

# Identity in Process: The Female Economy of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*

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For people who have discerned a feministic strain in reading George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, its ending often bothers them. It is hard for them to accept that Dorothea Brooke should end in being a "helpful wife" of an ordinary public man. This outcome is a far cry from the reader's expectation of the heroine. The narrator, to be sure, has claimed that there will be "no epic life" in the novel because "the later born Theresas" are "the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity" (3). Yet people still can not understand why the author would make Dorothea willingly stay in the obscurity of the wife's domestic sphere, for all her enthusiastic spirituality. It seems that, despite of all the social critiques during the process, Eliot succumbs to the symbolic order after all. But, perhaps there can be another way to see the meaning of the ending. Resistance needs not to be rejection. Seeing from Julia Kristeva's view of identity as a progressive interacting of the semiotic and the symbolic, I would argue that Dorothea's final wifely role in marrying Ladislaw is women's celebratable expression of the desire from the khora.

"Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa . . . walking forth hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors" (3)? Starting with this question about the relationship between man and history, the narrator of *Middlemarch* presents a glorious picture of St. Theresa whose "passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life" (3). However, later he {1} explains in a lamentable voice that this novel is not going to tell the story of some glorious heroines like Theresa. Instead, it is a novel about an age that baffles *these later born Theresas* because they were "helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (3). Given such a derogatory tone about the circumscribing age, the reader probably expects to see a regrettable defeat of a heroine in pursuit of grandeur. It is, therefore, natural that some readers would contest the narrator's composed tone in treating Dorothea's choice of marriage. Both critique and defense of the author's arrangement rise accordingly.

It is amusing to see that, whichever side critics take in this issue, most of them agree on one point: they tend to regard Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw as degeneration. In the critiquing side of Eliot's arrangement of Dorothea, two major opinions have been articulated. Firstly are those more traditional readers. Influenced by the Enlightenment liberalism, they see Theresa as an embodiment of women's ideal of self-realization. Therefore, they fault Dorothea for sacrificing her potential achievement to help her husband develop his political career. {2} The other opinion comes from some recent critics. Employing psychoanalytical terms, they maintain that Dorothea's self-devotion to her husband is another expression of sexual repression after her marriage with Causabon. They, henceforth, criticize Eliot for not being able to pose a truly feministic role for Dorothea. {3} On the other hand, on the supportive side of Eliot, there is mainly one stance. They also perceive the outcome of Dorothea's pursuit as a failure. However, these readers refuse to identify Dorothea's decision with the author's mind. While the critical

readers interpret the narrator's tone as matter-of-fact and thus see it as Eliot's acceptance of the status quo, the supportive readers protest that the narrator's tone is sarcastic. Therefore, for the latter the ending of the novel shows Eliot's observation of the current social limitation on women rather than her true wish about Dorothea's final settlement. {4}

The above stances expose one problem. The perception of Ladislav as a bad choice for marriage betrays the critics' tendency of conceiving marriage as an exchange. In considering the qualification of Ladislav what they apply is the typical patriarchal standard of wealth or social prestige. Under this concept women become a kind of commodity in exchange for promotion of social rank. It is perhaps what Eliot most opposes to when she portrays Dorothea as an anti-traditional heroine. No matter in choosing Causabon or Ladislav, Dorothea never seeks material interests from marriage. Those critics who fail to see Ladislav's unique features except his social destitution commit the same error as the Middlemarch people. About this the narrator has shown his derision in the "Finale." He relates that most of Middlemarch people lament over Dorothea's choice in marriage, but "no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done"(745). I agree with those supportive critics in that the narrator here is mocking her society's narrow-mindedness and the rigid space this narrow society allows for women. Nevertheless, in my opinion, in arranging the ending Eliot's attitude is stronger than what these critics have assumed. Rather than posing a resigned reflection of the limitation of women at that time, Eliot is presenting Dorothea as a feministic heroine. Dorothea's choice symbolizes her letting go of a barren spiritual enthusiasm to permit the spontaneous overflow of her female desire, which none except Ladislav can inspire and cherish. As the narrator says, "They were bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it. No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotions" (744). Contrasting to the narrator's fervent tone at the beginning in describing Dorothea's pursuit of knowledge, the loving relation of Dorothea's feeling toward her marriage to Ladislav marks Eliot's gradual recognition and cherishing of the female sexuality. This change, in our modern perspective, stands as a blessing rather than a move of degeneration as those traditional people think.

