

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT AND GEORGE ELIOT ON
CLASS, GENDER, AND MARRIAGE

By

ELIZABETH MICHELLE MYERS, A.A., B.B.A., M.A., M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

IN

ENGLISH

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved

Dr. Ann Daghistan Ransdell
Chairperson of the Committee

Dr. Mary Jane Hurst

Dr. Wendell Aycock

Fred Hartmeister
Dean of the Graduate School

December 2010

Copyright 2010, Elizabeth Michelle Myers

Acknowledgments

I would especially like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Ann Daghistany Ransdell, and my committee members, Dr. Mary Jane Hurst and Dr. Wendell Aycock for all of their patience, guidance, and support throughout my tenure as a graduate student at Texas Tech.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	iv
Background	iv
Organizational Structure	x
Theoretical and Critical Context	x
Chapter 1: On Becoming Louisa May Alcott and George Eliot	1
Birth & Family Background	1
Childhood & Education	4
Becoming George Eliot	12
Becoming Louisa May Alcott	30
Chapter 2: <i>Adam Bede</i> and <i>Moods</i> (1864 Edition)	46
Class	50
Gender	57
Marriage	69
Chapter 3: <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> and <i>Little Women</i>	84
Class	93
Gender	105
Marriage	122
Chapter 4: <i>Middlemarch</i> , <i>Work</i> , <i>Daniel Deronda</i> , and <i>Moods</i> (1882 Edition)	139
Class	147
Gender	159
Marriage	174
Conclusion	188
Works Consulted	195
Works Cited	197

Introduction

This comparative dissertation will explore in-depth the categories of class, gender, and marriage in both the writings of the American Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), and the British author, George Eliot (1819-1880). In addition, and when relevant, additional topics and categories are investigated, including, but not limited to: religion, morals, race, and education. The primary Alcott fictional works to be studied include *Moods* (1864 & 1882), *Little Women* (1868-69), and *Work* (1873). The primary Eliot fictional works to be studied include *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Additional works mentioned include, but are certainly not limited to, Alcott's *Little Men* (1871), "How I Went Out to Service" (1874), *Jo's Boys* (1886), and Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Silas Marner* (1859).

Background

This dissertation uses Alcott's *Little Women* trilogy (*Little Women*, *Little Men*, and *Jo's Boys*) and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* as the starting point for the comparisons. In the *Little Women* trilogy, Alcott recreates her own family in the March family. The real-life Alcott family consisted of Bronson and Abba May Alcott and their four daughters, Anna, Louisa May, Elizabeth, and May. The fictional family consists of Mr. March and Marmee, as she is affectionately known, and their four daughters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. Louisa May, the real-life second daughter in the Alcott family, creates Jo, the second daughter in the March family as her own fictional persona. Like the real

Louisa May Alcott, Jo is also a tomboy and a writer who possesses many of the same thoughts, ideas, and experiences as the real-life Louisa May. Likewise, Eliot does the same when she creates Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot, who was born Mary Anne Evans, but was known by numerous pen names throughout her life, was greatly influenced by her immediate family and had a particularly special bond with her brother, Isaac. Maggie also shares a similar special bond with her brother, Tom, in *The Mill on the Floss*. However, Isaac and Mary Anne had their differences, both in terms of opinion and opportunities available, and this too can be seen in their fictional counterparts. Thus, Louisa May Alcott in some ways represents the fictional Jo March and George Eliot in some ways represents the fictional Maggie Tulliver. By studying the characters of Jo March and Maggie Tulliver, we can begin to study the two authors as well.

In addition to both writers incorporating themselves as the main characters in their most popular novels, it is interesting to note one particular event which occurs in each novel and which happens to be an almost identical occurrence for both and thus furthers the similarities between the authors, their characters, and their novels. Although for different reasons, both Jo and Maggie cut their hair. Jo cuts her hair in order to earn extra money to help the family when Mr. March is injured in the war. Maggie cuts her hair in a rebellious moment after tiring of the constant remarks about her unruly hair and dark complexion and the constant comparison of her to Lucy Deane, her perfectly feminine blond-haired doll-like cousin. Despite the abhorrence of family members regarding their

actions, the haircuts are befitting to both Maggie and Jo because of their tomboyish natures and both are representative of the principles for which each character stands.

