

Dorothea Brooke's Political Economy: Romanticism and the Influence of John Ruskin on  
George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

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George Eliot, like her husband, George Henry Lewes, admired John Ruskin's writings. For example, in a letter to Sara Hennell dated 17 January 1858, she praises him, comparing his work with that of Wordsworth:

But I venerate him as one of great teachers of the day. The grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and solemnity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way . . . . He is strongly akin to the sublimest part of Wordsworth . . . .<sup>1</sup>

She felt moral affinities with Ruskin through Wordsworth, and she seems to have felt the same with his socio-political thought: "his little book on the 'Political Economy of Art' contains some magnificent passages" (Eliot, *Letters* 422).<sup>2</sup> But his influence on Eliot's novels, especially his ideas on political economy, still remains to be explored.

Born in 1819, Ruskin was greatly influenced by the Romantic poets and was thoroughly acquainted with Byron and Scott,<sup>3</sup> especially through his father, John James, who was enthusiastic about these writers. He also admired Wordsworth and read Shelley and Keats with appreciation. Following these Romantic poets, Ruskin celebrated both the

natural world and human nature as innately spontaneous and free, and his moral aspiration was supplemented by the evangelicalism taught by his mother, Margaret. His Romantic thought provided a philosophical background when he expounded his humanitarian theories of sensibility and morality in aesthetic writings like *The Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. He argued that individual will, which is indispensable to the progress of society, appears not only in art (individual and collective) but also in economic and political activities. He believed that Romantic aspiration was the main force for such progress, having been sustained through the centuries from masons in the Middle Ages to the middle and working class of the nineteenth century. His writings on “political economy” like *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris*, modified and adopted the same theory as his aesthetic writings. He criticised Victorian society for its indifference to social problems and economic disparities, and emphasized the importance of social affection (or what the Romantics called “sympathy”) as the essential force for social betterment: “. . . for the affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of political economy” (XVII: 31).<sup>4</sup> He clearly shows in *Munera Pulveris* that his vision of a better society was derived from Romantic self-development: “By sensibility I mean its natural perception of beauty, fitness, and rightness; or of what is lovely, decent, and just: faculties dependent much on race, and the primal signs of fine breeding in man; but cultivable also by education, and necessarily perishing without it” (XVII: 232). Ruskin’s ideal political economy required such aesthetics for social maturity and prosperity.

Since George Eliot, born in the same year as Ruskin, also read and admired Romantic literature, this article will focus on Eliot’s use of and reference to it as the common background and will explore the implicit but discernible influence of Ruskin’s socio-

political thought on Eliot's *Middlemarch*. This is the only novel by Eliot in which an aesthetic discussion develops into a socio-political one (just as Ruskin's own interest changed in the same way, from *Modern Painters* to *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris*). I shall first focus on the Romantic idealism of Dorothea to demonstrate Eliot's inheritance of Romanticism as similar to Ruskin's.<sup>5</sup> Her developing thought has to be excursively analysed to define her aspiring and altruistic disposition as comparable to Ruskin's.<sup>6</sup> In the second part of this article, I shall go on to introduce Ruskin as the key figure for re-reading the novel in a new light, especially for interpreting the shifting interest of Dorothea and Ladislaw from the aesthetic to the socio-political. Discussing Ruskin's political economy (according to Ruskin, the term represents not only domestic economy like the original Greek "oikonomia," but also social environment achievable by economic activities), I shall try to show how his socio-political thought is incorporated into Dorothea's behaviour in financial affairs, and how Eliot was influenced by Ruskin, especially in the emergence of Dorothea's Romantic political economy.

### **Dorothea and Romanticism**

*Middlemarch* was created by combining two different episodes (the Lydgate section started in 1869 and the Dorothea section in 1870). It is acknowledged that George Eliot's interest in social matters lay more in the narrative of the ambitious young physician than that of the philanthropic but naive woman. However, the prelude and the finale in which St. Theresa's image is imprinted upon Dorothea suggest that she functions as the centre of the novel's plots, as St. Theresa cut a figure in fourteenth century Avila, Spain. She is involved in every significant moment in the plot, bringing peace and order among her friends and acquaintances like Farebrother, Lydgate, and Rosamond. As Harvey points

out: “George Eliot does allow Dorothea her climactic moment and she prepares for it by a device which she also used in *The Mill on the Floss* (and of which James also was very fond); the mounting series of interviews—Dorothea and Lydgate, Dorothea and Rosamond, Dorothea and Will.”<sup>7</sup> Although the scope of her sympathy is limited, the finale describes how diffusively Dorothea contributes to achieving amicability in rural society and it seems, therefore, misleading to underestimate her function in the novel.<sup>8</sup>

