the last story of this trilogy, "Janet's Repentance," Janet Dempster, despite her "repentance," is not a "fallen woman" but an abused and misguided alcoholic whose inattention to dress and appearance contrasts markedly with the fashionableness of her more outwardly religious neighbors. These neighbors constitute, for the most part, "fallen women," in that their moral development never matches hers, and it is their smallness and vanity which provoke the narrator's satire. In this sense, the story presages *The Mill on the Floss* in that, in both, Eliot demonstrates the moral superiority of a woman who superficially seems inferior to her neighbors. Although the narrator's tone in discussing the Milby women's weakness is more

indulgent and humorous than it is in many other works, the relationship between fashion and frivolity remains clear.

Critics have generally been sympathetic to Janet, appreciating Eliot's handling of Janet's "sin" and her redemption. Thomas Noble, in his introduction to *Scenes*, credits this "scene" as the one in which the "doctrine of sympathy receives its fullest treatment," though he sees the story as primarily about Janet and Mr. Tryan. Derek and Sybil Oldfield also suggest Eliot's effective presentation of the need for human sympathy, but insist the work, like the other "scenes," is undercut by its "sentimentality." Again, the focus is primarily on the main characters and ignores the relationship between women. The reference to Mrs. Linnet notes only that she is the "best" of Eliot's "comic touches" in the work.

The discussion of the women in Milby suggests again that, by means of their dress, they are the (proud) bearers of masculine wealth within their community: "Looking at this plumed procession of ladies, you would have formed a rather high idea of Milby wealth . . ." (175). Even though "these sumptuously attired ladies flashed past the vulgar eye in one-horse chaises, by no means of a superior order," signifying a lack of great wealth, the women embody the illusion of moneyed status, a sort of communal dress which disguises Milby's ordinariness. The town's finery is thus somewhat pitiful, much like the dress of the plain Miss Tomlinsons who imitate the beautiful Miss Landor: "their beauty was considered of a coarse order, and their square forms were quite unsuited to the round tippet which fell with such remarkable grace on Miss Landor's shoulders" (175). Although a reference to male "displays of costume" follows, in which the narrator comments on the Sunday vanities of two young men, the passage is short and not repeated; the narrator seems to suggest that while men's dress can reflect a certain

pretentiousness, their absorption with dress carries neither the social significance nor the broad acceptance which women's does. Eliot was aware that, in general, men were expected to develop their minds in ways that women, to their detriment, were not.²⁸

Although the narrator assures us that Milby possesses that "salt of goodness which keeps the world together," we perceive that a good deal of "ordinary" (to use one of Eliot's favorite words) hypocrisy is mixed in as well. The clearest example of this mixture comes in the narrator's description of the gathering at the Linnet household. As the ladies, now under the influence of the Evangelical minister Mr. Tryan, prepare books for the new lending library, the narrator presents the Miss Linnets, examples of the disparity which social and experiential limitations create between women's potential and achievement. Mary Linnet, skilled primarily in craft-making and "poetical reading," reveals the limits of her moral and educational development through the copious "ornaments" which she spends her time making and which reflect her varying interests: "for the japanned boxes, the alum and sealing wax baskets, the fan-dolls, the 'transferred' landscapes on the fire-screens, and the recent bouquets of wax-flowers, showed a disparity in freshness which made them referable to widely different periods" (183). The uselessness of these objects contrasts ironically with her equally shallow friends' commendation that she is a "sensible woman." The narrator somewhat bitingly comments that these same friends, who "thought it a pity" she "had not found a good husband," say "nothing

²⁸ A number of critics, notably Gilbert and Gubar, have commented on the succession of "lazy" egotists that constitute the male "heirs" in Eliot's fiction. Though the egotism of these characters is criticized, their social power distinguishes them from the myth of the fallen woman.

more ill-natured of her than that her face was like a piece of putty with two Scotch pebbles stuck in it" (184). Her superficiality and theirs seem well matched.

These friends reserve more criticism for Mary's sister, Rebecca, described by Miss Pratt as "flighty and vain," and tease young men about marrying her. Characteristic of the vain judges they are, the Milby young women speak of Rebecca "sarcastically," laughing at "her fat, her finery, and her thick ankles." The narrator enacts a dual criticism, here. As with the Countess Czarlaski, the narrator blames the "fallen woman" whose vanity makes her the subject of ridicule but also criticizes the narcissistic society which has, in a sense, created her and now judges her. Offering her little occupation but that of wife and having insisted she look attractive to gain this profession, the Milby citizens hypocritically laugh at Rebecca's attempts to do just that. In spite of the fact that Rebecca still feels she "will not say but that if a man of suitable years and character were to offer himself, she might be induced to tread the remainder of life's vale in company with him," the "young ladies in Milby would have told you that the Miss Linnets were old maids." (186).

But the narrator's ironic presentation of Rebecca Linnet's "constant application of art to dress" reveals a disdain for her vanity and frivolity that is distinct from the criticism of the Milby women. These defects in character are revealed through her dress:

[H]er reading had been more extensive than her sisters . . . and nothing but an acquaintance with the course of her studies could afford a clew to the rapid transitions in her dress, which were suggested by the style of beauty . . . possessed by the heroine of the three volumes actually in perusal. (184)

Her changing taste in reading material (and heroines) is adroitly matched with her change in attire, Eliot demonstrating the superficiality of both. Clearly the narrator does not respect the kind of education which Rebecca's "extensive" reading has given her, much of which would have been the from the "white-neckcloth novels" that Eliot so much despised. The uselessness of this "education" corresponds to the frivolous and easily altered drapery with which Miss Linnet is fascinated:

A piece of lace, which drooped round the edge of her white bonnet one week, had been rejected by the next; and her cheeks, which on Whitsunday loomed through a Turnerian haze of network, were on Trinity Sunday seen reposing in distinct red outline on her shelving bust, like the sun on a fog-bank. The black velvet, meting with crystal clasp, which one evening encircled her head, had on another descended to her neck, and on a third to her wrist, suggesting to an active imagination either a magical contraction of the ornament, or a fearful ratio of expansion in Miss Rebecca's person. (184)

After her "conversion" under Mr. Tryan, Rebecca Linnet's now more advanced moral development alters her preoccupation with dress, and the narrator correspondingly approves:

But I have been describing Miss Rebecca as she was in former days only, for her appearance this evening . . . is in striking contrast with what it was three or four months ago. Her plain gray gingham dress and plain white collar could never have belonged to her wardrobe before that date . . . there is a change in her air and expression which seems to shed a softened light over her person. (185)

Although, the narrator assures us, she still has egoistic faults, symbolized by the fact that she is "not reduced in size" and "her brown hair will do nothing but hang in crisp ringlets down her large cheeks," she is no longer a "flower flaunting [sic] in a parterre in the hot sunlight," but a "peony in the shade." The former "faults" are excusable because they are "natural," not consciously cultivated. Because she now has "that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self," she wears "quiet attire." She has "more moral loveliness than in those flaunting peony-days, when she had no other model than the costumes of the heroines in the circulating library" (185); however, her tendency to call "piety much that [i]s only puritanic egoism," the narrator ironically remarks, leads her to wear "an excessive solemnity of countenance." Mr. Tryan similarly influences the other ladies of Milby, and their first signs of conversion are to prune "the luxuriance of their lace and ribbons" and "cut out garments for the poor." Regarding the intellectually vain Miss Pratt, the narrator assures us that, however weak she still is, her enlightened self is better than that of other, "unenlightened" women, who still demonstrate a frivolous taste for dress:

Miss, Eliza Pratt, listening in rapt attention to Mr. Tryan's evening lecture, no doubt found evangelical channels for vanity and egoism; but she was clearly in moral advance of Miss Phipps giggling under her feathers at old Mr. Crewe's peculiarities of enunciation. (228)

To have something outside oneself to "love" and "reverence" raises one from "fallen" status to, at least, struggling moral being.

The absorption in appearance and egoism of the Milby women contrast with the unselfconsciousness and usefulness of Janet Dempster, both before her "repentance" and

afterward. Again and again, Janet is shown as indifferent to or unconscious of her clothes and demeanor. Although her occasionally unkempt appearance is the result of drunkenness, the narrator still manages to imply praise for Janet's "natural" beauty and unselfconsciousness.

Auerbach claims that in Victorian literature, the fallen woman possesses an "absolute transforming power" (160). Here, Janet's wild look suggests an abundance of female rebellion and power, a "fallenness" which outshines the prim morality of conventional women. The older women, Miss Pratt and Mrs. Pettifer, recognize Janet's general superiority to other women, though they express themselves in conventional terms. Miss Pratt, who has inwardly censured Rebecca Linnet as "flighty and vain," praises Janet as "the most promising young woman of my acquaintance... There is no young woman in Milby now who can be compared with what Janet was when she was married, either in mind or person" (190). Mrs. Pettifer declares Janet, as a young bride, to have had "a very fine figure! and it showed off her white poplin so well." But these advantages are underscored by Janet's thoughtfulness: "I never see her but she has something pretty to say to me" (190). In spite of her trouble, Janet does not think of herself: "She comes to me sometimes, poor thing . . . anybody passing her in the street may see plain enough what's the matter; but she's always got some little good-natured plan in her head for all that" (190). Janet's bondage to alcohol and to an abusive husband cannot completely overshadow a certain emancipation from convention, and from feminine pettiness, which she subsequently acquires.

Eliot never idealizes this emancipation or the dangers which complete separation from communal standards and communal interaction implies. In this way, Janet's complete disregard for neatness is presented as negative, but only in contrast to a certain simple style of

dress, never more. After an attack the night before by her husband, Janet comes to her mother's in the morning, "her dress careless, her step languid," an image of hopeless suffering. Her behavior is self-pitying, if justifiable, just as her clothes are sloppy; however, as she comes to again focus on doing her duty cheerfully, she is "willing to attend her toilet." The look Janet achieves emphasizes her unusual beauty and goodness:

Janet was dressed; and when the mother had kissed her and said good-by, she could not help pausing a moment in sorrowful admiration at the tall rich figure, looking all the grander for the plainness of the deep mourning dress, and the noble face with its massy folds of black hair, made matronly by a simple white cap. (243)

The narrator particularly points out Janet's "natural" goodness and unconcern for her appearance in the climactic encounter between Janet and her husband. As Dempster confronts her (ironically over her refusal to pick up his clothes) and threatens her, Janet's utter simplicity is emphasized by the ordinariness of her dress. The "light dress which sat loosely about her figure," does not "disguise its liberal, graceful outline." Her hair, unlike Rebecca Linnet's careful ringlets, is "straight jet-black" and has "escaped from its fastening." Robert Dempster's act of throwing Janet out of the house in only her nightdress signifies not only her physical destitution and moral deprivation, but also her complete absence of conceit or vanity (she is "stripped of her pride"). Later, dressed in "such drapery as Mrs. Pettifer could find for her tall figure," she confesses to Mr. Tryan. (Mrs. Pettifer's dress, in a sense, symbolizes Janet's attempt to put on Mrs. Pettifer's evangelical religion.) At this moment, "wrapped up in a

large white shawl which threw her dark face into startling relief," she exhibits a "face with all a heart's agony in it, *uncontrolled by self-consciousness*" (my italics, 256).

Eliot has Mr. Tryan, at this point, reveal his past history with "poor Lucy," a poor girl whom he corrupted and abandoned. When he encounters her again, she has just committed suicide after, apparently, several years as a prostitute. Significantly, her history is revealed through her clothing. She, like Janet, has had nothing to wear and no means of support: "a woman dressed in fine clothes was lying against a doorstep . . . it was Lucy --dead--with paint on her cheeks . . . the very clothes on her back were not her own" (259). Her destruction is intimately connected with the "fine clothes" and "paint" just as Janet's salvation extends from her plain attire and lack of personal vanity.

Janet's lack of concern about her looks, either before or after her repentance, is not limited to moments of suffering as we see, in an early scene, when she is dressed for church. Although she is now "bright looking," she still wears only a "simple muslin dress and black lace shawl." Although her hair is now "braided" and "glossy" and she wears "white satin ribbons," her cap and bonnet are "modest." Like Mary Ann Evans (and "Marian Lewes"), Janet's attention to her appearance depends on the someone else's insistence, as Janet's appeal to her mother's approval makes evident: "Please, mother, I'm come to show myself to you before I go to the Parsonage. Have I put on my pretty cap and bonnet to satisfy you?" Her mother shows concern: "Your bonnet wants pulling a trifle forwarder, my child" (6). Her mother "brush[es] and coil[s] up her thick black hair" not because Janet wishes it, but because it makes her mother happy, "a favorite task, because it seemed to renew the days of her daughter's girlhood" (119). After her confession to Mr. Tryan, Janet wishes to attend his church. Her

desire for clothes to wear contrasts markedly from the description of the Milby women attending church in the first chapter. She wants only her "bonnet and shawl and black gown." When her mother cannot bring Janet's "best black gown" but only "black clothes," Janet tacitly agrees that these "will do." Excitedly, as if the clothes were highly stylish, Janet praises her mother's deed: "That's a dear mother!" (126) As the story ends, Janet remains plainly attired, and it is this style which affects so many around her: "Even neighbors who had no strong personal interest in her could hardly see the noble-looking woman in her widow's dress . . . and not be touched with fresh admiration for her" (155).

Janet's selflessness is presented as extending to her entire demeanor. Her lack of self-consciousness and "naturalness" are revealed through her face and body. Her body moves "with the firm grace natural to her." She has "grandly cut features" which, nevertheless, show "premature lines about them," signifying her suffering. Her nostril only *seems* "made to quiver with the proud consciousness of power and beauty" but, in reality, has "quivered to the heart-piercing griefs which had given that worn look to the corners of the mouth." Janet's eyes, on several occasions, convey a sense of outward focus: they are "searching," "questioning," "watchful," and exude "full forgiveness." Her features accurately display what she feels, a sign of a lack of hypocrisy. Janet's face is "pain stricken" and "seem[s] to bear written on it the signs of all Janet's intervening misery"; furthermore, although her "dark grand face" has a "childlike expression," this expression does not, as it does in some of Eliot's "fallen" women, signify childishness: the narrator assures us "[s]he might have been taken for an image of passionate strength beaten and worn with conflict." But although she is strong, Janet is not willful, for she

has a "sweet submissive face" before Mr. Tryan. Her smile is "innocent" and "kindly," and has a "sad sweet gravity in her face."

The reward for Janet's goodness and "repentance" (including nursing her once-abusive husband) comes when she "earns" the duty of caring for the dying Mr. Tryan. The narrator tells us that "[t]here were others who would have had the heart and skill to fill this place by Mr. Tryan's side . . . but they could not help feeling that God had given it to Janet" (182). Her compensations do not end there. Given the status Eliot accords widows ("good women in black"), we can infer that Janet is doubly redeemed by her status as survivor to both Dempster and Tryan. In addition, Dempster leaves her his wealth, which, of course, she does not spend on clothes, but on charity. These facts combine to make her especially admired in Milby. As Mrs. Jerome says: "I should like to hev a thousand or two at my own disposal; it makes a widow a deal more looked on." The narrator ironically comments that perhaps "this ground of respect to widows might not be entirely without its influence on the Milby mind . . . Errors look so very ugly in persons of small means. . . ." (156). Finally, the narrator cheerfully relates that "Janet is living still. Her black hair is gray, and her step is no longer buoyant; but the sweetness of her smile remains, the love is not gone from her eyes" (185). We are told that she is still "noble-looking" and that she is suitably blessed with an adopted daughter and grandchildren, the highest success for Eliot's good heroines.

In producing *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot allowed herself to experiment with form and content, practising a variety of literary techniques which she would use and expand in her full-length novels. One such experiment involved the treatment of the "fallen woman" figure. In examining the sources of "fallenness," Eliot's focus on "finery" remains a constant, symbolizing, as

no other object could, the origin of much that Eliot saw as wrong with female education and development. The personal nature of dress demonstrated the conflict between loyalty to communal values and individual free will. In the cases of Countess Czerlaski and Caterina Sarti, personal freedom to choose clothing is constrained by social obligations. The Countess is poor and must depend on the good graces of her wealthier brother or hope for an advantageous marriage in order to live comfortably. To gain economic stability, the Countess dresses the part of the rich widow in order to attract a suitable husband. The narrator is generally critical of this ambition, but often demonstrates that given the social climate (represented by the hypocritical citizens of Milby), the Countess is not entirely to blame. The town's relenting pity toward Amos after the Countess's departure and after Milly's death echoes the theme of social cleansing to which Eliot returns in future works, as well. Milly's generosity and selflessness, mirrored in her naturally simple style of dress, heals the community by providing a means of reconciliation between her husband and his backbiting neighbors.

The same pattern exists in "Mr. Gilfil's Lovestory." Caterina's ambiguous position as household "pet" at Cheverel Manor obliges her to dress "above her station" and exposes her to the attentions of the wealthy Anthony Wybrow. Unable to be a lady, Tina must remain (unnaturally) content merely to dress as one, and the dubiousness of this arrangement is evident in the general social repentance after Tina's anguished departure from the estate. The message seems clear. "Finery," like the class system it once represented via strict clothing laws, is part of a corrupt system of social relationships which inevitably demean women. Women who "love finery" reveal their slavery to a class-gender hierarchy which reduces them to objects of socio-economic

exchange, rather than "rational beings." That this objectified status makes them capable of "immoral" sexuality or even murder Eliot considers a matter of course.

In both Milly Barton and Janet Dempster, Eliot suggests the power of the "woman in black" to change the false values of those around her. By giving up "finery," by wearing the plain dress that implies seriousness, spirituality, even elected poverty, these women convey their moral worthiness to lead society away from materialism and vanity which separate individuals into egoistic fragments. The conviction that only through taking off "finery" could women discover and fulfill their highest potential is made manifest in the lives of Milly and Janet. While each exemplifies the kind of "natural beauty" which Eliot saw as a true "blessing," since Beauty could inspire human beings, each woman is totally unselfconscious about her looks, focusing on her moral development instead.

That the community is only incompletely transformed, however, is clear. Milly's death cannot stop Amos's unfair loss of the incumbency, nor can all of Janet's suffering efface her neighbor's remarks about her "fortunate" status as wealthy widow. The members of the Milby world still do not get the point. For Eliot, the "law of consequences" is too strong for individual or revolutionary efforts to disrupt. True change required social evolution, and the effects of Milly's and Janet's lives on the town indicate the part that freedom from "finery" can play in effecting progress.

Chapter Three: *Adam Bede*

It was a still afternoon . . . an afternoon in which destiny disguises her cold awful face behind a hazy radiant veil, encloses us in warm downy wings, and poisons us with violet-scented breath.

George Eliot

In her earliest work, Eliot reveals an intimate link between the "fallen" female character and the love of fine dress; she further extends this connection in her first full-length novel through the character of Hetty Sorrel. Like "destiny" in *Adam Bede*, Hetty, too, disguises her true nature behind a "hazy veil" of colorful dresses, ribbons, bonnets, and lace; like those taken in by destiny's disguise, the characters who trust in Hetty's appearance suffer.²⁹ Similarly, Hetty's trust in appearances, specifically her own and Arthur's, "poisons" her life forever. Just as Dinah's celebrated sermon is partly directed at Bessy Crange, a young woman of questionable morality³⁰ who reveals her preference of ornamentation to "natural beauty" by being "much prouder" of her ear-rings than of her "red cheeks," Eliot's work devotes a great deal of attention to the role that clothing and ornamentation play in feminine downfall, exploring the problems associated with Hetty's engagement (and that of others) in her dress and appearance.

²⁹ Ian Adam's note that Eliot, in *Mill*, seems to question the Wordsworthian doctrine that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her," seems just as applicable to the observers of the "still afternoon" in *Adam Bede*, who certainly are "betrayed" by Nature's disguises.

³⁰ Eliot offered no reference for the proverb that Bessy is "one of that unsoaped lazy class of feminine characters with whom you may venture to 'eat an egg, an apple, or nut.'" That Eliot ignored her publisher's suggestion to clarify the

Many critics have noted the strong condemnation of vanity in Eliot's novels, generally seeing a character's self-admiration as an emotional or even sexual act. Patricia Thomson argues that it is Hetty's sexual transgression, rooted in emotional recklessness, which Eliot punishes. In noting how Eliot's depiction of Hetty Sorrel's seduction attempted to answer important Victorian questions concerning sexual morality, Thomson comments that Eliot's interest in Hetty's fall concerns its "motivations," of which "vanity, ambition, and passion" are primary (141); Thomson suggests that this "vanity, ambition, and passion" represent a lack of "emotional self-discipline"—which Thomson claims that Eliot saw as the source of sexual promiscuity and for which Eliot can find "no atonement." The focus on "motivations" helps clarify Eliot's purpose, the interest in origins which she develops even more in later novels, but Thomson's insistence that Hetty's problem is emotional overlooks a good deal of the "details" of Hetty's world—the frequent references to dress and ornamentation which suggest a different "motivation."

Other readings have attempted to explore more fully how this critical space—one which accounts for the materialism in Hetty's desires—might be filled. Margaret Homans' contention, that Hetty's emphatically working-class status is tied to her "desire for luxury and her hope that [Arthur] will make her a 'grand lady,'" indicates a connection between Hetty's sexual fall, her class ambition, and her desires for "luxury" ("Dinah's Blush" 167). Nina Aeurbach's claim that Hetty falls not because of sexual feelings but because she wants the "social glamour and power Arthur embodies" suggests a similar conclusion. Sally Mitchell, in commenting on Eliot's

meaning of this axiom ("or it may be taken to imply something more than I suppose it does") indicates that Eliot thought

realistic depiction of Hetty's nature and desires, argues that Hetty's fall, though motivated in part by an "innocent natural sexuality," is equally moved by "an inherent taste for cleanliness and pretty things" (68). Mason Harris states more specifically that Hetty's love for Arthur is a kind of "Cinderella-fantasy," the nature of which focuses on his power to give her "things": "[t]he extent to which her fantasies about Arthur involve infantile dressing up should dispel any belief that sensual love or romantic passion is involved here" (183). The suggestion that the "infantile dressing up" is the motive for Hetty's fall does more than simply shift the focus from emotions to objects. It gestures toward a reading of the novel as an exploration of "material" causes, rather than (simply) moral weaknesses. The extent to which Hetty's sexual fall is rooted in her wish for fashionable dress rather than in her romantic or in her sexual feelings for Arthur becomes an important question for Eliot, one which she addresses in nearly every scene involving Hetty. Eliot's presentation of Hetty's "love of finery," its effect on Hetty's "moral sympathy," and the social origins of both suggests the "artificial ugliness" of dressing up and the moral potential of simple dress. By contrasting Hetty's "natural" preference for "finery" to Dinah Morris's more conscious choice of plain clothing, Eliot indicates the way that moral education and wider vocational opportunities for women, which Dinah has had, might eliminate both "fallenness" and the social causes which inflamed it. For those women who are encouraged through moral education to look beyond middle-class materialism and the feminine display which often accompanied it—for those who can reject the lure of "finery"—genuine goodness and personal self-fulfillment is possible.

the phrase self-explanatory. Certainly, a moral "casualness" is implied.

But in making this point, Eliot runs up against a problem, suggested in the opening chapters of the novel, which she never quite solves in this novel—how much is the fallen woman, trapped as she is by an oppressive culture which links social status with (female) material display, responsible for her condition? The question of moral choice, as Felicia Bonaparte makes clear, is a highly complex one for Eliot. And Eliot's difficulties in resolving how much of Hetty's problems result from an "innocent natural sexuality" and an "artificial" desire for finery are never completely worked out. It may not be quite true, as Bonaparte tries to argue, that Hetty is a mere "child," an amoral being whom the sympathetic narrator would not blame for any of her errors; but it is true that Hetty's fall is something she cannot prevent, given her nature and the education which has helped distort her.

The difficulty facing Eliot's depiction of Hetty's "fallen" nature is suggested by the first two comments the narrator makes about her. After describing in some detail the "objects," as Mary O'Connor calls them, of Hall Farm, the narrator mentions that the brilliant shine of the polished oak table serves as a mirror for Hetty, who "often took the opportunity, when her aunt's back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces" (80). The similarly shiny pewter dishes that Hetty's aunt Poyser displays also become mirrors to reflect Hetty's loveliness. That her aunt Poyser clearly disapproves of this self-admiration is likewise suggested: "for there was no weakness of which she was less tolerant than feminine vanity, and the preference of ornament to utility" (81). To the extent that Mrs. Poyser's "sharp tongue" speaks Eliot's judgments, Hetty's engagement with her attractiveness is presented as wrong.

But Mrs. Poyser's almost obsessive cleanliness and order in her home vaguely gestures at the Poyser's pride in their social position, "good farmers," and in the possessions which

symbolize that status, the "oak table," the "clean floor," the productive farm. If Hetty is fascinated with her appearance, and with enhancing that appearance, she has perhaps learned some of her superficiality at home. This is the view taken by Mason Harris, who contends that, in *Adam Bede*, "Hetty becomes 'subversive' to her community not by achieving the status of a rebel, but by acting out a naïve version of its values" (195). Hetty is the victim of a materialistic culture that formulates "femininity" as the exhibition of that materialism. Eliot only hints at this problem in *Adam Bede*, though she will take it up further in later novels. But the suggestion that Hetty is not entirely or even mostly responsible for her limited vision of herself and the world permeates descriptions of Hetty throughout the work.

The narrator's second mention of Hetty and her aunt extends this suggestion, and in a way that will complicate the relationship between "natural" beauty, love of "finery" and "fallenness" throughout the novel. In the first description of Hetty's beauty, given as Hetty makes butter in the dairy, the narrator admits the "naturalness" of an engagement with beauty. The narrator's original insistence that Hetty's is that "order of beauty which seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women" appears to naturalize both her engagement with her own appearance and ours, as well. Everyone feels her charm, even her Mrs. Poyser, "who professed to despise all personal attractions and intended to be the severest of mentors." Mrs. Poyser's confession that "the naughtier the little huzzy behaved, the prettier she looked" creates an apparent affirmation of the inescapable quality of Hetty's attractiveness. This affirmation suggests that neither Hetty nor the culture in which she exists is responsible for her "fallen" beauty—it is the result of "Nature."

Eliot never fully addresses this issue although, as I will argue, she will attempt to solve the problem through her presentation of Dinah Morris, but in the narrator's erotic description of Hetty in the dairy, "coquettishly" patting the butter while Arthur looks on, Eliot signals where the difference between a "natural" appreciation of beauty and a fatal "love of finery" might fall:

It is little use for me to tell you that Hetty's cheek was like a rose-petal, that dimples played about her pouting lips, that her large dark eyes hid a soft roguishness under their long lashes, and that curly hair, though all pushed under her round cap while she was at work, stole back in dark delicate rings on her forehead, and about her white shell-like ears; it is of little use for me to say how lovely was the contour of her pink-and-white neckerchief, tucked into her low plum-coloured stuff bodice, or how the linen butter-making apron, seemed a thing to be imitated in silk by duchesses, since it fell in such charming lines, or how her brown stockings and thick-soled shoes lost all that clumsiness which they must certainly have had when empty of her foot and ankle--of little use, unless you have seen a woman who affected you as Hetty affected her beholders . . . (90)

The account goes on for nearly two pages. The narrator's vivid description of Hetty's beauty emphasizes the "naturalness" of Hetty's good looks. Like the rich fecundity of Hall Farm, itself, Hetty literally brims with sensuous charm. In describing Hetty's ordinary working dress, the narrator establishes a specific attitude toward women's costume. In her natural environment, Hetty's country attire becomes "finery"—"a thing to imitated in silk by duchesses."

But Hetty is not content with looking as pretty as a duchess—she wants to *be* a “grand lady,” herself, and it is here that Eliot seems to point a finger. Rooted in Hetty’s class ambition is a fundamental acceptance of herself as an object for display. Though it may be true that in Hetty, Eliot presents the triumph of “nature” over “nurture,” as Paxton argues, it is equally true that Hetty experiences some—perhaps the most destructive elements of—cultural nurturing. For Hetty’s class ambition is inseparable from her desire for the clothing that reflects class power: the power to avoid labor, the power to buy easily ruined attire. Hetty’s desire for the clothing of a “grand lady,” her desire for the “silk gown and a great many clothes all at once” which comes with a wedding, leads her to fall in love with the only man who can fulfill these desires, Arthur. By marrying him, she anticipates “that she [will] be a lady in silks and satins” (300). In imagining a future with Arthur she envisions only to “sit in a carpeted parlour, and always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful earrings, such as were all the fashion; to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown, and something to make her handkerchief smell nice like Miss Lydia Donnithorne’s when she drew it out at church” (105). After Arthur kisses her in the wood, she envisions that “someday she should be a grand lady . . . and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair, and her dress sweeping the ground” (152). As a lady, she will have “her hair done in a great many different ways, and sometimes in a pink dress and sometimes in a white one” (152). The narrator comments that on the day of Arthur’s birthday feast, Hetty is so sure he will transform her life that “she lives already in an invisible world of brilliant costumes, shimmering gauze, soft satin, and velvet, such as the lady’s maid at the Chase has shown her in Miss Lydia’s wardrobe. She feels the bracelets on her arms, and treads on a soft carpet in front of a tall mirror” (244). Hetty

imagines that "Captain Donnithorne couldn't like her to go on doing work: he would like to see her in nice clothes, and thin shoes, and white stockings,³¹ perhaps with silk clocks in them" (151).

Eliot's narrator makes clear that Hetty's fall is not solely her doing through passages in which the narrator "indulges" in seemingly innocent physical appraisal of her looks and actions. The implication is that the narrator imitates society's encouraging reaction to female beauty and interest fashion. The heavy irony conveyed in these passages points out, as no other narrative commentary could do, the danger that society's "miseducation" of women can lead to.

Judith Mitchell views many passages in the novel as examples of the masculine "voyeurism" which Eliot only half-heartedly critiques later. For example, the lush, opening description of Hetty seems to present her as an object of the male gaze, and thus, her unfortunate plight seems determined right from the beginning. Small but definite clues point to an opposite interpretation, one which takes into consideration the heavily ironic tone of this passage. Hetty's is a "spring-tide beauty," a term which implies that it will not necessarily last because, like the "young frisking things" it reminds the viewer of, it is immature. Her looks convey a "*false* air of innocence," and are likened to a "star-browed calf. . . that, being inclined for a promenade out of bounds, leads you a severe steeplechase over hedge and ditch, and only comes to a stand in the middle of a bog" (91, my italics). In light of these remarks, the description of Hetty's looks and dress and the narrator's sly encouragement for the reader to

³¹ Eliot's research on late 18th century clothing, which she undertook before writing *Adam Bede*, confirms the extravagance of Hetty's desire. Joseph Wiesenfarth's work on Eliot's *Adam Bede* notes reveals that she had consulted actual letters from that period which confirmed that "in those days (i.e. about 1760) girls of the best families wore white

observe them appear as traps which, the narrator wishes to demonstrate, result when society nourishes only vanity and egoism in women.

A warning note sounds in Hetty's "dressing up" scene. The long view we are offered of Hetty is a carefully staged exhibition on Eliot's part to establish a particular moral outlook.

How pretty the little puss looks in that odd dress? It would be the easiest folly in the world to fall in love with her; there is such a sweet babylike roundness about her face and figure; the delicate dark rings of hair lie so charmingly about her ears and neck; her great dark eyes with their long eyelashes touch one so strangely, as if an imprisoned frisky sprite looked out of them . . . Every man under such circumstances is conscious of being a great physiognomist. Nature, he knows, has a language of her own, which she uses with strict veracity, and he considers himself an adept in the language. Nature has written out his bride's character for him in those exquisite lines of cheek and lip and chin, in those eyelids delicate as petals, in those lashes curled like the stamen of a flower, in the liquid depths of those wonderful eyes. (152-53)

The narrator's heavy irony here, the patronizing use of "little puss," the stress on every man's being a "great physiognomist," the contemptuous allusion to "Nature," display that the voyeurism "he" is engaged in is wrong, that the view offers a distorted picture just as Hetty's mirror does. We easily see through the aristocratic mask represented by Hetty's cheap jewelry and lace, and the narrator's satiric "sympathy" with what "every man" would feel about Hetty

stockings only on the Sundays, & one week-day which was a sort of public day:—on the other days, they wore blue

implies that we should be equally suspicious about all appearances. As the narrator, with a touch of irony, later confirms: "One begins to suspect at length that there is no direct correlation between eyelashes and morals" (154).

Mitchell notes that, in the passage above, the narrator's "tone changes abruptly [in the passage above] to seriousness as he pursues the matter further," going on to quote a subsequent passage in which, Mitchell claims, the narrator, "who sounds masculine—remains unconvinced about the validity of the beauty/goodness connection":

After all, I believe the wisest of us must be beguiled in this way sometimes . . .
Nature has her language, and she is not unveracious; but we don't know all
the intricacies of her syntax just yet, and in a hasty reading we may happen to
extract the very opposite of her real meaning. (Mitchell 94)

Certainly, this bit of Wordsworthian praise of Nature seems to qualify the narrator's heavy irony against "every man," but the caution about our inability to "read" the language of Nature conveys the same message of warning. Paxton's reading of this passage, in which she links the narrator's remarks with Eliot's critique of Spencerian evolutionary theories of beauty, similarly notes the narrator's criticism of reading Nature's language:³²

Eliot's comments about nature's inscrutability appear most frequently in the
context of her descriptions of Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris, and it is here that we
can see the special relevance of the new evolutionary analysis of women that

Doncaster woollen stockings with white tags" (139).

³² Paxton also argues that one cannot assume Eliot's automatic identification with her male narrator's point of view, since Eliot felt compelled to have that narrator's point of view remain consistently "male." Paxton suggests that the

Spencer began to formulate between 1852 and 1858. In constructing the theory of sexual selection described in 'Physical Training,' Spencer ignored the complexity of Nature's 'syntax' and assumed that the most beautiful women were those most naturally suited to become the best mothers of the race." (46)

This message is underscored by the narrator's comment afterward that "we must learn to accommodate ourselves to the discovery that some . . . human souls have only a very limited range of music" (102). The juxtaposition of this statement and the elaborate description of Hetty's hair, face, body, and dress reinforces the message her beauty is, after all, only skin deep. The same is true in regard to Hetty's conduct. When Hetty is annoyed and angry with her niece, a sure sign in Eliot's Comtean philosophy of a lack of feminine moral instinct, the narrator "excuses" Adam's amusement: "But there was something quite charming in her pettishness: it looked so much more like innocent distress than ill humour" (255). The narrator leaves no doubt that Adam's gullibility regarding Hetty's looks is wrong, and we feel an impending sense of danger in his continued blindness on this point.

As Eliot encourages sympathy of Hetty's vanity and materialism, the author continues to demonstrate the way in which these traits converge in her love of "finery," the only kind of love Hetty truly understands. Thus, Hetty's love for Arthur primarily focuses on his ability to offer her "trinkets" which she sees as "the earnest of her future paradise of finery" (320). Although Arthur thinks of Hetty's materiality as "the prettiest bit of childishness" (like that of the toddler, Totty, begging a coin from Arthur for her "tiny pink pocket"), the narrator suggests that the

reader must look to Rev. Irwine for a more balanced view of how easily Nature can "cheat" those who try to "read" her

desire comes from Hetty's vanity and cupidity. The narrator hints that she actually prefers the presents to the man:

Ah, you think, it is for the sake of the person who has given them to her, and her thoughts are gone back now to the moment when they were put into her hands. No; else why should she have cared to have ear-rings rather than anything else? . . . No, she was not thinking most of the giver when she smiled at the earrings, for now she is taking them out of the box, not to press them to her lips, but to fasten them in her ears . . . to see how pretty they looked (243).

Hetty imparts a similar attitude toward the locket Arthur has given her, having a "passion" for it which is only "a little less strong than her love of finery." When the cheap beaded chain, upon which Hetty wears the locket, breaks, Hetty exclaims, "My locket, my locket . . . never mind the beads," and her reason for distress is twofold. While she does fear Adam's discovery of her affair with Arthur (which the lock of his hair intertwined with hers in the locket will give away), she also fears the loss of the expensive locket, itself.

As in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot suggests the "shallowness" (Hetty is a plant "with hardly any roots") through scenes involving sewing. Unlike her aunt and Dinah, Hetty takes no pride in "practical" sewing, but thinks "there is no end to the making and mending of clothes."

Although Hetty is not presented as an idle person (as is the Countess Czerlaski), the narrator does hint that she works out of fear rather than out of a sense of duty, fear of her aunt and, later, apprehension to conceal her pregnancy. While Mrs. Poyser grudgingly agrees that Hetty

has "cliver fingers of her own, and can be useful enough when she likes," her aunt insists that Hetty is "no better than a peacock" since much of Hetty's work (like caring for the chickens) is done for extra pay, with which she purchases "bits of finery." Rather than focusing on work, according to Mrs. Poyser, "[i]t's what rag [Hetty] can get to stick on her as she's thinking on from morning till night" (324). Hetty is pleased when Dinah, whom the Poyser children make a "convenient household slave," "want[s] to do some mending for her." Hetty does indicate on several occasions that she would like to be a lady's maid, but her wish, says her aunt, is merely a pipe dream based on a desire to avoid hard work: "She thinks there's nothing belongs to being a lady's maid but wearing finer clothes nor she was born to, I'll be bound" (324). In ironic contrast, Mrs. Poyser is later happy when, after Arthur leaves Hetty, Hetty "[thinks] much less about her dress, and [goes] after the work quite eagerly, without any telling" (337). Hetty's "love of finery" begins to change just at the moment she, as Paxton puts it, "recognize[s] her imprisonment in her body" (61).