There are many other similarities as well as differences between the lives of the real women and their fictional counterparts, Jo and Maggie. Just like Alcott, Jo pursues a writing career, and like Alcott, she succeeds to become a famous children's author. However, unlike Alcott who never married or had children of her own and only raised her niece after her sister's death, Jo comes to believe at the close of *Little Women* that she is lonely and desires marriage and a family. Jo does marry, has two children of her own, and along with her husband, runs a school where numerous children, including her nieces and nephews attend and live. Eliot also shares many similarities with the character of Maggie. Eliot and Maggie are both plagued by the restrictions placed on women in nineteenth-century Britain. In Maggie, Eliot creates a young woman who is frustrated with these limits and who, despite all her brilliance and potential, can never seem to convince anyone that she is worthy of a good education. Maggie's brother Tom, however, is sent to schools because he is a boy, despite his dislike for school and studying and his poor intellectual skills. Maggie, for whom studying and book-style learning comes much easier and faster, is denied this same education simply because she is a girl. While Tom is asking to not have to endure any more formal education, Maggie is begging to be sent to school, but all to relatively no avail. Instead, she is expected to marry, have a family, and in the meantime depend entirely on her father and brother for her own well-being. Eliot, who faced many of these same struggles in her own life, albeit with greater successes than Maggie achieves, nevertheless creates a character through

whom she can express these frustrations and demonstrate to her audience the many problems of gender equity in nineteenth-century Britain.

Both Alcott and Eliot, at least to some degree, seem to wish for different endings for themselves and other women of their time period. Both appear to have achieved their desired careers, but they also seem to have recognized the problems and inequities facing women with such aspirations. While neither was successful at having both a career and a traditional family with marriage and children for themselves, Alcott was extremely successful in creating a character who does “do it all” and with relatively few obstacles. However, despite Jo’s success as a working mother, Alcott is still almost constantly using her characters to lobby for women’s rights and equality. In comparison, Eliot is unable to foresee such an optimistic future for her character and as a result, she chooses to exhibit the dependence Maggie faces as a woman who is required to seek out her male relations for financial support and personal happiness. Maggie, who cannot live for herself as an independent woman, instead lives for her brother who has the independence she so desires. Eliot, realizing that Maggie is confined by the restrictions placed on her by society, can never write a happy ending for Maggie, and therefore instead chooses to have Maggie meet her demise in the flood waters of the river Floss. Rather than have Maggie overcome society’s restrictions as Jo does, Eliot creates for Maggie restrictions which are simply too great for her to overcome and which end up overcoming her instead. This difference in viewpoint between Alcott and Eliot repeats itself over and over in almost all of their novels. While dealing with nearly identical subject matter, it is Alcott who nearly always takes the optimistic viewpoint and creates characters who are

able to overcome their obstacles, while it is Eliot who typically takes the pessimistic viewpoint and creates characters, particularly female characters, who despite their ambitions, nevertheless almost always fail and then find themselves either dying or submitting themselves to the male characters.

A perfect example of this contrast between the pessimistic and optimistic viewpoints can be seen when comparing Alcott's *Work* and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. In *Work*, we see Christie Devon, a young woman who makes up her mind that she will not stay in the small farming community where she lives with her aunt and uncle, but instead plans to find a way to succeed in the world on her own. Although her family does try to convince her that she should marry one of the local boys and be the typical country housewife, she insists that is not the life for her and leaves for the city where she takes up various forms of employment over the course of the next several years. While it is not easy for Christie and she does find herself several times rethinking her decision, she knows that she could never have survived being a simple country wife and mother. She perseveres and after many trials finally finds true love with her husband, David. With David, Christie finds an equal, someone who treats her on an equal playing field and does not see her as anything less because she is female. As Sarah Elbert in *A Hunger for Home* (1984) points out, Alcott insists on harmony between the sexes, men doing domestic duties and women doing real work, or in other words, each party in the marriage helping the other without fear of breaking gender norms. For Christie and her husband David, there are no real gender norms in their marriage. Society may place some on them, as for instance, when Christie follows David to war, she can only go as a

nurse, but at home, there are no duties relegated to each, nor any confinements based on gender.