Dorothea is not a complete, saint-like figure and her maturation process forms the novel's dynamism. (So, the novel can be considered as a kind of *Bildungsroman*.) Her only failure, her marriage to Casaubon, comes about mainly on her side due to her ardent wish to be wiser and more useful: “It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England” (3: 24).<sup>9</sup> However mistaken she is in seeing Casaubon as “a modern Augustine” (3: 21), her wish for self-realization is prompted and augmented partly by her self-absorbed idealism and her optimism about her spiritual prospects, and partly by her anxiety about an inactive womanhood: “For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective” (3: 24). This explains her wish to be liberated from her inertia under the yoke of womanhood and inactive wealth, and perhaps from Middlemarch. While her sense of devotion to others partly conceals her aspiration for intellectual development, her prospects of marriage offer an opportunity for her escapism and idealism. This contrast between escapism and meliorism identifies her with those Romantic idealists who tried to survey, re-interpret, and improve society through their individual development both in knowledge and sensitivity.

Her encounter with art works in museums and galleries in Rome reveals her inner passion as Romantic; she feels suffocated by them not only because of her puritan repugnance at the lavishness of Italian art, but also because of a rich sensibility overreacting to them: “Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions . . . all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensual and spiritual . . . jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of ideas which check the flow of emotion” (20: 159). Overloaded with impressions, she cannot relegate them to the background as other insensitive members of “Anglo-foreign society” superficially appreciate art pieces (20: 158).<sup>10</sup> This may mean that she unconsciously defends herself from her inner impulse for the sensuous and discovers her passion for the spiritual as replaceable by sensuous satisfactions. In this sense, her philanthropic projects for family, friends, and neighbours can be understood as the veil that camouflages her sensitivity and its versatile self-expression. Naumann sees in her “a sort of Christian Antigone—sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion” (19: 156). This predominance of sensitivity over reason also represents her as Romantic: “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” (1: 8). In this attitude, she is idealistic and Romantic like Romola, Daniel Deronda, and Felix Holt, who innocently believe in achieving their ideal vision through magnanimous compassion, Zionism, and social reformation. It is no wonder that Dorothea is destined to be attracted and bound to Ladislaw not just because she wishes to be freed from the stock values of the local society but also because she has a similar disposition.<sup>11</sup> Dorothea tells him of her creed of moral improvement: “That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don’t quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power

against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower” (39: 321).

Following the image of religious dichotomy of light and darkness, her language remains secularly tinted in her agnostic suspension of moral judgement and her approach towards the unattainable from anthropocentric thoughts. Ladislav immediately supplements her aesthetics about morality with his own creed: “To love what is good and beautiful when I see it” (39: 321). Persuading Ladislav into agreement with her, she reconfirms her own idea as Romantic: “But if you like what is good, that comes to the same thing” (39: 321). Encouraged by Ladislav, Dorothea assimilates his idea to her own, and she is unknowingly ready to combine aesthetic with socio-political thought.

Dorothea's idea of light's progress makes for an interesting parallel with Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, which gives the image of a widening circumference or skirt of moral goodness: “A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination . . . Poetry enlarges the circumference of imagination.”<sup>12</sup> This passage recalls Ruskin's claim for the moral significance of aesthetics, which George Eliot herself repeats in her review of the third volume of *Modern Painters*:

The fundamental principles of all just thought and beautiful action or creation are the same, and in making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in art, we are making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in morals; in learning how to estimate the artistic products of a particular age according to the mental attitude and external life of that age, we are widening our sympathy and deepening the

basis of our tolerance and charity.<sup>13</sup>

Dorothea's Romanticism, thus confirmed, develops through Ladislaw who gradually builds up her image as representative of the unattainable in his imagination and belief. At first, Ladislaw considered her to be "an unpleasant girl" for having married Casaubon, and as "stupid" (9: 65) about pictures. However, his view is immediately corrected when he is struck by her voice, which reveals her spiritual excellence: "There was too much cleverness in her apology: she was laughing both at her uncle and himself. But what a voice! It was like the voice of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp" (9: 65). Her spiritual beauty fascinates him, for voice is always associated with breath, which, in Greek, etymologically means spirit. He appropriately compares her to an Aeolian harp, as Shelley does: "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre" (480). Ladislaw has found his own soul perceiving its echo or its ideal partner in Dorothea's voice: "this soul out of my soul" (*Epipsychidion*, line 238). For him, she represents the ideal partly embodied, inspiration, and art itself: "You are a poem—and that is to be the best part of a poet—what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods" (22: 183). Her beautiful voice is also inseparable from her morality, as Ruskin generally discusses the beauty of voice in *The Queen of the Air* as follows: "the sweetness of voice comes of the past morality of her race" (XIX: 393). Seduced by Dorothea's voice, Ladislaw decides to quit painting and chooses to lead a life in which he can admire her and aid in her attaining spiritual satisfaction through social improvement: "The Æolian harp again came into his mind" (21: 171). It is important, however, to note that Ladislaw's motive is not simply overawed by her saint-like

influence. One must also recognize Ladislav's influence on Dorothea to reconsider her own ambition.

Having sensed reformative drive in Dorothea's aesthetics in philanthropy, Ladislav changes his professional target from art to politics. Dorothea criticizes the separation between the state of fine arts and ordinary people who never see and learn from them.

I should like to make life beautiful—I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it not better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it (22: 179-180).

Dorothea not only clarifies the problem as inclusive of social class but also connotes the possible efficiency of fine arts in the future; enjoyment in art may well be shared with most people, possibly for the public welfare: "art for life" or "beauty of life." This problem is to be solved by using the accumulated wealth and spending it for the public; then art will be valuable for all in the end. This is the very idea Ruskin argued in his *Political Economy of Art* ("A Joy For Ever"). He aimed to make paintings publicly accessible (especially in museums) as a means of developing morality among people through appreciating them. Inheriting Ruskin's idea, William Morris tried to realize the "art of life" by advocating the necessity of art in ordinary life in his socialistic writings like "The Art of the People" and "The Beauty of Life," which were published after *Middlemarch*. Like those of Ruskin and Morris, Dorothea's view of art in society seems to be of the Romantic tradition and aligns with the humanistic aesthetics of these two writers.



Divining Dorothea's socio-political intention, even in her "fanaticism of sympathy" (22: 180), Ladislaw sees the possibility of his cause being realized through Dorothea. This unique mixture of cause and love sustains him through all the trials of temptation such as his flirtation with Rosamond and Bulstrode's financial offer for his miserable past.<sup>14</sup> He strengthens his love for Dorothea by his imaginary bond with her in the Romantic cause: "to have within him such a feeling as he had towards Dorothea, was like the inheritance of a fortune" (47: 384). His political creed as duty emerges under the influence of Dorothea's "widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower" (39: 321); now his political aim is rendered as "cure" (46: 381) of "the massive sense of wrong" (46: 381).<sup>15</sup> Considering the affinity of the two minds, it seems as if she was subconsciously controlling Ladislaw as her political representative; or it is possible for us to regard the couple as a political unit. We can interpret that Ladislaw's activity with his seat in parliament provides Dorothea with a vista to ponder upon the indirect but practical effect of her philanthropy. In this light, it is significant that he proposes her own happiness as the one and only condition of it, responding to her extreme self-sacrifice:

The best piety is to enjoy—when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight—in art or in anything else (22: 180).

This epicurean solipsism superficially repeats that of Romanticism; one's better perception promises the other's improvement, and finally everyone's welfare. But the

situation is still the same that Dorothea, being a woman, is excluded from any actual socio-political activities, apart from certain kinds of donations and charities. Her self-realization is only possible through her husband's activities as an MP.