Hetty's love of "finery" corresponds to her skill at the kind of "fancy" sewing which is used solely to create such clothing. Her first meeting with Arthur in the woods comes as she goes to learn "tent-stitch and the lace mending" and "cutting out" from the lady's maid, Mrs. Pomfret. Hetty willingly learns this kind of sewing because by it, she can produce the clothing that she desires. Hetty, who especially longs for "white stockings," is especially proud of the "stocking-mending" that Mrs. Pomfret is teaching her and marvels to Arthur that "it looks just like the stocking, you can't tell it's been mended" (133). Miss Donnithorne later remarks that Hetty "has mended some lace of mine very respectably indeed, very respectably" (265). Hetty's pink-and-white spotted dress, in which she "[looks] as if she . . . [is] made of roses" is doubtless made by

her hand since, before Arthur's birthday feast, Hetty is "busy" modifying the sleeves. In one of Hetty's final scenes at the farm, her aunt scolds her for not properly preparing for wedding, saying "it was because they [the items Hetty's has failed to buy] were not for th' outside, else she'd ha' bought 'em fast enough" (347).

Through narrative asides, Eliot makes clear that Hetty's love for fashionable clothing is in direct contrast to her moral development. Hetty is "not deeply affected," "unsympathetic," a "lower nature," and "immovable and obstinate." She is an "ornamental" plant "with hardly any roots." Her aunt complains that "there's nothing seems to give her a tum i' th' inside" and when she attends church, Hetty is "deaf" to Pastor Irwine. The narrator describes her as having a "luxurious pleasure-seeking nature," and a "vain little nature." The narrator's comparison of Hetty to "water nixies, and such lovely things without souls," a comparison which seems to excuse Hetty's "natural" amorality, is undercut by a subsequent reminder that Hetty is not such a creature:

And Hetty must be one of them [the water-nixies]: it is too painful to think that she is a woman, with a woman's destiny before her—a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes, which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish. (243-44)

Hetty's aunt, the "feminine eye that first detects the moral deficiencies hidden under the 'dear deceit' of beauty," charges that Hetty is "too feather-headed to mind if everybody was dead, so as [she] could stay upstairs a-dressing [herself] for two hours by the clock" (101). When Hetty

makes use of Adam's love for her, although she knows she will never care for him, the narrator tells us that "[i]t never entered into [Hetty's] mind that Adam was pitiable too" (216); she cares little for her aunt and uncle, although they have apparently served as parents to her; and she clearly feels little moral compunction about either her affair with Arthur or her sham engagement to Adam.

Hetty's tendency to think of others in terms of their dress further reveals her limited capacity for moral sympathy. Since she cannot truly see others' "humanity," she cannot conceive of their suffering or her need to promote "fellow feeling." She thinks that Mary Burge, who is secretly in love with Adam and therefore pitiable, is a "sallow-faced girl; if she put on a bit of pink ribbon, she looked as yellow as a crow-flower and her hair was as straight as a hank of cotton," overlooking both Mary's general integrity and her suffering (104). When Hetty goes to the birthday feast, she jealousy imagines that "Mary Burge . . . would have a new hat or bonnet on." Hetty's "masquerade" as Dinah demonstrates Hetty's association of her cousin with the "ugly clothes" that Methodists wear rather than with Dinah's kindness or piety. Her observation of Miss Lydia Donnithorne at church centers on the lady's "fashionable coal-scuttle bonnet, with the wreath of small roses round it" (195). In fact, all of Hetty's perceptions of "ladies" focus on their clothing. Most fatal of all, her impression of Arthur revolves around his "white hands, a gold chain, occasional regimentals, and wealth and grandeur immeasurable." He is not a person but a "tall figure . . . in clothes of beautiful texture, with an odour like that of a flower-garden borne on the evening breeze." Adam, understanding Hetty's flawed nature and trying to justify her love for Arthur, rationalizes "Her head was allays likely to be turned . . . when a gentleman, with his fine manners, and fine clothes, and his white hands . . . came

about her, making up to her in a bold way " (312). Like Caterina Sarti, Hetty fails to see the moral weaknesses of the man she loves or the impossibility of marriage with him. She is forced to endure the "inexorable" punishment meted out for such egoistic blindness.

But Hetty's greatest moral weakness is to think of herself in terms of dress, as an object to be adored. The narrator comments that Hetty is "used to the thought that people liked to look at her" and most of her self-perception is wrapped up in satisfying those lookers. Hetty is aware early on that "Mr. Arthur Donnithorne would take a good deal of trouble for the chance of seeing her." Before her meeting with Arthur in the woods, she dreams of impressing him with "her new rose-coloured ribbon . . . which he had never seen." The memorable scene in Hetty's bedroom in which she covertly dresses herself in cheap finery while gazing at herself in the mirror underscores her illusory self-conception: "Even the old mottled glass couldn't help sending back a lovely image, none the less lovely because Hetty's stays were not of white satin--such as I feel sure heroines must generally wear--but of a dark green cotton texture" (151). Despite the narrator's irony concerning the usual dress of heroines, we see that Hetty does think of herself in terms of a conventional heroine who should be suitably dressed. In this same scene, Hetty imagines her future as one in which she "is the central figure in fine clothes . . . and everybody else is admiring and envying her--especially Mary Burge, whose new print dress looks very contemptible by the side of Hetty's resplendent toilette" (154). When she attends the burial service for Thias Bede, Hetty expects Arthur to see her, and she dresses up, according to her aunt, "as if there was a wedding i'stid of a funeral." Hetty puts a great deal of attention into impressing others with her "finery" and looks. When she goes to the birthday feast, Hetty prides herself that she wears "fine white cotton stockings: they really were

very nice indeed" (244). Similarly, knowing she will "not wear any neckerchief" at the dance, she thinks "more than usual about her neck and arms," cleverly designing a dress in which the sleeves can be modified (242). Ultimately, she is a victim, if not of her own vanity, certainly of the retribution in the Eliot universe on women who have accepted an objectified status.

Hetty's engagement in her own appearance signifies what is for Eliot a crucial moral flaw: a lack of self-knowledge. As Gillian Beer comments, concerning the mirror scene in Hetty's bedroom, "Hetty recognizes only a diminished image of herself, framed (perhaps over-significantly) in red, and corresponding to her as 'a veritable Hebe'" (66). Eliot consistently rewards characters who come to know and ultimately to subdue themselves, as, for example, Adam Bede does as he awaits Hetty's trial, and those who fail generally meet Eliot's harshest disapproval. Hetty never truly experiences such a personal enlightenment, and although she appears completely self-absorbed, she rarely demonstrates a sense of identity. Indeed, her one desire is to take a new personality, and frequently clothing serves to underscore this desire. She wants to "make herself look like that picture of a lady in Miss Lydia Donnithorne's dressing-room," a desire which exemplifies her ambitions and her distorted sense of identity. On several occasions Hetty seems to *be* nothing more than the clothes she wears. Willing to skip dinner to make up for being late, Hetty is scolded by her aunt, "Do you think you can live wi'out eatin', an' nourish your inside wi' stickin' red ribbons on your head?" (147). Later, Mrs. Poyser wonders if Hetty has "insides" at all: "I often ask her if she woul'n't like to be the mawkin' [scarecrow] i' the field, for then she'd be made o' rags inside and out" (324). Eliot connects Hetty's inclination for aristocratic dress with a misguided, even dangerous, misunderstanding of the objectified role that this inclination forces on her. In addition, like the Victorian social critic

in Valverde's article, the realist Eliot suggests that such pretensions more often lead to the dreamer's downfall. Although Eliot does not seem to sympathize with Miss Lydia Donnithorne, who boasts that she "[has] bought nothing but what is useful and substantial" for prizes at the birthday games, Eliot does seem to agree that, like Miss Lydia, she "should not think of encouraging a love of finery in young women of that [lower] class" (267). Similarly, although the narrator sneers at the plainness of the Green Lantern's landlady who comments that "[i]t 'ud have been a good deal better for [Hetty] if she'd been uglier and had more conduct," the sneer clearly is directed at the landlady's moralizing and not at the truth of her words. Most important of all, the narrator has Adam and his mother, models of working class morality, both reject Hetty's "love of finery": "[Adam] himself disliked it as much as it was possible for him to dislike anything that belonged to her" and it "was just the thing that would most provoke his mother" (218). Eliot, through Adam, seems even to endorse the Victorian association between dressing beyond one's station and a descent into prostitution. When Adam criticizes Hetty's desire to put a rose in her hair, "like the ladies in the pictures at the Chase; they've mostly got flowers or feathers or gold things i' their hair," Adam claims he "doesn't like to see 'em" because "they allays put [him] 'i mind o' the painted women outside the shows at Treddle'on Fair" (218). In this case, Adam rejects hair ornaments for both the aristocracy and the poor, since in both groups, the ornaments detract from a woman's "natural beauty," but he insinuates that Hetty looks more like the "cheap imitation of upper-class womanhood" seen outside the Fair than the real thing. Ironically, Hetty shares the background and fate of many of these "painted ladies." Most important of all, Adam's comments suggest the link, which Eliot repeatedly makes in her

works, between the fashionably dressed woman and the prostitute. Both often “sell” themselves for male socio-economic power and protection.

Hetty's fate is, of course, to suffer for her aristocratic aspirations, and the contrast between the identity she wants to have and that which she fears to have, that of a shameful, poor outcast, is marked by references to clothing. When Hetty first reads Arthur's good-bye letter, the narrator remarks, “She was not thinking of her neck and arms now; even her own beauty was indifferent to her” (321). As Hetty wearily journeys to find Arthur and then Dinah, she gives up her dreams of ladyhood, desiring only to “dress herself neat,” to avoid being thought a beggar or a “wild woman.” As Hetty gazes at the jewelry Arthur has given her and which she must sell for travel money, the narrator comments:

Those beautiful little ear-rings, with their delicate pearls and garnets, that she had tried in her ears with such longing in the bright sunshine on the 30th of July! She had no longing to put them in her ears now . . . (362)

When the landlord of the Green Man questions whether Hetty truly wishes to part with the jewelry, she responds “Oh, I don't mind . . . so as I can get money to go back” (364). She eventually is forced to sell even the clothes in her basket to avoid being taken to “the parish.” When Adam sees her in the prison, the disparity between Hetty's “fantasy” and real outcomes strikes him, again in terms of her appearance:

The face was marble now; the sweet lips were pallid and half-open and quivering; the dimples were all gone . . . and the eyes—O, the worst of all was the likeness they had to Hetty's. They were Hetty's eyes looking at him with

that mournful gaze, as if she had come back to him from the dead to tell him of her misery. (435-36)

The difference in Hetty's imagined and actual selves gains irony by the fact that Hetty loses rather than gains status in the novel. She goes from looking "like a respectable country girl," to being mistaken for a "mad woman." Beginning as a honorable farmer's niece, she descends to a transported criminal.³³ Her belief that Arthur will "make a lady of her" is, like her pretense in front of the mirror, based on a false sense of reality: it is a "dream," a "foolish joy," something "out of a ballad." Hetty pays for her "dream," and pays in a way that specifically reflects that Victorian invectives against working class girls' "love of finery." Hetty's seven-year transportation to Australia, as historian William Eisler's work makes clear, would almost undoubtedly resulted in an existence of prostitution. Although it's unclear how aware Eliot might have been about the life of transported women criminals,³⁴ this particular outcome of Hetty's "wretched fate of transportation" is suggestive. Eliot's judgment of working girls who become, as Valverde puts it, "cheap imitations of upper-class womanhood" retains all of the fervor of similar invectives launched by nineteenth-century moralists and didactic writers. The narrator allows Hetty to be similar to "ladies" in only one way, one which reveals Eliot's contempt for the kind of "lady" Hetty wishes to be. As Adam contemplates giving Hetty Arthur's letter, Hetty thinks of ways to deny her involvement with Arthur:

³³ Mason Harris comments on the fate of prostitution and abuse which awaits the victimized Hetty.

³⁴ That Eliot strongly encouraged the debt-ridden family of Chrissey Evans Clarke (her sister) to emigrate to Australia and that she actually aided a nephew in doing so indicates that she saw Australia as a more hospitable place than it was.

Hetty laid her small plots and imagined her little scenes of cunning blandishment, as she walked along by the hedgerows on honest Adam's arm, quite as well as if she had been an elegantly clad coquette alone in her boudoir. For if a country beauty in clumsy shoes be only shallow-hearted enough, it is astonishing how closely her mental processes may resemble those of a lady in society and crinoline, who applies her refined intellect to the problem of committing indiscretions without compromising herself. (307)

Hetty believes she can "mend" the situation, like the stocking she works on with Mrs. Pomfret, so that "you can't tell it's been mended." The tragedy for Hetty is that while her sexual "sin" is very like those of many aristocratic women (or of most men), she will pay for her misconduct in a mode that is particularly class specific.

Hetty's vanity and "love of finery" anticipate her final selfish act, the murder of her illegitimate child. Paxton comments on Hetty's impossible position as both the beautiful icon of Arthur's and Adam's fantasies and the "woman, with a woman's destiny," whose needs are much less "ornamental." Paxton notes that until Hetty's attempted suicide on the road from Winchester, she is unable to "[recognize] what it means to be a sexually mature woman" and when she does understand, she falls back not on "maternal instincts" but those of "self-preservation" (61). "'Natural' altruism, as Paxton argues, was far from a mere impulse of biology; it needed proper sexual, intellectual, and moral education to develop properly. Hetty's only moment of self-awareness comes when she tells Dinah "I can't feel anything like you . . . my heart is hard," and her confession seems to furnish her no new insights; her "poor soul is [still] very dark and discerns little beyond the things of the flesh" (433).

Hetty's love of finery is in direct contrast with Dinah Morris's disregard for external concerns. The two are frequently compared both by the narrator and by others, and their different exteriors cause as much comment as their disparate personalities. In an early scene together walking, Dinah, who has been "trying to speak words of comfort and strength to Seth" who is "very full of trouble," tells Hetty so, but "Hetty answered with a dimpled smile." The scene raises narrative comment:

[I]t made a strange contrast to see that sparkling self-engrossed loveliness looked at by Dinah's calm pitying face, with its open glance which told that her heart lived in no cherished secrets of its own, but in feelings which it longed to share with all the world. (142-43)

A similar comparison is raised shortly after as the two women dress for bed:

What a strange contrast the two figures made, visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight! Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. They were nearly of the same height; Dinah evidently a little the taller as she put her arm round Hetty's waist and kissed her forehead. (159)

The disparity between Hetty's self-conscious attractiveness and Dinah's unaffected beauty gains further importance in a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Poyser. In this case, Mrs. Poyser, who is "intolerant" of "feminine vanity," argues in favor of Dinah's "natural" beauty and

decries masculine preference for women who are "overpretty." But Mrs. Poyser reveals the double-bind of the logic inherent in her prescriptive comments. As she tries unsuccessfully to convince her husband, simultaneously, that a woman is not to be judged on her looks and that Dinah is just as "good looking" as Hetty, Mrs. Poyser demonstrates that looks (including dress) do matter:

"Though for the matter o' that, there's people wi' light hair an' blue eyes as pretty as them wi' black. If Dinah had got a bit o' colour in her cheeks, an' didn't stick that Methodist cap on her head, enough to frighten the cows, folks 'ud think her as pretty as Hetty."

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Poyser, with rather a contemptuous emphasis, "thee dostna know the pints of a woman. The men 'ud niver run after Dinah as they would after Hetty."

"What care I what the men 'ud run after? It's well seen what choice the most of 'em know how to make, by the poor draggie-tails o' wives you see, like bits o' gauze ribbin, good for nothing when the colour's gone."

These useless "draggie-tails," who no doubt waste money on the kinds of cheap finery that Hetty does, don't measure up measure up to Dinah, who wears a cap "ugly enough to frighten the cows." They are "bits of gauze ribbin," like the "rose-coloured ribbon" which Hetty wears to impress Arthur, deceptively pretty and ultimately useless.

These disparities in Dinah's and Hetty's characters culminate in the scene in which Hetty "dresses up" as Dinah. Playfully annoyed by Adam's lecture against fashion and his admiration of the suitability of Dinah's Quaker attire, Hetty intentionally misinterprets Adam's statement

that he "wouldn't like to see [Dinah] so well without [the Quaker cap]" to mean that "folks looks better in ugly clothes." Hetty imitates her Methodist cousin, emphasizing rather than disguising the fact that they are different in more than appearance:

The little minx had found a black gown of her aunt's, and pinned it close round her neck to look like Dinah's, had made her hair as flat as she could, and had tied on one of Dinah's high-crowned borderless net caps. The thought of Dinah's pale grave face and mild grey eyes, which the sight of the gown and cap brought with it, made it a laughable surprise enough to see them replaced by Hetty's round rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes. (222)

Hetty's normally kind uncle, who mistakenly thinks Hetty will "be all right when she's got a good husband," is nevertheless aware of the dissimilarity between Hetty and Dinah. He laughs that Hetty could never look like a Methodist, implying that her whole personality prohibits such a thing: "You must pull your face a deal longer before you'll do for one" (223). Mrs. Poyser, who is able to "[form] a tolerably fair estimate of what might be expected from Hetty in the way of feeling," is keenly aware of the difference between Hetty's conduct and Dinah's. Disturbed by the "strange appearance" of Hetty dressed like Dinah, Mrs. Poyser scolds those laughing at her with "I'd sooner cry nor laugh at the sight o' that poor thing's cap; and there's them as 'ud be better if they could make themselves like her i' more ways nor putting on her cap" (223). The inappropriateness of Hetty's "masquerade" finally leads her normally indulgent uncle to admonish: "You'd better take the things off again, my lass; it hurts your aunt to see 'em" (224). Hetty's desire to turn Adam's "lecture" to its ridiculous conclusion (by wearing anti-fashion) only heightens the awareness of her "love of finery."

Dinah's moral character is revealed through and accentuated by her preference for plain clothing. When we first see her preaching, she is not wearing a bonnet and the narrator comments on the "simple line of her black stuff dress." Others associate her with the "ugly" Quaker cap which she, as a Methodist woman, wears as her only head covering. When Adam first "notices" Dinah, he is impressed with her "slim figure, her plain black gown, and her pale serene face" (120). Lisbeth Bede remarks that she "wouldna mind ha'in [Dinah] for a daughter" since Dinah "wouldna spend the lad's wage i' fine clothes an' waste" (116).

The narrator repeatedly suggests that Dinah is unconcerned about her appearance or that of others, except when, like any "pure and tender mind," she appreciates beauty as "an excellent divine gift." Dinah is said to be "free from selfish jealousies." When Dinah interrupts Hetty's self-admiration in the mirror, Hetty is "glad that Dinah looked as if she did not see [Hetty's] ear-rings" (159). When Dinah goes to preach on the green, the narrator notes "total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanor." She is "unconscious as a little boy," and like little Ben, mentioned just before Dinah's appearance, she is "unchecked by false modesty." Her manner contains no "tremulousness" and her face no "blush"; she does not think herself "a pretty woman, too young to preach." When Pastor Irwine questions, "And you never feel any embarrassment from the sense of your youth--that you are a lovely young woman on whom men's eyes are fixed?", Dinah confidently answers, "No, I've no room for such feelings, and I don't believe the people ever take notice about that" (97). Dinah's modesty is especially remarkable since we know that some people (like Wiry Ben) do "take notice."

Unlike Hetty, Dinah does not desire jewels or clothes, but sees them as marks of "sin." When Bessy Crange comes to hear Dinah preach, Bessy proudly wears "a pair of large round

ear-rings with false garnets in them" (31). When Dinah sees them, she feels "pity" for Bessy's "evident vanity," and pleads with Bessy to "tear off those follies!" She remonstrates to Bessy: "You think of ear-rings and fine gowns and caps, and you never think of the Saviour who died to save your precious soul" (41). Dinah regards Hetty's love for these items with compassion, seeing Hetty as "bent merely on little foolish, selfish pleasures, like a child hugging its toys in the beginning of a long toilsome journey in which it will have to bear hunger and cold and unsheltered darkness" (158). When Arthur wishes to demonstrate his gratitude to Dinah by giving her his watch,³⁶ he remarks "I know she doesn't care about such things . . . But she will use the watch—I shall like to think of her using it" (445). Dinah's claim later on that she "always used the watch" confirms that the functional rather than ornamental capacity of the watch pleases her (506).

Unlike Hetty, Dinah does not want to "dress like a lady," a fact which is stressed by Dinah's gloveless hands. Lisbeth Bede, on first seeing Dinah, recognizes Dinah's "humanity" (Lisbeth originally confuses Dinah with an angel) by seeing Dinah's bare hand: "But in the same instant Dinah had laid her hand on Lisbeth's again, and the old woman looked down at it. It was a much smaller hand than her own, but it was not white and delicate, for Dinah had never worn a glove in her life . . . Lisbeth . . . fixing her eyes again on Dinah's face, said, 'Why, ye're a workin' woman!'" (114). Dinah's willingness to sew, a necessary task in a working household such as Hall Farm, underscores her conscious identification with labor and adult responsibility. Dinah not only sews and mends frequently at Hayslope but works in a mill in Snowfield.

³⁶ The fact that Dinah, without egoistic desire, gains such an expensive piece of "jewelry" (a man's gold watch might

These physical details correspond, as they do in Milly Barton and Janet Dempster, with a lack of egoism. As Hetty is gazing at herself in the mirror, Dinah is looking out her window at the scenery: "Dinah delighted in her bedroom window . . . And now the first thing she did on entering the room, was to seat herself in this chair, and look out on the peaceful hedgerows" (157). She worries over others' welfare, Lisbeth's, Hetty's, Adam's, Arthur's, and ignores her own. She dismisses, for example, her aunt's concern that Dinah's preaching will bring on Pastor Irwine's reproof by focusing on someone else's trouble: "But, dear aunt, don't think any more about it. He told me something that I'm sure will cause you sorrow, as it does me. Thias Bede was drowned last night . . ." (100). In the prison, she is not worried that it is "pretty nigh dark in the cell a'ready" and has "courage to stay all night in the prison" (422). She is only "disturbed" once by "any matter relating to herself," when she recognizes her love for Adam. Even then, the reason for her "disturbance" stems from a concern over her own egoism. She worries that she has become "anxious and careful about what should befall [her]" (480); she feels she will "forget to rejoice and weep with others" and "forget the Divine presence" (479).

As Dinah tries to overcome her own egoism, Eliot expresses Dinah's struggle in "material" terms. Dinah tells her aunt that she must "go away from this life of ease and luxury" (449), and tells Adam, similarly, that she cannot work "in the midst of too abundant wordly good" (456). Though Adam resists her leaving, he is always assured that Dinah is "cut out o' different stuff from most women" (462). In the end, he is proved right, and the unique fabric which shapes Dinah's character is externalized in the simple wedding dress she chooses:

cost £16 or so, according to Cunningham) is another demonstration of Eliot's ironic justice.

She was not in black this morning, for her Aunt Poyser would by no means allow such a risk of incurring bad luck, and had herself made a present of the wedding dress, made all of grey, though in the usual Quaker form, for on this point Dinah could not give way. (502)

Both Auerbach and Lefkowitz note Dinah's "new garb" at the wedding with Adam as exemplifying a change in Dinah's status. Dinah, they argue, "replaces" Hetty by novel's end in both husband and situation. But this assertion conflicts with the narrator's comments that, as Adam's wife, Dinah still wears a "plain black dress" and "white borderless cap," the symbols of her uniqueness in Hayslope. If anything, Dinah's selection of Methodist clothing demonstrates an ongoing act of will on her part, an unvarying choice of plain dress over "finery" which strengthens and reflects her moral influence.

What the marriage scene also indicates is Dinah's power to transform the community of Hayslope. After her short return to preaching, Dinah has the "fulness of strength to bear and do" God's will which she "had lost before" (501), and she uses this strength to "change hearts," as Colonel Townley puts it. Just as Dinah becomes the representative of "Divine Mercy" to Hetty and the "one source of comfort" to Arthur, Dinah represents a unifying principle in Hayslope, one whose deeds (such as her preaching) brings the villagers together. The narrator notes this power as he comments on the excited crowd at Dinah's wedding: "And no wonder they showed this eager interest on her marriage morning, for nothing like Dinah and the history which had brought her and Adam Bede together had been known in Hayslope within the memory of man" (502). Even Bartle Massey, misogynist and bachelor, feels compelled to give "the bride one more kiss than was necessary" (403)

That it is Dinah's influence and not some other factor which engenders these changes is clear from the variation in Bessy Crange's attire: When Dinah leaves early in the novel, Bessy resumes wearing her "large earrings" which she had "torn off" during Dinah's sermon on the green, and Mrs. Poyser with foresight predicts that Bessy will "be flaunting i' new finery" after Dinah leaves the second time. At novel's end, however, Bessy is dressed in her "neatest cap and frock" at Dinah's wedding. Dinah's influence on Adam is even more profound. Adam reflects that she is an ideal partner for him since she can "help [him] see things right . . . there's less of self in her, and pride" (499).

Dinah's lack of personal ambition "of self," is a quality that she retains despite her elevated status at novel's end. Her willingness to "set th' example" and give up all preaching because of the Methodist ban on women preachers demonstrates that she has conquered self-will and personal pride. Despite the fact that she is one of Eliot's "exceptional" women, who has both "gift" and "sperrit," she accepts the official injunction that "most o' the women do more harm nor good with their preaching" (506). In this accepting this view, Dinah mimics Eliot, who saw most of her sister writers, the "silly women novelists," as doing great social harm by producing preposterous stories about women.³⁷ After her marriage to Adam, which raises her social and economic status, Dinah retains her early look: "We can see the sweet pale face quite well now: it is scarcely at all altered—only a little fuller, to correspond to her more matronly figure, which still seems light and active enough in the plain black dress" (504).

³⁷ Of course, Eliot did not give up writing because of the "silly women" who did it, in her opinion, badly. But the quality of her work, the strain she experienced to continually produce novels which were in no way "silly," was a great concern for Eliot throughout her career.

It is a sense of crisis only partially averted, even more than a tone of moralizing judgment, which pervades Eliot's novel and which accounts for the tragic tone of the ending. Dinah's comment that the "poor wanderer's death, just when she was coming back to us has been sorrow upon sorrow" seems to be Eliot's final commentary on the results of both Hetty's sexual and spiritual failures. Hetty, now properly chastised, is allowed sympathy. With the Hayslope community mostly healed, the novelist can shift the focus from Hetty's wrongdoing to her victimization. Again, this shift highlights society's culpability in Hetty's fall, its encouragement of materialism and vanity in young women. Only Dinah, who is at the center of the final chapter and whose words conclude the novel, can properly instruct the community and "set th' example."

Chapter Four: *The Mill on the Floss*

Life stretched before her as one act of penitence, and all she craved, as she dwelt on her future lot, was something to guarantee her from more falling; her own weakness haunted her like a vision of hideous possibilities that made no peace conceivable except such as lay in the sense of a sure refuge.

George Eliot

As the follow-up novel to *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* pursues many of the same themes and types of characterization. The focus on a rural community, populated by a spoiled, rich son, a compassionate clergyman, an ineffectual mother, and a beautiful but transgressing young woman, makes Eliot's second full-length novel similar to the first; but *Mill* is undoubtedly a more complex and more ambitious work, widening the scope of the pastoral mode to include the town of St. Ogg's and all its attendant characters.³⁸ In addition, Eliot complicates the themes of sin/redemption and ignorance/education which she introduced in *Adam Bede*, enlarging the social and moral implications of individual action. Most important of all, Maggie Tulliver perhaps represents Eliot's most sympathetic treatment of this figure, as Maggie receives so much more of the reader's attention than do other such women, with the exception

³⁸ Eliot, in promoting the work early on to her publisher, John Blackwood, called it a "sort of companion picture" to *Adam Bede* (*Letters* 3: 41). Later, she spoke of the work as being "in some respects superior to Adam" (*Letters*

of Gwendolen Harleth, in Eliot's works. In fact, the novel, which was titled "Sister Maggie" during much of its production, focuses much more on Maggie's moral dilemma and on her redemption than it does on those of any other character.³⁹ In exploring the "origins" of Maggie's fall, Eliot broadens the inquiry into the motives and consequences of female fallenness and its relationship to fashionable dress. Eliot suggests this wider focus through her narrator's comments on "good society." The narrator's lightly ironic tone in describing "good society" as opposed to "unfashionable families" indicates that this novel will focus on more than those individuals with "claret and velvet carpets":

But good society, floated on gossamer wings of light irony, is of very expensive production, requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories, cramping itself in mines, sweating at furnaces, grinding, hammering, weaving under more or less oppression of carbonic acid—or else, spread over sheepwalks and scattered in lonely houses and huts on the clayey or chalky corn-lands where the rainy days look dreary. (307)⁴⁰

Although the work focuses more on the "arduous national life" than on those who benefit from it, by including both facets of existence, Eliot offers an even wider look at the influences which

3:151), suggesting that her vision had expanded as she wrote the novel. For a reading of *Mill* as pursuing then undercutting the pastoral mode, see Carol A. Martin.

³⁹ Eliot insisted to critics of the novel that she never intended for the work to focus so exclusively on Maggie or to seem to unsympathetic to the Dodsons, but this statement, like those defending the "Jewish half" of *Daniel Deronda*, seems at odds with the text.

⁴⁰ Virginia Woolf observed that this passage reflects Eliot's "vindictiveness" against "good society" and lack of familiarity with the drawing room environ which constitutes the last book of the novel. In that this environ came to represent triviality and conventionality in so many of Eliot's works, one would at least have to agree that Eliot resisted the moral apathy that she associated with "good society." However, as I will argue, Eliot primarily uses the wealth and ease associated with Lucy's drawing room to demonstrate the temptation such a sensuous lifestyle holds for Maggie.

shape individual action. The reader likewise sees Eliot's amplified awareness of the social forces that mold the novel's "fallen woman." Where Hetty embodies all of the weight of the fallen woman myth, suggesting that her moral barrenness reflects only *her* "miseducation," all of the St. Ogg's women are depicted as "fallen," in much the same way as are the Milby women in "Janet's Repentance," demonstrating how the vanity and moral timidity (or perfidy) of most women hinders their capacity for right thought and action. This shifting of sympathy is not unique to *Mill*, but no other work focuses quite so much on the culpability of "not the world but the world's wife." Eliot's shift in attention from a "fallen woman" to "falling women" indicates dissatisfaction with the former figure. The literal fall of the "forsaken female" seems less problematic than the spiritual falls of women, in general. In addition, behind each suggestion of female fallenness lurks the "world's husband," the social force which controls most of the wives' activities, and Eliot demonstrates fairly clearly that female oppression in a system dominated by male power and male institutions, like education, shapes women's "fallenness." In this sense, both women's lack of moral education and sympathy and men's refusal to encourage (or even allow) either one make them all guilty of the tragedy that destroys Maggie and Tom.

Feminist critics have frequently noted the damage the St. Ogg's community inflicts on Maggie, both in forming and rejecting her. Two critics particularly describe the way that Maggie's socialization as a woman forces her to suppress individuality, even self-hood. Margaret Homans argues that Maggie, as an increasingly passive reader of male texts (or "brotherly instruction"), is forcibly "feminized" by a culture which cannot accept woman as active creator ("Eliot, Wordsworth" 123-25). Though early in the novel, the girl Maggie "feels free both to read independently and to imagine freely," Maggie in "learning to be feminine" will, as a young woman, become the passively

literal reader of Thomas à Kempis, doomed to docile death in the flood. Mary Jacobus also envisions Maggie as trapped into feminine docility by her chance reading of Thomas à Kempis, the "opiate for the hunger pains of oppression" which "is only a sublimated version of Tom's plainspoken patriarchal prohibition" (218). Jacobus sees but small value in Maggie's religion of renunciation, a point I will take up later, but she clearly presents the conflict Maggie as both child and adult have with the "men of maxims." While both Homans and Jacobus describe this feminine self-suppression in relation to language and writing, the arguments they raise in favor of the young Maggie's "mis-reading" and the adult Maggie's feminine repetition of masculine directives has bearing on Eliot's treatment of the "love of finery"; if, as mentioned in the introduction, there is a "language of dress," then the "sister's instruction" occurs the minute she puts on clothes. And each time that those around her encourage Maggie to dress in the fashionable clothing that women are supposed to love, they attempt to "silence" her rebellious, and, in this context, "unfeminine" desire for plainer garb. Women's love of "finery" simply becomes one of the "maxims" spoken in St. Ogg's society, by men and women. Such a "maxim," like so many others in St. Ogg's, inevitably encourages Maggie to "fall."

Paxton's argument concerning Maggie and female authority depicts a similar struggle against the oppressive society of St. Ogg's. Paxton states that through Maggie's resistance of the "outward law," as represented by Tom, and of "natural" or "biological" law, as represented by Stephen, Eliot depicts the triumph of "moral law," to which Maggie ultimately adheres, over patriarchal constructs which try to naturalize female submission and ignorance. The subtle social encouragement of women's "love of finery" may also be interpreted in light of Paxton's theory of patriarchal laws. The system by which women were banned from male educational and economic

institutions and by which women were compelled into slavish ornamentation and display relies on the same program of "outward law" and "natural law." Women were compelled by tradition and social injunction to be interested in fashion and were trained to think of such interest as "natural" and part of biological (sexual) necessity. Women "needed" to be attractive to men in order for society to flourish. Maggie's struggle against the dual imperatives of social and scientific law solidifies around her rebellion against fine dress. Through this rebellion, Maggie signifies her adherence to an inner "moral law" that obligates her to redefine the female role away from mere ornamentation. By choosing not to wear the "finery" her aunts and St. Ogg's society require, Maggie posits a physical alternative to the life of "outward law" and "maxims" which surrounds her.

As Eliot develops the story of Maggie's struggle and "fall," she continues to rely on the language of dress to express both female character and the female social predicament. And although it is often Eliot's point that, as Mr. Tulliver says in a discussion about books, "it seems one musn't judge by th' outside" (23), Eliot encourages the reader to use the clothing of female characters and their love of dress to predict personality.⁴¹ Through depictions of characters' interest or disinterest in dress and appearance, Eliot conveys psychological maturity and moral culpability. As with Hetty, those women who care most for "finery" care least for developing Eliot's "moral sympathy"; in moments of intense difficulty, when they should display the greatest understanding, they remain timid, narrow-minded, and judgmental. In this way, these characters compare with Hetty, demonstrating the same mental triviality that leads her to ruin. Most important of all, through references to Maggie's plain dress and absence of vanity, Eliot indicates that

⁴¹ Mr. Tulliver's remark reminds of the narrator's caution in *Adam Bede* about "Nature's language," which time and mutability prevent us from understanding correctly.

Maggie, who occupies the role of "fallen woman" in the novel, is less culpable than her superficially more respectable neighbors.

No one speaks the "maxims" of St. Ogg's society more articulately than do the Dodson sisters, models of middle-class respectability, hypocrisy, and selfishness, and, in a distorted sense, epitomes of feminine vanity and narrowness.⁴² That the Dodson sisters care a great deal about appearance and appearances is clear from the narrator's first mention of them. As the narrator describes Mrs. Tulliver's family, he emphasizes their good looks, the clothing they wear, and their obsession with how others see them. The introduction of each sister begins with a reference to her looks and clothing, and this approach to characterization clearly establishes Eliot's point of view, as the narrator's tone becomes almost patronizing in these passages. For example, Mrs. Tulliver appears first: "Mr. Tulliver was speaking to his wife, a blond comely woman in a fan-shaped cap (I am afraid to think how long it is since fan-shaped caps were worn—they must be so near coming in again)" (14). The "masculine" narrative voice nostalgizing on the mutability of female fashion conveys ever so slightly the condescension which Eliot generally shows to this subject and to those, like the Dodson sisters, who take it seriously.

