

GALLEY
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An Open Letter On Women

Suffice it to say that a little matter has reached my ears. No need to question how. It is the delicate issue of the rights of women presently raging at Bennington College. I purport now to offer an opinion. I am not, I should add, an official member of WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). Nor of WRAP (Women's Radical Action Project). Nonetheless, I have, to recommend me, membership in no inferior group: I belong, incontrovertibly, to the Female Sex.

I have recently received a mimeographed sheet cataloguing famous men's attitudes toward ordinary women. I hereby salute the enthusiasm which went into its preparation, and I highly commend the passion which embraced such a cause. But ladies, and indeed I rank among you, are men in fact your worst enemies? There is, after all, only one salient thing that a man can do to you and that you cannot do to him. Consider, if you will, all the ways in which Female Offenders can deflate and deprecate themselves and each other.

I mention, for example, George Eliot. I will not dwell with malice on the fact that she chose to coin a male name. I will not. But does it not debase Middlemarch to contain the statement that "modes of education make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance"? Is a book which offers such an assertion any longer relevant? Can we still suffer it to be read? For truly we must concede the statement to be false. Bennington College is its disproof.

Yet it is George Eliot herself who offers us some hope. You have read Middlemarch and no doubt you recall the following passage: "If there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude". I implied hope, I did not promise it. I implied it because, along with George Eliot, I believe that the level of feminine incompetence is infinitely more various than has recently been demonstrated.

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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