It is also possible to see that Dorothea subconsciously feels Ladislav is subordinate. Apart from her pity towards Ladislav "used so ill" (83: 659) and her respect for his thoughts and ideas, she defines him as controllable in her imagination. The narrator explains this as a parable of a princess and a strange animal. The animal is free and independent but needs tending; the princess is materially satisfied but needs freer self-expression:

But her soul thirsted to see him. How could it be otherwise? If a princess in the days of enchantment had seen a four-footed creature from among those which live in herds come to her once and again with a human gaze which rested upon her with choice and beseeching, what would she think of in her journeying, what would she look for when the herds passed her? Surely for the gaze which had found her, and which she would know again. (54: 440)

Ladislav as the tended animal is represented as a safe, controllable man for Dorothea. Together with the fact that Ladislav is popular with old ladies at Farebrother's and with children in the village, Eliot seems to be content to leave him a childlike creature who is not likely to shatter, even when faced with practicalities, the idealism of an inexperienced woman like Dorothea.<sup>16</sup>

## Dorothea and Ruskin

The question should be asked how Dorothea actually tries to put her creed into practice. She is always concerned about her social contributions, like building cottages for tenants or joining in the management of the new hospital, perhaps because of her evangelical education. But, as the reviewer in the *British Quarterly Review*, 1 April 1873, points out, her motive is far from Christian: "It is true that the Divine Spirit lives in her, but she does not live in Him. She has not the joy, though she has the strength of the spiritual life."<sup>17</sup> Her principle is individualistic, strongly conscious of her gender, her social position and her own character: "I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up" (54: 445). Having obtained the monetary means only available to ladies of the landed classes, her property has to be spent not only to realize local social improvement but also "to make her life greatly effective" (3: 24).<sup>18</sup> Her emphasis on individual determination contrasts with the mechanically systematic form of charity practised by churches and organizations; her principle is spontaneous and original, "never heeding that she was a very young woman" (76: 623). The picture in which the most able, intellectual men like Farebrother and Lydgate are at the mercy of a naive, young widow seems controversial for the taken-for-granted values in a local town in the early nineteenth century, as Tennyson describes a similar inversion as socially disturbing in *The Princess* (1847). Eliot describes the idealistic individualism of Dorothea as rebellious and therefore dramatic.

There are two major aspects to Dorothea's charity. First, her project is never equivocal about its practical effects as well as its precise targets. She expects a better social atmosphere in Farebrother's parsonage and the advanced medical treatment at the

new hospital under Lydgate's supervision. She carefully investigates their personalities and potentialities before she invests money in them. She asks Lydgate about Farebrother's life and sermons before she decides to transfer to him the vicarage at Lowick. In helping Lydgate too, she interviews him and reconfirms his moral goodness; she understands his honesty as extending to both personal and social spheres and worthy of her investment: "I believe that people are almost always better than their neighbours think they are" (72: 601). She willingly invests in human goodness and expects better social relationships from it, as Ruskin defines that true wealth derives from investment in people: "the true veins of wealth are purple—and not in Rock, but in Flesh" (XVII: 55-56).

Another aspect is her fervour, which is often described as reckless or quixotic in other people's eyes as Casaubon ironically describes it as "her Quixotic enthusiasm" (42: 344). Lydgate observes it also paradoxically when he acknowledges her financial help: "Lydgate did not stay to think that she was Quixotic" (76: 625). The image of Don Quixote implies both her misrecognition of social customs and her noble but blind belief in virtues and philanthropy.<sup>19</sup> Like St. Theresa, Dorothea becomes most quixotic when she proposes a utopian plan for workers: "I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make it a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well" (55: 449). Considering Dorothea as a Romantic figure, it is not so surprising. There were many utopian plans and experiments for ideal communities both in the early and the later nineteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Coleridge planned the scheme of Pantisocracy together with Robert Southey. In the USA, the experiment of Brook Farm (1841-47) in West Roxbury was put into practice, supported by such prominent figures as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ralph Waldo

Emerson. In the latter half of the century, there were many utopian schemes and novels, including Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). But, above all, the most surprising fact is that Ruskin actually put his utopian plan into practice. As he reports its progress in *Fors Clavigera*, he conceived and carried out the plan called St. George's Guild, providing land and budget both from supporters' offers and from his own property (one tenth of it). Some small amounts of land were prepared for reluctant tenants, but it turned out to be a failure in less than thirty years. Together with this headlong project, the affinities between Dorothea and Ruskin are further suggested when we learn that *Don Quixote* was Ruskin's favourite book. Mentioning the valour of Quixote as a sad irony, given that his true moral tenderness is wasted and ridiculed, Ruskin was deeply sympathetic to the figure, especially when the hero becomes insane without being rewarded for his efforts.<sup>20</sup> This echoes Ruskin's own difficult situation when he experienced mental pressure for publishing his work on political economy only to receive vehement critique, and when all his social activities including the utopian project seemed unsuccessful. He felt Quixote so close that, in his report of the Guild, he called himself "the Don Quixote of Denmark Hill" (XXX: 110). Given her humanism, impulsiveness, and utopianism, one can see in Dorothea Ruskin's style of charity and social contribution.