To see this growth of self-consciousness in Dorothea, Kristeva's theory about the the dynamic interaction of the semiotic and the symbolic force in shaping one's subjectivity will offer great help. Influenced by Lacan's theory of the Unconscious, Kristeva argues that identity is the expression of the dynamism of two forces—the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic is the impulse from the khora—a term she borrows from Plato. Khora is the "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God, and consequently, defying metaphysics" (191). In this sense it is something like the unidentifying and converging space in the maternal body—the womb. This force has been present when a baby is born. When in the mother's womb, the baby's body is connected with the mother. All its life impulses move with the mother, and the mother's body supplies all its needs. Therefore, after the baby is born, it cannot distinguish itself from the mother or the outside world. It has no subject of its own. It regards its body as a continuum of the mother's. In this period, the baby's movement is marked by the characteristics of a chora—a non-expressive totality formed by the drive, which is essentially mobile and extremely provisional (93). This drive is the so-called semiotic—a force that precedes and underlies figuration (94). The unnamable, instinctive, sexual and destructive impulses all exist in this force.

The symbolic, on the contrary, operates through the functioning of figuration—called the

thetic phase by Kristeva. The happening of the thetic depends upon two factors: the mirror stage and the discovery of castration. After the Pre-Oedipal stage, in which the imaginary perception predominates, the baby is separated from its mother. Looking in the mirror, the baby perceives its own separate image and finds the mother as the Other. It is also at this time that the baby's needs are no longer to be satisfied immediately by the mother, since it is not always in her arms now. Language interferes at this moment. The baby has to appeal to language to let its mother know the needs. Freud's famous fort-da observation of the baby accounts for the function of language in a baby's development. As Kristeva observes, "language learning can therefore be thought of as an acute and dramatic confrontation between positing-separating-identifying and the motility of the semiotic chora" (100). Through language the baby learns the differentiation of one from the other. In addition to the mirror effect, the separation of the subject from its mother is further completed by the discovery of castration. Both the discovery of the lack in the mother and the Oedipal fear detach the subject from its dependence on its mother. Thus the perception of the lack "makes the phallic function a symbolic function" (101), for from the time on, the baby gains its own subjectivity and enters into the symbolic order, which is designated by the Law of the Father. Therefore, the symbolic serves the function of figuration. It is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures (96-7).

In this perspective, the semiotic stands as the fluid and blind flow of impulse in the unconscious while the symbolic represents the positing and articulating structure which functions on the repression of the other. However, Kristeva emphasises, though absolutely necessary, the symbolic is not exclusive and fixed once for all. Its operation is based on the presence of the semiotic which also precedes the thetic. The healthy identity of the subject is always the expression of the dialectic dynamism between the heterogeneous semiotic and symbolic--a liminary moment of the process which is always acted upon by the relation to the other (98). On the one hand, to reject the symbolic will result in fetishist mechanism and no meaning can be produced. The subject will fall into the "unsayable" state and lose the means to communicate (114-5). On the other hand, for meaning to be variable and creative, we need to remodel the symbolic order with the influx of the semiotic. The semiotic will constantly tears the symbolic open. This transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practices. Therefore, we should celebrate the irruption of the drives in the universal signifying order, that of "natural" language which binds together the social unit (113).

The development of Dorothea's character in *Middlemarch* can be seen as the growth of her self-identity under the dynamic working of the semiotic and the symbolic. This growth undergoes three stages. At the beginning Dorothea grounds her identity on the extreme articulation of the symbolic. Then Dorothea's sense of self is attacked by the irruption of the semiotic, and she experiences a slight hysterical breakdown in Rome. Finally she learns to release the flow of the semiotic out from the symbolic and gains a new sense of her role in life. In the following I will analyse how these three stages reveal themselves during the process of Dorothea's change.