Alcott's portrayal of gender equality is in sharp contrast to Eliot who in *Daniel Deronda*, creates Gwendolen Harleth, a young woman who when she learns that her family is now bankrupt and that she will be going away to become a governess, instead marries the wealthy Henleigh Grandcourt as a means of escaping her poverty and what she sees as a degrading occupation. Upon marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen is immediately unhappy when on their honeymoon, she realizes that Grandcourt has gained a mastery over her which will limit her desire for independence, Gwendolen previously being a very strong-willed and independent woman. While to some extent Gwendolen is freed when Grandcourt dies, she has nevertheless become a submissive woman who must rely on male support and guidance. In the end, Gwendolen does not achieve the independent outcome for herself which she was seeking before her marriage to Grandcourt. In this way, Eliot, as she does with most of her female characters, creates a young woman who must learn to submit to men and in doing so finds nothing but sadness and disappointment. Alcott, in contrast, tends to create women who are completely fulfilled in their duties as wives and mothers, and while at the same time, have retained their individual freedoms and rights as human beings.

In relation to this contrast, if Elaine Showalter is correct in saying in her "Introduction" to *Alternative Alcott* (1988) that the Americans were simply further ahead on the woman question than the English, this may very well explain some of the differences in the two authors' outcomes for their female characters. If Eliot had lived

long enough to see the same changes come to England that had already come for Alcott, she might have eventually also taken a much more positive outlook on the options available for women. While Eliot herself lived a much freer life than any of her female characters and is able to succeed in ways that none of them ever did, as U. C.

Knoepfmacher suggests in “Unveiling Men” (1981), it is likely that she realized the uniqueness of her situation and did not yet feel comfortable believing that it could be a reality for the masses, unlike Alcott who believed that it could and should be a reality for everyone.

Organizational Structure

In terms of actual structure of the dissertation, since this dissertation explores in detail the categories of class, gender, and marriage, and also when relevant, the categories of religion, morals, race, and education. the subtitles follow a breakdown according to the various categories in relation to each of the novels.

Theoretical and Critical Context

While much has been written about Louisa May Alcott and George Eliot, a study comparing the two is seemingly nonexistent. Thus, this dissertation will contribute to the scholarship through its close look at the categories and the treatment of the categories by both authors. In regard to the critics and theoretical orientations to be utilized in this dissertation, the secondary sources have been selected not only with the categories of

gender, class, marriage, and education in mind, but also included are texts which shed light on the broader and more general perspective of the historical, philosophical, religious, and literary backgrounds of the period in both America and England.

In addition, several Alcott and Eliot biographies will be referenced, as well as selected journals the authors kept during their lives. These are being incorporated with the intent of gaining a general knowledge of the authors' lives and the influences and experiences they had, as well as the opinions each possessed and the social causes each had the most passion for. Although many of these opinions and purposes are evident in their fictional writings alone, the biographies and journals provide further insight and clarification into the topics they chose to write about and the way they chose to have those topics play out in their fictional works. These biographies, letters, journals, and essays include: Alcott's "Happy Women" (1868), "How I Went Out to Service" (1874) and *Transcendental Wild Oats* (1873-74), *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, and Journals* edited by Ednah Dow Cheney (1895), Charles Strickland's "A Transcendentalist Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott" (1969), Cynthia H. Barton's *Transcendental Wife: The Life of Abigail May Alcott* (1996), *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott* edited by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine Stern (1987), *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott* also edited by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine Stern (1989), and *Alcott in Her Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, & Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* edited by Daniel Shealy (2005).

In addition, the following biographies, letters, and journals about George Eliot merit review and incorporation into the dissertation: *The George Eliot Letters* edited by Gordon S. Haight (9 vols.; 1954-1978) and Gordon S. Haight's *George Eliot: A Biography* (1968). In contrast to the "Foreward" by F. R. Leavis in the 2004 Penguin edition of *Adam Bede* which suggests that Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* was a main source for the novel, Haight suggests that *Adam Bede* was based on a story Eliot had heard from her aunt, Elizabeth Evans, a Methodist minister who is acknowledged to have been the model for Dinah in the novel. Also to be used in establishing the biographical facts of Eliot's life and the implications that had on her fiction are Rosemarie Bodenheimer's *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (1994), and Rosemary Ashton's *George Eliot: A Life* (1996).

Likewise, numerous Alcott, Eliot, and nineteenth-century general critics are being consulted for many of the same reasons. Some of the most prominent include a major Alcott critic and scholar, Sarah Elbert's works: *A Hunger for Home* (1984), *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* (1997), *The American Prejudice Against Color* (2002), and her "Introduction" (1999) to Alcott's novel, *Moods*. In comparison, additional works from a major Eliot critic and scholar, Gordon S. Haight were also studied: *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* (1965).