Compared to the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo, which Ruskin repudiated, Ruskin's theory on political economy is naively humane, especially in substituting mutual reliance and affection for supply and demand as motivation for economic exchange. Defining wealth as "power over men" (XVII: 46), attainable by means other than monetary possessions, he opposes the idea of monopolizing wealth and proposes its distribution among the poor, while maintaining class distinctions as

indispensable for ideal human relationship based on feudal duty and gratitude. This theory, which was first proposed in *Political Economy of Art* ("A Joy For Ever"), summarized in *Unto This Last*, and concluded in *Munera Pulveris*, caused a strong reaction among the public. In particular, *Unto This Last* attracted immense criticism for the naiveté shown by Ruskin in the use of biblical lessons to describe the mechanism of economy. The *Saturday Review* was the harshest in attacking Ruskin as a national disgrace: "insulting his country and reproaching his neighbours with the querulous female virulence, he may obtain a certain sort of worship."<sup>21</sup> The critique represents a typical reaction from the conservative publication, but its characterization of Ruskin's language as female is also significant because it associates his belief in distributing the wealth of the rich with church charities in which genteel women like Dorothea often took the lead.

Dorothea, who cannot but think it her duty to distribute her property among people in need, must have agreed with Ruskin's theory. She reproachfully contrasts herself as extravagant with common people, watching a scene of their lives, which has been repeated for aeons:

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 (80: 644-45).

Like Ruskin, her strong sense of duty and conscience as a possessor of property embraces the common feeling against capitalistic exploitation on the one hand, and typifies her Romantic hopes for social amelioration on the other. For example, Ruskin's comment on luxury, in which he attacks the wealthy for their ignorance of the poor and self-complacency, glosses her view: "but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruellest man living could not sit at feast, unless he sat blindfold" (XVII: 114). Dorothea, of the select, genteel class, properly understands the situation and contributes money to the betterment of society, following her conscientious command and executing it as her obligation. Ruskin defines a person like Dorothea who knows how to use property as "valiant." A "valiant" person, Ruskin explains, knows how to achieve wellbeing by spending money for oneself and others' sake: "that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others" (XVII: 105). In short, his ideal man of wealth has to be happy and confident in his private life so as to be able to take care of the weaker or the impoverished.<sup>22</sup>

Dorothea seems to unknowingly aspire to become this kind of figure, following Ladislaw's advice about her own happiness: "The best piety is to enjoy" (22: 180). She now balances her private contentment (by her marriage to him) with her philanthropic ambition, rightly recognizing her social and economic position and making it most effective by her altruistic investment: "the best way of spending money" (83: 657).

No life would have been possible for Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the

doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself [ . . . ] Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help (finale: 680).

In this sense, her marriage to Ladislaw is indispensable for self-realization, and she has discovered the way money can bless people's lives, which is paraphrased by Ruskin as follows: "THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE" (XVII: 105).

Dorothea's principle in political economy is congruent with Ruskin's also in its individualism. Although its ultimate purpose is collective, Ruskin believes that humanitarian economic distribution is only feasible individually and it eventually promises awakening of a social conscience: "all effectual advancement towards the true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort" (XVII: 111). Also in his criticism of architecture, "The Nature of Gothic," he argues that individual art works produced by masons were indispensable for the organic wholeness of Gothic architecture. Similarly, compared to St. Theresa's achievement, Dorothea's effort is positively assessed in the "epilogue" of the novel; a small, insignificant effort of an individual eventually has invaluable influence:

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably *diffusive*: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs (finale: 682 [my italics]).