In *Middlemarch* knowledge and feeling are the two representative forces in deciding Dorothea's sense of self. While the former stands for the symbolic order, the latter embodies the semiotic flow of desire.

In the first stage, Dorothea is seen propelled into the symbolic order upon the discovery of the castration. Parentless after twelve years old, Dorothea and her younger sister Celia are brought up in Switzerland. When Dorothea comes to the age of twenty they return to England to live with their uncle. As a girl of "open and ardent" (9) energy, Dorothea is unsatisfied with the strict sexual role the Middlemarch society designates to women. For example, her uncle complains about the trouble of paper-sorting, but when she offers to do it for him, he declines it because "young ladies are too flighty" (18). And at the table often does she want to join those man's talks but is annoyed at "being twitted with her ignorance of political economy, that never-explained science which was thrust as an extinguisher over all her lights" (17). Yet the male of her society will not consider this girlish ignorance of any importance; to their mind it is natural for a woman. As her uncle explicitly expresses, "I don't pretend to argue with a lady on politics . . . Your sex are not thinkers, you know" (49). In fact, a girl in this society does not need to know anything about politics because the social custom evaluates a marriageable girl by "good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection" (8). Thus Dorothea's eagerness to do some good to people—for example, to build new cottages for the tenants—is considered eccentric for a young lady. What a woman should do is, as her uncle thinks, to be able to "sit down and play you or sing you a good old English tune" (58). In a word, as Gillian Beer sees, in this society women are blocked from accesses to real education, for they do not have any use of it. What the society asks of them is to learn how to be marriageable (143).

Discontented with this narrow world of women, Dorothea indulges herself in the pursuit of the phallus. Perhaps owing to the lack of a father figure—as her uncle is a man of "acquiescent temper, miscellaneous opinions, and uncertain vote" (8)—Dorothea seeks her identity in her Puritan religion. In Kristeva's theory of the subject, religion is a radical discourse of a society's signifying edifice, whose operation is grounded on the regulation of the semiotic in the symbolic (119). Therefore it turns out that, while "in Mr. Brook the hereditary strain of Puritan energy was clearly in abeyance, in his niece Dorothea it glowed alike through faults and virtues" (8). The phrase "through faults and virtues" indicates Dorothea's extreme way in her pursuit of spirituality: "She was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it" (8).

Dorothea's religious enthusiasm makes her an aberrant figure in the secularised Middlemarch society. Its people can hardly understand her eccentric ways. From their contrasting opinion about her and Celia, we can see Dorothea's different stance from other women. When Dorothea is usually "spoken of as being remarkably clever," Celia is said to have "more common-sense" (7). People are "generally in favour of Celia, as being so amiable and innocent-looking, while Miss Brooke's large eyes seemed, like her religion, too unusual and striking" (9). They think that, compared with Dorothea, "the innocent-looking Celia" is "knowing and worldly-wise" (9). In their term, "worldly-wise" almost means conformity to social values. Celia has no difficulty in accepting her female role given by society. For Celia, to have some jewelry for ornaments in dressing is pleasant and not sinful at all since "necklaces are quite usual now," and "surely there are women in heaven now who wore jewels" (11). As most girls will do, she has nothing against marrying the good-willed but mediocre baronet Sir James, even though he is a former suitor of her sister. About her sister's character, she worries that "Dodo would perhaps not make a husband happy who had not her way of looking at things," because "her sister was too religious for family

comfort" (19). So it is not surprising that she shares her neighbours' view that both of Dorothea's marriages are disastrous. When the narrator sarcastically comments that "sane people did what their neighbours did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them" (9), Dorothea's alienated relationship to her society is implied.