The reader's introduction to the other sisters is likewise marked by commentary on her clothes, looks, or vanity, and Eliot's presentation of these details acts, according to Booth, as "a semiotic system begging to be read" (116). The narrator remarks on Mrs. Pullet's clothing, noting her "handsome silk dress" which must be "guard[ed] . . . from injury" as she climbs out of

the carriage. Mrs. Pullet's attire, the "balloon sleeves, abundant mantle, and large befeathered and beribboned bonnet" serve to make her much bigger than her small husband, an outward symbol of the relationship between all the Dodson sisters (except Mrs. Tulliver) and their husbands. The narrator comments ironically that Mr. Pullet "bore about the same relation to his tall, good-looking wife . . . as a small fishing-smack bears to a brig with its sails spread" (64). Mrs. Glegg is introduced as "not the least handsome of the sisters. As she sat in Mrs. Tulliver's arm-chair, no impartial observer could have denied that for a woman of fifty she had a very comely face and figure" (61). This comeliness is often in contrast to her unlovely personality and narrow moral vision. Mrs. Deane, rarely mentioned in the novel and "replaced" half-way through by her daughter, Lucy, is described little in terms of her own looks; instead, references to her, focus on Lucy's looks. As the mother and daughter are first introduced, the narrator remarks, "Mrs. Tulliver had to look on with a silent pang while Lucy's blond curls were adjusted. It was quite unaccountable that Mrs. Deane, the thinnest and sallowest of all the Miss Dodsons, should have had this child, who might have been taken for Mrs. Tulliver's any day" (68).

But though their looks are a source of pride for the Dodsons and each is vain and materialistic, they do not take an identical view of the value of fine dress. Mrs. Pullet, Mrs. Tulliver and Mrs. Deane are especially interested in fashion, wearing the latest bonnets and dresses as much as they can. When Mrs. Tulliver visits her wealthier sister Pullet, Mrs. Pullet, who is always imagining herself near death, quickly takes Mrs. Tulliver upstairs to see Mrs.

⁴² E. S. Dallas praises Eliot's presentation of the Dodsons "in all their intrinsic littleness" (10). Likewise, he hits on an important point by asserting that "sin as she may, the very faults of Maggie are more to be respected and loved than the hard consistency of her brother and the Pharisaical rigidity of the Dodson family" (Dallas 13).

Pullet's "new bonnet" since "it 'ud be a pity for you to go away without seeing it. There's no knowing what may happen" (98). Mrs. Tulliver's reaction to the bonnet, which has been taken from Aunt Pullet's locked drawer "with funeral solemnity," is especially indicative of the Dodson mindset:

The delicious scent of rose-leaves that issued from the wardrobe made the process of taking out sheet after sheet of silver paper quite pleasant to assist at, though the sight of the bonnet at last was an anticlimax to Maggie, who would have preferred something more strikingly preternatural. But few things could have been more impressive to Mrs. Tulliver. She look all round it in silence for some moments, and then said emphatically, "Well, sister, I'll never speak against the full crowns again!" It was a great concession, and Mrs. Pullet felt it. (99)

When Mrs. Pullet condescends to try on the bonnet, the sisters contemplate its merits with great seriousness, which lead back to Mrs. Pullet's favorite claim that "I may never wear it twice, sister; who knows? . . . Sister, if you should never see that bonnet again till I'm dead and gone, you'll remember I showed it you this day" (100). The comic seriousness of the sisters' remarks underscores Eliot's detachment from, even contempt for, these feminine rites.⁴³

But love of fashionable clothing takes a unique turn in the fourth Dodson sister. Rather than loving fine dress, Mrs. Glegg takes a kind of perverse pleasure in dressing poorly, indicating her moral worth and her superior economizing by deliberately wearing old, outdated,

⁴³ I agree with Natalie Houston that "[Susan] Fraiman's reading of Aunt Pullet's remarks as willfully homicidal ignores the material reality of bonnets and mourning conventions articulated in this scene" (32). The material reality of this and many other scenes has too often been read as merely "symbolic" if read at all.

and cheap clothing. The narrator comments that "for though . . . no woman had better clothes, it was not her way to wear her new things out before her old ones" (61). Her sisters lament that "there was no knowing what fright sister Jane would come out next" (68). By having Mrs. Glegg dress as she does and be the subject of cutting remarks, Eliot is not implying that Mrs. Glegg is uninterested in clothes, as, for example, Maggie is. Mrs. Glegg's hypocrisy and conceit in observing nineteenth-century conduct-book morality is apparent, as she uses dress deliberately to convey moral approval and reproof. The narrator dwells with ironic pleasure on Mrs. Glegg's old and fuzzy false front of curls as example of this habit. The Dodson women, like many women in their day, wear curled hairpieces to hide hair loss and graying. For the Dodsons, this practice has moved from aesthetic option to family dictum. When the youngest, Mrs. Tulliver, chooses to wear her natural curls instead, the sisters respond disapprovingly, ostensibly holding familial solidarity, however artificial, higher than individual naturalness.

Occasionally, indeed, Mrs. Glegg wore one of her third-best fronts on a weekday visit, but not at a sister's house, especially not at Mrs. Tulliver's, who since her marriage had hurt her sisters' feelings by wearing her own hair. . . . So if Mrs. Glegg's front today was more fuzzy and lax than usual, she had a design under it: she intended the most pointed and cutting allusion to Mrs. Tulliver's bunches of blond curls (61).

The narrator hints that personal jealousy and vanity, rather than true concern for propriety, motivates this criticism, as Bessy Tulliver is youngest and handsomest of the group: "Mrs. Tulliver had shed tears several times at sister Glegg's unkindness on the subject of the unmatronly curls, but the consciousness of looking the handsomer for them naturally

administered support" (61). When Mr. Tulliver loses his money through a lawsuit and Mrs. Glegg comes to counsel her sister about the matter, she "had on her fuzziest front and garments which appeared to have had a recent resurrection from rather a creasy form of burial, a costume selected with the high moral purpose of instilling perfect humility into Bessy and her children" (220).

As Houston notes, Eliot carefully uses references to dress in this work to establish the sense that we really are in 1820's England; but, as the narrator's comments on Mrs. Pullet's gown indicates, the references do more than offer authenticity. They underscore, as they do with the Countess Czerlaski, the contrast between feminine naturalness and "civilized" artificiality. Mrs. Pullet's "handsome silk dress" emphasizes both the fabricated emotional sensitivity she evinces and its antithesis, the passionate displays which Maggie so often displays. The narrator describes Mrs. Pullet's weeping over her neighbor's illness in just this way:

It is a pathetic sight and a striking example of the complexity introduced into the emotions by a high state of civilization--the sight of a fashionably dressed female in grief. From the sorrow of a Hottentot to that of a woman in large buckram sleeves, with several bracelets on each arm, an architectural bonnet, and delicate ribbon-strings--what a long series of gradations! (64)

The knowledge that she must avoid crushing the wide sleeves of the dress in the door frame makes the misty-eyed aunt Pullet "[produce] such a composition of forces by which she takes a line that just clears the door-post" (64). The narrator's ironic tone is clear. Civilization, as embodied in fashion, subdues true emotion, making all outbursts theatrical. Mrs. Pullet's

"touching gesture" of languidly unpinning and throwing back her cap-strings which is "indicative, even in the deepest gloom, of the hope in future dry moments when cap-strings will once more have a charm" appears studied and hollow. Likewise, adjusting the clasps of her bracelets marks her pretense of "studied fortuity." Finally, having "brushed each door-post with great nicety, about the latitude of her shoulders" she can send "the muscles of her face in quest of fresh tears" (65). Even as she weeps, she remembers to "[lift] up her mantle carefully behind" before she sits down and cries again. Emotion, in this case sympathetic grief, is an indulgence that must not impede social form, as symbolized by the wide buckram sleeves and a wide mantle.

The Dodson obsession with death and proper funeral rites further demonstrates their tendency to neglect substance for form, and this obsession is conveyed through their attitudes about correct material accompaniments. Though, no doubt, the Dodsons might have had a "Dodson" text for the funeral sermon and a "Dodson" funeral hymn, Eliot does not focus on these kinds of details. Instead, Eliot's narrator describes the Dodson pride concerning burial linens and mourning dress: "Funerals were always conducted with peculiar propriety in the Dodson family: the hatbands were never of a blue shade, the gloves never split at the thumb, everybody was a mourner who ought to be, and there were always scarfs for the bearers" (50). Aunt Glegg, who embodies the Dodson spirit the most strongly, goes an additional step, insisting that her best clothes and linens are to be displayed only at her death: "when Mrs. Glegg died, it would be found that she had better lace laid by in the right-hand drawer of her wardrobe, in the Spotted Chamber, than ever Mrs. Wooll of St. Ogg's had bought in her life." As in other matters, Mrs. Glegg uses dress to signify approval or disapproval, in this case of the

deceased. If Mr. Glegg were not to leave her well off after his death, she resolves "that she would have scarcely any weeper on her bonnet and would cry no more than if had been her second husband" (139). This focus on details of dress is important; the reader sees the Dodson family's selfish materialism as a particularly feminine weakness, contrasted as it nearly always is to the more generous and tempered attitudes of their husbands.

The superficial quality of the Dodson women is highlighted by their general attitude toward their children, nephews and nieces. As mothers and aunts, the sisters appear remarkably inadequate, a point which Eliot emphasizes by making two sisters childless, and each sister is especially unable to nurture Maggie.⁴⁴ Repeatedly, the Dodson sisters' difficulties with Maggie are contextualized in terms of dress. Mrs. Tulliver worries "how to keep her in a clean pinafore two hours together" and complains that "her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzy about having it put i' paper, and I've such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with th' irons" (18). The Dodson view is that girls should look and act like "little ladies." When Maggie resists this image, her mother and aunts scold her. Her aunt Glegg tries to tame Maggie's "naughty tendencies" by criticizing her dress and appearance. When she greets Maggie, Mrs. Glegg snaps "Put your hair behind your ears, Maggie, and keep your frock on your shoulder" (70). After Maggie cuts her hair to stop the "teasing remarks about it," her aunt Glegg declares, "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on

⁴⁴ Contrast the Dodson inadequacies with the maternal strengths of Mrs. Moss, Maggie's paternal aunt, who has eight children. However Eliot may have wanted to adopt a neutral position in relation to the Dodson-Tulliver dichotomy, the sympathetic picture of the kindly Aunt Moss, who particularly loves Maggie, tips the balance.

bread and water, not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles" (76). Mrs. Pullet agrees: "She's more like a Gypsy nor ever . . . it's very bad luck, sister, as the gell should be so brown . . . I doubt it'll stand in her way i' life to be so brown" (76). The Dodson sisters never stop trying to make Maggie into their image. When the Tullivers lose their money, the narrator remarks several times that Mrs. Tulliver's consolation for the loss of her "furnitur" is Maggie's looks, hair and clothes: "The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now on which she could bestow her anxiety and pride"; she scolds the "ascetic" Maggie, who resists care for personal adornment, "Let your mother have that bit o' pleasure, my dear . . . I'd trouble enough with your hair once" (310). After Maggie is disgraced in St. Ogg's, her mother says she must "be fond on" her troublesome child since her "furnitur" went long ago" (524).

But the process of "feminization," the learning of "maxims" is not limited to the conventions the Dodsons uphold. The "maxims" of the Dodsons merely reflect the broader social constrictions facing women. Eliot suggests that vanity and egoism are encouraged and accepted elements of feminine behavior and includes many other women who, in that they conform to repressive conventions about "finery," are truly more "fallen" than Maggie will be. Though none of these characters has a literal claim to the title of "fallen woman," as Maggie has, all demonstrate the weakness and narrowness of vision that reflects all that Eliot criticized about female education and character. Mrs. Stelling, wife of Tom Tulliver's schoolmaster, demonstrates the pretentiousness, which link her both to the Dodsons and to Hetty Sorrel, as well, as she aspires to look well despite a small income. Concerning Mrs. Stelling's use of Tom as an occasional "nurse" for her child, an abuse of Tom's subordinate position as student, the narrator makes an ironic justification: "When

the wife of a poor curate contrives under all her disadvantages to dress extremely well and to have a style of coiffure which requires that her nurse shall occasionally officiate as lady's maid . . . it would be unreasonable to expect of her that she should employ a second nurse or even act as a nurse herself" (155). The reader's sympathy for Mrs. Stelling's position as "the wife of a poor curate" is undercut by her selfish refusal to do any work, herself. Unlike Milly Barton, who also wishes to look respectable on very little money but who is willing to work for this appearance, Mrs. Stelling "considered she was doing Tom a service by setting him to watch the little cherub Laura while the nurse was occupied with the sickly baby" (154). Also, unlike Milly, "Mrs. Stelling was not a loving, tender-hearted woman; she was a woman whose skirt sat well, who adjusted her waist and patted her curls with a preoccupied air when she inquired after your welfare" (187).

However "fallen" Mrs. Stelling appears, Eliot's presentation of Mr. Stelling and the education which he instills in Tom Tulliver make is clear that Mrs. Stelling, like Maggie, has been socialized into this position. Jacobus notes as specifically formative in Maggie's feminization the scenes in which the young Maggie visits Tom at school. Eliot quite obviously suggests both the inappropriateness of Tom's classical education for his needs and the clear advantage Maggie might have gained from a similar instruction. But Jacobus describes how the scenes at Mr. Stelling's school show more than that. Through the largely incompetent teacher Mr. Stelling, Maggie and Tom learn the lessons of the Eton Grammar, which Jacobus points out, teach both Maggie and Tom several lessons about the inappropriateness of education for women: women are "quick and shallow," that "everybody hates clever women," and that "all astronomers to a man hate women." This instruction, says Jacobus, schools Tom's "latent misogyny" and reduces Maggie to mere "prattl[ing]" and "mimic[king] man's talk"

in order to gain attention. Mr. Stelling, representative of male education and culture and of women's lack of access to both, reflects the power of patriarchy to reduce women to mere "prattlers," whose interest is primarily in their appearance and in the appearances they create of their husbands' wealth and status.

The true inheritor of Dodson dress codes and Stelling-like "education" is Lucy Deane. Maggie's kind and generous cousin, superficially appears to be Eliot's "good woman," similar in appearance and personality to Dinah Morris. All of Maggie's friends and family and even Maggie herself insist on Lucy's essential goodness. She is "dear little Lucy," "pretty little Lucy," and "a little darling." She is "loving and thoughtful for other women, not giving them Judas-kisses with eyes askance on their welcome defects, but with real care and vision for their half-hidden pains and mortifications, with long ruminating enjoyment of little pleasures prepared for them" (386). Unlike most of the Dodsons, Lucy cares a great deal for Maggie and respects Maggie's intelligence and "general uncanniness," as she calls it, and the reader approves of Lucy's insight. That she wants to treat "Cousin Maggie . . . as well as the grandest lady-visitor—nay better" demonstrates Lucy's essential sympathy and generosity.

But, as Eliot presents her, Lucy's firm indoctrination in an oppressive culture has fettered her with a doll-like confinement to convention and conventional ideas. Her "mis-education" into femininity robs her of the kind of adult moral understanding which Eliot saw as necessary to combat the unpredictable "circumstances" of mature life. In her lack of insight, Lucy demonstrates the same naivete and egoism which structures her aunt's lives. Just as the Dodson aunts misunderstand Maggie throughout her life, Lucy's lack of experience limits her ability to understand the true nature of Maggie's relationships with Phillip and Stephen (contrast her naivete with

Phillip's jealous but accurate assessment), and she foolishly believes that "everything, even other people's misfortunes (poor creatures!) were conspiring now to make...[the Tulliver's] as happy as they deserved to be" (473). Carol A. Martin argues that Lucy lives in a world of "fantasy," unable to differentiate "illusion from reality" an ability which is "central to Eliot's moral vision" (78-79).

When Maggie first comes to live with Lucy, Lucy remarks "I've always been so happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble." The answer, as the reader learns, is a qualified "no." Though Lucy is presented as the wronged party in Maggie's "elopement" with Stephen (Maggie certainly sees her in that light), Lucy's lack of moral education and the sheltered life she has lived make her incapable of the self-sacrifice Maggie demonstrates. She can only utter "Maggie, you are better than I am. I cannot . . . [give up Stephen]."

Lucy's "goodness" is symbolized throughout the novel by her neat, lady-like attire. As a child, she possesses a "natty completeness" and "neatest little rosebud of a mouth." Her clothing is likewise "neat": the "row of coral beads" complements her dress and curls and "no accidents ever happened to her clothes, and she was never uncomfortable in them" (95). As a young woman, Lucy demonstrates this same trait. She is the "neat little lady in mourning whose light-brown ringlets are falling over the coloured embroidery with which her fingers are busy" (378). She is Maggie's "slight, aerial cousin whose figure was quite subordinate to her faultless drapery of silk and crepe" who thinks she would "be a mere rag" if she "put anything shabby on" (388), and like Caterina Sarti, whose form mimics Lucy's, her moral nature reflects her physical one—both are "small."

That Lucy has a certain moral "smallness" is reflected also in the "small vanities" in which she indulges. As a young woman, she is considered the "bell o' St. Ogg's" [sic] in part because of

her clothes, which her fashion-conscious Aunt Pullet wants to imitate: "Why, Lucy had got a collar on this blessed day . . . as I don't say I haven't got as good, but I must look out my best to match it" (355). Maggie laughs when Phillip suggests that Maggie can outshine her cousin, saying "As if I, with my old gowns and want of all accomplishments, could be a rival of dear little Lucy, who knows and does all sort of charming things and is ten times prettier than I am—even if I were odious and base enough to wish to be her rival" (349). Maggie's words are bitterly unprophetic yet serve to demonstrate the popular opinion that Lucy's goodness and her neat appearance are the same.

In a passage reminiscent of the descriptions of Hetty's beauty in *Adam Bede*, the narrator's lightly ironic tone in depicting Lucy after a visit from Stephen suggests the dilemma of this equation.

And you will not, I hope, consider it an indication of vanity predominating over more tender impulses that she just glanced in the chimney glass as her walk brought her near it. The desire to know that one has not looked an absolute fright during a few hours of conversation may be construed as lying within the bonds of a laudable benevolent consideration for others. And Lucy had so much of this benevolence in her nature that I am inclined to think her small egoisms were impregnated with it, just as there are people not altogether unknown to you whose small benevolences have a predominant and somewhat rank odour of egoism.

(385)

That Lucy is essentially a thoughtful person does not eliminate the "small egoisms" with which she should struggle. The patronizing tone, which suggests that Lucy's egoism excusable

because it proceeds from her kind nature, serves to emphasize the destructive weakness of Lucy's personality, her inability to see "evil" in others: her lover, her cousins, and her future sisters-in-law. The narrator's comment about Lucy's "harmless flashes of personal vanity" indicates his disapproval concerning these deficiencies.

In contrast to Lucy's conformity, Maggie represents female revolt against "maxims" and "natural" or "outward" laws. Maggie's rebellion against the "maxims" about proper feminine behavior and appearance which the Dodsons personify is couched in the "language of clothes."⁴⁵ This type of "speech" is particularly significant since Maggie's looks and dress alter significantly as the novel (and her family's fortune) progresses. As a little girl, she resists all attempts to dress her well; as a young woman she rebels against fashion, due to religious principle and poverty; as an adult, she is persuaded to dress well, but concludes the novel in dirty, wet dishevelment. Each of these stages in costume represents a distinct moment in Maggie's psyche, as she experiences a succession of falls and redemptions, before her final "trial by water."

As the novel opens, we see Maggie on the banks of the Floss with her dog, and the narrator's first description of her presents her in terms of her clothing, the dog's "playfellow in the beaver bonnet." Only a few pages later, Mrs. Tulliver's first comment about Maggie concerns the difficulty of keeping her "in a clean pinafore two hours together" followed by a (consistent) complaint that "her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzy about having it put i' paper, and I've

⁴⁵ Mary J. O'Connor argues that commentary on domestic "objects" in Mill serve to comment on the commodification of women in the nineteenth-century. While arguing that "Eliot's work is filled with satirical irony . . . against the reduction of women's lives to the acquisition of exchange commodities," O'Connor insists that the "Dutch paintings that Eliot herself loved and praised in another novel . . . provide a moment of conjunction between women and objects that equates them both as reified objects and as representations of a space that is protected from reification, different from and other than the marketplace" (140).

such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with th' irons" (17-18). Maggie's resistance to the image her mother has of female appearance is apparent in the first interaction the reader sees between these characters. Maggie, unconcerned about her looks or clothes, "threw off her bonnet," and Mrs. Tulliver chides, "What are you thinkin' of, to throw your bonnet down there? Take it upstairs, there's a good gell, an' let your hair be brushed, an' put your other pinafore on, an' change your shoes, do, for shame" (18). Defying her mother's concern for clothes, Maggie responds by "dragging her bonnet by the string." Mrs. Tulliver's difficulty concerning Maggie's hair is emblematic of this continued struggle. The narrator's comment that Mrs. Tulliver has cut Maggie's hair because she desires "her daughter to have a curled crop 'like other folk's children'" demonstrates how ill social conventions, represented by Mrs. Tulliver and her sisters, will suit the rebel Maggie. Because Mrs. Tulliver refuses to recognize that Maggie's hair "was usually straight an hour after it had been taken out of paper," she cuts it too short in front and is forced to see Maggie "incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark, heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes" (18).

Maggie's antipathy to "fine dress" is stressed repeatedly in the first two books of the novel. Maggie's refusal to "act like a lady," as her mother wishes, reflects an antipathy similar to Eliot's own. This attitude extends to her doll whose "toilette" she "neglects" though she showers the doll with kisses on occasion. Maggie's actions stress her impulsive and loving, if careless, nature. She frequently resists her mother's and aunts' efforts to reform her careless disregard for appearances, and she demonstrates her resistance (as Mary Ann Evans did) by refusing to look

and dress as they demand.⁴⁶ Maggie resents the constraints of femininity that is constructed, in part, by female clothing. When she is told she can't go out because "the morning was too wet, her mother said, for a little girl to go out in her best bonnet," Maggie rebels by "dipp[ing] her head in a basin of water standing near—in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day" (33).⁴⁷ In addition, Maggie wets her "clean pinafore . . . from top to bottom, making her mother lament, "Folks 'ull think it's a judgment on me as I've got such a child." When Aunt Glegg sends her old silk dress to Mrs. Tulliver for Maggie to have a dress made, Maggie's utter rejection of the material suggests equally her rejection of the generally unlikable aunt and her priggish sense of family honor:

Mrs. Tulliver had really made great efforts to induce Maggie to wear a leghorn bonnet and a dyed silk frock made out of her aunt Glegg's, but . . . Maggie, declaring that the frock smelled of nasty dye, had taken an opportunity of basting it together with the roast-beef the first Sunday she wore it, and finding this scheme answer, she had subsequently pumped on the bonnet with its green ribbons so as to give it a general resemblance to a sage cheese garnished with withered lettuces" (68).

That Maggie will wear the clothes sent by Aunt Pullet, since "these were always pretty enough to please Maggie," this concession seems due more to aesthetic preference than an acceptance of

⁴⁶ The contrast between Maggie's "shabby" dress and that of Aunt Glegg is clearly found in their attitudes toward dress. Mrs. Glegg's perverse pleasure in shabbiness comes ultimately from her high respect for wealth and "finery" while Maggie is motivated by a passionate resistance to control.

⁴⁷ I do not wish to imply, as Helene Roberts does, that women's attire constituted a form of slavery, by literally binding women and constricting their movements. What is important is that Maggie sees her clothes as constraining her actions (she will spoil the bonnet by going outside).

Aunt Pullet's values.⁴⁸ That Aunt Pullet thinks of Maggie as "naughty" and "awkward" as Aunt Glegg does underscores the antipathy.

Maggie's rebellion is often contrasted with the placid conformity of her cousin Lucy, just as Maggie's dark looks and disheveled clothing are contrasted with Lucy's neat appearance. Mrs. Tulliver frets that "Maggie always looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy," and the narrator agrees that "the contrast between the cousins was conspicuous, and to superficial eyes was very much to the disadvantage of Maggie" (69). That the Dodson women have "superficial eyes" is apparent in their preference for Lucy, a preference that even Maggie seems to share. But Maggie's adoration of Lucy is qualified, if unconsciously. Though Maggie "look[s] at Lucy with delight" and makes Lucy the queen of her imaginary world, the narrator concedes "only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy's form" (69). While Maggie may take aesthetic "delight" in Lucy, she never really wants to be her or to be like her.

After the Tullivers lose their money and control of the mill, Maggie is forced by poverty to wear plain clothes and she soon adopts a religion, found in Thomas á Kempis, which seems to justify her situation. The liberation she gains from "materialism" makes Maggie believe she is free from the temptation and slavery to "fashion" which most women experience. Dressed only in hand-me-downs from her aunts and in her "abundant black locks," Maggie uses her new religion of self-sacrifice to resist attempts to turn her into a piece of 'furnitur,' and she must be coaxed to have her hair "plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head after the pitiable fashion of those antiquated

⁴⁸ We seem meant to view Maggie's preference for Aunt Pullet's "pretty" hand-me-downs as part of what Kalikoff calls Maggie's "lifelong desire for sensual beauty and pleasure." Only tangentially does Maggie's preference here

times" (310). Despite the fact that her mother's hairdressing gives Maggie a "queenly head above her old frocks," Maggie steadily refuses "to look at herself in the glass." Unlike Lucy's "fine feathers," as Mr. Tulliver jealously refers to them, Maggie wears plain clothing: a "hereditary black shawl of some wide-meshed, net like material" and an "old lavender gown." Though Maggie has grown to be a very beautiful young woman, she remains unaware of it, the combination of religion and poverty supporting her choice to disdain "the glass." She resists wearing Mrs. Pullet's fashionable hand-me-down dress as "too showy for me," stressing her willful rejection of Dodson attitudes (355).

During this period of her life, Maggie's growing beauty, clothed in plain attire, is often depicted as "natural." In *Adam Bede*, Eliot stresses the contrast between Dinah Morris' "natural" beauty and Hetty Sorrel's "artificial" beauty, indicating the moral purity associated with the former. In *Mill*, Eliot continues repeats the contrast, stressing that Maggie's "naturalness" and "simpleness" reflect her superiority to the pretentious, vain women around her.⁴⁹ Maggie, in walking in the Red Deeps, with her "dark colouring and jet crown surmounting her tall figure . . . seems to have a sort of kinship with the grand Scotch firs at which she is looking" (314). Even when she seems most conscious of her looks, the narrator tells the reader, her reaction is "simply the rising again of her innate delight in admiration and love" (315). When she asks Phillip, "Am I like what you expected me to be?", the narrator comments, "The words might have been those of a coquette, but the full bright glance Maggie turned on Phillip was not that of a coquette" (315).

represent a "love of finery" although the relationship of Maggie's sensual aestheticism to her "fall" do reflect a certain critique of "indulgence" on Eliot's part.

⁴⁹ Maggie's association with the natural world has been remarked on by a number of critics. See Wendy Woodward.

But Maggie's weakness, her desire for "everyone to admire me most" is at war with her lack of physical vanity. Phillip Wakem's criticism of Maggie's "renunciation" as "benumbing and cramping your nature" strikes true, and Maggie again and again finds herself warring with a latent vanity which her social milieu encourages. When she rejects Mrs. Pullet's pink gown as "too showy," she softens her rejection with "at least for my other clothes that I must wear with it" (355). Aunt Pullet's reminder that Maggie should dress well as a credit to the family operates on Maggie's adult conscience as it did not when she was a child. Having become a Victorian woman, she increasingly feels compelled to reflect the image. That the Dodson sisters embody the prejudice against poor women who have a "love of finery," makes no difference in their desire to wear expensive clothes or to have Maggie wear them. That they cannot see the danger of this vanity, a danger not to their souls but to their autonomous selves, is revealed in their words. Mrs. Pullett chastizes Maggie: "To be sure, it 'ud be unbecoming [to wear showy clothes] if it wasn't well known you've got them belonging to you as can afford to give you such things when they've done with 'em themselves. It stands to reason I must give my own niece clothes now and then" (355).

Maggie's struggling resistance to her aunts' attempts to "feminize" her erodes further after Maggie, who teaches at a girls' school for two years, returns to St. Ogg's. In the final two books of the novel, aptly titled "The Great Temptation" and "The Final Rescue," Eliot explores the ways in which Maggie's education and the constrictions she faces in conventional society compel her elopement with Stephen and her eventual return to rescue Tom. Maggie's position in the novel is complex since she is, at the same time, the best and worst of the female characters: in fact, the very characteristic which makes her good, her intense emotional

response to life and to other individuals, leads to her to ruin.⁵⁰ As she describes herself to Tom, "But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for" (364). Eliot captures much of Maggie's paradoxical nature and the complications it brings through descriptions of Maggie's dress and looks.

The scene presenting Maggie's return to the Deane household demonstrates the kind of temptation dress and adornment will play in Maggie's new life of leisure. As Maggie is "introduced for the first time to the young lady's life," she revels in the "new sense of leisure" which has "some intoxicating effect on her after her years of privation" (419). The scenes in which the Dodson women discuss Maggie's looks and dress contrast pointedly with Lucy's comment that Maggie "look[s] best in shabby clothes." For Lucy, the dilemma defies logic: "Last night I was trying to fancy you in a handsome fashionable dress, and do what I would, that old limp merino would come back as the only right thing for you. I wonder if Marie Antoinette looked all the grander when her gown was darned at the elbows" (388). Lucy's next assertion, that Maggie "must change brooches . . . that little butterfly looks silly on you," undercuts her previous reflection. Maggie sees the ironic reversal and comments on it: "But won't that mar the charming effect of my consistent shabbiness?" Maggie realizes that Lucy wants her to look pretty and conforms accordingly, but not without this moment of playful resistance.

Maggie's entry into St. Ogg's society continues to press her to conform to the ornamental image of Victorian femininity. That Maggie's inclination and her years of practiced sacrifice still

⁵⁰ I appreciate Auerbach's point that Maggie's fall is "an illusion, existing only in its effect on the community and on other lives," that "Maggie seems a fallen woman by nature." I am arguing that Eliot is revising the definition of "fallenness" so that Maggie, the "fallen woman by nature," is actually more moral than the morally fallen women around

prompt her to defy these pressures is apparent in her first meeting with Stephen. Lucy's discussion of the approaching church bazaar, which the narrator remarks is filled with "effeminate futilities," reveals the sheltered life of "oppressive liberty" she lives. By contrast, Maggie, who has had to work for her living, is not "addicted to the fashionable vice of fancy-work," but "can do nothing more difficult or more elegant than shirt-making," though Lucy says the results are "so beautiful." Like Maggie's looking "best" in "shabby clothes," Lucy cannot understand the "mystery" of Maggie's "exquisite sewing" since Maggie "used to dislike that sort of work so much in the old days" (395). Maggie refuses to take the complement, responding "Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by; so I was obliged to try and do it well" (395).⁵¹ Lucy and the women of her social circle have no such need, and their industrious efforts to make items for the charity bazaar have an air of frivolity and playfulness.

Maggie's "unfashionable" confession that her ability to sew well was developed out of necessity rather than pleasure has an effect, however, that she doesn't expect. The narrator declares: "But if Maggie had been the queen of coquettes, she could hardly have invented a means of giving greater piquancy to her beauty in Stephen's eyes" (395). This statement suggests divergent conclusions: on the one hand, the remark demonstrates that Maggie is not a coquette, though her actions sometimes take on that appearance. On the other, the narrator's comment indicates Stephen's fascination with Maggie's poverty. The narrator explains that the poverty and

her. This argument addresses the many readings of Maggie's death in the flood. Her punishment, instead, reflects Eliot's early attempt to work through the implications her work has concerning the nature of the "fallen woman."

⁵¹ As Eliot was writing *Mill*, she read an article in *English Women's Journal* which no doubt affected the picture of Maggie's sad attempts to earn money by plain sewing. The article discussed a "group of little girls making shirts under the direction of an old woman." According to a footnote in Eliot's collected letters, one particular little girl "had hemmed

"plain sewing . . . assisted by beauty" make "Maggie more unlike other women even than she had seemed at first" (395). The suggestion of class and gender hierarchies which underscore Stephen's response is evident and helps clarify, in part, just what Maggie will be up against in St. Ogg's. Stephen, as a male and as a member of a wealthy family, begins responding to Maggie as a kind of "Cinderella," whose status as a working class woman makes her exploitable. The narrator has already noted Stephen's pride in himself as a man of "sense and independence," who has had to overcome his family's "slight unwillingness and disappointment" over his preference of Lucy, "the daughter of his father's subordinate partner." This "pride" encourages his preference for the still more unsuitable Maggie, and though her good looks and intelligence account for part of his fascination, the narrator's comment reinforces that Maggie's "subordinate" position has its charm, too. The socio-economic conventions which reinforce Maggie's powerlessness and its subsequent charm for men like Stephen will partly shape Maggie's decision to elope with Stephen and will serve as major obstacles to her later decision to reject him.

The pressure to conform to social expectations, by dressing in fashionable clothes, is strong within Maggie's family. Aunt Glegg, who was so harsh to the child Maggie, desires her company since Maggie is "at once ornamental and useful" (475). Lucy's insistence that Maggie "must have a new dress now" makes her enter "with some zeal" into the Dodson plans to "re-fashion" Maggie. Not even Lucy questions whether it might be better to leave Maggie "in shabby clothes," whether being a "mere rag" might be preferable to being "looked at a great deal." There is an undercurrent of accepted objectification in the family discussion about Maggie's new dress:

nearly a yard of calico in the neatest manner, but all along there were crimson specks of blood, showing how sadly the

Maggie must have an evening-dress as soon as possible, and she was about the same height as aunt Pullet.

"But she's so much broader across the shoulders than I am—it's very inconvenient," said Mrs. Pullet, "else she might wear that beautiful black brocade o' mine without any alteration; and her arms are beyond everything," added Mrs. Pullet sorrowfully, as she lifted Maggie's large round arm. "She'd never get my sleeves on."

"Oh, never mind that, aunt; pray send us the dress," said Lucy. "I don't mean Maggie to have long sleeves, and I have abundance of black lack for trimming. Her arms will look beautiful."

"Maggie's arms *are* a pretty shape," said Mrs. Tulliver. "They're like mine used to be—only mine was never brown; I wish she'd had *our* family skin."

"Nonsense, aunty!" said Lucy, patting her aunt Tulliver's shoulder, "you don't understand these things. A painter would think Maggie's complexion beautiful."

(400)

Maggie's response to this dissection of her looks is decidedly negative: "'Oh dear, dear!' said Maggie, laughing but impatient; 'I think that will be the end of *my* brown skin if it is always to be talked about so much" (400).

As she attends her first party, "with such moderate assistance of costume as you have seen foreshadowed," she is subjected further to the gaze and expectations of others. Young Torry "fatigued his facial muscles more than usual in order that 'the dark-eyed girl there, in the corner'

little finger must have been pierced" (*Letters* 3:153).

might see him in all the additional style conferred by his eye-glass; and several young ladies went home intending to have short sleeves with black lace and to plait their hair in a broad coronet at the back of their head--'That cousin of Miss Deane's looked so very well' (418). Maggie is "on her way to [becoming] an object of some envy" (418). This envy culminates at the St. Ogg's bazaar, where Maggie's "conspicuous position" subjects her to "emphatic notice."

At the St. Ogg's bazaar, which represents "the culmination of Maggie's career as an admired member of society," Maggie's "simple, noble beauty, clad in a white muslin of some soft-floating kind . . . appeared with marked distinction among the more adorned and conventional women around her" (449). The narrator comments that "we never detect how much of our social demeanor is made up of artificial airs until we see a person who is at once beautiful and simple" (450). Even the Miss Guests, who "were much too well-bred to have any of the grimaces and affected tones that belong to pretentious vulgarity," appear "artful" next to Maggie: "it seemed newly obvious today that Miss Guest held her chin too high and that Miss Laura spoke and moved continually with a view to effect" (450). Like the Countess Czerlaski and Miss Assher in *Scenes*, the Miss Guests' pretentious appearance reflects their snobbery and mean-spiritedness. That they will be Maggie's harshest critics after her elopement with Stephen is unsurprising. When Maggie's naturalness affirms her status as decorative object, the "world's wife" admires and imitates it. When "naturalness" conflicts with that status, as it does in Maggie's refusal to marry Stephen, these same women utterly reject it.

Maggie's growing fascination with Stephen and her "drifting" elopement with him in the boat represent the ultimate trial for her. The strong sexual attraction Maggie experiences, the "hunger" for "long looks," certainly proceeds from her passionate nature, and the morality of this attraction

and, thus, of Maggie "passion" has been the subject of much critical controversy. Critics who have wanted to regard Maggie as an emblem of goodness, have found the elopement with Stephen troublesome. Praising Maggie, Leslie Stephen attacks Maggie's elopement with Stephen Guest as "indefensible" because Stephen Guest is so clearly unworthy of her (144). F. R. Leavis, in opposition, sees Maggie's choice as indicative of her tendency to this kind of error. Attacking instead Eliot's "idealized" depiction of Maggie, Leavis agrees that the conclusion of *Mill* its "chief defect" (52-58). Gordon Haight defends Maggie's choice of Stephen as the "better mate" for her in a Darwinian sense, though he reluctantly acknowledges the failure of the ending of the novel.

More recent critics have indicated that what Susan Fraiman calls the "competing male claims" on Maggie constitute her biggest problem. John Hagan presents Maggie's fate as the result of her dilemma in choosing either Stephen, Phillip or Tom—Eliot's critique of the impossibility of choice (at least for women) within Victorian culture. The impossible choice can only be resolved by Maggie's death, in union with her brother. Jacobus' argument that the "men of maxims" have so bound up Maggie that she can only escape in moments of "unbounded desire" (such as in the elopement) articulates a similar concern about Maggie's choice. Jacobus asserts that Maggie's "elopement with Stephen Guest . . . would have placed Maggie finally outside the laws of St. Ogg's" and expresses disappointment that Maggie is brought back merely to Thomas à Kempis-like "renunciation and suffering" (219).