Although the details of Dorothea's contribution to society are unknown, it is suggested that she has devoted herself to creation of its amicable atmosphere, like Ruskin's happiest man, having "the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others" (XVII: 105). Far from defeatism, this is the victory of individualism, and, in this sense, Dorothea's self-realization is exceptional among Eliot's heroines, including Hetty, Maggie, Romola, and Gwendolen. As Bodenheimer comments, individualism may appear to be beaten but in its spirit never yields to the convincing picture of reality: "the story of a 'wide' idealistic mind coming into collision with the intractable prejudices around it and finding its heroism in bending to that narrowness in the name of common humanity."<sup>23</sup> What makes Dorothea's principle of social aid so characteristic of Romanticism is this victorious individualism.<sup>24</sup>

Dorothea has made beautiful her own life first, Ladislav's next, and then the lives of others, gradually but steadfastly proceeding towards the unreachable goal of overall welfare. As Ruskin comments on the effect of creating beauty for moral progress, Dorothea, through her own choices and activities, has recreated herself as a secular saint for her neighbours: "If he produce or make good and beautiful things, they will *re-create* him" (XVII: 151). Escaping the grasp of Casaubon's "The Dead Hand" and "The Shadow of Death," Dorothea has attained self-realization and contentment by producing the light for better social relationships.

The image of Dorothea's "skirts of light" is repeatedly used when she works for the sake of others. The most apparent case is when she interviews Lydgate about his financial problem; it describes how her inner light (or her compassion) influences and encourages him even to change his view (or his light) on life. Different meanings of

“light” are deliberately used to create an image of moral progress. Her light of sympathy illuminates his self-contempt under the economic pressure and social animosity to make him realize it and to make him redeem his true self by the power of her belief in him:

“The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character” (76: 624).

Compared to the money offered by Bulstrode to protect his reputation (which would destroy Bulstrode himself as well as Lydgate), Dorothea's economy proves the best use of money, following Ruskin's principle of “social affection,” and changes the lights for him. As Lydgate comments that “her love might help a man more than her money” (76: 629), her principle of help follows that of Ruskin. It is no wonder that, while appraising her as if she were the Virgin Mary, Lydgate felt such social affection in her that she was “a fountain of friendship towards men” (76: 629).

The image of light is also important in Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Using the metaphor of a veil to describe the blind self-righteousness of the middle class and their indifference towards the misery of labourers, he asks them to lift the veil and see the reality:<sup>25</sup>

Raise the veil boldly; face the light; and if, as yet, the light of the eye can only be through tears, and the light of the body through sackcloth, go thou forth weeping, bearing precious seed, until the time come, and the kingdom, when Christ's gift of bread, and bequest of peace, shall be “Unto this last as unto thee” (XVII: 114).

Ruskin describes the misery of the working class at which one cannot look without being moved to tears in pity and sadness. This is the same kind of sadness that Dorothea feels

for the labourers in the village and for the tenants at Tipton. He argues that “the light of the eye” must be informed of the misery, and this external influence accordingly corresponds with the inner light, “the light of the body,”<sup>26</sup> or compassion, which induces one to redress oneself and to proceed diligently towards a better future of mutual welfare. The interview between Dorothea and Lydgate constitutes both an explanation and commentary on Ruskin's doctrine.

Although Ruskin describes an indefinite future in which everybody is given bliss according to promises of Christian teachings, his belief is at one with Dorothea's regarding the gradual and limited improvement as immediately feasible.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that Eliot represents Dorothea as a successful practitioner of Ruskinian creed, not a failure. Ruskin's description of an ideal philanthropist at the ending of *Munera Pulveris* can be rightly applied to Dorothea: “He hath dispersed abroad. He hath given to the poor. His righteousness remaineth for ever” (XVII: 283). When Dorothea ponders upon how to execute her financial plan, she sits with books in the library at Lowick:

She sat down in the library before her particular little heap of books on political economy and kindred matters, out of which she was trying to get light as to the best way of spending money so as not to injure one's neighbours, or—what comes to the same thing—so as to do them the most good (83: 657).

Surely, she must have had Adam Smith and David Ricardo, but it is not so far-fetched to think that, in Eliot's mind, John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was also among these books. She wishes “not to injure one's neighbours” but “to do them the most good,” and the most appropriate theory of political economy would have come from Ruskin, who sought

an economic system based on “social affection” (XVII: 25), which brings happiness even “unto this last.”

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 422-23.