But Dorothea does not mind what her society thinks of her, as she consciously transgresses the bondage of sexual difference. In revealing that she sustains slight regards for domestic music and fine art (59), Dorothea's perverse idea about the female's role is overtly exposed. Actually much earlier in the novel this transgression has been indicated. One example is her plain dress. Though, as the narrator explains, generally this practice might result from mixed reasons such as the pride of good birth and well-bred economy, in Dorothea's case "religion alone would have determined it" (7). Another similarly perverse act is her unwillingness to wear jewels, even including those relics from her mother. This is particularly significant, given Celia's words that to wear them is to keep "mama's memory" (11). Dorothea's declining to wear the inherited jewels seems to indicate her willful cutting off the connection to the mother—an act that marks the subject's entrance from the pre-Oedipal stage into the symbolic order. Celia's observation that the necklace is "a little too tight" (12) for Dorothea suggests Dorothea's great discomfort about the social designation of the sexual roles.

In this perverse pursuit of the phallic power, Dorothea is compelled to repress the semiotic impulse from the khora. This impulse is often conveyed in the spontaneous flow of her feelings and energy. One evident expression of this flow is Dorothea's love of horse riding. Horse riding is an activity suggestive of sexual energy. The description that "most men thought her bewitching when she was on horseback" (9) betrays Dorothea's female sexuality. At least the "fresh air and the various aspects of the country" (9) she loves for her riding indicates her inclination for the wild. The narrator describes that in riding "when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasure, she looked *very little like a devotee*" (9; italics mine). This description discloses the contradiction between Dorothea's ardent spirituality and the inborn energy in her. And Dorothea herself knows this. For her, "riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it" (9). Dorothea's sense of guilt and her wish to renounce this hobby reveal her rigid repression of the semiotic force.

Dorothea's repression of the sensuous is also shown in the scene of the division of jewels. After giving Celia most of the jewels, Dorothea opens some ring-boxes, which disclose "a fine emerald and diamonds, and just then the sun passing beyond a cloud sent a bright gleam over the table" (13). Dorothea is instantly enchanted with their beauty. At first the narrator portrays her unmediated exclamation of surprise. "'How very beautiful these gems are!' said Dorothea, under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam" (13). The sudden current of feeling implies the irruption of the semiotic desire in Dorothea. Yet immediately the symbolic power interferes. "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John. They look like fragments of heaven" (13). Dorothea tries to make this enchantment acceptable for her in religious terms. However, the orthodox interference can not block the flow of the inborn desire. Allured by the gleam of the gems, Dorothea starts "holding them towards the window on a level with her eyes" (13). But again she cannot bear the assertion of her natural tendency for the sensuous. She

appeals further to the symbolic to govern this unknowable current of feeling. "All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy" (13). This disturbing self-denial in Dorothea is discerned by Celia, who begins to "think with wonder that her sister showed some weakness" (13). Then the narrator goes on to show how much this weakness troubles Dorothea. "If Miss Brooke ever attained perfect meekness, it would not be for lack of inward fire" (13), the narrator comments. Here one needs also to notice the mention of the sun gleam when Dorothea looks at the gems. The connection with sun gleam or sunlight is an important symbol of the semiotic desire in *Middlemarch*, a point I will take up later in this paper.

As the semiotic drive flowing underneath the symbolic is not to be so easily repressed, Dorothea's self-mortification results in certain inarticulate anxieties. These anxieties first attack her in her difficult attempt to posit her own role. For example, the idea of feminine fashion troubles her. As Celia observes, in the decision of plain dress, her sister can not accept momentous doctrines without "eccentric agitation" (8). About embroidery this same confusion happens. It is not that Dorothea dislikes embroidery. The problem is that "she could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery" (8). Suffering from these irreconcilable anxieties, Dorothea becomes restless in finding her identity: "For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do . . ." (26).

Troubled by the disturbance of the semiotic flow and impatient to stay any longer in the girlish ignorance—a symbol of the female's lack of phallus—Dorothea tries to seek salvation from knowledge. As the narrator says, "all her eagerness for acquirement [of knowledge] lay within that full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were habitually swept along:" (77). She seems to presume that once she gets knowledge, she will find a solid position for her life, because "those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen" (57).