If Maggie were truly renouncing sexual attraction, the "passion" of her nature, then her decision to give up Stephen might truly be seen, as Stephen claims it is, as a "perversion." But what Maggie renounces is not (only) sexual law-breaking, but the law-bound rule of female display which a return as Stephen's wife would necessitate.

What Maggie really must choose, to the extent that she has choice in such an oppressive social system, is whether to embrace "finery," to be the ornamental and sexual object of Stephen's gaze and/or the ornamental and economic commodity of the Dodson family. The narrator comments that Maggie's "excessive delight in admiration and acknowledged supremacy" almost moves her to accept Stephen. The narrator emphasizes that Maggie can only attain this "acknowledged supremacy" through her appearance. On the day of the charity bazaar, Maggie feels "that satisfactory consciousness which had necessarily come from being taken before Lucy's cheval-glass and made to look at the full length of her tall beauty" and she forgets "everything in the sense of her own beauty" (457). The narrator comments that "if that state of mind could have lasted, her choice would have been to have Stephen Guest at her feet." In the walk in the conservatory at Park House, Maggie's temptation concentrates in the "trees and flowers" which to Maggie seem "all made of jewels" (462). Maggie's remark that "I am quite wicked with roses; I like to gather them and smell them till they have no scent left" expresses her guilt concerning her illicit feelings for Stephen and for the life (of roses) he can offer. But although Stephen can give "her a life filled with all luxuries, with daily incense of adoration," Maggie conquers this "state of mind" because "there [are] things in her stronger than vanity" (457).

It is Maggie's resistance to social conventions, having "things in her stronger than vanity" which separates her from St. Ogg's society. When her simple "white muslin of some soft-floating kind" outshines the more elaborate wear of the other women, their "envy" becomes more pronounced, and the reader senses that Maggie is moving in a world which cannot comprehend her. Maggie's social "direct gaze," which first heartens the other women as giving her "an air of *gaucherie*," begins to look "bold" and "undefinably coarse." Maggie is moving in their minds from a

woman who deserves to wear fine clothes to a "huzzy" who parades in the "finery" of others. After hearing of Maggie's elopement with Stephen, the St. Ogg's women again wish her to conform to their image of her as a romantic heroine. Properly attired as the wife of wealthy man, Maggie can take her place in society. In an often quoted passage, Eliot reveals the hypocrisy of their position:

If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest with a post-marital trousseau and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St. Ogg's as elsewhere, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results. (512)

If Maggie only dressed and acted as a "lady" would have done, she would not appear as a "fallen woman." If she had returned wearing a "maize-coloured satinette" with "the folds in front" which "[became] her complexion" (and the accompanying "maize-coloured" wedding ring), the ladies at St. Ogg's would have supported her. Instead, she returns "without a trousseau, without a husband, in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead" and "the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind" (514).

For Maggie, however, as Beth Kalikoff insists, marriage to Stephen would represent failure. Maggie's ties to "the past," her feeling that Lucy and Phillip have stronger and more permanent claims on her than Stephen, Maggie rejects the convenient marriage which would have saved her social reputation. She also rejects the solution, marriage to Stephen, which would fulfill her own desires for "luxury," resisting, as Dinah Morris had done at first, any personal or material lure which would separate her from her conscience. Claiming autonomy as her one right and obligation,

Maggie insists on returning to her family. As she returns to St. Ogg's, her "love of independence" pushes her to fall "back on that [plan] of returning to her plain sewing and so getting enough to pay for her lodging" (515). Maggie's "independence," of course, is cut short by the flood that seems to answer her prayers for resolution.

Several critics have argued that the "ineffectiveness" of Maggie's final acts, her rejection of Stephen and her attempt to save Tom, reflect the restrictive culture around her. Wendy Woodward contends that Maggie's role in *Mill* is that of *isolata*, a figure who is rejected by the very community, particularly the community of women, which she so desperately needs. Given this hostile climate, Maggie's actions, whether of action or renouncement, can have no effect: "Any overt self-assertion on her part has been nugatory, and as useless as her heroism in returning to St Ogg's after the episode with Stephen" (53). Nancy Cervetti concurs, arguing that the flood must be seen as a punishment of "patriarchal authority" embodied by Tom and that "the flood also serves as a condemnation of a culture that cripples Maggie, punishing her for her lively spirit, dark skin and unruly hair, and, at the same time, creating within her needs and dependencies which she cannot outgrow" (23). But other readings show that Maggie's decisions to "give up" Stephen and to try to save Tom are not entirely "nugatory." Kalikoff's assessment of Maggie's struggle concludes, like John Bushnell's, that Maggie's death in the flood reflects "her best self" and that she finds "a state of grace" at last. Maggie's ending must be seen as a triumph because "she dies full of energy and commitment," having resisted the temptation of marriage to Stephen which, for Maggie, would have been a spiritual failure. In each of these readings, Maggie is seen as at war with her restrictive and oppressive culture; her death in the flood is explained in terms of her fight to overcome those limitations. In combining elements of these these readings, I see Maggie's life as

indeed a struggle against temptation, represented not necessarily by Stephen but by the women in St. Ogg's, a struggle which death alone can and does end. This struggle and the culture in which it takes place are not only couched in terms of the clothing and appearance, but constitute the source of conflict, the materialism which encourages women's vanity. By allowing Maggie ostensibly to occupy the role of fallen woman, Eliot demonstrates just how unfallen she is, and how desperately immoral is the community around her.

Many critics have felt a sense of frustration at Eliot's failure to save Maggie from death. Sir Leslie Stephen was appalled at Eliot's treatment of her heroine, stating that in the "adult" half of *Mill*, "the falling off is grievous." Whether Maggie finds this resolution in her heroic row to Tom and the mill may be debatable. But her repudiation of the decorative function held out for her, represented by the destruction of Stephen's final letter, is undeniable. In the positive action of saving Tom, Maggie loses the self-consciousness of ornamentation. Her disheveled appearance in the boat reveals this loss and the spiritual freedom she has gained in consequence: "Onward she paddled and rowed by turns in the growing twilight; her wet clothes clung round her, and her streaming hair was dashed about by the wind, but she was hardly conscious of any bodily sensations—except a sensation of strength, inspired by mighty emotion" (542). Maggie's comment that Lucy will probably be at the Guest's since "Park House stands high out of the flood," stresses the separation between Maggie, who is "in the current of the river," and her cousin. Maggie has rowed away from Park House, away from the Misses Guest, the "glass of fashion," away from "the world's wife." This decision reinforces much of Eliot's message in the novel: that the world Maggie is offered, a world of masculine oppression and female objectification, which labels her, and not her weaker sisters, a "fallen woman."

Several critics have attacked Eliot's decision to let Maggie die in the flood, and several others have defended it in that her death allows Maggie to find the union with Tom she has always desired. In the former camp are Knoepfmacher, Leavis, and Mary Jane Lupton. In the latter camp are critics such as Levine, Bushnell, and Emmitt. But these critics do not address the nature of Eliot's constrictions as a woman writer—as a producer of "plausible" fiction about women's lives. As Nancy Miller argues, Eliot's literary options were limited. Maggie's ending must be "realistic." Cervetti argues that, given this limitation, Maggie's tragic conclusion must be seen as more positive than happier conclusions. This approach to Maggie's final renunciation and death come closest to explaining the difficulty modern feminists have had with *Mill* and suggest a new way of looking at Eliot's treatment of fashion and the fallen woman here. Eliot resisted saving the fallen Maggie just as she resisted Gaskell's saving Ruth. In this sense, Eliot bows to the plausibility of Maggie's ending: once a woman has rejected society's standards (without rejecting society altogether), where can she go? By making Maggie's death (like Hetty's) tragic, Eliot continues to question the role of society in creating and destroying women like Maggie.

Gilbert and Gubar note Maggie's role as one of Eliot's "angels of destruction" but argue that Maggie's violence co-exists with her renunciation: "Maggie is...both a Satanic inflictor of pain who pushes her pretty cousin Lucy into the mud and a repentent follower of Thomas á Kempis who associates love with self-inflicted martyrdom" (492). The "violence" and "renunciation" however need not simply co-exist. In Maggie's rejection of the fashionable world—and the fashionable clothing—of the "world's wife," she enacts "violence" upon a system that, for Eliot, must be renounced. That is, by pushing Lucy into the mud or by riding out the flood in her tattered clothing,

Maggie's violent acts serve to dismantle a society which Eliot saw as partly corrupt and in need of positive change.

This approach allows for Maggie to be more than merely a victim of social determinism. Critics such as Auerbach and Bushnell have refuted the image of Maggie as victim, noting her "stored-up force" and "demonic and transforming power." These readings suggest the positive potential of Maggie's "fall." Extending them, I would note that the specific convention Maggie rejects—"finery"—demonstrates that it is not her sexual "fall" which gives Maggie so much power but her "fall" away from the conventions of St. Ogg's society which empowers her. But in Maggie's death, Eliot's depiction of the unfallen "fallen woman" reflects even more how truly fallen is the fashionable "world's wife." Maggie's life and death make a more powerful statement about the nature of moral development and the good woman's revitalizing power. The deeper tragedy embodied in Maggie's undeserved fate suggests a more powerful questioning of social values. Where Dinah can only remark on Hetty's death that it has been "sorrow upon sorrow," the narrator can claim for Stephen and Phillip that in Maggie's grave "was buried there *deepest* joy and *deepest* sorrow." Maggie is "life-affirming" even in death, as her "presence" lingers in the Red Deeps. She is a fallen woman, but one who, like Ruth, challenges and changes the community around her.

Maggie's return to Tom and her death in the flood may be seen as triumphant in another way, as well. Tom represents the "men of maxims" particularly in his capacity as breadwinner and head of the Tulliver family. But as the brother of the child Maggie, he represents, at least somewhat, the freedom of Maggie's childhood, when dipping her head in the water to prevent the curls was a supreme, and relatively effective, act of rebellion. That is, I, like Homans, see Maggie's childhood

as a time before "femininity" (and "finery") nearly break her spirit and see Maggie's return home as a rejection of the "femininity" which can have no positive definition for her. Her grave with Tom is a permanent reminder to the community of this rejection, though many, of course, will not see the importance—but like the flood, itself, the "ravages" of Maggie's fall and redemption cannot be erased. In future novels, Eliot will avoid this kind of cataclysmic ending, never allowing the "fall and rise" (to misquote Auerbach) of one woman to have such an impact on community. Such a move has compensations for Eliot's thematic treatment of women's oppression and women's ability to reject that oppression—never again will a woman like Maggie have to die to be released from "oppressive narrowness."

Chapter Five: *Felix Holt, The Radical*

'I abstain from judging by the outward appearance only,' he answered, with his usual simplicity. 'I myself have experienced that when the spirit is much exercised it is difficult to remember neckbands and strings and such small accidents of our vesture, which are nevertheless decent and needful so long as we sojourn in the flesh.'

George Eliot

In 1866, Eliot published *Felix Holt, The Radical*, a work which, as Peter Coveney notes, "occupies a decisive place in George Eliot's development." Coveney is speaking of the work as representing Eliot's return, after writing *Romola* and *The Legend of Jubal*, to "English" fiction drawn from memories of her Warwickshire upbringing. Coveney's statement may be applied to *Felix Holt* in another way, as well, for this work reflects not only Eliot's return, after exploring Jubal's trials as male artist, to the theme of fashion and the fallen woman, but her exploration of this theme from a new perspective. In Hetty, Caterina, and Maggie, Eliot avoids examining the long-term consequences of their falls by "allowing" them to die. In Arabella Transome, Eliot confronts the prolonged suffering and guilt of a conventionally "fallen woman." Mrs. Transome's fate is not to die but to live—to see her bastard son mature and to feel the humiliation of an early affair with a man beneath her socially, intellectually, and spiritually. Esther Lyon, the novel's "falling" woman, sees this degradation and learns from it, avoiding a similar (or worse) fate by vicariously experiencing Mrs. Transome's anguish. Eliot's purposeful engagement of the issues surrounding women's sexual misconduct, its origins, and its consequences make Mrs. Transome's experiences, and Esther's subsequent moral education, particularly relevant and important.

Critics of *Felix Holt* disagree about what Esther's "moral education" teaches her—and the reader—about the role of women in Victorian society. Henry James, in commenting that Mrs. Transome is "superfluous" to the novel and that her "sorrows and trials occupy a space disproportionate to any part that she plays," clearly misses her role as Esther's "tragic vision." F. R. Leavis, while appreciating at length the masterful presentation of the character of Mrs. Transome, barely mentions her influence on or connection with Esther. Arnold Kettle comes nearer the mark when he notes that Eliot's engagement with Mrs. Transome's situation "has something to do with the position of woman *vis-à-vis* men," but his analysis of this "something" and what it might have to do with Esther ends there. Barbara Hardy, in contrast, notes the "careful parallel" drawn between the two women and sees that "Esther's own consciousness of the parallel hastens her renunciation of what Mrs Transome chose" (*Century* 327); however, Hardy sees Esther as primarily avoiding Mrs. Transome's escape into fantasy: "Esther escapes the temptation of her romantic dreams of love and this decomposition of [Mrs. Transome's] character underlines the narrowness of her escape" (*Century* 327).

Richard Conway's analysis of *Felix Holt* as a revision of *Silas Marner* also insists on the centrality of Esther's moral *bildungsroman* to the rest of the novel. Esther chooses to marry Felix Holt, he says, because she comes to realize, through her life at Transome Court, that marriage to Harold implies a "trap," a situation in which Esther, like Mrs. Transome, will become "a prisoner of her own history" (299). In marriage to Felix Holt, Esther will be able "to retain a sense of her identity" (302). Likewise, Lise Kildegaard perceives a kind of feminist agenda in *Felix Holt*, arguing that Esther's triumph occurs because she, unlike Mrs. Transome, learns how to choose the *right* husband, the non-materialist Felix; in the process, Esther gains the power to "resurrect the

authority of the social fathers and reclaim the language," which capitalist economy (rampant materialism) has robbed of any meaning. In their position outside of economic exchange, women can exercise a social and cultural power, though in Eliot's works this power, according to Kildegaard, will always be reinscribed by "male authority" (111). Other feminist analyses indicate disappointment with Esther's moral education and with her choice to marry Felix. Bonnie Zimmerman's analysis of women's power in the novel concludes that Esther's marriage to Felix, while indicative of Eliot's understanding of the complex decisions facing an oppressed group, is "disappointing" and indicative of Eliot's "uncomfortable conclusion" that Esther's "proper sphere" is "powerlessness and subjection." The lesson Esther learns from Mrs. Transome is that woman's "pursuit of power ultimately narrows her soul" (*Felix Holt* 442). Though Zimmerman recognizes a certain suggestion of radical social commentary in the fates which have shaped Mrs. Transome's destiny, Zimmerman concludes that "this isolation of women from a male-controlled political system, which might have been an ironic condemnation of English politics, becomes instead a structural problem in the novel" (*Felix Holt* 447). At the most "radical" political moments of the text, Mrs. Transome is absent. This reading ignores Esther's triumph over the materialism and vanity, embodied in dress, which have destroyed Mrs. Transome. Esther's new authority over herself is brushed aside as "female submission" to male (political) power. Ruth Bernard Yeazell interprets Esther's activities as equally regressive, arguing that Esther serves to undercut the radical threat of violence implicit in the politics of the mob and in Felix himself through her exercise of "inspired ignorance" at Felix's trial. This approach suggests collusion on Eliot's part with the oppressive social forces which left women only "inspired ignorance" and ignores Eliot's criticism of women's "mis-education" which is implied throughout the novel. While Eliot almost certainly saw

women as potential "healers" of social morality, she specifically denies that women will attain this powerful role only by inspiration—in Mrs. Transome's case, "ignorance" and the vanity which accompanies it are particularly desecrated.

Rita Bode pursues the themes of women's education and power in *Felix Holt*, insisting that what Esther gains by marrying Felix is "triumph over a society that tries to restrict her kind." Though Bode does not deny "Esther's growth or her hero worship of Felix," Bode indicates that Esther's "choice of Felix over Harold is something of a 'political' decision, for whether consciously or instinctively, she [Esther] chooses the person over whom she can exercise some authority" (770). Bode's recognition that Esther's interest in "dress, behaviour, amusements, ornaments" at the expense of more noble interests poses a great threat to "the state of her soul" points out the most crucial problem for women in this novel—how to find and embrace a life beyond "appearances." This same note pervades Catherine Gallagher's analysis of Felix's struggle with and against "appearances." Gallagher's point is that this struggle reveals Eliot's ambivalence in defining "the relationship between what is and what ought to be" ("Failure" 378), and she argues for the importance of Felix's anti-materialist stance in the novel in constituting a "major rhetorical shift" in Eliot's later works, a shift in which the value of "objects" (to use Houston's term) is re-evaluated. For Felix, the material details of existence are actually more than "unimportant"; they are potentially dangerous: "He is, rather, actively hostile to some [details], for he sees them not as arbitrary signs but as material causes of spiritual degeneration" ("Failure" 381). Although Gallagher does not explore the feminist implications of this ambivalence (or hostility) toward facts, such as dress, inferences of this kind are crucial, since how to respond to the social convention of dress, to "remember . . . accidents of vesture, which are nevertheless decent and needful," is more

than an aesthetic question for Eliot's heroines. The determination regarding what is "needful" becomes an important part of Esther's education, and too much concern for "neckbands and strings" is as dangerous for her as it has been for Mrs. Transome. As Coveney puts it, "In *Felix Holt* George Eliot asserts the formidable power of fashion in a generally cosmetic society" (50). While Coveney does not explore how this power particularly affects women or the sexual falls of those like Mrs. Transome, such an exploration helps elucidate the source of Esther's moral crisis. Esther must come to realize this power and to "pierce the surface" of the "finery" which has effected Mrs. Transome's fall. To the extent that Esther is able to reject the "generally cosmetic society" of Treby Magna, of Malthouse Yard, and of Transome Court, her decision to give up her wealth and marry Felix represents Eliot's most hopeful re-working of the fallen woman's predicament.

Eliot's exploration of this predicament and Esther's eventual triumph begins with Arabella Transome and her empty existence at Transome Court. A sense of Mrs. Transome's fallen state, of the waste and regret she embodies, pervades the descriptions of her from the opening chapters of the novel, and these descriptions imply the ruination associated with "the love of finery." The epigraph of Chapter One foreshadows these descriptions as the speaker tells her bleak story:

He left me when the down upon his lip
 Lay like the shadow of a hovering kiss.
 'Beautiful mother, do not grieve,' he said;
 "I will be great, and build our fortunes high,
 And you shall wear the longest train at court,
 And look so queenly, all the lords shall say,

'She is a royal changeling: there's some crown
 Lacks the right head, since hers wears nought but braids."
 O, he is coming now—but I am grey;
 And he—

Harold Transome has realized the hopes that the son in the poem only promises. However, the outcome of Mrs. Transome's life has not been and will not be happier because of it. She will "look so queenly" and will, metaphorically, "wear the longest train" but will no longer care. She has lived to feel that men are "good . . . to women" by "giving them cushions and carriages . . . and then expecting them to be contented under contempt and neglect" (201). The son's unfulfilled promises to the speaker of the poem reflect Mrs. Transome's entire lack of fulfillment in the fashionable life she achieves. The sense of profound loss implicit in the aged mother's "now—but I am grey" symbolizes not only Mrs. Transome's nervous anxiety that she too has wasted her life and energies waiting for Harold's success, but expresses the physical deterioration of age which Mrs. Transome's early philosophy has not taught her to accept or understand. Since she, like the woman in the poem, cannot "build [her] fortunes high," but must depend on a man for wealth, Mrs. Transome's curse is to sit and wait for him, for her fate to play out.

Just as Maggie Tulliver manifests the "oppressive narrowness" of female existence, Mrs. Transome remains a symbol of ruined feminine potential—a would-be queen whose "fine dress" is reduced to tattered rags. Just as Maggie's temptation to fall is couched in terms of the fashionable clothes she might have worn, the "fallen" Mrs. Transome's faded "finery" mirrors the spiritual degradation she has come to know; in addition, the contrast of her well-worn clothing and her "aristocratic" beauty lends a sense of tragedy to her condition, stressing again a sense of

irretrievable loss. When Mrs. Transome is introduced, the narrator focuses on her worn dress and appearance:

She was a tall, proud-looking woman, with abundant grey hair, dark eyes and eyebrows, and a somewhat eagle-like yet not unfeminine face. Her tight-fitting black dress was much worn; the fine lace of her cuffs and collar, and of the small veil which fell backwards over her high comb, was visibly mended; but rare jewels flashed on her hands, which lay on her folded black-clad arms like finely cut onyx cameos. (86)

Though the description conveys a sense of grandeur, necessary if the reader is to see Mrs. Transome as tragic, the passage is filled with ironic foreshadowing. Mrs. Transome may be "proud-looking," but the reader soon discovers her secret humiliation. She may wear "mended" clothing, but, in poverty, she is freer to shape her life than she will be after her wealthy son returns home. Mrs. Transome, like the ruined Transome estate which Harold can only superficially repair, has been so completely debased by her past that she can never be completely redeemed. Clothed in the "finery" which Harold buys her, Mrs. Transome increasingly resembles the "furniture with new drapery" and the lifeless portraits of "pearly-skinned ladies with . . . blue-ribbons, and low-bodices" which decorate the walls of Transome Court.

That Mrs. Transome has fallen through her sexual relationship with Jermyn is implied from the first chapter, but Mrs. Transome's reflections reveal that the pre-conditions of this fall were embedded in her youthful vanity and useless education: "She always thought that the dangerous French writers were wicked, and that her reading of them was a sin; but many sinful things were highly agreeable to her, and many things which she did not doubt to be good and true were dull and meaningless" (105). Bode agrees that Mrs. Transome's "education" is the root of her

dilemma. According to Bode, Eliot questions how "women are to exert power for good—to join with men as part of a responsible public opinion—when their education is restricted" (441). The narrator's ironic remarks concerning Mrs. Transome's pitifully conventional learning, which conflates morality with "principles, sustained on Tory and the Church of England," exposes the ineffectiveness of such "immature" learning. Paxton, who interprets *Felix Holt* in light of Spencer's biological theories of class and gender hierarchies, agrees that inadequate education is at the heart of Mrs. Transome's fall. The lack of a "wider vision" not only encourages Mrs. Transome's affair with Jermyn but entangles her in guilt and secrecy afterward: "[Eliot] reveals more pointedly in this novel how the values shaping Mrs. Transome's education have also narrowed her vision and reinforced the prejudices of her class, imprisoning her even more securely in her misery" (147).

The description of Mrs. Transome's early years under "a superior governess" suggests that Mrs. Transome's education has been merely decoration, designed to make her more appealing to men: "And it is astonishing how effective this education appeared in a handsome girl, who sat supremely well on horse-back, sang and played a little, painted small figures in water-colours, had a naughty sparkle in her eyes when she made a daring quotation, and an air of serious dignity when she recited something from her store of correct opinions" (105). Mrs. Transome's preference for "stories of illicit passion" and "the lighter parts of dangerous French writers" portends her affair with Jermyn; that she delights in "ridicule of Biblical characters" suggests her alienation from any real moral system which can sustain her through inevitable suffering. The narrator's irony concerning this approach to female intellectual development unveils its fundamental danger: "But however such a stock of ideas may be made to tell in elegant society,

and during a few seasons in town, no amount of bloom and beauty can make them a perennial source of interest in things not personal; and the notion that what is true and, in general, good for mankind, is stupid and drug-like, is not a safe theoretic basis in circumstances of temptation and difficulty" (106). This "notion" has failed Mrs. Transome: she has had no guard (as Maggie has) against sexual temptation, and she has had no comfort in the intervening years of deprivation. Mrs. Transome is aware that her education has been merely decorative, but can only respond in bitterness:

Mrs. Transome had been in her bloom before this century began, and in the long painful years since then, what she had once regarded as her knowledge and accomplishments had become as valueless as old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal. (106)

That she continues to founder in a sea of moral confusion is apparent in the narrator's description of her current life: "Mrs. Transome, whose imperious will had availed little to ward off the great evils of her life, found the opiate for her discontent in the exertion of her will about smaller things...petty habits and narrow notions" (106). She continues morally blind to the larger world around her: "the great story of this world [was] reduced for her to the little tale of her own existence" (438).

Mrs. Transome's lack of moral training parallels the interest she has been encouraged to take in dress and physical beauty. Though the narrator provides fewer details of the young Mrs. Transome's ("Miss Lingon's") preoccupation with clothing than with similar characters, several important passages reveal what Mrs. Transome's attitudes have been and continue to be. That Mrs. Transome has "never dressed herself without aid...[n]otwithstanding...the fewness of

servants" indicates a long association with both the ease of aristocratic privilege and the clothing of a fine lady which accompanies such privilege. Although Mrs. Transome now wears "an old black velvet dress with much mended point," her position as a "goddess in ages which it is not thought necessary or likely that a goddess should be very moral" remains unquestioned by her personal maid. The stories Mrs. Transome relates about her youth to Esther further connect an attention to appearance to a supposed freedom from moral restraint: "the conversation turned chiefly on what happened in Mrs Transome's youth—what she wore when she was presented at Court—who were the most distinguished and beautiful women at that time—the terrible excitement of the French Revolution—the emigrants of the Lingon family" (493). Mrs. Transome's youthful "portrait in evening costume of 1800" who "look[s] smilingly down" on its observers both highlights the vanity and egoism which has permeated her life and the sad discrepancy between the "youthful vigor" of the portrait and the aged paralysis of the original.

In Harold Transome's patronizing tyranny over his mother and Matthew Jermyn's pretentious chivalry towards her, Eliot represents the tragedy of relationships in which vanity, egoism, and materialism have replaced love and sympathy. That Mrs. Transome, herself an egoist, suffers greatly from Harold's treatment demonstrates her greater susceptibility, as a woman and as a mother, to the "zoological" forces Eliot sees as inherently women's lot. Mrs. Transome's guilt over the affair with Jermyn makes her especially vulnerable to both Harold's power and Jermyn's since she dreads either man's discovery of truth: Harold, that he is Jermyn's son; Jermyn, that she recognizes his "selfish insensibility" which has "turn[ed her] love into a good bargain." Both Harold and Jermyn see Mrs. Transome's feminine powerlessness as a fact to be exploited, a justification for treating her with contempt.

Zimmerman is essentially correct in her analysis that *Felix Holt* is about power. Words such as "mastery," "power," and "submission" abound, and such language amplifies in scenes between Mrs. Transome and her son, who is determined, it seems, to "kill her with kindness." Harold, ignoring his mother's desire to exercise authority on the estate, placates her for the hard work she has been "forced" to do over the years: "Ah, you've had to worry yourself about things that don't properly belong to a woman—my father being weakly. We'll set all that right. You shall have nothing to do now" (95). Paxton comments that this scene represents Harold's truest self, a symbol of "male dominance so effectively disguised by the sentimental glorification of motherhood": "In this patriarchal household, filial duty becomes a disguise for domineering paternalism" (151). Harold's "mastery" contrasts with what Mrs. Transome comes to see as her utter subordination to his will. She repeatedly confesses, "I have no power over him . . . none" (201).

Harold couches much of his mastery over women—in particular the patronage he shows to Mrs. Transome—in material, rather than spiritual or intellectual, terms, and his words emphasize his perception of women's function as social ornaments. When women are decorative and pleasant, they have value; thus, Harold insists on making his mother (and himself) happy by making her "a brilliant figure." Harold, whose habits of thought have "no reference to any woman's feeling," insists her mother shall be "grandmamma on satin cushions" (95). That Mrs. Transome declares she is "not prepared" for that useless role fails to register with Harold. Ignoring her "silent agony" upon his initial return, Harold off-handedly remarks that she is "as straight as an arrow still" and "will carry the shawls" he has brought her "as well as ever" (93). Repeatedly, Harold rejects his mother's opinions and wishes, dismissing her as worrying "about things that don't properly

belong to a woman" and condescends that a "woman ought to be a Tory, and graceful, and handsome, like you" (194). Rejecting women's right to intellectual debate, Harold ends a potentially uncomfortable discussion of his Radical politics with a reference to what he sees as woman's true sphere: "I say, mother, shall we have this room furnished with rose-colour? I notice that it suits your bright grey hair" (194).

The difficulty for Mrs. Transome is that she too continues to think of herself in objectified terms, the "natural consequence," for Eliot, of Mrs. Transome's lack of moral education. Like Hetty Sorrel, Mrs. Transome conceives of herself as an ornamental object, one which no longer has any value now that she is old. Mrs. Transome's complaint, "I am a hag," uttered in one form or another throughout the novel, reveals her tendency to consider herself in terms of physical appearance. Realizing that Harold will not take her advice about the estate or Jermyn's fraudulent dealings, Mrs. Transome blames her powerlessness, in part, on her withered looks. Staring at herself in the mirror, she laments that she is "an ugly old woman who happens to be his mother. That is what he sees in me, as I see a stranger in him. I shall count for nothing. I was foolish to expect anything else" (97). This experience is repeated later, when Mrs. Transome begins to think Esther will marry Harold. Distressed by circumstances and saddened by the contrast between Esther's youth and her own age, Mrs. Transome shrinks before the mirror in her room. After "unfasten[ing] her abundant grey hair, which rolled backward in a pale sunless stream over her dark dress," she reflects on her image. Asked by her maid why Mrs. Transome has "undone" her hair alone, she replies, "I undid it to see what an old hag I am. These clothes you put on me, Denner, are only a smart shroud" (486). Mrs. Transome's words again reflect some insight about women's ornamental function, but her action (gazing in the mirror) suggest that for her, as for Hetty, no

other role is possible. Though she sees her decorative function as a kind of "death-in-life," the outward sign of a permanently fallen condition, she continues to operate in that role. She does "carry the shawls" Harold has brought her "as well as ever," believing she has forfeited other options through her affair with Jermyn. Several scenes involving Mrs. Transome's maid highlight this picture of constricted existence. Mrs. Transome protests Harold's contemptuous treatment, but continues the rituals of being "dressed" just the same. Night after night, Denner turns Mrs. Transome into a "majestic lady" instead of a "Hecuba-like woman," trying to cheer her mistress to "set [her] mind at rest" and Mrs. Transome maintains the fiction of "grandmamma on satin cushions" which she finds so repulsive.

Jermyn's relationship with Mrs. Transome is likewise rooted in egoistic self-love and "materialism" which replaces emotional claims with material ones. Eliot makes it clear that Jermyn's affair with Mrs. Transome is rooted in the well-dressed beauty which marked her young life by having him haunted by this figure at key moments. When Jermyn first thinks of blackmail as a way to ward off Harold's suit against him, he confuses his fashionably draped daughter with the young Mrs. Transome:

Just then Jermyn's third daughter, a tall slim girl wrapped in a white woolen shawl, which she had hung over her blanketwise, skipped across the lawn towards the greenhouse to get a flower. Jermyn was startled, and did not identify the figure, or rather he identified it falsely with another tall white-wrapped figure which had sometimes set his heart beating quickly more than thirty years before. For a moment he was fully back in those distant years when he and another bright-eyed person had seen no reason why they should not indulge their passion and their vanity, and

determine for themselves how their lives should be made delightful in spite of unalterable external conditions. (317-18)

When waiting to speak with Mrs. Transome about Harold, Jermyn experiences a similar moment as he is struck by her young portrait:

It was a charming little room in its refurbished condition: it had two pretty inlaid cabinets . . . and Mrs. Transome's own portrait in the evening costume of 1800, with a garden in the background. That brilliant young woman looked smilingly down on Mr Jermyn as he passed in front of the fire; and at present hers was the only gaze in the room. He could not help meeting the gaze as he waited, holding his hat behind him—could not help seeing many memories lit up by it . . . Before three minutes had passed, however, as if by some sorcery, the brilliant smiling young woman above the mantel-piece seemed to be appearing at the doorway withered and frosted by many winters, and with lips and eyes from which the smile had departed. (513)

These scenes indicate not only the ghostly presence of the past, a theme in the novel, but reveal the physical, superficial nature of Harold's original attraction. This attraction, like Mrs. Transome's beauty, has "withered" and Jermyn is left only with "amorous and bland" feelings towards her.

The well-dressed and beautiful specter of Mrs. Transome suggests the "materiality" of Jermyn's original passion for Mrs. Transome and explains both his inability to sympathize with her and his tendency to resist her most desperate pleas. The narrator remarks that "so many things were more distinctly visible to him, and touched him more acutely, than the effect of his acts or words on Mrs. Transome's feelings" (520). Mrs. Transome recognizes that "there was a possibility of fierce insolence in this man who was to pass with those nearest to her as her indebted servant,

but whose brand she secretly bore. She was as powerless with him as she was with her son" (203). When Jermyn entreats her to tell Harold the truth of his paternity, in order to stop Harold's legal proceedings against him, Mrs. Transome bitterly accuses him of using her affection for his personal advancement: "I have made sacrifices too, but it was . . . after I saw that your tenderness had turned into calculation—after I saw that you cared for yourself only, and not for me" (518). Of Jermyn's self-interested plea, Paxton comments that Jermyn's "lifestory dramatizes how his insensitivity has been cultivated by his participation in a legal and social system that defines kinship in patriarchal terms, overvalues wealth and power, and assesses love by determining if it is a 'good bargain'" (154).

Despite allowing Mrs. Transome to express a number of invectives against male power, which seemingly express Eliot's own repressed anger concerning female oppression, Eliot makes it clear that Mrs. Transome's choices have led to her fall, and it is for these choices—for her acceptance of an objectified status—that Mrs. Transome is punished so thoroughly. Degraded by the knowledge that she has ruined her life for "a man who is beneath her in feeling," Mrs. Transome self-confesses, "You brought it on yourself" (203). Mrs. Transome's desires as a young woman to oppose convention and her strongly physical attraction to the then handsome Jermyn reflect the egoism that pervaded her youthful folly. That the sexual relationship between Jermyn and Mrs. Transome, like that of Hetty and Arthur or Caterina and Anthony, has proceeded from physical and superficial attraction necessitates the "material" and "materialistic" consequences which Mrs. Transome finds so bitter down the road. Mrs. Transome's reduction from estate manager to mere "material" item, the "grandmamma on satin cushions," in Harold's world stems from the same social cause as her minor sexual power as a young woman: from a system of male patronage.

Mrs. Transome has "endured all the more privation" from the dishonest dealings of Matthew Jermyn in large part because "through all her life there had vibrated the maiden need to have her hand kissed and be the object of chivalry" (202). Mrs. Transome cannot simply "dismiss" Jermyn or "tell him what she saw him to be" because, in the case of her former lover, "[c]oarse kindness is at least better than coarse anger" (201).

In *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot contrasts the attention to dress paid by important female characters in order to demonstrate the consequences of female vanity in one. In *Felix Holt*, she does something more; for Esther is not Mrs. Transome's antithesis, but her successor, a vain, egoistic young woman nearly doomed to repeat the mistakes of the older woman's life. Zimmerman upholds this point: "It is, in fact, primarily through the contrast of Esther that George Eliot illustrates the consequences of Mrs. Transome's egoism" (444). But Esther, though morally weak, has not completely fallen yet. The narrator comments that her "changing face was the perfect symbol of her mixed susceptible nature, in which battle was inevitable, and the side of victory uncertain" (468). Esther is described as "intensely of the feminine type, verging neither towards the saint nor the angel" for whom, in her "freshness," "choice is possible which gives unity to life" (551).

Though Esther's story is unevenly expressed and culminates in what Gallagher notes is the highly unlikely trial scene, her tale, even more clearly than that of Mrs. Transome, reveals the small "accidents" of mind and habit which make her so vulnerable to the fate of fallenness. Most important, Esther's engagement with fine dress and appearance—which she believes constitutes ladylike taste—makes her nearly incapable of developing the mature moral vision which Eliot (and Felix) sees as necessary for women. As Philip Rogers notes, in his comparison of Esther with

similar women in Tolstoj's works, both Eliot and Tolstoj see vanity and selfishness in women as more than domestic problems. They see that "society as a whole has been perverted by the false values of fine-ladyism" (382). The reader's first glimpse of Esther, which is significantly through Felix's eyes, exposes her vanity. Felix's repulsion, though extreme in proportion to his attraction, suggests Eliot's own criticism of Esther's "ladylike" character:

[Felix] would not observe her, but he had a sense of an elastic walk, the tread of small feet, a long neck and a high crown of shining brown plaits with curls that floated backward—things, in short that suggested a fine lady to him, and determined him to notice her as little as possible. (149)

Felix's opinion that a "fine lady was always a sort of spun-glass affair" is supported by Esther's defense of her superior taste in dress: "A real fine-lady does not wear clothes that flare in people's eyes, or use importunate scents, or make a noise as she moves: she is something refined, and graceful, and charming, and never obtrusive" (153). Sneering that Miss Jermyn, the wealthy lawyer's daughter who employs Esther, is no "judge of what is ladylike," Esther complains Miss Jermyn "is vulgarity personified—with large feet, and the most odious scent on her handkerchief, and a bonnet that looks like 'The Fashion' printed in capital letters" (153). The narrator's remark that Esther "is well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard" indicates Esther's pride focuses entirely on the world of surfaces. She cares that "the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said that she might be taken for a born lady" (which, ironically, she is though she does not know it yet) and "her own pretty instep, clad in a silk stocking, her little heel, just rising from a kid slipper, her irreproachable nails and delicate wrist, were the objects of delighted consciousness to her" (159). Esther's moral code is

displaced by a much more materialistic assessment of people and possessions: she has "a little code of her own about scents, colours, textures and behaviours, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned all things and persons" (159).