Other major secondary sources include Christine Doyle's *Louisa May Alcott & Charlotte Brontë: Transatlantic Translations* (2000). In this text, Doyle asserts that there is "concrete evidence that Charlotte Brontë's work as well as her life inspired Louisa May Alcott" (xxi). However, despite Brontë's influence on Alcott, Alcott did not always

agree with Brontë, especially as Alcott progresses into some of her later writings. As one critic cited by Doyle points out, Alcott “eventually reacted with ‘troubled refusal’ to the way [Brontë’s] characters act out their destinies, and [Alcott] responded with an increasingly assured, increasingly American, literary voice” (xxiii).

In addition, Charles Strickland in his *Victorian Domesticity* (1985) states that Alcott’s contribution to nineteenth-century feminism and the question of women’s roles and expected duties come through her fiction and the roles her characters take and the comments they make. For example, as Strickland reiterates, Marmee advises her daughters that not marrying is better than marrying someone they don’t love (76-7). Furthermore, Strickland also discusses the notion of Victorian domesticity and the expected roles it placed upon women and compares it to the post World War II era which also created its own Victorian domesticity and feminist era just like during Alcott’s period (Epilogue).

Likewise, Sarah Elbert in *A Hunger for Home* (1984), reiterates how Alcott so often models domesticity in utopian settings (157), thereby creating her typical optimistic storylines and outcomes. As Elbert writes, “what appeals to readers across time may therefore be Alcott’s depiction of the woman problem, the conflict between domesticity and individuality that first presents itself at just the moment when little women move from girlhood to womanhood” (152-3). Being the preeminent Alcott scholar of our time, Elbert’s works will be closely studied and used, as she not only makes valid contributions to Alcott scholarship in general, but has much to say on the categories to be investigated in this dissertation.

Carolyn Heilbrun's "Louisa May Alcott: The Influence of *Little Women*" (1982) states that Jo "may have been the single female model continuously available after 1868 to girls dreaming beyond the confines of a constricted family destiny to the possibility of autonomy and experience initiated by one's self" (141). Heilbrun also makes a very interesting point when she brings up a study that claims that most unconventional women are either from all-girl families, are only children, or are significantly older than any brothers they might have. The argument is that without any sons, a father will have a tendency to make at least one of his daughters act the role of "son." Although these daughters are still female in every way, they often experience a different upbringing than daughters in families where there are sons along with daughters. Because Alcott was one of four daughters, had no brothers, and was much more inclined than her sisters to be the tomboy of the family, Heilbrun asserts that she was essentially her father's "son" (142-3). Heilbrun even states that Maggie Tulliver [and likewise Mary Anne Evans/George Eliot] has a brother and is not able to succeed as Jo does even though they are both tomboys and very similar. The difference is that Maggie has a brother to act the part of "son" to her father while Jo does not (143).

Other Alcott critics include Nina Auerbach who in her "Austen and Alcott on Matriarchy: New Women or New Wives?" (1976) writes about the connection between marriage and death in *Little Women*, and goes so far as to assert that if Alcott could have, she might have written about a self-sustaining sisterhood in which the March girls did not marry and go their separate ways as they actually do in the novel. On the other hand, William Leach's *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society*

(1989) alludes to Alcott's demand for equality between the sexes, in everything ranging from occupations to marriage, while reiterating what Sarah Elbert wrote about in *A Hunger for Home* (1987) when speaking about Alcott's demand that men and women should be equal not only outside the home but also in it and that men, as well as women should share in the domestic duties. This claim is much easier to back up as it is what repeatedly happens in Alcott's fictions; we do not see a self-sustaining sisterhood presented by Alcott, although it has been argued by some critics, including Auerbach, as being something that Alcott would have wanted.