To gain her salvation Dorothea marries Causabon. In the thick maze that hovers over Dorothea's bewildered mind, Causabon appears, with the dazzling halo of the Father's knowledge. Causabon's lifetime project on *Key to All Mythology* satisfies both Dorothea's religious enthusiasm and ardent quest for perfect knowledge. She wants to marry Causabon. She feels that marrying Causabon will be "like marrying Pascal;" she will "learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by" (27). As Jill Matus remarks,

in Dorothea's system of value, an elevating desire is the desire for the power of knowledge and language in a world that privileges male speakers and where, according to Dorothea, only the Father is the route to plenitude, knowledge, and voice.(224)

Dorothea's comparing her relationship to Causabon to that of "Milton's daughters" to their father reveals Causabon's role as a father figure in the marriage. This marriage symbolizes

Dorothea's total identification with the Law of the Father:

The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge . . . Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. (26)

In embracing the Law of the Father for salvation, Dorothea indulged herself in further repression. In this respect, Matus's psychoanalytical discussion about the sexuality of both St. Theresa and Dorothea is perceptive in many aspects, but I can not agree with her when she says that Dorothea has expected to find in her marriage to Causabon the satisfaction of both the sexual and intellectual desire. On the contrary I think Dorothea is trying to repress her sexual desire through the phallic power of the symbolic order. When Mr. Brooke reminds her that Causabon is "over five-and-forty" and "his health is not over-strong" (37), it is unlikely that Dorothea does not understand what is probably indicated about his sexuality. Her answer can be seen as her denial of the sexual desire in marriage. "'I should not wish to have a husband very near my own age,' said Dorothea, with grave decision. 'I should wish to have a husband who was above me in judgment and in all knowledge'" (37). Besides, if the love for the sensuous in the gems already causes Dorothea to fear "I don't know to what level I might sink" (13), sexuality is by far beyond the question.

Whether Dorothea demands from marriage simply the Father's knowledge, or both knowledge and sexuality, in the center of the symbolic Dorothea will find absence only: Causabon is sterile for both. In Rome where they stay for their honey-moon travel this lack is disclosed. The disclosure marks the beginning of the second stage in the forming process of Dorothea's identity. In this stage she will experience a stronger out-pouring of the semiotic.

This influx of the drive underneath is shown through a symptom of the hysteria precipitated by the repression of the sexual impulse. A few weeks after they arrive in Rome, one morning Dorothea is found sobbing bitterly in her room. But what causes the crying is unclear. "Dorothea had no distinctly shapen grievance that she could state even to herself" (173). Yet, the narrator's description of the scene two hours before is revealing. In this scene Dorothea, clad in Quakerish grey drapery, is standing against "the marble voluptuousness" (170) of Ariadne's statue. This picture poses the great contrast between Dorothea's spirituality and the Greek sensuousness. As Ladislav's friend Naumann beautifully phrases it, "There lies antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death, but arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and here stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom" (170). This contrast, together with Naumann's later perception that Dorothea "should be dressed as a nun" strongly suggests the want of sexuality in Dorothea's marriage.

If Eliot means not to show Dorothea's sexual repression, Dorothea's crying will appear groundless and unreasonable. Since Dorothea seeks judgement and knowledge in marriage, she should have been satisfied with her current state. As she herself reflects,

She had married the man of her choice . . . and from the very first she had thought of Mr. Causabon as having a mind so much above her own, that he must often be claimed by studies which she could not entirely share; moreover, after the brief narrow experience of her girlhood she was beholding Rome, the city of visible history. (173)

But actually Dorothea is not happy. Even when visiting the famous statue, she is absent-minded. "She is not looking at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor" (170). The streak of sunlight reminds us of the sun gleam when Dorothea looks at the gems and is disturbed by its beauty. Therefore, Dorothea's crying can be seen as a symptom caused by the repression of the semiotic desire.