But Esther's "superiority," however legitimately inherited it may be, indicates just the kind of false values which Felix attributes to "women who spoil men's lives" (212). Felix, who doesn't notice whether a candle is wax or tallow, realizes the danger in Esther's belief that "it was her superiority which made her unable to use without disgust any but the finest cambric handkerchiefs and freshest gloves"; he asserts that these kinds of illusions either force husbands to "toil with brain and limb for things" or entice Esther, who could give extra money to charity, to "[save] nothing from her earnings" but spend all her money "on gratification of these nice tastes" (160). Thus, Felix's original assumption that Rev. Lyon's daughter will be a "prim Miss" who will be fond of "ornamental knitting which is not inconsistent with Nonconforming seriousness" only misses the mark by aiming too high—Esther's goals, like those of other such women, "will not place [her] on a level with the intelligent fleas" (156).

Her one desire is to be a fine lady and, in pursuing this goal, she undergoes a education similar to that of Mrs. Transome; and if we believe Eliot's "mouthpiece," Felix Holt, she is headed toward a ruinous fate, perhaps one similar to Harold's bitter mother. Esther's love for Byron demonstrates the bent of her education and is similar to Mrs. Transome's familiarity with Chateaubriand and the "dangerous French writers." Although Esther's years in a French Protestant school have not made her "papistical," her father's greatest fear, they have, according to the narrator, led to "a good deal of non-papistical vanity" (174). Esther's vanity, like Mrs. Transome's, is only fed by the society in which she moves. When Esther becomes governess in a

wealthy household, an honor which seems as odds with the poverty and Dissent her father embraces, "all her native tendencies toward luxury, fastidiousness, and scorn of mock gentility, were strengthened by witnessing the habits of a well-born and wealthy family" (159). Even her life among her father's Dissenting parishioners encourages her superficiality. Though they criticize Mr. Lyon for "being led astray by the melancholy vanity of giving her exceptional accomplishments and allow[ing] her to take situations where she had contracted notions...of a too worldly kind," the narrator comments that these parishioners' "tears were shed under the best bonnets" (157). Esther's experiences have taught her not to "mind about people having right opinions so that they had good taste" and, as Dinah counsels Hetty, Felix desperately wishes to "make her cry and cut her fine hair off" in order to disrupt Esther's complacent ignorance.

Esther's life at Transome Court appeals to all of her "tastes" and temporarily tempts her to reject the life Felix can offer. All of Esther's previous thoughts and experience transform her new existence into the fulfillment of a "day-dream." The narrator sympathetically comments: "no one, who has not, like Esther, a strong natural prompting and susceptibility towards such things, and has at the same time suffered from the presence of opposite conditions, can understand how powerfully those minor accidents of rank which please the fastidious sense can preoccupy the imagination" (473-74). She revels in the ladylike presence of Mrs. Transome, a presence partly shaped by externals: "Esther's pretty behaviour it must be confessed was not fed entirely by lofty moral sources: over and above her really generous feeling, she enjoyed Mrs. Transome's accent, the high-bred quietness of her speech, the delicate odour of her drapery. She had always thought life must be particularly easy if one could pass it among refined people; and so it seemed at this moment" (481). Esther's appropriation of the "finery" which is part of Mrs. Transome's persona

and to which Esther's new position entitles her, completes her dream: the narrator remarks that it was pleasant "to be decked by Mrs Transome's own hands in a set of turquoise ornaments which became her wonderfully, worn with a white Cashmere dress, which was also insisted on" (495-96).

Esther's new life offers her the material trappings of wealth that she has always craved and these accoutrements at first obscure the growing self-awareness she has gained under Felix's tutelage. When Esther first leaves her father to go home with the Transome's, her surroundings please Esther despite her concern for her father and for Felix, who is now in jail: "In spite of all the grave thoughts that had been, Esther felt it a very pleasant as well as new experience to be led to the carriage by Harold Transome, to be . . . looked at admiringly and deferentially by a person opposite, whom it was agreeable to look at in return" (484). Though perceiving Mrs. Transome's "isolation" from the rest of the family and recognizing "indefinable indications of a hidden anxiety," Esther at first cannot penetrate the older woman's intense suffering since it is disguised by "beauty, position, and graceful kindness towards [Esther]." Esther's admiration for the long pictures of Transome ancestors temporarily obscures the danger residing in her fantasies—that she too will be transformed into a mere picture.

But Esther's particular experiences and her confrontations with Felix, Harold, and especially Mrs. Transome allow her an opportunity to choose something more. In this opportunity, Eliot suggests, as she does in *Mill*, that character alone does not determine destiny. Though Esther has been subjected to many of the same social forces as Mrs. Transome, certain altered circumstances—the tutelage of Felix Holt and the example of Arabella Transome—vary the decisions she can and will make.

Esther's first experiences with Felix Holt demonstrate his complete disregard for the "charm," a matter of fine clothing appropriately worn, with which she captivates others. He is repelled by the idea of "a fine lady as the daughter of" the "rusty" Rev. Lyon, and chides that her "niceties" are only "round-about euphuisms [sic] that *dress up* swindling till it looks as well as honesty" (152 my italics). In response to Esther's insistence that Miss Jermyn is not "ladylike," Felix insists, "One sort of fine ladyism is as good as another" (153). Coveney sees Felix's embrace of poor "people who don't follow the fashions" as an example of a "deep moral intention" in the novel—the "determination to reject social fashion" (50). This determination makes Felix assert that Esther is a mere "peacock," the same charge Mrs. Poyser levels at Hetty, and to insist, "I want you to change . . . by asking yourself whether life is not as solemn a thing as your father takes it to be" (211). He rails that she is "a bird trimming its feathers" and one of the "foolish women who spoil men's lives" (212). When she appears not to listen to his arguments, Felix replies in utter disgust: "I see; I have made a fool of myself. I thought you had a more generous mind—that you might be kindled to a better ambition. But I've set your vanity aflame—nothing else" (213).

Esther's attraction to Harold represents all of the materialism and superficiality that Felix abhors and that almost make her another "fallen" woman. She engages in the kind of romantic banter with Harold which Felix rejects as her attempt to "turn the talk" away from "any judgment that must carry grave action" (211). Esther's first meeting with Harold, which occurs before either knows of her lineage, reflects her almost unconscious participation in an oppressive and sexist culture. The narrator's comment, that Harold "regarded women as slight things" of which he is "fond" when they don't "interfere with the course of his serious ambition," strengthens the message that the discussion between him and Esther is only part of a "pleasant diversion":

"I hope you are not going to let us disturb you," said Harold, noticing [Esther's] action. "We come to discuss election affairs, and particularly desire to meet the ladies."

"I have no interest with any one who is not already on the right side," said Esther, smiling.

"I am happy to see at least that you wear the Liberal colours."

"I fear I must confess that it is more from love of blue than from love of Liberalism.

Yellow opinions could only have brunettes on their side." (266)

Irony abounds here. Harold's desire to "interest" Esther in politics is, of course, a mere formality since she cannot vote or hold office, and she unconsciously demonstrates her acceptance of this superfluous role by confessing that her wearing "the Liberal colours" is "more from the love of blue." Dress, not politics, determines her "opinions."⁵²

Several subsequent interchanges repeat this pattern. The most telling one occurs when Harold interrupts Esther as she gazes at the portrait of a Transome ancestor, Lady Betty. To Harold's playful command, "Don't move, pray . . . you look as if you were standing for your own portrait," Esther responds with a laugh: "I take that as an insinuation . . . for I notice almost all the portraits are in a conscious, affected attitude. That fair Lady Betty looks as if she had been drilled into that posture, and had not will enough of her own ever to move again unless she had a little push given to her." Harold's response that the original would not have been as "cheerful" as the

⁵² Coveney suggests that this passage "reflects the cosmetic nature of their political world." I would argue that it reflects even more the "cosmetic" role women play not only in that world, but in the entire society which makes up the novel.

portrait causes Esther to agree: "one would certainly think that she had just been unpacked from silver paper." In noting the self-assertion of Esther's rejection of Harold, Bode comments extensively on Harold's inability to see Esther, or any woman, as much more than a picture—the portrait of a lady such as hangs in Transome Court. Bode cites Harold's reference to the picture of "Lady Betty" as exemplifying his egoistic perception of women; he sees them only in relation to his own pleasure: "She brightens up that panel well with her bright satin skirt . . . but alive I dare say she would have been less cheerful company" (772). Bode maintains that "Harold's view of women in terms of art is not tribute to them, but rather a means of subordinating them to his powerful will whose influence is often destructive" (771). This is a perceptive analysis of Harold's "appreciation" of women, but overlooks that, at this point in the novel, Esther actively participates in this iconography, only just gleaning the fact that she too may be subordinated by Harold. Esther's temporary concern whether "the woman who looked in that way [like Lady Betty] ever felt troubles" and her statement that Harold would want a woman to "mind" if her "man himself got into trouble" is undercut by her "merrily" asking, "Or suppose . . . the man himself was troublesome?" (500). Esther's lingering desire for flirtatious repartee overcomes her momentary moral reflection. She immediately starts into a witty debate concerning Harold's perfections and hers "with her pretty toss of the head."

But Esther's conversations with Felix, which have suggested a life of "difficult blessedness" which would make her "exalted into something quite new," have not been wasted. When Felix chides Esther for her vain wrong-headedness, Esther, at first, resists: "She could not bear that Felix should not respect her, yet she could not bear that he should see her bend before his denunciation" (213). She feels "seriously shaken in her self-contentment" but "could not change

for anything Felix said" (214). Her actions belie her conviction since, for the first time, she begins to take a real interest in her father's welfare, and soon confesses to Felix that she is "not offended" at his criticisms and that Felix "should believe in [her] more" (325). Esther begins to see her vanity and the "mis-education" which has contributed to it as impediments to a mature moral vision: "The favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn" (327). When she hears of her possible inheritance—a future which will encompass all of her material wishes and to which she once looked forward—the prospect "affect[s] her with dread." She has begun to see beyond the "life of surfaces." Felix's expressed wish that Esther might be the "one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life" stirs her desire to be that woman. Esther's hope that she can "be worthy of what she revered in Felix" encourages her to "gaze on the degrading hard experience of other human beings" (474).

A visible manifestation of Esther's changed nature, her visit to Felix in prison, is reflected, as it is in Maggie's metamorphosis in the flood, by a change in her dress:

Esther had thrown a dark cloak over the handsomer coverings which Denner had assured her was absolutely required of ladies who sat anywhere near the judge at a great trial; and as the bonnet of that day did not throw the face into high relief, but rather into perspective, a veil drawn down gave her a sufficiently inconspicuous appearance. (554)

Esther's "handsomer coverings" are "cloaked" by the simpler garment she wears, significantly, to see Felix, who would criticize the "finery." Her impulse to look "inconspicuous" demonstrates a reluctance to confess her love for Felix to a society that will not understand it or him; it also

represents a alteration— her desire for a man who will "look at her more persistently [with her "curls all pushed back carelessly"] than . . . when her hair was perfect" (359).

This desire transforms her perception of life at Transome Court, and the knowledge that if she inherits the estate, the Transomes must leave, is only the beginning of the "dread" which pervades her stay there. By experiencing the Transome's superficial existence and its tragic repercussions, which coalesce in Harold's discovered illegitimacy, Esther gains "such a vision of the future" that she looks beyond the "atta-of-rose fascinations" which disguise those consequences. Though Esther is at first delighted with the life of aristocratic privilege which Transome Court represents, she soon admits that all is not as it seems. Esther begins to sense that Mrs. Transome is only "act[ing] the part of hostess as she performed the toilet and went on with her embroidery: these things were to be done whether one were happy or miserable" (495). She discerns the lovelessness of the Transome marriage, contracted for political and economic reasons, thinking, "It was not easy to conceive that the husband and wife had ever been fond of each other" (493). Esther's growing tie to Felix increases her perception of "a change in Mrs. Transome" (the result of Harold's threat to ruin Jermyn, his at yet unacknowledged father): "But while Mrs Transome was dressed just as usual, took her seat as usual, trifled with her drugs and had her embroidery before her as usual, and still made her morning greetings with that finished easy politeness and consideration of tone which to rougher people seems like affection, Esther noticed a strange fitfulness in her movements" (552). Esther's awareness, which, critics have observed, comprises the necessary "fear and pity" for the novel's tragic outlook, brings her to a moment of moral "recognition," enabling her to undergo "something little short of an inward revolution" (591). She now knows "those feelings which, now she had once known them, [life] seemed nothing less than

a fall and a degradation to do without" (592), and these "feelings" permit her, in the end, to see the contrast between the "youthful brilliancy" reflected in Mrs. Transome's portrait, "smiling with deluded brightness," with the "joyless, embittered age" which Esther "daily saw had come instead of it" (585). Struggling to make "a great decision" concerning her inheritance, Esther experiences her "tragic vision" of the lonely and tormented Mrs. Transome, steadily pacing the corridors of house. Overwhelmed by the "disordered grey hair—the haggard face—the reddened eyelids under which tears seemed to be coming again with pain," Esther recognizes the self behind the façade of "finery," the self Esther will become if she does not change, as Felix wishes:

Esther found it difficult to speak. The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love. (597)

Esther's new perspective, which grows on her throughout the novel, also alters her fascination with Harold and the life he represents. Although Esther initially hides what she considers an affection for Felix, for fear that Harold will think it "a degradation of her taste and refinement," Esther later enthusiastically defends Felix to him, declaring, "I never knew what nobleness of character really was before I knew Felix Holt!" (537). Although she is at first charmed by Harold's attention and chivalrous deference to her wishes, she comes to see the tedium of a life amidst such gallantry:

She could not help being gratified by all the manifestations from those around her that she was thought thoroughly fitted for a high position—could not help enjoying, with more or less keenness, a rehearsal of that demeanour amongst luxuries and dignities

which had often been a part of her day-dreams, and the rehearsal included the reception of more and more emphatic attentions from Harold...And yet, this life at Transome Court was *not* the life of her day-dreams: there was dulness [sic] already in its ease, and in the absence of high demand; and there was the vague consciousness that the love of this not unfascinating man who hovered about her gave an air of moral mediocrity to all her prospects. (523-24)

The lively repartee which has functioned as romantic window-dressing in Esther's relationship with Harold comes to seem worse than mediocre. Esther's initial vision of Harold as "not a tragic hero" but a man for whom a woman "must dress for genteel comedy" is severely checked by the knowledge that Harold's "Orientalism" concerning women is more than a pose. When she mentions her assumption that he is a widower, Harold shocks her (while trying to reassure her) with the truth: "Harry's mother had been a slave--was bought, in fact" (541). The narrator remarks: "It was impossible for Harold to preconceive the effect this had on Esther. . . . She was unable to speak. . . . she was now pale, and shaken with feelings she had not yet defined for herself" (541). Esther perceives Harold's love as "silken bondage" and "a stifling oppression" which, if she marries him, will end in the "well-cushioned despair" (592).

Eliot signifies Esther's moral triumph at Transome Court by not only having Esther return to the life "without attar-of-roses," an existence without "finery," but by having Esther *undress* Mrs. Transome, as well. Esther's "terrible vision" of Mrs. Transome, "pacing slowly, with her cheek upon her hand," impresses Esther "to soothe this suffering woman." As Esther assures Mrs. Transome that "not all" men "are selfish and cruel," she begs to help Mrs. Transome get ready for bed: "Do let me go to your room with you, and let me undress you, and let me tend upon you"

(598). That Eliot uses this undressing scene to represent both Mrs. Transome's return to human sympathy and Esther's rejection of life at Transome Court accentuates the role of fine dress in women's degradation. Removal of Mrs. Transome's "new finery" disrupts the pattern of objectification that has marked her life, a life from which Esther now demonstrates her freedom. She will not be one of the "saddening relics and new finery of Transome Court" but "resign[s] all claim to the Transome estate."

Eliot completes Esther's conversion from "falling woman" to wife "of a man who said he would always be poor" through Esther's reunion with Felix upon his release from prison. Though Zimmerman laments that this reunion represents "Esther's disappointing conversion into the 'Angel of the House,'" Bode demonstrates the power and self-assertion of the move: "If the vain, conceited Esther of the first scenes promises to be another Angel in the House by the novel's end, the impression is that it will be her own house in which she presides" (786). When Esther assures Felix that she "did not wish to marry [Harold], or to be rich" but prefers "a very bare and simple life" with him (601), she asserts her right to choose her own life—an act of will not possible in Harold Transome's world. Illustrating her new self-identity, Esther maintains that having "seen many things very seriously" at Transome Court, she "made a deliberate choice" to leave it behind. Of her ladylike pretensions, only her curls remain; in Esther's justification "They cost nothing—they are natural" (602), the reader again hears Eliot's advocacy of "natural beauty" over "artificial ugliness." Bode's playful remark that Esther's influence in her new home will be so strong that "it would not be a complete surprise to find the candles made of wax there" (a reference to Esther's earlier pretensions) misses the mark since it is Esther's willingness to leave such pretensions behind which permits her new control. Esther affirms her rejection of fashion for both her and Felix.

When he half-seriously asks, "You won't want me to wear a stock?", Esther responds definitively: "No: and you will not attribute stupid thoughts to me before I've uttered them" (603). In confirmation of her new status as "unfallen woman," Esther's final act of renunciation is her "very simple wedding," a ceremony in which the freedom from "finery" only inspires the community to "[believe] in everything more" (604). That Rev. Lyon's additional wedding sermon is done so that there may be "no bondage to questionable forms" reflects not only his Dissenter's outlook on church ceremony, but Esther's perception of the imprisoning life she has left behind.

Of either Harold's or Felix's "radical" politics, little remains. In that Esther's and Mrs. Transome's stories are the center of the novel, only their private futures are mentioned in the conclusion. One assumes that Harold's loss of the election ends his political career, and the narrator says only that he takes a discreet vacation with his mother before settling down to life at Transome Court (with which Esther's "abdication" has left him). That he can, in the end, comfort his mother and that, in her community, there was "silence about the past," appear Eliot's compensations for Harold's and Mrs. Transome's suffering. While Felix does seem to retain a degree of political radicalism, the narrator does not report that Felix has again taken public action or caused public scandal. The results of his experiences with and for Esther establish a happy domesticity for the pair—perhaps the only conclusion Eliot could envision, disbelieving in quick political reform as she did. Esther's "fairy-tale" inheritance of Transome Court, her "legitimate" right (as opposed to Harold's illegitimate one) to the land and fortune, is neatly inverted by her rejection of the claims of birth. This transformation of the familiar "changeling" story is important in suggesting Eliot's future consideration of sexual fallenness and female materialism. Society is finally rejuvenated by "Cinderella's" sacrifice of her legitimate inheritance in favor of the fallen

woman's illegitimate progeny—both are subsequently ennobled. That Esther's choice rejuvenates her permanently is clear. Rejecting "people who follow the fashions," Esther, the narrator concludes, "has never repented."

Chapter Six: *Middlemarch*

'Ay, to be sure, there should be a little devil in a woman,' said Mr Chichely, whose study of the fair sex seemed to have been detrimental to his theology. 'And I like them blond, with a certain gait, and a swan neck.'

George Eliot

For George Eliot's sixth novel, she returns as she had done in *Felix Holt* to England of the 1830's, to England at the time of the first Reform Bill, the England of her childhood; and, once again, she uses this crucial moment in socio-political history to explore the issues surrounding women and fashion. In this novel, Eliot presents what many critics consider her most ringing indictment of female education and socialization through the character of Rosamond Vincy. Rosamond reflects, as does the young Esther Lyon, the dangers both for men and women of ornamental femininity. It is an acceptance of this condition which marks not only Rosamond's morally "fallen" state, but which precipitates the perhaps more tragic spiritual fall of her husband, Tertius Lydgate. Throughout the novel, Eliot explores this tragedy and other potentially similar ones by examining the attitudes of various men and women toward female dress. Barbara Hardy notes this importance of dress in *Middlemarch*:

The women in *Middlemarch* usually show some degree of sartorial self-consciousness, ranging from the assumptions of Rosamond Vincy about her trousseau, to Harriet

Bulstrode's shift from fashionable and expensive costume to appropriately austere Quaker wear for forgiveness and shared penance. The critical reader can extract the sartorial pattern and abstract a sense of social and psychic customs and rituals, which are heightened in the work of art, but reflect, and reflect on, customs and rituals outside literature. (*Particularities* 160)

If, as Hardy claims, imagery "says" in *Middlemarch* what the narrator might have said in earlier novels (*Novels* 215), then the image of clothing speaks volumes. Through a series of comparisons, Eliot takes a wide look at the "customs" associated with women's subjection in a materialistic and chauvinistic culture; the novelist suggests that degrees of moral "fallenness" parallel degrees of interest in clothing and appearance, as the tableau of Middlemarch life manifests the range of female virtue, from the Madonna-like Dorothea, to her less visionary sister, from the plain but honest Mary Garth, to her beautiful but selfish cousin, Rosamond.

In spite of the novel's ostensibly "epic" scope, or perhaps in conjunction with it, many critics have noted Eliot's focus on the problems of female socialization in *Middlemarch*. An early reviewer, in discussing Dorothea's disappointing marriage to Casaubon, asserts that Dorothea's delusions about Casaubon spring from the way society has (mis)shaped her visions (Harvey 134). Virginia Woolf recognized that Eliot's heroines, despite their flaws as artistic creations, remain the element of Eliot's fiction on which "we would cast a final glance," since it is in their struggle for "they scarcely know what" that readers find the "burden and complexity of womanhood" articulated by a writer who understood that burden. That *Middlemarch*, for Woolf, is "one of the few novels written for grown-up people" suggests just how complex Eliot's presentation of women's position is. Henry James, although he lamented that Dorothea's role in the novel was not more important,

still saw her problem—"a young girl. . . yearning for a motive for sustained spiritual effort and only wasting her ardor"—as the central one of the novel.

For other critics, Eliot's treatment of women's issues reveals the author's native conservatism, even her anti-feminism. Laurence Lerner charges that Eliot's ambivalence over Dorothea's plight reflects the "feminist ghost" which haunts the text. Lerner claims that the ending of the novel, however, is "not at all feminist," and finds himself agreeing with a contemporary reviewer from *The Times*: "There is a certain school which will find satisfaction in thinking that Dorothea's story involves some special impeachment of the fitness of the present female lot. We do not think that this is at all intended" (Lerner 243). Feminist critics such as Lee Edwards have lamented the limited vision of female achievement inscribed by Dorothea's "failure" to do "something better." In this way, *Middlemarch* represents "both the logical conclusion to the problem of female energy posed in [Eliot's] work and, less happily, the result of the failure of her own imagination to create the sorts of alternatives [J. S.] Mill envisions" (237). Mary Jacobus' similar reading of the changed "Finale" of *Middlemarch* suggests similar frustration. While Eliot's original ending "risks turning the neighborhood of Middlemarch into 'social air,' and uncovering fiction as polemic," the published ending possibly indicates a "loss of nerve" on Eliot's part. Such a reading extends that of Ellen Moers, who sees Dorothea as just the kind of useless, stereotypical heroine that "images of women" critics most deplore: "Dorothea Brooke . . . is good for nothing *but* to be admired. An arrogant, selfish, spoiled rich beauty, she does little but harm in the novel" (295). Patricia Beer, likewise, sees Dorothea as embodying all of the weakness and unimaginativeness that Eliot's heroines in general display: "George Eliot herself triumphed over greater handicaps than any of her women characters are faced with" (181).

Other feminist critics note subtle but important clues in the novel that indicate its feminism. Kathleen Blake defends Eliot's realistic presentation of the difficulties facing women who sought to be more than society encouraged in the nineteenth century. Blake notes that "Dorothea achieves the definite at the expense of her highest potential, which is too vague to be of much good to her or the world. . . . I think *Middlemarch* shows that Dorothea would have *been* better if she had been in a position to *do* better" (66). Zelda Austen concurs, arguing that Dorothea's experiences were much more representative than were George Eliot's. Ellin Ringler, though calling this defense of Eliot's realism "questionable," asserts that both Eliot's presentation of women's "impressive personal dominance" over the men around them and Eliot's "thoughtful protests against the limitations of education and opportunity imposed upon her female characters," should "attract twentieth-century feminists to *Middlemarch*" (59).

As in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot establishes the breadth of this problem by presenting a number of well-dressed but morally shallow women, each of whom pre-figures Rosamond. *Middlemarch* has no literally "fallen" woman—but it has a series of egoistic and materialistic women who see fashionable dress as more important than moral development. As in *Mill*, Eliot includes most of *Middlemarch* society in this category, a move that serves to critique social attitudes toward "finery." As she also does in *Mill*, Eliot demonstrates the way in which society misconstrues the motivations of the novel's most moral women, a misconception which reveals society's inability to understand the world beyond appearances. Dorothea is deemed, by "those who had not seen anything of [her]," as not "a nice woman" for marrying Casaubon and Ladislav. The Vincy's, unable to appreciate Mary's gratitude toward and love for Fred Vincy, wrongly see Mary's marriage to Fred in terms of her social and material elevation. In stark contrast, women

such as Rosamond or even Celia Brooke, are perceived as devoted wives—as women who do “what their neighbors [do].” Through this kind of ironic reversal, Eliot reveals Middlemarchers’ improper valuation of women’s potential. By rewarding women who dress in “finery” and punishing those who do not, society encourages the kind of moral laxity which leads women to “fall,” even as society hypocritically condemns “fallenness.” Women’s ability to choose goodness within the limitations imposed by this communal myopia are limited and often “take the aspect of error.” Only at key moments and at great cost to themselves can certain women comprehend and reject the ornamental role society offers them, sometimes overcoming moral timidity and sometimes only narrowly avoiding adulterous “falls.”

In what ultimately seems to be Eliot’s stab at the superficiality of the Middlemarch community, the reader is introduced to Celia Brooke, Dorothea’s less religious sister. While Celia’s plain dress seems to reflect the “mixed conditions” which determine her appearance and Dorothea’s (“in most of which her sister shared”), “close observers” can see that Celia wears “more trimmings” and her clothing has “a shade of coquetry in its arrangements” (29). In the famous scene, Celia raises the issue of “mamma’s jewels,” with what appears to be careful calculation, and in the end, she keeps most of them, having a “soul,” as Dorothea says, whose “complexion” allows her to “wear ornaments.” Celia’s soul reflects the “small vanity” which permeates her personality, as it does that of Lucy Deane. Not only does the “necklace of purple amethysts set in exquisite gold-work” suit “the Henrietta-Maria style of Celia’s head and neck” but Celia is aware of this fact, “she could see that it did, in the pier-glass opposite” (34). And her reaction to Dorothea’s “inconsistent” decision to wear emeralds, a decision Celia initially encourages, extends from her knowledge that “emeralds would suit her own complexion even better than purple amethysts” (36).

Celia's preference for fine dress, though always shown as appropriate for her station in life, reveals her acceptance of an ornamental role in society, as the model wife of a local aristocrat. Despite the narrator's ironic distance from the zealous Dorothea in the novel's opening chapters, his presentation of Celia as morally undiscerning and somewhat self-absorbed always suggests Dorothea's spiritual superiority. Though Celia, like her sister, practices "well-bred economy, which in those days made show in dress the first item to be deducted from," her "plain dressing" has more to do with the "pride of being [a lady]," and with being "of such birth" than with "religious feeling." It is she and not Dorothea who "regard[s] frippery as the ambition of a huckster's daughter," for again and again the narrator demonstrates that Celia alone appreciates the "Brooke connections" which the narrator calls "good." While never critical of Celia, Eliot suggests that the younger Miss Brooke's outlook is limited by her regard for "fashion" and for "fashionable" attitudes. Celia's local reputation for "common sense," arises from her embrace of traditionally feminine "weak opinions."⁵³ Unlike Dorothea, Celia is one who "[does] what her neighbors [do]." Religion, which settles the question of attire for Dorothea, affects Celia very little; she only "acquiesces" in her sister's opinions and accepts "momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation" (30). In this way, Celia is "knowing and worldly wise," a fact which Celia's admiration for and marriage with Sir James Chettam underscores. Though Middlemarchers may approve of such "wisdom," Eliot

⁵³ Certainly, Kathryn Summers' argument that Eliot "[b]y using Dorothea's clothing to signal her gentility, uses without critiquing an element [simple dress] of conventional middle-class ideology" would have merit if Eliot did, in fact, use dress to depict Dorothea as "class conscious" (Summers 204). But, as Celia confesses to Lady Chettam, "Dodo never minded about precedence if she could have her own way" (871). Dorothea's desire to build a "village" which will be a "school of industry" suggests an almost socialist mentality. However, Summers' point that *Middlemarch* reflects the "potentially destructive effect of epideictic rhetoric on its hearers" (205), essentially supports my argument that the objectification of women, whether through identifying them with fashion or through idealizing their natures, is what Eliot resists.

remains skeptical, at best. Celia can never sympathize with Dorothea's aspirations, right or wrong, and she cannot understand either of Dorothea's marriages. When Celia, thinking of Dorothea's engagement with Will Ladislav, admits, "I cannot think how it all came about," Dorothea agrees: "No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never understand" (880).

Both Mrs. Vincy and Mrs. Bulstrode, mother and aunt to Rosamond, reflect a similarly superficial mindset, one which, as with Celia, excludes them from the serious business of Middlemarch life. Each woman's connection to the clothing industry, via her husband's business, serves to intensify her role as "model consumer" of "raw materials."⁵⁴

In Mrs. Vincy, this superficial role particularly marks her, as it does Mrs. Tulliver, as unsuitably attractive for her age. Mrs. Vincy's conformity to nineteenth-century ideas of femininity reinforces her love of elaborate dress, a preference which Middlemarch society, jealous and scornful, condemns as inappropriate for older women. Mrs. Vincy's "pink capstrings," presumed an unusual sign of vanity in a woman her age, are remarked on by both the narrator and other characters: Mrs. Waule comments, "you may see yourself, brother, when a woman past forty has pink strings always flying, and that light way of laughing at everything, it's very unbecoming" (133). Mrs. Waule's remarks are motivated by religious and social conformity (perhaps even by jealousy) and her condemnation, though it echoes Eliot's, rests on an acceptance of society's shallow valuation of female worth. Mrs. Vincy is judged only by her conformity to a particular dress code, in this case, that of Evangelical religion.

⁵⁴ Mrs. Cadwallader's remark that Mr. Vincy is "one of those who suck the life out of the wretched handloom weavers in Tipton and Freshitt," though a reflection of her snobbery, does echo Eliot's own opinion (perhaps gained from her early friendship with Charles Bray, the "socialist" son of a ribbon manufacturer).

Mrs. Vincy's own tendency to judge her children and others by their clothing and appearance characterizes her shallowness, as well. Mrs. Vincy thinks Mary Garth is "a dreadful plain girl—more fit for a governess," and tries "unsuccessfully" to imagine "caring about Mary's appearance in wedding clothes, or feeling complacency in grandchildren who would 'feature' the Garths" (691). She laments to Mrs. Farebrother, "It is a pity that [Mary] is not better looking" (694). Proud of her children's good looks, Mrs. Vincy accepts as a matter of course, their equal moral goodness. When Fred begins to work for Caleb Garth, Mrs. Vincy fails to rejoice in Fred's newly adopted work ethic. She only laments that Fred "with his beautiful face and stylish air 'beyond anybody else's son in Middlemarch,' would be sure to get like that family [the Garth's] in plainness of appearance and carelessness about his clothes" (614). Likewise, after Rosamond's miscarriage, Mrs. Vincy confuses Rosamond's egoistic indifference with "good temper": "I'm sure I felt for her being disappointed of her baby; but she got over it nicely" (614).

Mrs. Bulstrode's dress is likewise noted by the possibly jealous women around her as being "too showy," and one spiteful neighbor comments that "I have never seen that her religion made any difference in her dress" (801). Lydgate likewise recognizes the inconsistency between Mrs. Bulstrode's attire and her Evangelicalism: "Mrs Bulstrode's naïve way of conciliating piety and worldliness, the nothingness of this life and the desirability of cut glass, the consciousness of filthy rags and the best damask, was not a sufficient relief from the weight of her husband's invariable seriousness" (302). Mrs. Bulstrode, a woman whose love of dress nearly equals her niece's, scornfully notes that Rosamond is "almost as expensively equipped" as Mrs. Bulstrode, though Rosamond's family is not wealthy. The "quilling inside Rosamond's bonnet" is "so charming" that it

distracts her fashion-loving aunt from lecturing Rosamond, although Mrs. Bulstrode mentally regrets that Rosamond spends so much on dress.

Rosamond's awareness of dress particularly characterizes her, from her first introduction, as a modern *Io*, "a maiden much beguiled by attractive merchandise."⁵⁵ The narrator's first description of Rosamond in terms of dress reflects that this materialism is an inherent part of her nature. The narrator notes that Rosamond has "excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure blondness which gave her the largest range to choice in the flow and colour of drapery" (123). Her entire being is concentrated on developing this "excellent taste," as she aims at a "perfection of appearance"(196) which is designed, most of all, to attract men. Comparing herself to "ladies" of her acquaintance, she considers herself "a much more exquisite ornament to the drawing room." The artificiality of Rosamond's conception of herself is reflected in Rosamond's lack of interest in "natural" beauty, as such. Though Rosamond is blessed with "a smile which suddenly revealed two dimples," Rosamond "thought unfavourably of these dimples and smiled little in general society" (125).

Rosamond conceives her relationship to Lydgate in terms of clothes. The narrator notes that Rosamond's "realistic imagination," when she contemplates marriage with Lydgate, focuses on "the costume and introductions of her wedded life," and that she "could hardly have mentioned a deficiency in" Lydgate "if he had been able to discriminate better the refinements of her taste in dress" (300). Fearing Lydgate will not propose to her after all, Rosamond begins "to know the pang of disappointed love" but her grief appears superficial, more related to the dresses she will

⁵⁵ According to Herodotus, *Io*'s kidnapping by the Persians takes place when she is at the wharf, admiring the

never wear than the man she will never marry: "Poor Rosamond lost her appetite and felt as forlorn as Ariadne—as a charming stage Ariadne left behind with all her boxes full of costumes and no hope of a coach" (334). After Lydgate proposes, she nearly delays their marriage because she fears her "wedding clothing" cannot be ready in time, a fact which undercuts her former "disappointment." Lydgate, in his calm assumption that Rosamond will "not mind about new clothes" and would never "insist on [his] waiting months for the sake of clothes," misunderstands the importance of image to Rosamond. While appearing to agree with his assessment of her character, she "[goes] through many intricacies of lace-edging and hosiery and petticoat-tucking in order to give an answer that would at least be approximate" (386). When Lydgate assumes that they will take a short honeymoon, Rosamond is aghast since "she was thinking of her evening dresses for the visit to Sir Godwin Lydgate's, which she had long been secretly hoping for as a delightful employment of at least one quarter of the honeymoon" (386). The narrator ironically remarks that in her "haste" to marry Lydgate, Rosamond "contented herself without the very highest style of embroidery and Valenciennes," although, as a bride, she "must have a few first-rate pocket handkerchiefs" (389).

Jewelry likewise serves as a fashionable accessory for Rosamond, an important part of a created image. When Lydgate purchases her "some purple amethysts costing thirty pounds" as a "bridal present," he does so because they were "so exquisitely suited to Rosamond's neck and arms." The crucial scene of their marriage, in which Rosamond coldly offers to give back the jewels Lydgate has purchased in order to help settle their debts, reveals the depths of her

connection to them. Though Lydgate secretly wishes for her to volunteer the jewels, he will not ask her to do so. When she does make the offer, she submits them with quietly bitter reserve widening the distance between her and her husband, both literally and metaphorically: "She carried the leather box containing the amethysts, and a tiny ornamental basket which contained other boxes, and laying them on the chair where she had been sitting, she said, with perfect propriety in her air—"This is all the jewellery you ever gave me. You can return what you like of it, and of the plate also. You will not, of course, expect me to stay at home to-morrow" (643). She in essence lets the jewels replace *her*, withdrawing her sympathy as she sacrifices what she sees as an intimate part of herself.