<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, she partly rejects Ruskin's political economy as "stupendous specimens of arrogant absurdity" despite her recognition of his "magnificent passages." Her ambivalent attitude seems to be due to her reverence for John Stuart Mill (Ruskin's enemy on this matter) with whom Lewes was personally acquainted.

<sup>3</sup> Attempting to become a poet like Byron, Ruskin left some poems in the style of Byron like "A Scythian Banquet Song," "The Tears of Psammenitus," *Iteriad, Athens* (unpublished), and *Journal of a Tour through France to Chamouni, 1835*.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Ruskin's writings are from *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols., ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-12) and are cited hereafter in the text in parentheses with volume (in Roman numerals) and page numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Although there has been a general view that Eliot is a realist, Romanticism is often represented by her characters like Dorothea, Ladislav, Felix Holt, and Daniel Deronda, as some critics have pointed out. In *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, NY: Harvard University Press, 1980), Donald D. Stone surveys Eliot's development as a novelist in terms of her absorption of Romanticism: "Eliot's celebration of the powers of the artistic imagination places her firmly in the Romantic tradition" (241). In "'A New Unfolding of Life: Romanticism in the Late Novels of George Eliot,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26 (1998): 273-302, Edward Dramin similarly discusses her achievement as a kind of refinement of Romantic thought into something feasible: "when they offer practical guidance for facilitating human interaction and resolving immediate human dilemmas" (292). K. M. Newton, in *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (London: Macmillan, 1981), describes the development from the egotistic to the organicist Romantic, focusing on Romantic tendency in thoughts rather than specific influences.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I object to the distinction Dramin and Newton make between two kinds of Romanticism in Eliot's novels. Dramin negatively uses moral judgement about "unrealistic" Romanticism: "She is also critical of Romantics . . . when they are 'unrealistic' . . . On the other hand, Eliot is appreciative of other Romantics . . . when they are 'realistic'" (Dramin 292). Newton contrasts the "organicist" with "egotistic" side of Romanticism, but, since Ladislav partly represents the "egoistic" side and still leads Dorothea to her self-realization, this simple distinction does not seem to work in explaining their interactive development very well (see Newton 11).

<sup>7</sup> W. J. Harvey, *The Art of George Eliot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), 147-48.

<sup>8</sup> In "George Eliot: *Middlemarch*," in *George Eliot: Middlemarch*, ed. Patrick Swinden (London: Macmillan, 1972), David Daiches denies that Dorothea is "the moral centre of the novel" (117); that is, the moral standard Eliot tries to establish in the novel. Although Dorothea is idealistic, Eliot's conclusion is apparent in the finale where it is people like Dorothea who can bring about social peace and goodness. F. R. Leavis attacks Eliot's vague delineation of Dorothea as a failure when she is inspired and becomes self-important. Here, even if Leavis succeeds in arguing from the viewpoint of the author's maturity, he seems to be reluctant to see the novel's effect in illuminating the reality of human life through Dorothea's idealistic eye. The theme of her aspiration is left undiscussed. See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948). In "Dorothea and the Theresa-Complex," in *George Eliot: Middlemarch*, ed. Patrick Swinden (London: Macmillan, 1972), Lawrence Lerner comments on this, defending Dorothea as the moral centre: "I think that Leavis is right and Daiches wrong about the balance of the book: Dorothea is its moral centre. But I think Leavis is wrong, and George Eliot right, about her soul-hunger" (234). This article puts Dorothea as the centre of the novel but does not deny Eliot's achievement in the Lydgate part, which has been praised by many critics.

<sup>9</sup> All quotations of Eliot's *Middlemarch* are from *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford University Press, 1986) and are cited in parentheses in the text with chapter and page numbers.

<sup>10</sup> After her initiation into Italian art, Dorothea could not control her emotion within herself and against Casaubon, as the following passage shows: "She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium: all her strength was scattered in fits of agitation, of struggle, of despondency, and then again in visions of more complete renunciation, transforming all hard conditions into duty" (20: 163).

<sup>11</sup> As Elizabeth Langland comments in "Inventing Reality: The Ideological Commitments of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*," *Narrative* 2 (1994), 87-111, their Romantic love is totally different from

others' in the sense that it ignores the custom and common sense of *Middlemarch*: "the novel works to locate their passion outside of social convention and custom" (104). Ladislav is needed to be introduced as the harbinger of the beyond for Dorothea, and their love, when it is consummated in marriage, has to be continued in London, outside *Middlemarch*.