Elizabeth Janeway, in her article, "Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy and Louisa" (1968), writes that Jo is the tomboy dream come true for many young girls because she represents the dream of growing up into full humanity, complete with all the potentialities that go along with it, as opposed to growing up into a limited femininity as most girls did during Alcott's time. As Janeway points out, Jo looks after herself, she pays her own way, and she does effective work in the real world. She does not rely on a man to take care of and support her. Katherine Butler, another Alcott critic, writes in "'A Useful, Happy Woman': Feminine Transcendentalism in the Works of Louisa May Alcott" (1966) that "the feminine transcendentalist is defined foremost in terms of her selfhood, [. . .] defined not in terms of submissive quietude to patriarchy, but a distinctly enriched self found 'out in the world.'" While some of Alcott's characters can find fulfillment in domestic roles such as wife and mother, this character does so only after Alcott has established that it is the desirable option of her and *not* a role forced on her by society" (32). Jo March and Christie Devon are perfect examples of feminine transcendentalists as Butler defines

them to be. Both become wives and mothers, but only after *they* decide that is what they want to be. Unlike so many of Eliot's characters who jump into marriage before they are ready for it, Jo and Christie both know that this is what they desire for themselves, both are ready for it, and both are fulfilled by the experience.

Elaine Showalter in her "Introduction" to *Alternative Alcott* (1988) explains that Americans were generally further ahead on the woman question than the English. For example, as she points out, Dorothea in Eliot's *Middlemarch* agonizes for 800 pages about what her vocation is to be and she still never reaches a decision. Gwendolyn [or Gwendolen] Harleth in Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* does the same thing. Christie in Alcott's *Work* knows exactly what her purpose is – to help the cause of women. Christie is also much more independent than the Eliot characters (xxxix).

"Maggie Tulliver's Long Suicide" (1974) by Elizabeth Ermarth claims that "the social norms of St. Oggs exert a heavy influence on Maggie's development" and "they are norms according to which she is an inferior, dependent creature who will never go far in anything, and which consequently are a denial of her full humanity" (587).

Furthermore, according to Ermarth, by internalizing these crippling norms, Maggie grows up fatally weak because she has learned to rely on approval, to fear ridicule, and to avoid conflict. Ermarth asserts that like one is either Dodson or not-Dodson in the novel, one is also either male or not-male. In either case, the nots (not-Dodson or not-male) equate to being wrong in some way (588-9). Maggie learns and internalizes this idea and she becomes dependent on others; for example, she is dependent on others for their approval and love. In addition, Ermarth claims that "her need for love is a morbid dependency,

and Tom uses it to master her, threatening to hate her if she is not just what he requires” (593) and she despairs “at being shut out from acceptance by Tom” (597). These are, of course, very interesting points considering Eliot’s relation with her own brother, Isaac.

In F. R. Leavis’ “Introduction” (2004) to *Adam Bede*, he compares Eliot’s *Adam Bede* to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* pointing out many of the similarities and following the parallel storylines. He suggests that Eliot was likely influenced by *The Scarlet Letter* when she was writing *Adam Bede*. According to Leavis, Eliot “had read *The Scarlet Letter* when it came out, and [. . .] expressed a great admiration for Hawthorne” (x). Comparing *The Scarlet Letter* to *Adam Bede* is important as it yields Eliot’s agreements and disagreements in thought with Hawthorne. If Leavis’ assertions are to be believed, Eliot rewrote the storyline of *The Scarlet Letter* for a reason, and a comparison of the two novels can result in a conclusion about why Eliot chose to make these changes in relation to how she felt the main characters were either treated fairly or unfairly by society. However, if we believe Gordon Haight, a major Eliot critic who asserts that Eliot was only retelling a story she had heard from her aunt, Elizabeth Evans, it may be much more difficult to make the connections to Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also point out in their *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (2000), that by the end of the 18th century women were writing about fictional worlds in which patriarchal images and conventions were radically revised (44). Furthermore, as Gilbert and Gubar write, Eliot and Charlotte Brontë disguised themselves as male authors by

taking up male pseudonyms and then wrote about the flaws and failings of young women their own age as if to distance themselves as much as possible from the female sex (70).

In addition to critics specializing in one particular author, critics and historians who have written about the period in general, society, culture, and historical background information were also consulted in order to gain a greater understanding of the period in which the two authors were living and the challenges each faced. One such author is Margaret Fuller, who wrote the essay *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Fuller, an American, would likely have had experiences more similar to Alcott's than to Eliot's, but the general thoughts apply to both. Fuller desires equality for women in all realms. For example, she argues for educational rights for women (42) and expresses the need for general harmony between women and men, husbands and wives, and does not believe in the idea that the man should have more power than the woman (47). One poignant example depicting the current status of women during the period occurs when she describes the thoughts of expectant mothers who are wondering whether they will have a son or a daughter. The expectant mother might think of all the wonderful things to come if the child is a boy, while at the same time feel sympathy for the child if it should be born a girl, and all because of the inequality between rights and options open to men versus women. As she states, "I have heard mothers express not unfrequently" "sadness at the birth of a daughter" because "living [is] so entirely for men" (94).