This symptom is also shown by Dorothea's love to "drive out to the Campagna where she could feel along with the earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes" (174). Dorothea's fondness of the wild symbolises her wish to return to the maternal body--the space in which meaning exists as a continuum—when she find that she is not up to coping with the weight of history, which is typically the male's modality of time. According to Kristeva, men and women sustain different concepts of time. Women's time is of two modalities: repetition and eternity. Whereas the former represents "the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm, the latter is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape. In the repetition modality, women experience time as "extra-subjective," "cosmic," which occasions "vertiginous visions" and "unnameable jouissance" (191). In the eternity modality, women experience time as a kind of space, "all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space" (191). In contrast, men's time is of only one modality: the time of history. For men, time unfolds itself as a project or teleology—"departure, progression and arrival" (Kristeva 192). Causabon's ambitious project of surveying the human history of theology well expresses this male modality of time. And in marrying Causabon, Dorothea has meant to participate in this modality. However, this time of history proves too much for her to reconcile with her inner female cognition. I think that is why the dreamed-for ancient city Rome turns out to be a suffocating place for her and she now aspires for the liberation in the wild.

At this critical moment Dorothea again wrongly appeals to the symbolic power to elevate her from this inner turmoil, this "dream-like strangeness of her bridal life" (173). She suggests fervently to Causabon that he begin to write the book that will make his vast knowledge useful to the world. This suggestion reveals her eagerness to push back the semiotic drive. Dorothea hopes that in this way she can be of some help to her husband, the wifely duty she has assumed for herself in marriage. "I will write to your dictation, or I will copy and extract what you tell me" Dorothea eagerly utters, "in a most *unaccountable, darkly feminine manner*, ended with a slight sob and eyes full of tears" (180; italics mine). The words "unaccountable, darkly feminine manner" fully demonstrate the unnameable force I have discussed in the above. And the "tears" and "sobs" also remind us of the unaccountable hysteria mentioned earlier.

The passage quoted above indicates Dorothea's anxiety in fixing her own identity. Yet Dorothea's expectation is baffled. Irritated at his wife's spying on his sterility, Causabon accuses poignantly of her ignorance. As the narrator observes, "She was as blind to his inward troubles as

he to hers" (180). Dorothea's seeking to find her own identity by marrying to the Law of the Father now proves to be a failure.

Frustrated in her expectation of knowledge, Dorothea gradually learns to face her feelings. Soon after their arrival in Rome, Dorothea begins to feel the insufficiency of mere knowledge in her life. She is unsatisfied with the cold way that Causabon answers her questions:

"This kind of answer given in a measured official tone, as of a clergyman reading according to the rubric, did not help to justify the glories of the Eternal City. There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy " (177)

However, though Dorothea begins to long for others' expression of feelings, she is not ready yet to liberate her own feelings, for she has not been encouraged to "pour forth her girlish and womanly feeling" (178).

Fortunately when knowledge fails to console Dorothea's frustration, Ladislav offers an alternative way of perceiving one's sense of self. Ladislav is a great contrast to those Middlemarch men, particularly Causabon. While both Causabon and Lydgate seek reputation for their study, Ladislav "declines to choose a profession" (72). In his vision of self he can never succeed in anything "by dint of drudgery" (186), for he believes that if things do not come easily to him, he can never get them (186). Here is a man who follows the fluid energy in him. His psychic economy is contrary to ordinary men. As Helene Cixous observes, usually a man has a fear of "decapitation (or castration); he holds so dearly to his title and his titles, his pouches of value, his cap, crown, and everything connected with his head" (317). Causabon's fear of exposing his sterile research is typically such male economy.

In contrast, Ladislav's inner economy is that of the female's. He has no desire for the male's province of "a more accurate knowledge of the earth's surface;" instead he prefers "some unknown regions preserved as hunting-grounds for the poetic imagination" (73). In Kristeva's view, this poetic imagination is abundant in the metamorphosis of meanings played by the semiotic. Besides, Ladislav's refusal to look at things from the studio point of view and to live a one-sided life corresponds to Cixous's description of the female psyche. It is an economy that repels all phallogocentric values of "opposition, hierarchizing, exchange, the struggle for mastery which can end only in at least one death (one master--one slave)" (320). This inner abundance of Ladislav enables him to discern the natural passion in Dorothea's inmost self:

She was not coldly clever and indirectly satirical, but adorably simple and full of feeling. She was an angel beguiled. It would be a unique delight to wait and watch for the melodious fragments in which her heart and soul came forth so directly and ingenuously. (187-188)

This perception is an expression of what Cixous says about the female's inclination "to love, to watch-think-see the other in the other, to despecularize, to unhoard . . . A love that rejoices in the exchange that multiplies" (320).