For Rosamond, the term "dress" extends, as it does for Mrs. Transome and the young Esther Lyon, beyond her appearance, and especially includes, again as it does for the women in *Felix Holt*, the education afforded wealthy women. Rosamond's training at Mrs Lemon's school "for young ladies" particularly reflects Rosamond's conception of herself as an admired object, designed for beauty rather than use: "She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, 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" (123). The narrator comments that Rosamond "could say the right thing," and that, at all times, she is diligently "active in sketching her landscapes and market-carts and portraits of friends, in practising her music, and in being from morning till night her own standard of a perfect

merchandise which has just been imported.

lady She found time also to read the best novels, and even the second best, and she knew much poetry by heart. Her favourite poem was 'Lalla Rookh'⁵⁶ (196). When she fears she has lost Lydgate, Rosamond's controlled response suggests the prosaic, even artificial, bent of her education. She experiences "alarmed conjecture" but does "not think of committing any desperate act: she plaited her fair hair as beautifully as usual, and kept herself proudly calm" (334).

Rosamond's "ladylike" behavior demonstrates the shallowness of both the "pattern" she imitates and her own assurance in appearances, which Eliot condemns in this novel as in earlier works. That Rosamond "never show[s] any unbecoming knowledge, and [is] always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date" (301) only emphasizes the distance between her appearance and the weak moral character which reigns within. The honest Mr. Farebrother, one of Eliot's "touchstones," privately regards her as rather "uninteresting" and "a little too much the pattern-card of the finishing school" (690). Though Rosamond is not unequivocally dishonest, she has been educated to know that society does not reward women for strict and forthright veracity: "She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were not a direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light—they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please" (301). The narrator reminds the reader that her use of distraction is part of the very social training which makes Rosamond such a model of femininity, but her expertise at finishing-school behavior distorts her perspective and constricts her moral vision: "What she liked to do was to her the right

⁵⁶ By Thomas Moore (1817), this immensely popular poem reflects Rosamond's conventional, if "correct," taste in

thing and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it. . . . No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within her tastes and interests" (630-31).

This limited moral vision leaves Rosamond bored with marriage and with her husband:

"Rosamond's discontent in her marriage was due to the conditions of marriage itself, to its demand for self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband" (810). As Rosamond's romantic interest in her husband declines, her interest in attractive dress increases, intensifying the link Eliot makes between love of dress and moral ruin. Lydgate realizes that Rosamond can never laugh at poverty, for "in poor Rosamond's mind there was not room enough for luxuries to look small in" (754), and her desires for "luxuries" come to include the power of treating men as servants, whose purpose is to please her. Though Rosamond's fascination with men includes elements of romance, her interest generally is recorded in egocentric and materialistic terms. Men become "slaves" which she can exploit for her personal needs or they become accessories which complete a carefully constructed self-image, that of "romantic heroine." Her egocentrism feeds this constructed self. The narrator remarks that Rosamond is "one of those women who live much in the idea that each man they meet would have preferred them if the preference had not been hopeless" (809). Like other "fallen women," Rosamond's self regard grows out of a world clothed in illusions, in which is the principal player: while she has little reason to dream that Will loves her, the narrator comments that "vanity, with a woman's whole mind and day to work in, can construct abundantly on slight hints" (474-75).

In these depictions of Rosamond's imagined love life, the novelist never fails to have the narrator describe and comment on Rosamond's dress, a fact which underlines the link between the two subjects. When the scene in which Dorothea first sees Rosamond and Will together is presented, the narrator carefully describes Rosamond's appearance:

[I]magine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hair-plaits, with her pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large embroidered collar which it was to hoped all beholders would know the price of, her small hands duly set off with rings, and that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity. (470-71)

As Rosamond's fantasies about other men, chiefly Will and Captain Lydgate, evolve, her attention to clothes and appearance progresses. She literally becomes a coquette by dressing the part. As she discovers "what when she was in her unmarried girlhood had been inconceivable to her except as a dim tragedy in bygone costumes—that women, even after marriage, might make conquests and enslave men" (474), she takes greater "pains with her music and the careful selection of her lace" and wears colorful outfits. One of Will's visits brings out "her cherry-coloured dress with swansdown trimming about the throat," and on another occasion, Rosamond's maid notes that Rosamond, who is sending Will a letter begging for a visit, looks "so pretty in a bonnet." Rosamond's "drapery of transparent faintly tinted muslin" which she wears when Ladislav visits one evening makes her "slim yet round figure" look "graceful."

As with the Countess Czerlaski, Eliot conveys Rosamond's passion for dress by stressing Rosamond's skill as an actress, a role which suggests a perpetually "costumed" personality. The narrator speaks of this "charming stage Ariadne," when she rejects a marriage proposal from the

hapless Ned Plymdale, as having "a great sense of being a romantic heroine, and playing the part very prettily" (331). Much of Rosamond's courtship with Lydgate is characterized by a sense of drama, in which Rosamond plays to a captive audience. At their first meeting, the narrator comments:

Nothing escaped Lydgate in Rosamond's graceful behavior: how delicately she waived the notice with which the old man's want of taste had thrust upon her by a quiet gravity, not showing her dimples on the wrong occasion, but showing them afterwards in speaking to Mary, to whom she addressed herself with so much good-natured interest, that Lydgate, after quickly examining Mary more fully than he had done before, saw an adorable kindness in Rosamond's eyes. But Mary from some cause looked rather out of temper. (144)

As if to underscore the theatrical nature of the performance, the narrator stresses, "Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her own physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (144).

Even when Rosamond appears to act from natural impulse, the narrator insinuates that she is acting by design. The "pretty anxiety" which Rosamond displays to Lydgate when her brother is sick, "after waiting just long enough" to ensure that Lydgate has noticed her, is calculated to entice him. When Lydgate hands Rosamond the riding whip she has dropped, "their eyes met with that particular glance which is never arrived at by effort, but seems like a sudden divine clearance of haze" (145); the moment only seems spontaneous: "Yet this result, which [Rosamond] took to be a mutual impression, called falling in love, was just what Rosamond had contemplated beforehand.

Ever since that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had woven a little future, of which something like this scene was the necessary beginning" (145). When Rosamond reveals to Ladislav the nature of Casaubon's will, she "[desires] nothing better than to tell in order that she might evoke effects"; when Rosamond appears not to notice Lydgate at a party, the narrator suggests calculation behind her seeming indifference: "In reality, however, she was intensely aware of Lydgate's voice and movements; and her pretty good-tempered air of unconsciousness was a studied negation by which she satisfied her inward opposition to him without compromise of propriety" (692). Will Ladislav's presence nurtures Rosamond's need for "romantic drama which Lydgate's presence had no longer the magic to create," and the narrator speaks of the "little romance" that Rosamond constructs around what she imagines is Ladislav's passion for her as developing out of her sense of the dramatic: "Will Ladislav was always to be a bachelor . . . and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes" (810). The only such "scene," the one in which Dorothea discovers Will holding a tearful Rosamond's hands, at first pleases Rosamond, bringing her "hardly so much annoyance as gratification."

Only Will's bitter denouncement of her shakes Rosamond's complacency and "theatricality." When Dorothea returns to see Rosamond in order to "save" Rosamond from "falling," the narrator notes that Rosamond is "under the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others" and, after she sobs hysterically before Dorothea, Rosamond thinks "What was the use of thinking about behaviour after this crying?" (854).

Eliot externalizes Rosamond's transformation in the scenes with Will and Dorothea by having Rosamond, in the only instances in the novel, neglect her dress: after Will's bitter accusation of her, she "[throws] herself on the bed with her clothes on." When Dorothea visits the next day, Rosamond, "wrapped in her soft white shawl," looks only "like the lovely ghost of herself" (851). The effect is, however, only temporary. That Rosamond does not commit adultery with Will is solely the result of Dorothea's intervention, an act which effects only a small change in Rosamond's personality: though Rosamond keeps in "religious remembrance the generosity which had come to her aid in the sharpest crisis of her life," Rosamond's moment of generosity toward Dorothea is "a reflex of [Dorothea's] own energy" which stimulates Rosamond to "[begin] her confession under the subduing influence of Dorothea's emotion" (856-57). Rosamond's future with Lydgate fulfills her expectations as, "instead of the threatened cage in Bride Street," he provides "one all flowers and gilding, fit for the bird of paradise that she resembled" (893). The narrator's caustic irony in revealing that, as a widow, Rosamond "[makes] a very pretty show with her daughters, driving out in her carriage," underscores Eliot's final denouncement of all the superficiality that Rosamond represents.

Eliot reflects Rosamond's "fallenness" by contrasting Rosamond's unchanging and unpunished egoism with the conversions of other morally "fallen" women in the text. While Mrs. Vincy and Mrs. Bulstrode reflect the vanity and superficiality which society expects of women, both demonstrate an ability to rise above their "fallen" morality by their love for others more than themselves, a strength Eliot, in Comtist fashion, often connects with motherhood. Mrs. Vincy's comically touching despair over her son's illness is reflected by her changed attire. When Fred is sick, Mrs. Vincy's "brightness was all bedimmed; unconscious of her costume which had always

been so fresh and gay, she was like a sick bird with languid eye and plumage ruffled, her sense dulled to the sights and sounds that used most to interest her" (297). Mrs. Bulstrode's more dramatic change after she hears of her husband's disgrace in Middlemarch represents one of the novel's most touching moments:

But this imperfectly-taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her—now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him. . . . When she had resolved to go down, she prepared herself by some little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of wearing her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down and put on a plain bonnet-cap, which made her look suddenly like an early Methodist. (807)

Mrs. Bulstrode's conversion to "early Methodist" becomes a signifier to her husband of her knowledge and shared acceptance of his guilt: "her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling about her mouth, all said, 'I know'" (808). Her changed dress as much as her changed status awaken Mrs. Bulstrode's maternal conscience, and she becomes mother to the "withered and shrunken" man who now "[looks] smaller." Like Lydgate, she becomes more because her spouse is less: "A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave" (808). J. M. S. Tompkins agrees that although Eliot uses Harriet Bulstrode's love of fashion

to satirize her and her friend Mrs. Plymdale, Eliot's softening irony as the novel continues allows the reader to admire both women:

Emboïdered collars and Tuscan bonnets accompany this 'honest ostentatious' woman through the book, and we like her more and more. In the end we admire her, and think with kindness of her friendship with Mrs Plymdale, based on 'nearly the same preferences in silks, patterns for underclothing, china-ware and clergymen' (the three-to-one proportion reflects her natural worldliness and her acquired religion) until, with Mrs Plymdale's defence about the lavender feather,⁵⁷ the satire melts away (182).

If Eliot criticizes the "mis-education" of women through her depictions of the "fallen" women such as Rosamond, the novelist indicates the often difficult path forged by women who resist this socialization. In Mary Garth and Dorothea Brooke, Eliot depicts moral strength and goodness, traits which cost each woman social ostracism and economic hardship but which offer them a less-egoistic moral view. In both cases, the novelist depicts the determinedly plain dress of each character as it reflects and affects her moral position—the clothing which Mary and Dorothea wear suggests their connections to community and to nature, connections in opposition to those created by the chauvinistic and materialistic culture of Middlemarch. To emphasize their "unfallen" natures, Eliot contrasts Mary and Dorothea with other, less morally developed female characters, such as Celia and Rosamond.

⁵⁷ Tompkins refers to the scene in which Mrs. Plymdale defends Harriet "in her calamity," by stating, "[Harriet] wears very neat patterns always. . . . And that feather I know she got dyed a pale lavender on purpose to be consistent. I must say of Harriet that she wishes to do right" (801).

Critics have often found Mary Garth's position in the novel difficult to fix. Henry James complained that Eliot accorded a status to Mary's story which the reader finds hard to justify. Many feminist critics, in an effort to assault or defend Dorothea, ignore Mary altogether. Among Dorothea's detractors, Ellen Moers, Lee Edwards, and Kate Millett fail to mention Mary's positive influence or quietly "feminist" voice in the novel. Lise Kildegaard neglects Mary's position (and her mother's) as a working woman who not only wields the domestic influence which Kildegaard laments the absence of in *Middlemarch*, but who demonstrates a certain degree of economic and social independence because of that work. Only a few observers have noted Mary's importance or her position as complement to Dorothea. David Daiches calls Mary the "moral center" of the novel while Gordon Haight argues that Mary, and not Dorothea, is the novel's true heroine (Daiches 66; Haight, "Heroine" 4). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in examining Mary as an example of controlled feminine rage, note Mary's "elevating effect" on Fred Vincy as Mary saves him from "both money and deathly keys," symbolized by Peter Featherstone.

From the opening description of Mary as nurse to the selfish Peter Featherstone, Mary's goodness is associated with her plain looks and simple dress. Though Mary has "the aspect of an ordinary sinner," and though the narrator claims "it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues," Mary's "honesty, truth-telling fairness" reflects the author's highest praise. While plain women, according to the narrator, have their "peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as [beautiful women]," Mary is not guilty of self-delusion: "she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof" (140). Mary freely acknowledges that, compared to Rosamond, she is a "brown patch" and admits Rosamond's beauty by teasing that Rosamond "is the most unbecoming companion" for a plain girl. Mary brushes off Rosamond's

platitudes, "No one thinks of your appearance, you are so sensible and useful, Mary. Beauty is of very little consequence in reality," with a sardonic, but appropriately honest, rejoinder: "You mean *my* beauty" (140). Mary is clearly aware of Rosamond's effective use of beauty and of society's "susceptibility" to appearance(s); she is also aware of her plainness and the inclination of some men, such as Lydgate, to ignore her because of it. Though Mary has not "attained that perfect good sense and good principle which are usually recommended to the less fortunate girl," the sympathetic narrator offers Mary some justification for her occasional sarcasm: "to be called an ugly thing in contrast with that lovely creature your companion, is apt to produce some effect beyond a sense of fine veracity and fitness in the phrase" (140).

The narrator's insistence of Mary's ordinary looks and dress, however, accentuates the equal insistence on her "reigning virtue," honesty and plain-spokenness. Her "intelligent honesty" is part of a complex and perceptive understanding. She can say "one of the bitterest things you have ever tasted the flavour of" if she is angered but will "never forget" a kindness done for her. Again the narrator is suitably sympathetic to Mary's attitude; while Mary may have a "streak of satiric bitterness" for those who treat her badly, she loses this quality in "a strong current of gratitude towards those who, instead of telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her so" (140). Her honesty makes her criticize the selfish Fred Vincy, though she cares for him a great deal; helps her resist the temptation to burn one of Peter Featherstone's wills; and moves her finally to admit her love for Fred to Mr. Farebrother, though she does not want to.

Throughout the novel, Eliot continues to comment on Mary's plainness as a positive contrast to Rosamond's pretentious appearance and personality. As Rosamond feigns amiability to Mary in front of Lydgate, Mary's less charming behavior reveals her inability to "act," a strength for Eliot

heroines. While Mary "looks about her" and "notices everything," she "does not suppose that anybody is looking at her" (443). Mary resists Rosamond's attempts to make use of her in order to attract Lydgate. When Rosamond shows her dimples, not to Lydgate, but "afterwards in speaking to Mary, to whom she addressed herself with so much good-natured interest, that Lydgate. . . [sees] an adorable kindness in Rosamond's eyes," the narrator remarks that "Mary from some cause looked rather out of temper" (144). Mary's scorn reinforces her earlier rebuff of Rosamond's machinations: when Rosamond dissembles in order to gain information about Lydgate, Mary responds bluntly, "not choosing to indulge Rosamond's indirectness" (141).

Mary's inattention to dress and appearance externalizes her desire to be a useful adult, rather than a ornamented "doll." In most scenes in which she appears, Mary is working, often sewing, a point which characterizes her personality even more than her economic status. When Fred visits Mary at Stone Court, she sits "with sewing in her hands and a book open on the little table by her side," dual signifiers of Mary's hard work and intelligence. While Rosamond sees marriage as elevating her to the rank of the non-workers, Mary experiences Rosamond's wedding in terms of the extra sewing required for Rosamond's trousseau. Mary's playfully ironic attitude about this occupation expresses Eliot's attitude about both the waste of talent implied by this "trivial" occupation and the benefit to women's esteem which paid work offers: "I must get this sewing done. It is for Rosamond Vincy: she is to be married next week, and she can't be married without this handkerchief.' Mary ended merrily, amused with this last notion" (435). Letty Garth's confusion over this statement, "Why can't she, Mary," suggests humorously Letty's young, literal mind, but also indicates the absurdity of the idea, which Rosamond truly holds, that clothing is a necessary part of courtship and marriage.

Mary's plain appearance and attire fuse with her unaffected attitude toward men. Her ordinary looks separate her from "those daughters of Zion who are haughty, and walk with stretched-out necks and wanton eyes" (444). Unlike Rosamond, Mary does not desire to make men "slaves," and she resents having her relationships with them continually labeled in romantic terms. While Mary is "human" enough to resent the social slight implied in Lydgate's overlooking her, "I am not magnanimous enough to like people who speak to me without seeming to see me," she resents Fred's assumption that the presumptuous John Waule loves her. Mary's uncoquettishness separates her from other, perhaps more attractive women whose beauty bars them from friendship with men:

And to me it is one of the most odious things in a girl's life, that there must always be some supposition of falling in love coming between her and any man who is kind to her, and to whom she is grateful. I should have thought that I, at least, might have been safe from all that. I have no ground for the nonsensical vanity of fancying everybody who comes near me is in love with me (165).

When Fred later suspects that Mary returns Mr. Farebrother's love, Mary's response makes clear her contempt for the emotional duplicity such a feeling would imply: "Fred . . . you are too delightfully ridiculous. If you were not such a charming simpleton, what a temptation this would be to play the wicked coquette, and let you suppose that somebody besides you made love to me" (624). Mary, unlike Rosamond, sees "the idea that [she] could accept any exchange" for her "tender affection" for Fred as a "cheapening of [her] life" (625). The narrator comments that though the idea of being Farebrother's wife presents "fleeting visions of another kind—new dignities and

an acknowledged value" to Mary, the thought of "these things with Fred outside them . . . could never tempt her deliberate thought" (625).

In spite of Daiches' and Haight's argument to the contrary, most critics have seen Dorothea, the novel's modern "St. Theresa," as the heroine of *Middlemarch*, and her desire "after an unattained goodness," which contrasts decidedly with Rosamond's selfish egoism, serves as touchstone to the motives of other characters in the novel. The difficulty for critics has been the narrative distance with which Dorothea's character is often treated, especially in the opening chapters. While Eliot apparently intends the reader to see Dorothea as a positive character, one who makes "things . . . not so ill for you and me," she is careful to demonstrate that Dorothea's almost fanatical anti-materialism, while grounded in "noble impulse," is somewhat absurd and psychologically limiting. As Dorothea comes to understand more clearly the ways in which she, like other women, is bound to a social system which inevitably patronizes or objectifies her, her rejection of "fine dress" takes on new meanings.

One important mark of Dorothea's position as heroine, and as "foil" to Rosamond, comes in the opening pages. The narrator notes Dorothea's unusually unfeminine education and her impatience with traditionally feminine concerns:

Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's *Penseés* and of Jeremy Taylor by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam. She could not

reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery.⁵⁸ (30)

Eliot's careful contrast of the two subjects, fashionable dress and evangelical theology, reflects both the novelist's humor, characterized by narrative irony, and her thesis. Eliot makes fun of Dorothea's naïve embrace of Evangelical legalism; at the same time, Eliot sympathizes with Dorothea's perception about the inanity of women's education which encourages them to think only about superficialities, such as clothing.

The first mention of Dorothea suggests her uniqueness, a condition which is coupled from the first with her inattention to dress and appearance; in fact, the narrator remarks, Dorothea's inattention to dress appears to enhance her beauty:

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper" (29).

That Dorothea does not wear "provincial fashion" gives her an air of timelessness and associates her beauty with spirituality rather than physicality. The simplicity of Dorothea's clothing also first

⁵⁸ "Guimp" refers to "a yoke insert for a low necked dress" or a kind of trimming, but it also refers to "a starched cloth covering the neck on shoulders as part of a nun's habit." Considering Dorothea's religious evangelicalism, the latter

suggests the "poem" metaphor which Will Ladislaw later uses to describe Dorothea—she is a work of art.

In this respect, Dorothea is similar to other Eliot queens and angels, Janet Dempster, Dinah Morris, Maggie Tulliver, and Esther Lyon (at the end of *Felix Holt*), and if Dorothea were simply like Dinah, an angel seemingly untempted by material concerns, her heroic renunciation of wealth and rank in the "Finale" would mean less. But the narrator's perception of Dorothea is different, for he rarely displays an unmixed sympathy for Dorothea, as, for example, the *Mill* narrator does for Maggie. Dorothea's "kind of beauty" only "seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (my italics) and her regard for ancient religious texts appears absurd, unlike Dinah's simple Methodism.⁵⁹ The repetition of "seems" throughout the opening chapter implies narrative uncertainty, a distance from this "queenly" character, and hints that Dorothea only appears to be more beautiful in her dull clothing.

Such distancing produces two crucial effects in terms of the theme of female dress: the reader is forced to evaluate Dorothea's beauty, her clothing, and her morality again and again, each time in attempt to clarify their true relationship, and the reader is compelled to note the subtle connections between these three factors and the theme of "seeming" (or acting) which saturates the novel.

meaning is as appropriate as the first. Both indicate Dorothea's frustration with the "feminine" preoccupation with dress and with morality which is merely superficial.

⁵⁹ Ellen Moers misreads Eliot entirely when she criticizes Dorothea's wardrobe as "the most stunning . . . in Victorian fiction" (295-96). Moers' resistance to what she perceives is Dorothea's "ignorance" and idleness is natural enough, given that Moers wishes Dorothea to be and do much more than Eliot allows. But to ignore Eliot's repeated references to Dorothea's plain attire is to miss the importance of Eliot's and Dorothea's determined struggle against objectification. Moers winds up conflating Dorothea with Rosamond, whose truly "stunning" clothing replaces any conception of selfhood.

Gordon Haight claims that narrative irony in *Middlemarch* indicates Eliot's criticism of the "short-sighted" Dorothea ("Eminent" 38). Certainly, this narrative distance complicates the question of Dorothea's superiority to Celia, who "scarcely wore more trimmings" but about whom others remark that she "had more common-sense" than Dorothea. On the surface, Celia appears to be just as unconcerned with fashion as her sister but more "worldly-wise," lacking Dorothea's extremism. But a careful analysis of the two sisters' attitudes toward dress, jewels and appearance(s) reveals Eliot's bias in favor of Dorothea. Through subtle presentation of Celia's "materialism," Eliot implies a certain shallowness in Celia which aligns the younger sister more strongly with the novel's "fallen" woman, Rosamond, than with Dorothea.

While the narrator seems to esteem Celia's "common-sense" over Dorothea's eccentricity, his comment that a close observer could note "a shade of coquetry in" her dress hints at the criticism to come. Since Dorothea's unusual behavior and looks exclude her, the narrator's satiric comment on the usual determination of women's marriage prospects being decided by "looks, vanity, and mere canine affection," applies primarily to Celia. She, unlike Dorothea, will have no schemes "for the application of her income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses." Though even the cottagers in the neighborhood admire the "amiable and innocent-looking" Celia, the narrator confirms that she is more "worldly-wise" than Dorothea, an ironic example of deceptive appearances since Dorothea's "unusual and striking" eyes hide her essentially childlike outlook. The narrator's ironic tone in making this observation, coupled with earlier remarks about the more fashionably dressed Celia's affinity with "young women of such birth," creates an unsettling moment in the text. Is the narrator's point that the cottagers, by an irrational leap from eyes to minds, have discovered Celia's valuable worldly wisdom, or that Celia's

eyes correctly project her fundamental innocence, her inability to struggle with the kinds of moral complexities which trouble the more adult Dorothea?

The answer is delayed as the two sisters are introduced. The first scene in which Eliot presents Celia and Dorothea together, the scene in which the two divide their mother's jewelry, only suggests a link between Celia's "shade of coquetry" and the shallowness of her moral development, but the subject of their disagreement, a woman's "right" to wear jewels, is suggestive. Eliot indicates the centrality of the issue of female ornaments and ornamentation to the spiritual growth of her heroine, Dorothea, and suggests how much women's fates are determined by their acceptance or rejection of a decorative function. Celia, who first asks about the division of the jewelry, embraces this traditional role, as the narrator's careful suggestions about Celia's "long meditated" explanation makes clear. She has considered the jewels for some time and has obviously prearranged responses to Dorothea's religious objections about wearing jewels. But Dorothea doesn't object to jewels in general; in fact, she selects ornaments for Celia, whom we are told she mentally adorns "with attractions altogether superior to her own" regularly. The issue, then, for Dorothea is not "jewels" but something they represent, at least, for her.

The clue to this "something" surfaces as the two sisters divide the jewels. Dorothea's original dismissal of the jewels, "We need discuss them no longer," is, as Celia supposes, a bit of a pose, Dorothea's imitation of "Puritanic toleration." Celia's first arguments to "encourage" Dorothea to wear the jewels fail. Neither "mamma's memory" nor the need for sisterly solidarity moves Dorothea. Dorothea merely comments that it "is too much to ask, that I should wear trinkets to keep you in countenance" and she explains her fear that "If I were to put on such a necklace as that, I should feel as if I had been pirouetting" (35). But Dorothea's reference to "that necklace"

suggests that other jewelry might be acceptable, a fact which Celia notes immediately by "opening some ring-boxes." The enclosed emeralds and diamonds strike Dorothea with "a new current of feeling." Her first comment that "gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John" suggests that she wants to see a difference between these gems and the cross necklace which she has said would be "the last thing" she "would wear as a trinket" (35). The narrator remarks on Dorothea's attempts "to justify her delight in the colours [of the emeralds] by merging them in her mystic religious joy" (36). Though Dorothea recognizes the "inconsistency" in keeping the emerald ring and bracelet, saying "what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them," she continues to wear and look at them, thinking "of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour" (36).

As with Stephen's proposal to Maggie, the jewels symbolize "temptation" for Dorothea, temptation which nearly engulfs her in the marriage to Casaubon. Lise Kildegaard notes the essentially similar views of women's function which Casaubon shares with Harold Transome: "Like the mercantilist Harold Transome in Felix Holt, Casaubon brings the terms of economic life into the most personal and intimate of his relationships. And like Harold, who has a padded yoke waiting for everyone who depends upon him, Casaubon foresees only complete subservience from the woman he plans to 'annex'" (165-66). Gilbert and Gubar note a further similarity between Casaubon and Lydgate, whose patronizing attitude toward women has already made him "reject" Dorothea as improperly "earnest." Dorothea begins to recognize and overcome the temptation to be the "lovely young bride" Casaubon wants and signals her rebellion through a literal rejection of

"jewels" and the egoism they foster.⁶⁰ While the traditional Celia may accept that "the wearing of a necklace will not interfere with my prayers," Dorothea remains "unhappy . . . questioning the purity of her feeling" about the ring and bracelet. Her appearance while honeymooning in Rome, dressed in a "plain dress of some thin woollen-white material, without a single ornament on her besides her wedding-ring, as if she were under a vow to be different from all other women" (398), externalizes this same internal struggle with egoism and superficiality. Dorothea resists the usual prescription, adopted by Rosamond, to "display" herself via an expensive trousseau. Dorothea's desire for Will's opinion about the cameos she has bought for Celia further demonstrates this resistance. Again, the question is not whether jewels themselves are "wrong," but whether they are "right" for Dorothea; Dorothea's earlier comment that soul's have "complexions" like faces and that Celia's soul allows her to ornament is echoed in Dorothea's statement to Will, "O, [the cameos] are for my sister, who has quite a different complexion. You saw her with me at Lowick: she is light-haired and very pretty—at least I think so" (251). Celia may wear them, though Dorothea, in growing self-awareness, comments that she "[does] not think them a great object in life" (251).

The frustration critics such as Moers and Patricia Beer have felt at Dorothea's largely inactive role in the novel mirrors Dorothea's own frustration with her life. Part of the reason jewels can

⁶⁰ Again, I take issue with Lori Hope Lefkowitz, who sees Dorothea's wearing of the emeralds as part of her "education" about the value of art, an education which Will Ladislav continues. Lefkowitz claims that what Dorothea learns is "proper valuation"—of people, of art, of jewels. Making Dorothea a "jeweled woman," Eliot disrupts the tradition in Christian mythology which marks such a woman as a harlot, a whore of Babylon (66). This disruption demonstrates a "change in fashion" in Victorian society, one which allows for women to ornament themselves. I see this last point as true, and agree with Alison Lurie, whom Lefkowitz quotes, that the trend "allowed them [women] to display their father's and husband's wealth to the fullest extent" (66). But Lefkowitz seems to miss the implications of Lurie's words. For

take on such moral significance for Dorothea is that her sphere of action is itself so limited: the decision whether to accept society's valuation of women is, perforce, dependent on "unhistoric acts" such as this one involving jewelry. Given only a narrow range of operative choices, Dorothea's resolve against fine dress and her hesitancy about wearing "ornaments" suggests the great weight such resolutions for women, and for Eliot's "home epic."

Dorothea is well aware that the world she inhabits is "little" (though she overestimates the largeness of the world of men), and though she is exposed to generally the same trivial education as Rosamond, she is too perceptive (and becomes more so) to accept that the "girlish instruction" she has received gives her much understanding of society or her position in it. Unlike Rosamond or Celia, Dorothea realizes the "the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse" are no "accomplishment" at all. Only a woman with "some endowment of stupidity and conceit" could find her "ideal of life in village charities, patronage of the humbler clergy, the perusal of *Female Scripture Characters*, unfolding the private experience of Sara under the Old Dispensation, and Dorcas under the New, and the care of her soul over her embroidery in her own boudoir" (50-51). That such an education is mere "window dressing" to Dorothea becomes clear as the narrator describes Dorothea's need to emotionally connect with spiritual and psychological truths: "She did not want to desk herself in knowledge—to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action" (112). Such an option, which describes Rosamond's approach to the feminine education of Mrs. Lemon's school, appears as superficial as "guimp" to Dorothea, and with bitter irony the narrator applauds this perception. Though Dorothea may hold many illusions, she is "shut out"

Eliot, jewels symbolize materialism and chauvinism, the traps which Middlemarch uses to lure women into their own

from the "contentment" encompassed by traditional female education. Eliot's anger over women's limited educational opportunities surfaces here in full sympathy with Dorothea's predicament and, with great pity and understanding, with Dorothea's misguided desire to escape it by marrying Casaubon.

Eliot externalizes Dorothea's struggle with the gentlewoman's "oppressive liberty" by stressing Dorothea's determinedly unpretentious style of dress. This emphasis works to underscore both Dorothea's resistance to vanity and "theatricality." Unlike Rosamond, Dorothea is no actress—in fact, her truest self reveals itself when she is the least "civilized"—in Nature. The narrator describes Dorothea's looks during a walk outside, suggesting Dorothea's connections with Nature and naturalness as her "clothing" literally falls off of her.

She walked briskly in the brisk air, the colour rose in her cheeks, and her straw-bonnet (which our contemporaries might look at with conjectural curiosity as at an obsolete form of basket) fell a little backward. She would perhaps be hardly characterized enough if it were omitted that she wore her brown hair flatly braided and coiled behind so as to expose the outline of her head in a daring manner at a time when public feeling required the meagreness of nature to be dissimulated by tall barricades of frizzed curls and bows, never surpassed by any great race except the Feejeean. This was a trait of Miss Brooke's asceticism. But there was nothing of an ascetic's expression in her bright full eyes, as she looked before her, not consciously seeing, but absorbing into the intensity of her mood, the solemn glory of the afternoon. . . . (49)

objectification. Dorothea's struggle, ending in marriage to Will, reflects her resistance to this pressure.

While the "expression in her bright full eyes" is not ascetic, it is not coquettish, either. Dorothea's refusal to follow artificial sartorial customs demonstrates her oneness with the natural world. The narrator stresses the hollowness of those customs, as opposed to other healing kinds of communal ritual, by noting (as the narrator of *Mill* had done) their position as "historical oddities": the basket-like hat and the "Feejeean" hairstyle are artificial signifiers of femininity as opposed to exposed heads and rosy cheeks.⁶¹ Dorothea's appearance as Mr. Casaubon courts her reveals what little interest she takes in looking "good": "she came into the drawing-room in her silver-grey dress—the simple lines of her dark-brown hair parted over her brow and coiled massively behind, in keeping with the entire absence from her manner and expression of all search after mere effect" (114).

The narrator stresses Dorothea's unselfconsciousness, connecting this trait to her plain clothing and lack of ornamentation throughout the novel. But Dorothea's "plain dress," as opposed to Dinah Morris's Quaker garb, suggests a note of determined resistance, notably during her stay in Rome where her "purity" is challenged by the lure of artistic sensuality and decadence. Contemplating the statue of Ariadne, Dorothea is "clad in Quakerish grey drapery: her long cloak fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided hair" (220). Here, Dorothea's absence of

⁶¹ Barbara Hardy notes the importance of Dorothea's thinking at this moment. Dorothea is grappling in this walk with the role of history in her own life, with how she might "lead a grand life here—now—in England." Dorothea sees Casaubon as the historian who will "take her along the grandest path," ignoring that he is a poor guide, a "historian," as Hardy puts it, "who ignores the evidence of history" (Bloom 29). Eliot's depiction of fashion as a meaningless historical signifier, as something apart from the real individuals who lived in and in spite of it, suggests a connection between

ornamentation works as a kind of talisman, separating her from the "corruption" around her. Psychologically, this separation manifests as a freedom from the self-consciousness and egoism apparent in the art around Dorothea. When Will comes to meet her, Dorothea meets him "with that smile of goodwill which is unmixed with vanity" (236), and in Nauman's studio, Dorothea submits to Nauman's positioning "without any of the affected airs and laughs frequently thought necessary on such occasions" (248-49). Those who see only the contrast Eliot establishes here between "decadent" Italian art and English Puritanism miss part of these scenes' importance. In Nauman's and Will's different reactions to Dorothea's appearance is the essence of all Eliot says about women and dress. Dorothea, who wants more than anything to be perceived as more than a "fashion plate," dresses plainly, partly to resist being the mere object Nauman (or other men) would make her. Will's awareness of Dorothea's beauty, which first motivates him to bring her to the studio, alters as he begins to see Nauman's objectification as "desecration," and, in the end, Will comes to respond more to Dorothea's "presence" than to her "bodily prettiness." Such a response accords with Will's argument about art with Nauman in which Will contends that women are more than "mere colored superficies" and they "change from moment to moment" (222). Will's argument here reflects Eliot's own response to the German Nazarene artists, and to painting in general—what artists need, what society needs is a "fuller image" of human beings, "especially" women, as Will says.⁶²

Casaubon's role as a lifeless de-mythologizer and the hollowness of women's bonnets and hairstyles. Both inscribe women like Dorothea in worlds which have no meaning for them.

⁶² Frank G. Nigro, in his discussion of Eliot's debt to Goethe, raises this point and refers to Joseph Wiesenfarth's essay "*Middlemarch*: The Language of Art" for further analysis of Eliot's response to art and artistic representation.

Dorothea's general goodness, which separates her from "fallen" women such as Rosamond, is revealed in her struggle to construct a "fuller view" of others and of herself. Dorothea is able to avoid the trap of complete egoism by refusing to judge others on the grounds of appearance and dress. Dorothea's outburst concerning Celia's evaluation of Casaubon's looks, though motivated by some false idealism, is right in essentials: "It is so painful in you Celia, that you will look at human beings as if they were merely animals with a toilette, and never see the great soul in a man's face" (43). Though Celia's ironic question, "Has Mr. Casaubon a great soul?" suggests Dorothea's naivete, Celia's inability to understand human beings on a level beyond the superficial represents her weakness compared to the less egoistic Dorothea. Even if Dorothea's achievements in "soul reading" fall short of her aims, her desire to see others as spiritual, intellectual beings reflects moral development. This struggle enables Dorothea, in the end, to see past Rosamond's studied beauty, to avoid condemning Rosamond as a rival, thus saving Rosamond and herself.

While it might at first appear tempting to see Dorothea's black mourning dress as part of her preference for plain dress, this conclusion is only partly justified by the text. Though certainly as Dorothea's devotion to her husband reflects her determination to conquer egoism, her mourning dress represents a struggle to overcome what others may see as misplaced loyalty. When Celia, confronting Dorothea with Casaubon's jealous codicil to his will, says "I am sure religion does not require you to make yourself uncomfortable about him," the reader recalls Mrs. Glegg's declaration to not wear "weepers" if her husband left her penniless. Of course, Dorothea does wear "hijeous weepers," but in part, to fight her "violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband" which his codicil incites. As long as she struggles with this repulsion and with the misogynist thinking which

encompassed her relationship with Casaubon, Dorothea keeps the mourning on. On two occasions, as she rebuffs suggestions that she re-marry for "blood and beauty" and as she reaches out to Will Ladislaw, in opposition to convention, does Dorothea remove her mourning dress. On the first, Celia takes off Dorothea's "widow's cap," an action which enables Dorothea's resistance to Mrs. Cadwallader's "second marriage" hints. Celia comments: "Really, Dodo, taking your cap off made you like yourself again in more ways than one. You spoke up just as you used to do, when anything was said to displease you" (594). The second instance comes after Dorothea has met with Will Ladislaw. For Will, Dorothea's mourning is a symbol of all that divides him from her: "He used to say that the horrible hue and surface of her crape dress was most likely the sufficient controlling force" that saves him "from falling down at her feet" (587). Dorothea's desire to reach out to Will, after he learns of Casaubon's codicil, makes her resist the "controlling force" of her mourning clothing. When Will leaves, having confessed his love for her, she gets into her carriage "her eyes . . . bright and her cheeks blooming under the dismal bonnet. She threw back the heavy 'weepers,' and looked before her, wondering which road Will had taken" (683). Both of these moments lead to Dorothea's eventual decision to reject the heavy mourning altogether.