According to Suzanne Romaine in her *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2000), Victorian cultural constructs sanctioned language as much as dress and behavior. As there were certain codes and expectations for how one should

dress and behave, so there were certain codes and expectations for how one should speak as well. According to Romaine, some pronunciations were “tantamount to social suicide” because they might seem uneducated. As Romaine also points out, women and minorities were typically devalued and so was their language. Susan Gal, also writing from the linguistics perspective in her “Language, Gender, and Power: An Anthropological Review” (1995) points out that manliness is typically associated with toughness and working-class culture while femaleness is typically represented by respectability, gentility, and high culture. As Gal states, it was not accidental that in literature and popular culture these same stereotypes also emerged in both America and England during the 19th century. As she claims, linguistic practices strengthen and reproduce such stereotypes while encoding them in books institutionalizes them.

Barbara Welter is a critic who is another source of information pertaining to general gender issues of the period. As she points out in her “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860” (1966), a true woman would not marry for money (171). This statement is especially crucial to one of the investigations this dissertation seeks to make: Alcott’s and Eliot’s responses and thoughts on marrying for money instead of love and vice versa. Both authors make it clear in their novels that money is not the reason one should choose to marry, despite the apparently predominant thought of the time that it should be at least of great consideration in choosing a potential spouse. Welter also details the four cardinal virtues by which women were often judged – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity – which, according to her, often translated into mother, daughter, sister, and wife (152) and thus restricted the accepted roles of women. As

Welter states, a woman who stepped out of the bounds of these four cardinal virtues was often considered to be “no woman at all” (154). She also points out that a woman was not supposed to have ambition and was not expected to think of financial matters or want to work (160) and that housewifery and domesticity were supposed to be the roles for women, along with other feminine duties and hobbies (165). In another article by Welter, “Anti-Intellectualism and the American Woman: 1800-1860” (1966), she further expounds upon the notion that women were not supposed to use their minds, but instead follow their hearts. Furthermore, since women were only supposed to be wives and mothers and nothing else, the belief during the early to mid- 19th century was that if a woman was an Amazonian, she got everything she deserved, an unhappy life, or death, for example. Margaret Fuller became a prime example of such a woman since she was considered an Amazonian-type and also had many personal tragedies in her life and death.

Points made by all the various critics establish the bounds within which Alcott and Eliot were expected to live and which they, in their own ways, stepped out of, and encouraged their readers to step out of as well. Alcott, who was greatly influenced by the women’s rights era and abolition, can often be seen arguing for equal rights for all by her portrayal of women and African Americans. By creating an ideal world in her novels, she was able to model for her readers what she believed the world should be like and how it should change in the coming years. Unlike Alcott, who tended to write for a much younger audience and who therefore modeled her ideal world for her young readers, it seems Eliot put the problems of society on display for her readers. Instead of creating the

ideal scenarios like Alcott does, she chooses to show the disastrous results of society's effects on people. For example, in *Adam Bede*, Hetty is doomed when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock and is unable to marry her true love and the father of her unborn child simply because they are of different social classes. Likewise, in *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie is also doomed when she is unable to obtain the same rights to education and freedoms as her brother Tom. In *Middlemarch*, even Dorothea is at least temporarily doomed when she chooses to marry a man she does not love simply because she believes that, by marrying him, she can have better access to knowledge and learning. If Dorothea and Maggie had been able to acquire knowledge without having to take such drastic measures due to the lack of gender equality, both would probably have done well for themselves. Likewise, had the class structures of the period not been so rigid, Hetty might have been able to marry her true love and the father of her child, and if this had been possible, it is likely that she too would not have met the same disastrous end. However, because of society's rules, all three of these main female characters in Eliot's novels are condemned to death or a life of misery as they pine after goals they cannot achieve. With the exception of Sylvia Yule in *Moods*, Alcott's characters are able to overcome the typical gender and social bounds and instead of falling into miserable or disastrous situations as so many of Eliot's characters do, Alcott's characters tend to live full, happy lives which become examples of what Alcott would have liked to see in real life.