In her talks to Ladislav, Dorothea lets out her natural feelings progressively:

Dorothea felt that she was getting quite new notions as to the significance of Madonnas seated under inexplicable canopied thrones with the simple country as a background, and of saints with architectural models in their hands . . . Some things which has seemed monstrous to her were gathering intelligibility and even a natural meaning; but all this was apparently a branch of knowledge in which Mr. Causabon had not interested himself. (192)

This illumination in Dorothea is very important. It means that she gradually detaches herself from the oppression of the symbolic order. Causabon's disinterest in anything other than his historical study betrays Rosemarie Tong's observation that "phallogocentric thought is founded on a repression of the semiotic" (230-231). As Pam Morris explains, the symbolic disposition is driven "by an urge to master and control, through the act of defining, what is other and therefore potentially threatening to the self" (145). The "natural meaning" Dorothea now finds in all she sees symbolizes her bending toward the semiotic drive, "the sexually unidentified pre-Oedipal maternal body" in Tong's term (231). The play of the semiotic has created the transformation of meanings for her. It poses a great contrast to Dorothea's earlier complaints to Ladislav that she is "seeing so much all at once, and not understanding half of it" (185). Dorothea's failure to connect the meaning of those fragmentary adventures in Rome is a result of her conforming merely to the symbolic order in perceiving things. In repressing the semiotic and allowing the symbolic only, Dorothea is alienated from the unifying vigor of the khora. This new shift of the inner economy is also shown in Dorothea's perception of art. Now under Ladislav's guidance she begins to see the connection "between pictures and nature" (71), which she has supposed but can not feel before. This connecting perceptivity is gained because of the semiotic drive, which tends to see meaning "as a continuum, with identification rather than separation from what is other" (Morris 145).

However, Dorothea still has to return to her marriage, the "stone prison at Lowick" (198) in Ladislav's words. The couple's return to England starts the third stage in Dorothea's forming process of identity. In this stage Dorothea's female sexuality will get its chance of full articulation.

During the first period of this stage, Dorothea allows the semiotic in her to assert itself but she does not sense its true significance. After they return to England, Dorothea gradually learns to "look steadily at her husband's failure" (327). Though she is still concerned about him, she now turns to Ladislav for perceiving the meaning in her life. She discovers that "she had not, as we know, enjoyed her husband's superior instruction so much as she had expected . . . But Will Ladislav always seemed to see more in what she said than she herself saw" (324). This change marks the decline of the repressive phallic power Causabon represents. But Dorothea does not know that her attraction by Ladislav is wrought by the libidinal drive. She simply knows that "the mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in the wall of the prison, giving her a glimpse of *the sunny air*" (324; italics mine). Here is again an example of the association of the sun with the semiotic drive.

Causabon's will further separates Dorothea from the symbolic order. After she is informed with the contents of the will, Dorothea feels "a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw" (440). Though she is still confused about this yearning toward Ladislaw, it is clear that she now rejects the predominance of the symbolic order. The answer she writes to the instructions Causabon leaves after him for her symbolises her disavowal of the phallogocentric thought represented by Causabon and his knowledge. She had a silent colloquy with her deceased husband: "I could not use. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in" (482)? However, Dorothea is not accustomed to the strong irruption of the semiotic. The discovery of her emotions toward Ladislaw shocks her, because "it had never before entered her mind that he could, under any circumstances, be her lover" (440). Perhaps to fend off this shock, Dorothea actively engages herself in the affairs of the Infirmary. This is another desperate repression of the semiotic. However, the libidinal drive will continuously assert itself. One obvious example happens on the day when she tries to work on some papers about her income. Before she sets out to work, she is "looking out along the avenue of limes to the distant fields. Every leaf was at rest in the sunshine . . . and seemed to represent the prospect of her life, full of motiveless ease—motiveless, if her own energy could not seek out reasons for ardent action" (484). The mention of sunshine once more indicates the flow of her female desire. And her anxiety to pour out her energy into some ardent action is once again reveals the symptom of hysteria caused by her arbitrary repression.