This rejection comes after Dorothea witnesses Will and Rosamond in what Dorothea thinks is a love scene. After her long night of soul-searching, Dorothea finds herself rejuvenated by the sight of the man, wife, and child on the road and by the knowledge that she is connected to a wider world that still demands her "labour and endurance." These revelations lead Dorothea not to wear her deep mourning any longer. Telling her maid, Tantripp, to "bring me my new dress. And most likely I shall want my new bonnet to-day," Dorothea surprises her. Tantripp cannot reason "at

this strange contrariness in her young mistress—that just the morning when she had more of a widow's face than ever, she should have asked for her lighter mourning which she had waived before" (847). Dorothea's thinking at this time sheds an interesting light on the change which the events of the novel have had on her personality:

Dorothea wished to acknowledge that she had not the less an active life before her because she had buried a private joy; and the tradition that fresh garments belonged to all initiation, haunting her mind, made her grasp after even that slight outward help towards calm resolve. For the resolve was not easy.

This is a significant step for Dorothea, as she begins to leave behind the woman she has been: the one who built cottages, the one who debated over emeralds, the one who married Casaubon, the one who walked out on Will and Rosamond. It is equally significant in separating Dorothea from the "fallen" women around her, which in the egoism of mourning she might have joined. For Dorothea, here and in other parts of the novel, the impulse to take off clothes (the heavier mourning) always reflects a move toward simplicity and naturalness.

In Dorothea's final visit to Rosamond, the reader sees this same impulse, as Dorothea immediately begins removing the barrier of clothing which separates her from Rosamond: "But Dorothea, who had taken off her gloves, from an impulse which she could never resist when she wanted a sense of freedom, came forward, and with her face full of a sad yet sweet openness, put out her hand" (851). This freedom facilitates the physical contact which cements Rosamond's decision to tell Dorothea the truth about Will:

[Dorothea's] face had become of a deathlier paleness, her lips trembled, and she pressed her hands helplessly on the hands that lay under them. . . . involuntarily

[Rosamond] put her lips to Dorothea's forehead which was very near her, and then for a minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck.

"You are thinking what is not true," said Rosamond, in an eager half-whisper, while she was still feeling Dorothea's arms round her (856)

The abandonment of this scene prepares Dorothea for her final heroic act—the agreement to give up her fortune to marry Will Ladislaw. When Will visits her, Dorothea has once again lost all self-consciousness: "What she was least conscious of just then was her own body" (865). Her experiences with Casaubon and with Rosamond enable finally to assert her own free desire to Will. With "the flood of her young passion bearing down all the obstructions which had kept her silent," Dorothea saves herself from fallenness once and for all: "We could live quite well on my own fortune—it is too much—seven hundred-a-year—I want so little—no new clothes—and I will learn what everything costs" (870). If the love of finery is the trap of the fallen woman, Dorothea has escaped.

But Dorothea's salvation is not Eliot's only aim in this novel. Eliot's reference to "many Dorothea's" in the "Finale" indicates a larger concern for women in general who may well have "a far sadder sacrifice" than Dorothea. While Eliot condemns the shallowness of Rosamond's behavior and outlook, the novelist suggests with equal consistency that Rosamond is a product of larger forces. Unlike several of her predecessors, Rosamond does not appear early in the novel. She is not mentioned until Chapter 10 and does not speak until Chapter 11, so that the reader's

slow introduction into the world she inhabits frames her presence. David Daiches' early characterization of Rosamond as essentially "innocent" or "pre-moral" hints at a similar observation. He claims that although "her actions are evil, destroying a good man, they are in a sense innocent" (Daiches 27). The tragedy of women's lives, for Eliot, is that their circumstances rarely make them capable of moral choices or actions. Moral infantilization, a condition which Eliot particularly abhors, is not only tolerated in women but encouraged, and Eliot concedes the terrible social obstacles which prevent women's moral maturation. Thus, the reader is aware that Dorothea's yearning for more than the life Victorian society offers her, a yearning which leads her into several "errors," mirrors Rosamond's determined exploitation of her position as a beautiful female. Dorothea's frustration over the limitations of feminine existence both projects Rosamond's equal frustration with Middlemarch society and anticipates her strategic resistance.

That Eliot's intention is to specifically comment on "The Woman Question" is evident in the much-critiqued conclusion of the novel. Jerome Beaty notes that the manuscript and first published versions of *Middlemarch's* penultimate paragraph reinforce Eliot's "indictment of society." Eliot's attacks on "a society which smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his age" and on "modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance" reveal "the shortcomings of female education and more sweepingly the breeding hypocrisy" (59-61).⁶³

⁶³ Beaty comments further on Gordon Haight's original observation that a comparison of the manuscript, the first published version, and the 1874 version of the penultimate paragraph of the novel reveals a tempering of the social criticism stated in the first two versions. In the later version, Eliot less specifically denounces the "imperfect social state" in which Dorothea and Rosamond have to live, not the precise ills of "convenient" marriages and poor female education (Beaty, "Text" 59-60). Despite Eliot's omission of specific social attacks in the 1874 version, her original

While Rosamond's egoistic self-absorption is characterized, even caused by her "fashion-sense," her outlook, as Harris says of Hetty Sorrel's, merely reflects that of Middlemarch society. Rosamond fulfills Mr. Chichley's ideal of womanhood, as she does that of Ned Plymdale and, most importantly, Tertius Lydgate. "She is grace itself," Lydgate thinks. Her doting mother rhapsodizes frequently on Rosamond's perfections, and Rosamond's taste in clothing is often depicted as a mirror of her mother's or of her aunt Bulstrode's. But the person whose view of women Rosamond most reflects, even though eventually he comes to regret this view, is Lydgate. His conservative attitude concerning proper feminine behavior asserts itself in the scene in which he is introduced. Meeting Dorothea, he concedes that she "is a good creature—that fine girl" but laments that she is "too earnest," "always wanting reasons, yet . . . too ignorant to understand the merits of any question" (119-20). In contrast, Lydgate views Rosamond as "perfectly lovely and accomplished" and "what a woman ought to be" (121). Lydgate conceives that a woman "ought to produce the effect of exquisite music" and that "plain women" were "to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science." He is inclined to "give [adornment] the first place among wifely virtues," and desires his home to be a "paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven" (122). He desires a wife who possesses "that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music" and "that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys" (193).

indictments remain as central themes of the novel; in fact, the omissions in the 1874 version perhaps say more about Eliot's concern with "overkill" than about any change in her point of view.

Lydgate's conception of perfect womanhood extends beyond her beauty to her education, which is likewise ornamental. He disapproves of Dorothea because she does "not look at things from the proper feminine angle" (122), and again and again, he admires Rosamond's "kind of intelligence" which is "polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence" (193). Lydgate's "almost forgetting that he must carry on the conversation, in thinking how lovely this creature was" exemplifies that her beauty more than her conversation moves him; Rosamond's "ideas" are attractive (and therefore important) only when they flatter men: Lydgate "[holds] it one of the prettiest attitudes of the feminine mind to adore a man's pre-eminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in" (301). When Rosamond reacts to Lydgate's description of Casaubon's illness and Dorothea's subsequent distress by saying "Of course she is devoted to her husband," Lydgate regards this "notion of necessary sequence" as "the prettiest possible for a woman" (327). His admiration for her "intelligence" depends on his whole-hearted belief in feminine weakness. When Rosamond interrupts his political discussion with Will Ladislaw, Lydgate sympathizes, "Poor Rosy! . . . Disputation is not amusing to cherubs" (507).

Eliot's development of the Lydgate's tragic marriage centers on Lydgate's discovery that his valuation of feminine ornamentation has been too high, that Rosamond is incapable of mature reasoning or necessary self-sacrifice. Summers notes that Eliot "uses Rosamond to dramatize the argument she made in her review of [Margaret] Fuller and [Mary] Wollstonecraft," a point noted by others, as well (Summers 203). Eliot insists that

Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an "establishment" may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine (Pinney 204-05)

As the novel proceeds, Lydgate's admiration for "floating gauze" and "infantile blondness" declines, and he recognizes his mistake as, at least, partly his own fault, a point which separates him from Casaubon's narrow egoism. Nevertheless, Lydgate's bondage to "terrible tenacity of this mild creature" persists. The scene in which Rosamond strategically manages to turn Lydgate's disapproval over her riding into tacit submission to her reflects the degree of Lydgate's subservience to the very ornamentation which had earlier seen as an accessory to his own position:

'My darling, don't talk nonsense,' said Lydgate, in an imploring tone; 'surely I am the person to judge for you. I think it is enough that I say you are not to ride again.'

Rosamond was arranging her hair before dinner, and the reflection of her head in the glass showed no change in its loveliness except a little turning aside of the long neck. Lydgate had been moving about with his hands in his pockets, and now paused near her, as if he waited some assurance.

'I wish you would fasten up my plaits, dear,' said Rosamond, letting her arms fall with a little sigh, so as to make a husband ashamed of standing there like a brute. Lydgate had often fastened the plaits before . . . thus the discussion ended with his promising Rosamond, and not with her promising him. (630)

In her unchanging egoism, Rosamond reflects all of the "fallenness" embodied in Hetty Sorrel and Mrs. Transome, and her "triumph" over Lydgate emphasizes the inflexibility of her superficial nature, a nature he has helped and will continue to help foster.

Lydgate comes to appreciate the "earnestness" of Dorothea that he had rejected early on. Echoing her description of Madame de Sablé as "a woman whom men could more than love—whom they could make their friend, confidante, and counsellor" ("Women in France" 80), Eliot says Lydgate comes to Dorothea as a woman whom he could "make a friend of." Lydgate's change of heart comes too late, though. Though the worst of his miseries is lessened by Dorothea's £1000, he still faces the "consequences" which Eliot metes out to those who accept, or perpetuate, "the love of finery" in women.

In thus refocusing her critique away from specific women who fall and redirecting it toward a fallen society, Eliot implies a great deal, both about Rosamond and about the "many Dorothea's" with which the novel concludes. Dorothea's desire for simple dress marks her as different from Rosamond, but the trap which finery reflects, the suffocating life of a woman "of such birth," continues to plague Dorothea until the end of the novel. Eliot emphasizes that for women like Dorothea who aspire beyond the prescribed social limitations, ornamentation represents a special kind of trap, the lure of materialism which Dorothea only truly overcomes in her outburst about learning "what everything costs."⁶⁴

⁶⁴ David Daiches, in noting Lydgate's casual snobbery about being a "gentleman," remarks that "George Eliot is interestingly original in seeing a refusal to understand the economic realities that underlie class distinctions as a sort of vulgarity" (47). While Dorothea's understanding of these same "economic realities" is only developing as the novel opens, she certainly aims at understanding more fully. She becomes particularly sensitive to the ways in which women's lives are manipulated by economic forces and how an anti-materialist stance can help women maintain an independent stance.

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot demonstrates a more complex understanding of the dangers which "finery" poses for women like Celia, Rosamond, Mary, and Dorothea, for in this work, Eliot shows that the social system signified by dress is itself an intricate web in which the actions of one individual—taking on or taking off "finery"—may have enormous consequences for others.

Dorothea's decision to wear "mamma's jewels" or Mrs. Bulstrode's decision to wear plain clothing after her husband's disgrace, both signify choices which are affected by and which affect others. Likewise, Rosamond's cold return of her jewels to Lydgate marks an epoch in their marriage, one which symbolizes both Rosamond's clinging desire for the "finery" she wants Lydgate to bring her and her utter inability to sympathize with her husband's nobler aspirations. Hardy's comment that events such as these shape the novel thematically and structurally is accurate; but what these scenes point out about the oppression which finally constricts Dorothea to an "unvisited tomb" is just as noteworthy.

For if Dorothea must try to discover "what to do," as she says, "here, now, in England," she requires something more than fine clothes and a wealthy (or classically educated) husband to find it. She needs some way of getting around the system which makes "cameos" into "great objects in life." Mary Garth's simple and unambitious lifestyle will not quite work for Dorothea, gifted as she is and hampered by generations of "Brookes" whose land and name she is compelled to pass on. That Dorothea is not capable of completely overcoming this obstacle of patriarchal ancestors, that she is in the end capable only of "wifely help" for her husband, only emphasizes the need for social change which pervades the novel. That even Mary's "plainness" is fraught with "temptations" as well as beauty suggests just how complex the problem of women's role in a misogynistic and

materialistic culture is to Eliot. In her next novel, Eliot will try to answer what a change in that role might encompass.

Chapter Seven: *Daniel Deronda*

The implicit confidence that her destiny must be one of luxurious ease, where any trouble that occurred would be well clad and provided for, had been stronger in her own mind than in mamma's, being fed there by her youthful blood and that sense of superior claims which made a large part of her consciousness.

George Eliot

Daniel Deronda occupies a unique place in Eliot's fiction. In this final novel, Eliot not only explores the many complex issues relating to English anti-semitism and Jewish nationalism, issues which force readers to stretch the limits of their "moral sympathy" in order to comprehend, but she integrates a number of her perceptions about "finery" and the "fallen woman" into a new kind of plot and a new kind of heroine.

Critics disagree a great deal about the merits of Eliot's new plot and heroine. F. R. Leavis expresses the admiration of many critics for the "realness" of the character of Gwendolen Harleth by dividing the novel into the "bad half," focused on Daniel and the English Jews, and the "good half," which Leavis re-names *Gwendolen Harleth*. Ruby Redinger sees the novel in similar terms, saying that Eliot's frustration over those who would "cut the book into scraps," stems from Eliot's perception, not conveyed well in the novel, of the "single concept in her own mind" which had generated the two halves, the concept of the all-powerful mother. The power of this female figure for Eliot pervades the work. Barbara Hardy sees the two halves as more successfully combined, arguing that the contrast of Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda is "a moral opposition in a

human relation" which "depends on an increasing irony, for Daniel preaches to Gwendolen the lesson of the transmutation of self, but its logical end, for him is the Zionist vocation which keeps them irrevocably apart." Hardy continues that Daniel's "prior discovery of Mirah—Gwendolen's rival and moral opposite—is organic to the theme and not a piece of plot-making" (112).

Hardy's view of the centrality of the Gwendolen/Mirah contrast anticipates the interest of feminist critics in the novel. Jennifer Uglow notes the metaphor of "fetters, chains, handcuffs and bonds" which, through "the most powerful controlling force . . . the domination of the market," Gwendolen's and Mirah's predicaments are linked. Both must face the fact "that all women have to sell is themselves—either their bodies, like Gwendolen, or their art, like Mirah—and consequently they risk all in the transaction" (228).

Gillian Beer recognizes the way in which Gwendolen is both a mirror and an extension of earlier "fallen women," stating "in Gwendolen, George Eliot makes restitution to those earlier figures such as Hetty and Rosamond excluded from her full sympathy because they could never succeed in fully sympathising with others" (219). In Gwendolen, says Beer, Eliot dramatizes the rage of women who, "without special talents," still aspire to "freedom and independence" (218). Ellen Rosenman takes a less hopeful view of this dramatization of "rage," despite seeing in the novel an assertion of the disruptive power of women's speech and a deep questioning "about the ultimate meaning of 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (248). She argues that, in the end, "Gwendolen's fate confirms the restoration of masculine power" (253), as the chastened Gwendolen fades into the hollow words she expresses in her letter to the now-married Daniel. Gilbert and Gubar's acknowledgment that, despite the triumph of female Nemesis in Eliot's works, in the end it is the "Madonna" who "survives as the narrator's heroine," seems to support Rosenman's

disappointment. But their equal acknowledgment that Eliot suggests something "compensatory" in this renunciation indicates that Gwendolen's final repression of self need not be all negative. That Gwendolen has achieved anything like Mirah's quiet renunciation is questionable; that Gwendolen's conclusion is "silenced" is questionable, too, since, if anything, she gets in the last word.

Catherine Gallagher's observation that "it is the problem much more than the solution we find compelling in this novel" seems also to answer critics like Rosenman who find the ending of *Daniel Deronda* timid ("Prostitute" 59). Katherine Linehan concurs, seeing in the plots of the novel's "fallen women," a "suppressed feminism that finds its outlet in the unsanctioned angers against male tyranny" which abound in the novel. Linehan's comment supports the notion that the stories of the "fallen women" strike the reader in a way that the stories of their renunciatory sisters do not. Though Linehan agrees that a "backward-looking goal of restoration of an earlier and supposedly healthier form of patriarchy" pervades the ending of the novel, she asserts that "extremely interesting tensions are opened up in the novel by the opposite dynamic of feminist impulses exerting pressures on Eliot's conservative agenda" (342). In this "dynamic" readers find Eliot's treatment of the fallen woman in *Daniel Deronda*—"fallenness" still comes from a vain search for "finery," but the fallen searcher captures receives greater sympathy and understanding from her creator-judge, Eliot herself. The difficulties surrounding her "fall" and her "redemption" and the ways in which both are embedded in patriarchy are explored, as well.

Certainly, Eliot treats the fallen woman differently than she does in earlier works, though this treatment is sometimes suggested in Eliot's handling of characters such as Maggie and Mrs. Transome. In *Daniel Deronda*, the truly fallen woman, Lydia Glasher, treads the moral high

ground while the morally fallen woman, Gwendolen Harleth, egoistic and vain, is judged and punished; the woman labelled as "fallen," the Princess Halm-Eberstein, in contrast to both of these women, represents the defiance of a woman who embraces fashion and "fallenness" to achieve social and financial independence. In all three cases, Eliot is herself and makes the reader highly sympathetic to the terrible choices these "fallen" women must make given their limited education and resources, though their fashionable clothing and interest in appearance continues to reflect their "fallen" condition. In what must certainly signify a certain frustration with the good girl-bad girl dichotomy, Eliot creates a woman who eschews "finery," Mirah Cohen, in whom the reader loses nearly all interest by novel's end, and whose quiet submission pales beside the vitality of her rival, Gwendolen, and her counterpart, the Princess. Arrayed alongside Mirah are a range of "good" women, Anna Gascoigne, Catherine Arrowpoint, and the Meyrick sisters, whose willingness to dress "according to their station," while demonstrating their moral worth, involves so little moral struggle or sacrifice that their stories ultimately fade into insignificance next to Gwendolen's "fallen" misery and final redemption.

These complex alterations to conventional plot devices are not radical. Eliot uses somewhat similar changes in most of her novels, from *Mill* onward; but these shifts suggest a consolidation of earlier ideas about women's abilities to understand and make moral choices. To the extent that society encourages women to "love finery," women who consequently "fall" or who characterize "fallenness" are only marginally to blame for their state. If women are encouraged to be concerned with fine clothes, with being "well clad and provided for," they cannot learn concern for the important issues which face society. If they are educated to value appearance rather than human goodness, they will value appearances more than truth. If they are rewarded only when they excel

at ornamentation, they will view gender relations as merely a matter of "good bargaining" rather than one of love and duty. All of these factors lure women into moral temptation—often sexual—making "fallenness" more a matter of fate than of will.

As in earlier novels, Eliot establishes early in the novel a contrast between the vain and materialistic "fallen women" and the plain, idealistic foils. The clothing worn by these two groups, and their attitudes toward it, externalize the moral differences between the two young women. The point of *Daniel Deronda* is suggested in its opening lines: "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" Daniel's question to himself, as he watches Gwendolen play at roulette, is more than simply aesthetic. Women's physical and moral beauty is a matter of great concern for Daniel and for readers of this novel, and whether ultimately a woman is "the best of women," as Daniel wishes Gwendolen to be, or "only harm" to others, as she eventually claims, is embedded in Daniel's first internal dispute.

Anna Gasgoine represents the kind of woman about whose morality there is little doubt. Dressed simply and averse to all social display, Anna demonstrates the self-effacement and renunciation that denote feminine goodness. Her "timid appearance and miniature figure" recall those of Lucy Deane, though Anna, unlike the young Lucy, has had a childhood reputation as a "romp" who is both "wild and shy" (27). Anna demonstrates that only social and familial duty have changed her demeanor. She assures Gwendolen that, although she is "altered now" having "come out, and all that," she still "in reality . . . like[s] to go blackberrying with Edwy and Lotta as well as ever" (27). When Rex considers emigration after Gwendolen rejects him, Anna quickly volunteers to go with him, since this scheme would leave her free from fine dress social formalities which she hates: "'I should have done with going out, and gloves, and crinoline, and

having to talk when I am taken to dinner—and all that” (80). Significantly, the only mention of Anna’s being well-dressed comes when she serves as Gwendolen’s bridesmaid, though her sadness on the occasion, which stems from her pity for the rejected Rex, still suggests her responsiveness to emotional rather than material claims: “Only two faces, it was remarked, showed signs of sadness—Mrs Davilow’s and Anna’s. . . . It was less understood why Anna should be troubled when she was being so well set off by the bridesmaid’s dress” (325). A final comment by her, that her family’s poverty doesn’t bother her since “it makes very little difference to us, except that we keep no carriage, and have no dinner-parties—and I like it better” (609), underscores Anna’s simplicity and lack of vanity. But this simplicity does not make her “naïve” as Gwendolen first thinks. Anna’s confidence to the Meyrick’s that, but for Grandcourt’s financial generosity, she “should have thought he was not very nice—rather proud, and not at all lively, like Gwendolen” is an astute observation (611). It is this insightfulness, and not her desire to “dress up,” which makes Anna a surprisingly good actress in the home theatrics which Gwendolen initiates. The narrator notes: “Anna had caused a pleasant surprise; nothing could be neater than the way in which she played her little parts; one would even have suspected her of hiding much sly observation under her simplicity” (52).

Anna’s friendship with the Meyrick’s, formed through her brother and theirs, while mentioned only once in the novel, highlights the girls’ similar natures. Characterised by their artistic endeavors, their purposeful sewing, and their admiration for Daniel Deronda, the Meyrick sisters are, like their mother, “united by a triple bond—family love; admiration for the finest work, the best action; and habitual industry” (180). These psychological traits are

mirrored in their plain attire which the narrator conspicuously contrasts with that of fashionable ladies:

Everything about them was compact, from the firm coils of their hair, fastened back *à la Chinoise*, to their grey skirts in puritan nonconformity with the fashion, which at that time would have demanded that four feminine circumferences should fill all the free space in the front parlour. All four, if they had been wax-work, might have been packed easily in a fashionable lady's travelling trunk (180-81).

But while Eliot presents their simplicity and goodness, especially their kindness to Mirah, as admirable, the novelist does not quite take them seriously. Their selflessness and their idealism of Daniel, for example, goes so far that they cannot imagine him marrying anyone, much less one of them. Excluding him from the world of material reality, the sisters hint at their own moral blindspot. Mab exclaims: "No woman ought to want to marry him. . . . / never should. Fancy finding out that he had a tailor's bill, and used boot-hooks, like Hans. Whoever thought of his marrying?"

In contrast to both Anna Gascoigne and the Meyrick sisters, Eliot presents the more balanced Catherine Arrowpoint, who is "generally liked for the amiable unpretending way in which she [wears] her fortunes" (38). Her frequent consideration of Gwendolen's feelings, in spite of having reasons to be jealous of Gwendolen, reveals her thoughtful nature, and her commitment to music, and Herr Klesmer, is genuine. Though she wears the fine clothes of a lady, the implication is that she does so out of duty to her family's high position. Her eventual marriage to the "classless" artist, Herr Klesmer, and her willingness to be subsequently disinherited, indicate how far she is from the "figure of Wealth in allegory" to which Gwendolen

likens her at the Archery Meeting. Herr Klesmer's attraction for her suggests that he loves her for her "inner beauty" rather than her material splendor or superficial attractiveness:

There is a charm of eye and lip which comes with every little phrase that certifies delicate perception or fine judgment, with every unostentatious word or smile that shows a heart awake to others; and no sweep of garment or turn of figure is more satisfying than that which enters as a restoration of confidence that one person is present on whom no intention will be lost.

Mr. Arrowpoint's threat that he will disinherit Catherine if she marries Klesmer raises an anti-materialistic response from her that sounds very like that of Dorothea Brooke: "It is no sacrifice to me . . . except that I am sorry to hurt my father and mother. I have always felt my fortune to be a wretched fatality of my life" (230).

But despite the shining example of morality which Miss Arrowpoint and her "good" sisters display, Eliot seems less interested in their stories than in the similar ones of heroines such as Dorothea Brooke and Maggie Tulliver. None of these women struggles to overcome serious temptation. Anna Gasgoine remains at the end of the novel the cherished sister of the now prospering Rex; the Meyrick sisters acknowledge and applaud Daniel Deronda's marriage to Mirah, overcoming only a slight repugnance to her Jewishness; and Catherine Arrowpoint keeps her fortune and gains her acclaimed husband, as her parents eventually relent about the marriage. Though the Klesmer's are generous to poor artists, such as Mirah, the couple lacks for little, and their brief battle with the Arrowpoint's ends happily. Certainly, none of these women's stories takes up more than short passages in the long story of Gwendolen and Daniel, and the praise Eliot allots them appears almost perfunctory.

The reader is at first inclined to be much more interested in Mirah, whose initial hardships and despair hint at the "great girl-tragedy" which her life suggests. Mirah's plain attire originally strikes the reader, as it touchingly mirrors the simple faith she places in Daniel, who saves her from suicide by drowning. The plain-spoken honesty with which she relates her story of separation and loneliness, as a travelling actress with her manager-father, derives pathos from its similarity to the "fallen woman" tales of Mrs. Transome and Hetty Sorrel; and Mirah's purity at first seems a matter of hard-won combat against the lure of "finery" and wealth, and Mirah's desire for everything that is not contrived communicates her triumph.

Mirah, who has been an actress, appears supremely beautiful without fine dress or "artificials." When Daniel first sees her, Mirah is wearing only a "large black hat" and a "long woollen cloak," and the apparent poverty which her clothes suggest underlines her natural beauty: 'I should not have forgotten the look of misery if she had been ugly and vulgar,' he said to himself. But there was no denying that the attractiveness of the image made it likelier to last. It was clear to him as an onyx cameo: the brown-black drapery, the white face with small, small features, and dark, long-lashed eyes." The narrator repeats this message two chapters later, insisting on the fitness of Mirah's plain, cheap dress:

It was Mab who carried her breakfast and ushered her down—with some pride in the effect produced by a pair of tiny felt slippers which she had rushed out to buy because there were no shoes in the house small enough for Mirah, whose borrowed dress ceased about her ankles and displayed the cheap clothing that moulding itself on her feet seemed an adornment as choice as the sheaths of buds.

(193)

Despite Mirah's observation that Daniel and his friends, the Meyricks, might well have thought her "wicked," since they knew nothing about her when they met her, Mirah's plain dress and unselfconsciousness mark her as "good" right from the beginning. Though Daniel does imagine "what might be" Mirah's unfortunate history and circumstances which makes him "wait to know more," he and the Meyrick's assure her, "[w]e think no evil of you, poor child" (183). Her voice, her accent, her looks—all the sweet purity that clothed her as with a consecrating garment made him shrink the more from giving her, either ideally or practically, an association with what was hateful or contaminating" (191). When Mirah goes to meet her brother, whom Daniel has located for her, she demonstrates her goodness and unpretentiousness by dressing simply: "[Daniel] was startled to find that she had on the hat and cloak in which he had first seen her. " In justifying her plain attire, Mirah reveals her highly developed moral sympathy. She responds to Mrs. Meyrick's question, "You like to go in that dress dear?" by saying "My brother is poor, and I want to look as much like him as I can, else he may feel distant from me" (541).

Mirah's desire to leave the stage, in order to avoid the life of "kept woman" which she sees herself being forced into, is coupled with a resistance to the "finery" often worn by actresses. Ironically, Mirah's unselfconscious appearance makes Daniel feel he has no right to look at her: "He had no right to linger and watch her: poorly-dressed, melancholy women are common sights; it was only the delicate beauty, the picturesque lines and colour of the image that were exceptional, and these conditions made it even more markedly impossible that he should obtrude his interest upon her" (172). Discussing life with her actor-father and his actress-mistress, Mirah confesses to Mrs. Meyrick, "But then and ever since I hated our way of life. My

father had money, and we had finery about us in a disorderly way; always there were men and women coming and going . . . I shrank away from all those things" (196). Mirah, with an almost innate delicacy, discerns her father's plan to "sell" her to a disreputable Count as mistress, and prays for deliverance since, as she says, "I had seen what despised women were." When she eventually runs away, Mirah takes off her fine clothes and puts on much simpler dress: "I put on my plainest things—the cloak and hat I have worn ever since" (203). When Mirah sets out to be a private singer, she undergoes an ordeal, similar to Maggie Tulliver's, concerning appropriate dress. The Meyrick's insist she must have a new dress while she pleads to wear "this black merino" with "white gloves and some new *bottines*" since she has neither. Crying that she only wants to be what she is, "a poor Jewess," Mirah claims that even as an actress "I almost always had a part with a plain dress" (456). In the end, the notion that Daniel will like "for her to have a handsome dress," Mirah concedes to "a black silk dress such as ladies wear," though its simplicity is still a key point.

Even as Eliot includes Mirah's story, which confirms stereotypes associating acting with prostitution, Eliot takes pains, again, to distinguish the life of the actress-artist from the life of the actress-prostitute, the well-dressed doll who sees the theatre as a medium for financial and social advancement. Mirah assures Daniel and the Meyrick's that her father's aim to "sell" her was, in part, determined by her inadequacy as an actress-singer. By recognizing her limitations as an "artist," Mirah avoids the pitfall of "fallenness" which engulfs those, like Gwendolen, who look to "donning the life as a livery." In giving up the stage, Mirah does not give up a promising or fulfilling career, for, in keeping with her whole personality, she is no actress. Her father's mistress, an Italian actress, scorns that Mirah "will never be an artist: she has no notion of

being anybody but herself. That does very well now [when Mirah is young], but by-and-by you will see—she will have no more face and action than a singing-bird”(197). Though Mirah initially quails at this prediction of her future, she admits to Mrs. Meyrick “I knew that my acting was not good except when it was not really acting, but the part was one that I could be myself in, and some feeling within me carried me along. That was selfdom” (201). Mirah, without being told, understands Herr Klesmer’s injunction about the commitment and talent required of a great actress or singer, and humbly admits that her voice will earn her money only at private parties or as a teacher. Mirah’s honesty and unselfconsciousness demonstrate her complete freedom from the tendency to “play act.” Daniel recognizes this, at once: it was “impossible to see a creature freer at once from embarrassment and boldness.” She is clearly “like a little flower-seed that absorbs the chance confusion of its surroundings into its own definite mould of beauty.” In this way, Daniel sees it as a blessing that Mirah’s “theatrical training had left no recognizable trace.” Only Mirah’s reading of great plays, which she claims teach her wisdom, leaves any impression on her.

But Mirah’s place as “good woman,” though essentially unchallenged in the novel, is reduced in importance by her more prestigious and talented counterpart, the Princess Halm-Eberstein. The latter’s celebrated career as the singer-actress, Alcharisi, suggests the professional life which Eliot felt some women, at least, had the right to pursue. Even Bonnie Zimmerman, who says that, through the character of Alcharisi, Eliot expresses her fear of “female leadership and feminism,” admits that “Eliot seems to have placed her most intensely feminist outcries in the mouth of this ‘unnatural’ woman precisely in order to protect herself at the same time that she exposes deep resentments” (“George Eliot and Feminism” 236). While

the Princess's profession evokes Eliot's associations between fashion and fallenness, the Princess reflects none of the humiliation or even the moral depravity which Eliot assigns other such women. Clad in "black lace," "a long train," and "some rich bracelets," the Princess's appearance suggests the sexual immorality that her words to Daniel confirm: "Men followed me from one country to another. I was living a myriad lives in one" (584). But the Princess's tone is far from that of Hetty Sorrel, as she pleads for Dinah Morris's understanding in the prison. The Princess proudly relates her infamy to Daniel, asserting her right as an artist to be treated with respect: "I was the Alcharisi you have heard of: the name had magic wherever it was carried. Men courted me" (591). She defies Daniel's opposition by affirming, "There is no shame attaching to me. I have no reason to be ashamed" (592). Even when she confesses to some "weakness," partly the sign of severe illness, which makes her tell Daniel of his Jewish heritage, she resists his implied criticism. Defying those, seemingly Eliot herself, who would discourage her vanity and egoism, the Princess presses the miniature of herself into Daniel's hand, exclaiming, "had I not a rightful claim to be something more than a mere daughter and mother? The voice and the genius matched the face. Whatever else was wrong, acknowledge that I had a right to be an artist, though my father's will was against it" (619).

Through the Princess's words to Daniel, Eliot conveys her bitterest invective against the educational and social limitations placed on women. In the Princess's decision to defy convention and live the "wide life" of the artist, Eliot suggests more strongly than in any earlier treatment, the reasons for broadening woman's sphere. Marriage, as Gwendolen's experience shows the reader, is not the natural conclusion for every woman's life. The Princess says, "I did not want to marry. I was forced into marrying your father—forced, I mean, by my father's

wishes and commands; and besides, it was my best way of getting some freedom. I could rule my husband, but not my father. I had a right to be free, had a right to seek my freedom from a bondage I hated" (584). The Princess resists the bonds of her Jewishness, but, more than that, she resists being "the Jewish woman." When Daniel claims that he "enter[s] into the painfulness of [the Princess's] struggle" against her racial heritage, the Princess's response demonstrates just how outside most men's understanding is the humiliation of subjected womanhood: "You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out . . . a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet" (588). The metaphor is telling, here. Conventional clothing, however prescribed, suggests constriction. To the extent that women are educated to wear "finery," to put themselves on display, this type of clothing corrupts their nature; but simple Jewish dress may corrupt, as well, if its simplicity becomes too prescriptive, too linked to a tradition which seeks to constrict individual achievement.

If the Princess's rebellion against the traditional expectations by not marrying, by embracing the life of the "fallen woman," suggests a triumph of will against unjust oppression, her sudden retirement from the stage and marriage to a Russian nobleman indicate the perversion of communal ties which "social marriages" produce. The Princess, who marries Halm-Eberstein only to avoid "failure and decline" in her profession, hints at the implicit degradation such a union causes women: "I made believe that I preferred being the wife of a Russian noble to being the greatest lyric actress of Europe; I made believe—I acted the

part. . . . I repented" (596). The inherent falseness of her action, in contrast to the artistry of her stage career, recalls the deception of ornamental femininity, in contrast to the professionalism of the costumed actress. This deception and falseness constitute part of "all things" which the Princess says conspired to keep her from returning to the stage after her marriage, when she discovered that she had not lost her voice, after all. For the role of wife and mother is one she cannot change or exchange; unlike her earlier abandonment of Daniel, done when she was a widow, her position of aristocratic "ornament" prohibits freedom. The Princess's situation reminds readers of her earlier condemnation of her father as one of the men "who turn their wives and daughters into slaves" (589). She too is a slave, paid for with money and a titled position. This kind of relationship is destructive and unnatural, a fact supported by the Princess's claim that "nature sometimes thwarts" the misogynistic association of women with submission, making women also "clever . . . grand, with an iron will" (589). The Princess hints that nature's thwarting happens perhaps quite often, though mis-educated women and men deny it. Explaining her motivation for allowing Sir Hugo Mallinger to raise Daniel, the Princess explains:

Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster.

I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel—or say they feel, for fear of being thought not like others. (586)

If women act conventionally out of "fear," Eliot implies, their lives and actions risk all of the distortion which Eliot sees coming from "falsity." Though most women may act "like others," some women must be allowed to be "exceptional"—and be encouraged to fulfill their promise.

If the Princess Halm-Eberstein's words and actions hint at the social wrongs facing extraordinary women, Gwendolen's life reflects how these same wrongs are magnified for women who are not extraordinary. The narrator's remarks suggest how strongly Gwendolen, through her "mis-education" is pre-disposed to "falling." Speaking of Gwendolen's entry into poverty, the narrator asks: "How much more might such trifles tell on a young lady equipped for society with a fastidious taste, an Indian shawl over her arm, some ten cubic feet of trunks by her side, and a mortal dislike to the new consciousness of poverty which was stimulating her imagination of disagreeables?" (211). The answer is that she, like many young ladies in her situation, is unprepared for life. As Beer notes, Gwendolen "figures woman's absolute distress," crying for "life for herself without the special permission granted to talent" (221). As Eliot, with a strong measure of sympathy, prepares to tell Gwendolen's "insignificant thread in human history," she asserts that the importance of this story lies in its commonness, the fact that it represents the tragedy of so many similar women. To illustrate Gwendolen's fundamental problem with vanity and superficiality, Eliot reveals Gwendolen's love of "finery," not only of clothing but of the entire "fabric" of her existence, all the feminine details which Gwendolen sees as part of her persona.