<sup>12</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 487-88.

<sup>13</sup> George Eliot, *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (Penguin, 1990), 368.

<sup>14</sup> Ladislav comments inwardly: "it would have been impossible for him ever to tell Dorothea that he had accepted it" (61: 510).

<sup>15</sup> The narrator comments: "Our sense of duty must often wait for some work which shall take the place of dilettantism" (46: 377). It is interesting to compare Ladislav's development in profession with the vicissitudes of Ruskin's criticism from aesthetics to socio-politics. Ruskin, who tried to find the true beauty in paintings and architecture as morality, finally shifted his interest in nurturing it by education and in society, which he proposed to improve not systematically but individually.

<sup>16</sup> Yearning for Ladislav, Dorothea makes his image out of bearing and caring for her own child. It is obvious that she thinks of him not as her superior but subordinate. The image is that of the women in *The Princess*, where Ida accepts the prince as an alternative of Lady Psyche's child, a companion not commanding her.

<sup>17</sup> *George Eliot: Middlemarch*, ed. Patrick Swinden (London: Macmillan, 1972), 82.

<sup>18</sup> The money question always appears in Eliot's novels, and the comparable case is Gwendolen's in *Daniel Deronda* who had to accept Grandcourt's proposal in order to save her mother and sisters from poverty and disgrace. In a harsher situation, Gwendolen's judgement is realistic and inevitable, while Dorothea is allowed to behave according to her own principles. In *Romola*, Romola is ironically estranged from Tito because of his avidity for wealth and success.

<sup>19</sup> It is significant that Cervantes composed the novel while St. Theresa was active, and that St. Theresa of Avila, who loved and wrote stories of chivalry for fun before becoming a nun, behaved bravely and recklessly when establishing monasteries.

<sup>20</sup> See John Ruskin's letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 9 August 1870 (XXXVII: 17).

<sup>21</sup> *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J. L. Bradley (London: Routledge, 1984), 274.

<sup>22</sup> "That your neighbour should, or should not, remain content with *his* position, is not your business; but it is very much your business to remain content with your own" (XVII: 112).

<sup>23</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 67.

<sup>24</sup> In terms of cause and effect, Barbara Hardy's view is right in describing Dorothea's charity as insignificant in *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: Athlone Press, 1959): "Her generous warmth has no more than a brief effect on the others, and they go on in their chill, not radically changed . . . but many of her actions are not idealized but shown as decidedly unspectacular. It is a novel where there are no moral miracles" (101). But it is important to remember that Dorothea's actions help to save people around her from their crises, regardless of their lives after them. And it is the moment of salvation to which they feel Dorothea most contributes. It is admitted, as Stone says, that this is the only triumph in the novel: "But it is precisely toward this triumph of their Romanticism that *Middlemarch* tends: Dorothea's and Will's victory is all the more notable in the context of a novel in which all forms of delusions of grandeur . . . are scotched" (Stone 235). However, in my opinion, their delusions are necessary steps for their achievement and, without them, another step for practical reformation is

<sup>25</sup> The image of the veil not only comes from biblical references but also reminds us of Shelley's sonnet, "Lift not the painted veil," from which George Eliot took the title and major image for her middle-length story, "The Lifted Veil."

<sup>26</sup> Ruskin explains this inner light as "the spiritual sun" (XXVIII: 614) in Letter LXVI in *Fors Clavigera*: "that you cannot love the real sun, that is to say physical light and colour, rightly, unless you love the spiritual sun, that is to say justice and truth, rightly" (XXVIII: 614).

<sup>27</sup> In "*Middlemarch*: Narrative Unity in the Story of Dorothea Brooke," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (1961): 17-31, John Hagan points out that Dorothea's practical thinking is flexible: "In short, though Dorothea continues to long for far off objects and larger distant goals (one of her projects is a grandiose land reclamation scheme curiously reminiscent of Ruskin's Guild of St. George), she is



now also thinking practically in terms of known facts. In telling Mr. Brooke that 'I think we have no right to come forward and urge wider changes for good until we have tried to alter the evils which lie under our hands' (Chapter XXXIX), she is proving that she has learned to obey the Carlylean gospel of 'doing the duty that lies nearest'" (28-29).