The scene in Rosamond's living room serves as the key force to help liberate Dorothea's repressed female desire. Witnessing Ladislaw's apparent intimacy with Rosamond wakes up Dorothea's sexual longings. What Dorothea beholds when looking out from her window in the early morning after the inner storm in her is spent is one of the most touching scene in the novel:

On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (705)

This scene symbolizes the moment of the unnameable *jouissance* that Dorothea experiences for the first time in her life. In feeling herself as a part of the world, Dorothea is enjoying the emancipation of the semiotic in her. After she recognizes her female desire, she has undergone the periods of repressive anxiety and explosive crying respectively. Now the spontaneous overflow of sexual energy finally comes to her. This energy brings her the back to the maternal *khora*, the nourishing, all-encompassing and infinite matrix space where she can experience the female's extra-subjective, cosmic time. It is because of this liberation that she can face her own affections and happily accept Ladislaw as her husband. It is worth noticing that after this experience, Dorothea's female true self comes out. No longer handsome-boy-like, now "she looked amusingly girlish after all her deep experience" (720).

Probably influenced by the association of St. Theresa at the beginning of the novel, many readers have regretted of Dorothea's ending as a devoted wife of Ladislaw. Even if they have expected Dorothea's incapability to fulfil her religious enthusiasm in seeking a martyrdom, they

seem to presume that this will be a failure of sublimity. They do not appreciate the amusingly happy-ending tone of the narrator in presenting this marriage. Though differing in their interpretations, these criticisms seem to take it as a pity that Dorothea can not become a St. Theresa and Eliot can not thoroughly separate herself from the patriarchal society. However, if we see from Kristeva's view, we will find that the martyrdom or great success is often grounded upon the repression of the female desire. When a woman does that to gain achievement, she falls again under the phallogocentric dominance. So why don't we read *Middlemarch* as Eliot's feministic representation of a woman's gradual discovery of her true self by setting free the semiotic from the repression of the symbolic order? I agree with Kristeva's belief that a liberated person is someone able to acknowledge the play of semiotic and symbolic, that is, "the continual vacillation between disorder and order" in Tong's term (230-1). If we see from this perspective, we will not doubt Eliot's role as a feminist. She is not advocating for the total separation of the female from man's society. Instead, through writing she has made her feministic performance that will force man to notice the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations. This performance is important because, as Kristeva believes, "from the intersection of these differences there might arise, more precisely, less commercially and more truthfully, the real fundamental difference between the two sexes" (192).

### Notes

1. Since the author Marian Evans uses a male pseudonym George Eliot when she published her novels, I will refer to the omniscient narrator as a male.
2. For more details in this debate, see Suzanne Craver 64-74.
3. Matus, for example, has a perceptive discussion on the female sexuality of Theresa and Dorothea in their self-devotedness. Nevertheless, I think she is making a strange inference when she concludes that Dorothea's choice is a further repression of the female sexuality done for fitting into the social designation of women's position. In fact, Matus's article greatly enlightens me in the conception of this paper. But I disagree with her about Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw. I see it as a liberation of Dorothea's sexual desire. I do not think Ladislaw is a bad choice for marriage and neither do I take Dorothea's decision as an act of conforming to the current social environment. On the opposite I think in liberating her sexual desire Dorothea's choice is "bad" only in the eyes of her society but not so in an anti-patriarchal perspective. Hence in this decision Dorothea is actually a non-conforming female of her time.
4. Most critics dwell upon the limited education women could receive in that age. This limitation results in bad choice of marriage out of two situations. One is that, without proper knowledge for a vocation, those who are not rich can only depend on marriage to get a living. The other is that, for those lucky women with wealth, they probably do not want to seek fortune in marriage; instead they may try to pursue knowledge from their marriage. Both of them are bad motivation of marriage. For analysis of this respect, see Kathleen Blake and Beer.

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