In the first description of Gwendolen, Eliot implies the contrast of "natural" beauty and "artificial ugliness" which is a theme throughout her works. Gwendolen, dressed elaborately as "the nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments, with a pale sea-green feather fastened in silver falling backward over her green hat and light-brown hair" is the image of a fashionably dressed woman (7). Like the "gilt-mouldings, dark-toned colour and chubby nudities, all correspondingly heavy" which make up the gambling hall, Gwendolen dresses for effect, as she

mingles with those of "the highest fashion" whose very breathing air is not to be shared "by persons of little fashion" (3).

Gwendolen's ability to make a visual impression on others by her dress and demeanor bolsters her egoistic sense of "specialness":

No youthful figure there was comparable to Gwendolen's as she passed through the long suite of rooms adorned with light and flowers, and visible at first as a slim figure floating in white drapery approached through one wide doorway after another into fuller illumination and definiteness. She had never had that sort of promenade before, and she felt exultingly that it befitted her. (37)

That Gwendolen looks so much more attractive in her "finery" than other women deludes her into disregarding their often superior talents. Gwendolen, blinded by this disregard, originally fails to appreciate Miss Arrowpoint's exceptional musical ability and sympathetic generosity; Gwendolen and her admirers only notice "how even the handsome Miss Lawe, explained to be the daughter of Lady Lawe, looked suddenly broad, heavy, and inanimate; and how Miss Arrowpoint, unfortunately also dressed in white, immediately resembled a *carte-du-viste* in which one would fancy the skirt alone to have been charged for" (38). But Gwendolen's sense of "specialness" does not motivate her to inspired action or greatness, such as Daniel Deronda embraces; the nature of her "specialness," wrapped as it is in the trappings of ladylike finery, limits her vision entirely:

She rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of

fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin boots. (47)

Like Rosamond Vincy as a "charming stage Ariadne" or Hetty Sorrel as a "star-browed calf" who leads pursuers into a bog, Gwendolen's egoistic vanity hurts others and herself.

The narrator remarks on Gwendolen's fashionable dress, on the effect she attempts to create by her clothing and appearance, in nearly every scene, suggesting over and over again Gwendolen's illusory perceptions of herself and the world. That her dress and behavior are calculated to present a carefully studied image is clear even in the gambling scene. When Gwendolen wins, the narrator says:

The sylph was a winner; and as her taper fingers, delicately gloved in pale-grey, were adjusting the coins which had been pushed towards her in order to pass them back again to the winning point, she looked round her with a survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation. (5-6)

Eliot continues to contrast this desire to produce effects through dress and behavior—to act a part—with the shallow morality that Eliot often sees as accompanying it and with the "true self" such acting often hides. At the dance after the Archery Meeting, Gwendolen intentionally imitates simple dress, but only to avoid "vulgarity" for she is acutely conscious of her entire demeanor:

[Gwendolen's arms] were bare now: it was the fashion to dance in the archery dress, throwing off the jacket; and the simplicity of her white cashmere with its border of pale green set off her form to the utmost. A thin line of gold round her

neck, and the gold star on her breast, were her only ornaments. Her smooth soft hair piled up into a grand crown made a clear line about her brow. Sir Joshua Reynolds would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth of change—only to give stability to one beautiful moment. (102)

The narrator's reference to Joshua Reynolds reminds the reader of the *Felix Holt* narrator's many comments on the paintings at Transome Court. Like those "painted ladies," Gwendolen is a picture of fashion. The tragedy for her and for Eliot is that she is not merely a picture, though she often thinks of herself in picturesque terms; she is a living being who needs more than the stultifying life she is offered.

Gwendolen's desire to act, both in homemade theatrics and on the stage, parallels and mirrors her desire to act like the "princess in exile" she wishes to be. In all cases, Gwendolen is especially concerned to "dress the part." On first seeing the organ at Offendene, Gwendolen's first response is to play the part of Saint Cecelia: "She had thrown off her hat and gloves, and seated herself before the organ in an admirable pose, looking upward; while the submissive and sad Jocosa took out the one comb which fastened the coil of hair, and then shook out the mass till it fell in a smooth light-brown stream far below its owner's slim waist" (22).

Gwendolen's desire for homemade theatrics blends with her desire to "dress up." Gwendolen rebels against the boredom she feels at home by "leav[ing] out Alice's lessons (on the principle that Alice was more likely to excel in ignorance)," and "employ[ing] her with Miss Merry, and the maid who was understood to wait on all the ladies, in helping to arrange various dramatic costumes which Gwendolen pleased herself with having in readiness for some future

occasions of acting in charades or theatrical pieces" (48). The desires for wearing costumes and acting a part are set against the backdrop of Rex's impassioned young love for her, love which her "plastic" self cannot return. Gwendolen's desire to play Shakespeare's Hermoine revolves chiefly around a "desire to appear in her Greek dress" in a "statuesque pose" (52). Eliot stresses Gwendolen's superficiality by having the costume, not the art of acting, be the important element. That Gwendolen forces Rex, in his role of Leontes, to "kiss the hem of her garment" rather than embrace her, as she, in the role of Hermoine, comes "alive," underscores this importance.

Eliot takes some pains in this novel to distinguish acting as a profession, as an Art, from "theatrics" which signify superficiality and insincerity. Gwendolen reflects only the latter, as she "plays at acting" in her home. Gwendolen's perceptions about "acting" reveal that she thinks "dressing up" well, looking good, makes a good actress. When Mrs. Davilow tells Gwendolen about seeing the actress, Rachel, Gwendolen assumes that she too could be a great actress "since she was more beautiful than that thin Jewess" (48). When Gwendolen truly considers earning money by acting, Herr Klesmer, who speaks for Art in *Daniel Deronda*, assures her that she "must unlearn" the "*plastik*" which she has practiced "from the drawing-room *standpunkt*" (237). As an artist, she "will hardly achieve more than mediocrity" though he will applaud her for her efforts at Art; but, he insists, "the honour comes from the inward vocation and the hard-won achievement: there is no honour in donning the life as a livery" (236). At this stage, Gwendolen cannot conceive of embracing hardship for doubtful gain. In the end, only the "livery"—the fame and fashionable dress and lifestyle—attracts her.

But if Gwendolen initially deceives herself and others by her careful exhibition of "finery" in all its forms, she learns, after she meets Lydia Glasher, to suspect her motives, and, after she marries Grandcourt, to re-assess the value of "finery" at all. Lydia Glasher first represents to Gwendolen the true powerlessness of women's "charms" over men who do not truly respect women or social ties. As Gwendolen observes on first seeing Mrs. Glasher, the fallen woman is or has been, like Gwendolen herself, beautiful: "she was startled and shrank back, but in doing so she could take in the whole figure of this stranger and perceive that she was unmistakably a lady, and one who must once have been exceedingly handsome" (136). The narrator confirms Gwendolen's impression later, noting Mrs. Glasher's "beauty and brilliancy" which "had made her rather conspicuous to [observers] in foreign places, where she was known to be living with young Grandcourt" (312). Although the narrator dwells intensely on Mrs. Glasher's bitterness at her role as mistress, having no "pleasure in her toilet" now, the narrator relates that she is still forced to make herself attractive to Grandcourt during his visits:

Mrs Glasher's toilet had been made very carefully—each day now she said to herself that Grandcourt might come in. Her head, which, spite of emaciation, had an ineffaceable beauty in the fine profile, crisp curves of hair, and clearly-marked eyebrows, rose impressively above her bronze-coloured silk and velvet, and the gold necklace which Grandcourt had first clasped round her neck years ago. . . .

Her chief thought of herself seen in the glass was, "How changed!"—but such good in life as remained to her she would keep. If her chief wish were fulfilled, she could imagine herself getting the comeliness of a matron fit for the highest rank. (316)

Lydia Glasher's wasted appearance and disgust with herself mirrors the same emotion in Mrs. Transome, but with a small difference. Mrs. Glasher has no "secret" as Mrs. Transome has, and no shame to hide. Her repentance, such as it is, is due to the children who must risk losing their inheritance, a matter of birthright that the reader comes to support.

Gwendolen's fear of Lydia Glasher and the curse she places on Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt, comes, in part, from seeing the similarity between their respective situations. Lydia Glasher warns her, "You are very attractive, Miss Harleth. But when he first knew me, I too was young. Since then my life has been broken up and embittered." Gwendolen recoils from the "terror" embodied in Mrs. Glasher's words: "it was as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said, 'I am woman's life'" (137). If, as Beer claims, part of what separates Gwendolen from "those earlier heroines—Hetty, Bertha, Rosamond, with their physical allure" is Gwendolen's "imagination," then it is this imagination which enables Gwendolen to truly understand the crime she has committed in marrying Grandcourt. Mrs. Glasher passes on the symbol of her relationship with Grandcourt, the diamonds which he now wishes Gwendolen to wear, and the symbolism is lost on neither the reader nor Gwendolen. If the diamonds are the "finery" which have paid for the fallen woman, Lydia Glasher, then Gwendolen, herself, is only a more legally sanctioned version of that woman. In Gwendolen's shrieks, after receiving the diamonds, are her terrified response to Mrs. Glasher's burning questions: "Shall you like to stand before your husband with these diamonds on you, and these words of mine in his thoughts and yours? Will he think you have any right to complain when he has made you miserable?" (330). She recognizes that "truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor creature" (331).

In her marriage to Grandcourt, Gwendolen experiences the full measure of the terror she foresees in receiving the diamonds from Mrs. Glasher. As the "poison" of the gems enters Gwendolen's heart, she comes to resemble the poisoned flowers which she remarks on early in the novel, and which stand as symbols for young, unmarried women in the novel. As her statement to Grandcourt about the inanity of women's lives suggests, Gwendolen's dull existence envenoms her life, pushing her into choices which result in further ruin: "We women can't go in search of adventures. . . . We must stay where we grow, or where gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous" (120). If Gwendolen begins her relationship with Grandcourt at the Archery Meeting as one of the "flower-groups of ladies, moving and bowing and turning their necks as it would become the leisurely lilies to do if they took to locomotion," she and her relationship become corrupt. The first sign of her coming tragedy involves dress. After Gwendolen has triumphantly danced with the eligible Grandcourt, her mother presents Grandcourt's assistant and repulsive alter ego Mr. Lush. Gwendolen, with a "physical antipathy" to him, brushes off the introduction, saying, "I want to put on my burnous"⁶⁵ (108). When Lush attempts to help her with the shawl, she recoils; Grandcourt immediately replaces Lush, insisting, "You had perhaps better put it on" (109). This pattern of initial resistance and capitulation to Grandcourt's desires will repeat itself again and again as Gwendolen approaches and finally becomes Grandcourt's new wife.

⁶⁵A kind of shawl.

The famous scene in which Grandcourt forces Gwendolen to wear the diamonds she now hates, because of their association with Lydia Glasher and Gwendolen's broken promise, shows this same pattern. When Gwendolen responds to Grandcourt's initial suggestion, "Put on the diamonds," with "I don't think diamonds suit me," Grandcourt reveals how little her will matters: "What you think has nothing to do with it. . . . I wish you to wear the diamonds" (397). Gwendolen recognizes that there is "nothing that would not hurt her worse than submission," since to confess her repulsion to the jewels is to reveal her knowledge of Grandcourt's relations with Lydia Glasher. In this moment, Gwendolen realizes the trap which marriage will be for her: "With a bitter sort of sarcasm against herself, Gwendolen thought, 'What a privilege this is, to have robbed another woman of'" (398). The narrator's subsequent comment that "to others [the diamonds] were brilliants that suited [Gwendolen] perfectly," demonstrates the irony behind the situation. To gain social respect, to wear the diamonds of a wealthy man, Gwendolen has submitted all her will and her conscience to Grandcourt, emblem of male financial and social power.

Critics such as Rosenman and Linehan who see as Eliot as complicit with male domination in this novel too easily overlook the consistent critique the novel offers of the misogyny and materialism which foster "falling" in women such as Gwendolen. Repeatedly, as Gwendolen suffers for her vanity and superficiality, Eliot demonstrates the large role which Gwendolen's education and social conditioning have played in forming these attributes. The narrator notes that Gwendolen's "two years at a showy school, where on all occasions of display she had been put foremost, had only deepened her sense that so exceptional a persona as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less

than advantageous" (19). Gwendolen herself feels her education "had left her under no disadvantages" for "[a]bout her French and music, the two justifying accomplishments of a young lady, she felt no ground for uneasiness" (34-35), though the narrator remarks that Gwendolen's sense of intellectual aptitude was based partly on the fact "that no one [around her] had disputed her power or her general superiority" (35). Unlike Daniel Deronda, no one around Gwendolen questions whether she is "beautiful" or "not beautiful" or whether her ornamental education is good for her soul.

Eliot suggests the source of Gwendolen's destructive potential, the same enacted by Rosamond Vincy, lies in the tendency for others to view her superficially. Her mother, Mrs. Davilow, constantly reflects Gwendolen's beauty back to her, as an early scene at Offendene demonstrates. Entering the bedroom she is to share with her daughter, Mrs. Davilow, like Gwendolen, seats herself at the large mirror. Her question to Gwendolen, "'That is a becoming glass, Gwendolen; or is it the black and gold colour that sets you off?'" is packed with meaning. Like Daniel, Gwendolen's mother asks an essential question about Gwendolen's beauty—does it depend on externals such as colour to be 'set off'? Unlike Daniel's question, though, Mrs. Davilow's is essentially superficial. Gwendolen's inner beauty is less of a concern for Mrs. Davilow. The same is true of most of Gwendolen's other acquaintances. In the evening after she has lost at gambling, Gwendolen impresses others with her "*ensemble du serpent*" and her "Lamia beauty" and her admirers and detractors likewise discuss the effect she makes:

"A striking girl—that Miss Harleth—unlike others."

"Yes; she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual."

"Oh, she must always be doing something extraordinary. She is that kind of girl, I fancy. Do you think her pretty, Mr Vandermoodt?"

"Very. A man might risk hanging for her—I mean, a fool might."

The party's discussion about the beauty of Gwendolen's nose and mouth is inconclusive. Like Daniel's speculations, these remarks leave the reader in doubt about Gwendolen's success as a beauty but in none about her desire to make others notice her.

Gwendolen's uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, responds to Gwendolen in a similar way, seeing her attractiveness as indicative of good character and, more important, marriagability. As he explains to his wife, "The girl is really worth some expense: you don't often see her equal. She ought to make a first rate marriage, and I should not be doing my duty if I spared my trouble in helping her forward" (31). This is the same kind of thinking which Mirah Lapidoth's father indulges in when he tries to sell her to the Count who has paid Lapidoth's gambling debts and rescued him from prison. As others, though in ignorance of this event, remark about Mirah's father, "Oh, he is one of those clever Jews—a rascal, I shouldn't wonder. There's no race like them for cunning in the men and beauty in the women. I wonder what market he means that daughter for" (199). The narrator's "indulgent" tone regarding Mr. Gasgoine's similar attitude toward Gwendolen reflects the somewhat bitter irony with which Eliot viewed the "marriage market": "It would be a little hard to blame the Rector of Pennicote that in the course of looking at things from every point of view, he looked at Gwendolen as a girl likely to make a brilliant marriage. Why should he be expected to differ from his contemporaries in this matter" (33). That Gwendolen's costume must facilitate this end is, in the rector's mind, a matter of course: "it would have been mere folly to have been guided by the exceptional and idyllic—to have

recommended that Gwendolen should wear a gown as shabby as Griselda's in order that a marquis might fall in love with her" (33).

Gwendolen's mother tacitly agrees with her brother-in-law, and when trying to consider "what was [Gwendolen's] welfare," she thinks "in no other shape than marriage." As Mrs. Davilow tries to envision whether Gwendolen would accept Grandcourt, who has just arrived in the neighborhood, her first concern is how Gwendolen will look at the coming Archery Meeting, where she will meet Grandcourt: "The discussion of the dress that Gwendolen was to wear at the Archery Meeting was a relevant topic" (85). Gwendolen's awareness of her mother's and uncle's thinking about Grandcourt, however mercenary is the prospect, enlivens the discussion about the dress, as she reveals her awareness against the backdrop of discussing what color to wear:

[H]owever; and when it had been decided that as a touch of colour on her white cashmere, nothing, for her complexion, was comparable to pale green—a feather which she was trying in her hat before the looking-glass having settled the question—Mrs Davilow felt her ears tingle when Gwendolen . . . said with a look of comic enjoyment—

"How I pity all the other girls at the Archery Meeting—all thinking of Mr Grandcourt! And they haven't a shadow of a chance."

Mrs Davilow had not presence of mind to answer immediately, and Gwendolen turned quickly round toward her saying, wickedly—

"Now you know they have not, mamma. You and my uncle and aunt—you all intend him to fall in love with me."

Through careful juxtaposition, Eliot conveys that Mrs. Davilow's concern for her daughter's appearance mirrors the concern for Gwendolen's making "a good match." That Gwendolen comes to think likewise is hardly surprising.

The mirror is a symbol Eliot uses often, particularly in relation to "fallen women."

Gwendolen's experience in the bedroom with her mother mimics an earlier one, in the hotel at Leubronn, where Gwendolen mistakes her "image" for her whole being: "And even in this beginning of troubles, while for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image in the growing light, her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning. Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm" (14). Gwendolen kisses her reflection because she sees her appearance as indicative of her future success. In part, she is right. In that others share her view, including Grandcourt, she will get the "rewards" of money and position that society offers the ornamental woman.

But hidden in these rewards, in fact, part of their very nature, is the nightmare life Gwendolen comes to know as Grandcourt's wife. The humiliation of dependence and subservience, the always "fallen" existence of the woman who has sold herself into marriage, these facts reflect Wollstonecraft's comparison of marriage to slavery (or prostitution). The narrator's comment comparing Gwendolen to a purchased slave underscores this role: "Pre-eminence is sweet to those who love it, even under mediocre circumstances: perhaps it is not quite mythical that a slave has been proud to be bought first" (90). As Gwendolen's desire for "pre-eminence" moves her to accept Grandcourt's offer of marriage, Gwendolen is presented as, if not more, "fallen" than is Lydia Glasher and with the guilty knowledge that she has

wronged herself and Mrs. Glasher willingly, a fact underscored by Gwendolen's acceptance of Grandcourt's ring. When Grandcourt sends Gwendolen the ring in a package, rather than putting it on himself, Gwendolen recognizes his action for what it is: an attempt to avoid having to ask her to wear it. As she discusses Grandcourt's gift of the ring with her mother, Gwendolen is forced to confront her decision to marry him—even to re-consider the rightness of her choice. Grandcourt's additional gift of £500 to her mother at first "reminds" Gwendolen why she believes she is marrying him, to save her mother and sisters from poverty. But as Mrs. Davilow protests, "you are not going to marry only for my sake," Gwendolen is pushed to admit other, less "noble," motives: "She was irritated at this attempt to take away a motive. Perhaps the deeper cause of her irritation was the consciousness that she was not going to marry solely for her mamma's sake—that she was drawn towards the marriage in ways against which stronger reasons than her mother's renunciation were yet not strong enough to hinder her" (287). So thinking, Gwendolen accepts the marriage, "slipping the ring on her finger, and looking at it with a charming movement of her head," and the narrator specifically notes her attempts, as she continues dressing herself, to "justify" her acceptance: "Even in the hour of making her toilet, she had drawn on all the knowledge she had for grounds to justify her marriage. And what she most dwelt on was the determination, that when she was Grandcourt's wife, she would urge him to the most liberal conduct towards Mrs Glasher's children" (288). The irony of Gwendolen's naïve belief that she will be able to control Grandcourt becomes clear all too soon.

As Gwendolen comes to see the death-in-life of constant display, she comes to value her connection with her family and, most importantly, with Daniel. That the life of display hinders

her rapid progress troubles Gwendolen. Lamenting that she has no time to read the philosophical books which she, somewhat erroneously, believes Daniel wishes her to, Gwendolen notes:

But it was astonishing how little time she found for these vast mental excursions. Constantly she had to be on the scene as Mrs Grandcourt, and to feel herself watched in that part by the exacting eyes of a husband who had found a motive to exercise his tenacity . . . [a]nd she herself could not have made up her mind to failure in her representation. (509)

Gwendolen's inability to shake off the sense of "ornamentality" which makes her resist "failure in her representation" is part of her problem; but the iron will of her husband again symbolizes the nearly unbreakable forces which prevent her unlearning her decorative role.

But unlike her predecessors—Hetty, Rosamond, Mrs. Transome—Gwendolen is not beyond saving. Like her father's necklace with its "three central turquoises" of some "size and quality," which Daniel redeems for her from the pawnbroker, Gwendolen has worth beyond the brilliancy of her exterior. The necklace, which Gwendolen after her marriage specifically packs and wears in Daniel's presence, as a sign of her redeemability, comes to stand for the familial ties Gwendolen has with her past, ties which will help her overcome her "mis-education" and the materialism of the society around her. When Gwendolen returns in the boat after Grandcourt has drowned, it is her changed appearance, the entire dishevelment of her dress, which most marks her beginning freedom from this society:

[Daniel] saw Gwendolen half raising herself on her hands, by her own effort, under her heavy covering of tarpaulin and pea-jackets—pale as one of the sheeted dead,

shivering, with wet hair streaming, a wild amazed consciousness in her eyes, as if she had waked up in a world where some judgment was impending. (639).

That Gwendolen's "wet clothes" will "[add] to the impediment of her weakness" symbolizes the trap that this "finery" has been for Gwendolen. But the ruin of her dress mirrors that of Maggie Tulliver, rowing to find Tom in the flood, and the suggestion is the same. The Gwendolen who cares so much about appearance and appearances is like the "sheeted dead," and the new Gwendolen is emerging. When Gwendolen next sees Daniel, the description of her dress further emphasizes that it belongs to a dead woman: "she was seated with a white shawl wrapped round her . . . her long hair was gathered up and coiled carefully, and, through all, the blue stars in her ears had kept their place. . . . she looked like the ghost of that Gwendolen Harleth whom Deronda had seen turning with firm lips and proud self-possession from her losses at the gaming table" (641).

Though the novel continues for several chapters, Gwendolen's beauty and appearance are never again a subject. Gwendolen's return to Offendene, to her family, and to the old life which she tells Daniel she will make new for herself and others, concludes her story. That Gwendolen's story has, as critics have noted, an unfinished quality does not detract from the magnitude of the social analysis and criticism Eliot conveys through Gwendolen and Gwendolen's interactions with the fallen woman, Lydia Glasher. That the latter ends up, through her son, with the bulk of Grandcourt's estates and money is Eliot's fitting conclusion on the subject of fallenness. Society must make what restitution it can in cases where only legal barriers, such as marriage, separate the fallen from the "unfallen" women. Where moral barriers exist, as in Gwendolen's case, the "fallen" woman's redemption will take more than

money and estates to effect (money which Gwendolen nearly rejects, anyway). Gwendolen's "fallen" state requires the education and experience that will teach her to be a "rational being." That Gwendolen's redemption will be achieved is clear in her final words to Daniel: "You must not grieve any more for me. It is better—it shall be better with me because I have known you" (754). Why should readers doubt her word?

Conclusion

On first seeing Dinah Morris preach, Colonel Townley, whose ride through Hayslope serves as a frame for *Adam Bede*, comments: "A sweet woman...but nature surely never meant her for a preacher." The narrator somewhat ironically remarks: "Perhaps he was one of those who think that nature has theatrical properties and, with the considerate view of facilitating art and psychology, 'makes up' her characters, so that there may be no mistake about them." This statement conveys Eliot's deeply held conviction that what is outside does not always match what is inside, that the interaction between "nature" and "nurture" is complex. Those, like Mrs. Irwine, who believe they can tell inner morality based on outward "look" are sadly mistaken. When Mrs. Irwine insists that if her godson had been "a puny, wiry, yellow baby" she "should have been sure [he] would turn out a Donnithorne," her son reminds her: "But you might have been a little too hasty there, Mother...Don't you remember how it was with Juno's last pups? One of them was the very image of its mother, but it had two or three of its father's tricks notwithstanding." Pastor Irwine is more right than he knows since it is his godson Arthur who will prove to have "two or three" tricks of his own.

But in spite of Eliot's consistent recommendation, via her narrators' comments, that individuals must be assessed only after one knows their complete character and circumstances, Eliot herself, as an artist concerned with developing the moral sympathy of her audience, felt compelled to offer a suggestion on how one element of personal appearance—dress—might indeed determine personal virtue. In her exploration of the connections between women's moral development and their "love of finery," Eliot relies on the figure of the fallen

woman. By using this familiar figure, Eliot is able to show how much women's encouragement to self-display shaped their conception of themselves and of their duties to others.

The way in which a "love of finery" and attention to appearance contribute to women's moral ruin is a recurring pattern in Eliot's earliest work. Through characters such as Mr. Tryan's "Lucy" and Hetty Sorrel, Eliot tells a somewhat conventional story: the woman whose desire for "finery" leads to her sexual fall at the hands of an older, wealthier man. In the case of Hetty, Eliot magnifies the "sin" of Hetty's illicit relationship by making her guilty of infanticide. In both Lucy's and Hetty's stories, Eliot avoids both the bitter denunciations of working class immorality, so common in Victorian homilies, and the idealization of fallen "victims," as Gaskell has done. Hetty, about whom we know a great deal, is not a "good girl" who is "led astray" by Arthur—despite Adam's vindictive outcry. She is a vain and materialistic lover of "finery" whose childish morality and egoism make her vulnerable to the almost the overwhelming temptations of sexual promiscuity and child murder. Hetty is allowed little *choice*, little control over either her circumstances or her nature, and, as the "consequences" of her sexual relationship with Arthur and the subsequent murder of their child bring punishment on Hetty, Eliot allows her almost unbounded sympathy.

Hetty's lack of choices—or the possibility to choose—is, in fact, part of the condition of her fall, and Eliot continues to pursue this condition in her second novel. As Maggie Tulliver's life unfolds, the ostensible emphasis on her moments of "sin" and "repentance" serve primarily to show how little any decision she makes matters in the larger world around her. What Maggie experiences as alienation from conventional society—her trip to the gypsies, for example—is really only further demonstration of her bondage to a culture which completely ties women to

the "maxims" of patriarchal power, of which dress is a signifier. Maggie's struggle for personal power, for a separate (moral) identity, is always constrained by a society that sees women as, fundamentally, objects of display and exchange within a male economic system. As lawyer Wakem says, "We don't ask who a woman is . . . we ask who she belongs to." Maggie's attempts as a child and as a young woman to rebel against the "love of finery" which seems expected of women in such a system prepare her later attempts to resist both the "finery" and the sexual abandon inherent in a life with Stephen Guest. That her adult resistance brings her only marginal victory, as she clings desperately to the words of Thomas à Kempis, demonstrates what Eliot saw as the almost overwhelming odds against positive female self-expression. In the law of *social* consequences, Eliot perceived the high price that rebellion (against fashion, against marriage laws) exacted of women. In Maggie's decision to return to St. Ogg's and her later decision to rescue Tom at the mill, Eliot presents the concrete, if only minimally rewarding, possibility for female choice. For in the end, Maggie proves that she is not "fallen" at all, and the painful rejection of Stephen and the yearning return to Tom are represented, even effected, by the wet, torn dress in which Maggie makes her final appearance. In strong opposition to the "world's wife," who would dress her in a "maize-coloured satinette," Maggie triumphs in the "consistent shabbiness" of the moral woman.

That Eliot longed to find an alternative solution to the social problem of "fallenness" which did not require such sacrifice and death is evident in the more positive conclusion of *Felix Holt*. In the tragic tale of the fallen Mrs. Transome, Eliot creates a morality tale that the heroine, Esther Lyon, can learn from. Esther's gradual perception that Mrs. Transome's suffering has been brought on by dangerous egoism, vanity, and "love of finery" complements the education

Esther receives at the hands of Felix Holt. His insistence that her "fine ladyisms," including a "taste" for fashion, have nearly murdered her capacity for moral sympathy helps Esther make sense of the sadness she sees and experiences at Transome Court. As this sadness erodes the fantasies Esther has always held about "people who follow the fashions," Esther undergoes a transformation which allows her to give up her claims to the Transome fortune and to Harold Transome's proposal. As Esther comes to see acceptance of the fortune and of Harold as "falls," she avoids the traps which originally led Mrs. Transome to an affair with Matthew Jermyn and imprisoned her within an artificial and vain existence. As Esther is able to take off the fine clothing offered by the Transome's, she is able, likewise to re-dress Mrs. Transome, bringing about the final reconciliation between Harold and his mother. Esther's transformation also gives rise to her permanent happiness with Felix, as she comes to value his life of poverty. Keeping only her curls, which are "natural," Esther makes a "deliberate choice" to renounce "finery."

Eliot's interest in the broad social implications of Esther's decision to reject "finery" leads to the further examination of this subject in the next novel, *Middlemarch*. In this novel, Eliot abandons the examination of the sexually "fallen woman" in order to more fully explore the moral "fall" of the shallow and superficial Rosamond Vincy. In Rosamond's overwhelming adherence to fashion and fashionable behavior, Eliot depicts the woman so many other "fallen" or "falling" women might have become. She is Countess Czerlaski married to an aspiring tradesman in Milby. She is Hetty Sorrel if Hetty had been sufficiently high-born to have married Arthur. She is Esther Lyon without the "terrible vision" given to Esther by Mrs. Transome, and she is Mrs. Transome before age and disappointment embitter the older woman. Rosamond

demonstrates the "love of finery" characteristic of each of these women and she similarly lacks moral sympathy. All that separates Rosamond from a sexual "fall" as tragic as that of Mrs. Transome is the intervention of the novel's "good woman," Dorothea Brooke. In Dorothea's struggle to make personal choices for herself and in her greater struggle to understand the unforeseen consequences of those personal choices, she finds the strength to overcome egoism and vanity, sharing Rosamond's pain and offering Rosamond a means of escaping "fallenness." In Dorothea's "poor dress" and in her decision to "learn what everything costs," Eliot suggests the material sacrifice which, perhaps alone, can transform society and women's role in it.

That Dorothea's act of selflessness fails to completely change Rosamond is in keeping with Eliot's view of consequences. Rosamond's lifetime of selfishness, disguised from an equally unenlightened society by her "faultless drapery," leaves her almost morally bankrupt and she ends her life as the "bird of paradise" whose complete egoism makes her Tertius Lydgate's "basil plant." The education Rosamond receives at the hands of Mrs. Lemon enscribes her in values, initially shared by Lydgate, which limit her vision of the world to "appearances." That Dorothea is able to break from these values is the great triumph of the novel.

In her final work, *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot pursues many of the themes and character types which she had explored in earlier works but with a complexity which, in many respects, surpasses even that of *Middlemarch*. In Mirah Cohen and the Princess Halm-Eberstein, Eliot explores for the first time in her novels the role of the woman artist and how the woman singer/actress might mirror or transcend the more obviously theatrical woman of the drawing

room. In Gwendolen Harleth, Eliot considers the impulses which drive this "woman of the drawing room," and examines how this woman's vain "love of finery" sinks her morally to or beneath the level of the woman "outside" the drawing room, Lydia Glasher, the permanently cast out mistress of Gwendolen's husband, Henleigh Grandcourt.

In treating this complicated series of comparisons and contrasts, Eliot reveals how far her sympathy for sexually fallen women had come and how little interest she felt able to generate for the conventionally good woman. Mirah Lapidoth/Cohen is unselfconscious and unpretentious, and her aversion to "finery," practiced even when she chooses stage costumes, makes her one of the most faultless of Eliot's women. But Mirah's complete submissiveness, unlike Dinah Morris's, reflects no real struggle with egoism and thus no great moral triumph. Under the care of the Meyricks and Daniel Deronda, Mirah becomes as passive as an infant, and her turning away from the world of choice and responsibility reflects what Eliot had saw as a danger in the philosophy of renunciation which her condemnation of "finery" necessitates. For in accepting the opinions of others regarding her career and her dress, in placidly conforming to others' convictions, Mirah becomes the figure that Virginia Woolf was to later describe as the "murderer" of the woman artist, the "Angel in the House." Eliot saw the danger to all women of confusing renunciation with passivity, and she expresses this concern in terms of the danger such compliance posed for the writer, noting in the late article, "Judgment on Authors," that "the habit of expressing borrowed judgments stupifies the sensibilities" (443). Mirah is "stupified" and largely uninteresting by the conclusion of the novel, in part, because she conforms too strongly to the doctrine that plain dress signifies moral worth.

In the Princess Halm-Eberstein, Eliot contrasts Mirah's happy compliance with the Princess's rebellious individualism. In asserting her right to pursue career over motherhood and domesticity, the Princess marks a new kind of character for Eliot, and one who reflects Eliot's ambivalence concerning the role of "finery" in the life of the singer-actress. The Princess wears "finery" both as a necessary part of her work and as the wife of the Russian nobleman. As an artist, her beautiful clothes become part of the medium whereby she moves audiences. As wife to a wealthy man, the Princess's fine clothes reflect conformity to a patriarchal system in which women are simply objects of exchange and display. The Princess as "the Alcharisi" defies communal convention through her lavish dress and artistry; the Princess as dutiful spouse "crumbles" before the overwhelming protocol of aristocratic "consort." Eliot's sympathy for the ruined artist is clear, even while she allows the "consequences" of the Princess's choice to leave the stage to create a private hell for the former singer.

Through the story of Gwendolen Harleth and the ever-important question "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" Eliot finds fullest expression for the problem that the "love of finery" poses for women. In Gwendolen's spiritual journey from the Lebroun casino to Grandcourt's estate to the drawing room at Offendene, Gwendolen struggles to raise herself above the mass of "common" women, who she sees as accepting the boring lives offered to them. That Gwendolen cannot envision what an "uncommon" life might be like, that ultimately her only choice is to marry a wealthy and perverse man whom she blindly believes she can control, suggests the distorted reality which her "school girl" education presents her. Gwendolen endures intense suffering when she realizes not only the high cost of a life of "finery" but also that she is willing to pay it, and only in rejecting this life, by accepting Grandcourt's humiliating

division of property as just, can Gwendolen begin to find peace. The novel ends on a somewhat uncertain note as Gwendolen's future apart from Daniel seems unpredictable. In part, this indecision may suggest that Eliot saw the social forces controlling Gwendolen's life as too powerful to resist. Gwendolen's future can be only one of mind-numbing self-sacrifice. But a more positive reading is possible, as well. Free from Daniel, Gwendolen at last has the financial security and the mature presence of mind to choose her own future. She can do more than offer "wifely help" like Dorothea and more than "just talking to folks a bit in their homes" like Dinah. Unfettered by marriage (as Eliot truly was with Lewes), Gwendolen can find and follow her own vocation, even her own artistry. And she has the uplifting knowledge that both she and the fallen woman, Lydia Glasher, are rid of the oppressive Grandcourt forever.

In Eliot's exploration of the relationship between the "love of finery" and the "fallen woman," the novelist exposes not only what she saw as desperate social evils that needed to be corrected; she reveals one of the central difficulties of realism. For Eliot's development of this theme—female sexual and moral falls and the desire for fashionable dress—demonstrates the way in which the novelist herself must manipulate "realistic" details, such as dress, to make her point. In this manipulation, however, what was *real* becomes something else or, at least, something more, an "artificial" symbol of a condition or idea, in this case "fallenness." Eliot's description of the Princess Halm-Eberstein's artistic use of "finery" to reflect great human potential (through her acting-singing) reflects the tension the woman artist experiences between rebelling against conventions and using those conventions to express a higher moral truth. The Princess's artistic embrace of "finery" is like Eliot's artistic use of Victorian conventions about "the love of finery." Though the Princess's wearing of fine dress in no way

constitutes her "fallenness" or her acceptance of social restraints (in fact, just the opposite), she must nevertheless *appear* in this clothing, the same worn by both sexually and morally fallen women all around her, women who do accept their objectified status. Eliot is likewise bound by the very conventions concerning female dress and fallenness which her work seeks to transform into broader social critique. Although Maggie asserts that "common words" used on "a grand occasion" will stand out just as "everyday clothes hung up in a sacred place," Eliot realizes that the "words" and the "clothes" cannot always be made to represent the special meanings the artist intends. Thus, Eliot's use of the "fallen woman" figure and her associated condemnation of "finery" are perhaps fated to always elude final interpretation. But in the narrator's comment concerning Gwendolen's wedding-day letter to Daniel that it was "something more precious than gold and gems" (754), Eliot suggests the value which words, which artistic transformation of symbols, can have. In Eliot's world, the "finery" which should attract women (and men) is the wealth of human relationships transmuted into imaginative truth by the artist.

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