

# The Way from Ellen Glasgow's Major Novels to Magnum Opus *Barren Ground* and Analysis of its Protagonist's Character

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to show the passage from Ellen Glasgow's first novels to her Magnum Opus *Barren Ground*. The goal of the article is to link the themes and characters appearing in some of her key novels to *Barren Ground's* central character, Dorinda Oakley and to analyze her multifaceted nature. The analysis is based on qualitative research using critical sources and literary texts. The latter are mainly used while showing the creative way from the first novel to *Barren Ground*, while the former are utilized to analyze Dorinda's character.

The article discusses a number of Glasgow's significant novels dealing with women's dilemma between their duties and self-realization, specifically mentioning the so-called 'women's trilogy' in which feminist themes and issues are of primary focus. These are seen as the stage directly preceding *Barren Ground* with their heroines viewed as predecessors of Dorinda Oakley. Dorinda's character is analyzed further with the focus on three different facets of her personality associated with religion, vocation, and love. The main conclusion made is that these facets of Dorinda's character manifest themselves in her activities stemming from the understanding of her mission proceeding from her religious background and finding its realization of her vocational activities after failing in and ultimately rejecting happiness in love.

**Keywords:** Dorinda Oakley, barren ground, feminism, mission, vocation, love

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## Introduction

Prominent writer from the American South Ellen Glasgow is known for the novels, which, on the one hand, portray life in the South unveiling itself at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with its social, historic, or economic peculiarities, and, on the other hand, describe and uncover the nature and aspirations of women as seen through the prism of Southern life and community (High, P. B., 1986). Basically, Glasgow's work, describing the fate of the people of the South with its women playing the main part of the story, provides an original insight into and unique version of the American dream as seen from the perspective of its heroines. Glasgow's literary legacy comprises 20 novels, each having its own themes, heroes, and setting. With Glasgow's debut having started in 1897, most critics agree though that her mastery reached its climax in 1925 with the publication of *Barren Ground*, the novel having become the quintessence of creative approach she developed and mastered through years of writing (Richards, 1971). The themes of failures and success of a sensitive but strong young woman refuting happiness in love at the expense of conquering heights in professional life, failing in romance but winning in business, sacrificing personal for the sake of the common, all that described and delivered with utmost creative mastery, turned the novel into the Magnum Opus of the Virginian writer (Spiller, et al., 1955). The character of the novel's protagonist, Dorinda Oakley is versatile and multifaceted, of which three main facets can be distinguished. The sides of her personality somehow overlap with those of both the writer and of the heroines of other novels, the latter serving as steps on the ladder of ascension from the first novel published to *Barren Ground*. Let us trace some of those steps and see how their themes and characters unfold in the personality of Dorinda, who manages to convert vain striving for happiness into the 'vein of iron' of triple-natured success and accomplishments.

### Overview of Major Novels before *Barren Ground*

Ellen Glasgow's first novel, *The Descendant*, published in 1897, is composed of elements which seem as programmatic ones for her subsequent novels, providing basis for Glasgow's following works and representing the manifesto which incorporates various themes, with the woman's issues being the subject of our concern. The novel's fabula foreshadows the fabula of *Barren Ground*, and it is amazing that it is reiterated in Glasgow's most personal and significant work. The story explores a number of themes, the dominant one being (strong) woman's choice between love and business. It is shown that, acting as a protagonist of her own plot, the woman is supposed to neglect love and family life as long as she is willing to succeed in her business life. Rachel neglects private life in favor of career, and it is what Dorinda Oakley will do in *Barren Ground*, in which Michael Ackersham will be replaced by Jason Greylock. Glasgow's other heroines renounce private life at the expense of professional one as well. The theme was very dear to Glasgow, as she explains it in *The Woman Within*, and she, although considering the idea, would not be able to fulfill it completely until she got fifty – a biographic landmark represented in *Barren Ground* when Dorinda Oakley gets fifty and tells her step-son that she has made the decision to give up any efforts to marry again (AWW, 1980).

The novel *The Voice of the People* was published in 1906, following Glasgow's first arduous love affair, starting discussing the accomplishments of Southerners – 'the Southern Dream' – which are equal to American Dream to Glasgow (Santas, 1965). This novel starts the series of novels dealing with social history of Virginia retold from the

standpoint of characters who triumph over social uncertainty. This theme shall develop in her subsequent novels culminating in *Barren Ground* through development of the already mentioned notion of the 'vein of iron' – vitality of a strong individual whose dream survives harsh reality. Glasgow's novels written in 1913, 1916, and 1925 constitute the women's trilogy, as they explore the theme of strength of woman linked to woman's education (Wagner, 1982).

The first of these novels, *Virginia* (1913), deals with tradition and feminism. One of the feminist ideas of the novel is expressed through contrast of marriages. The novel asserts that the more independent the woman is in marriage, the happier the marriage itself is. Those husbands who follow the 'traditional' form of marriage are actually not satisfied, while those who follow the more modern approach, find happiness. Hence, the woman should be given greater freedom in marriage to ensure happiness and eventual sustainability. Also, by juxtaposing two contrasting friends – Virginia and Susan, the author asserts that happiness and self-realization cannot be achieved through care-giving and admiration, that following one's own goals and aspirations is necessary for a woman to establish herself in the world and get what she deserves (Catapano, 1989).

*Life and Gabriella* (1916), the second part of the trilogy, brings forward the vein-of-iron character of its heroine. In the span of time, during which Gabriella succeeds professionally and financially, she hardly socializes herself with anybody beyond her work, barely goes out, and totally confines herself in her professional and family life, preferring seclusion to socialization (Rouse, 1962). Essentially, Gabriella's destiny and the resolution of the novel is very similar to those of Dorinda Oakley and *Barren Ground*. That is the output most liked by Ellen Glasgow. *Life and Gabriella*, the second novel of 'the woman trilogy', actually represents the transition from *Virginia* to *Barren Ground*.

Probably, the most astounding fact about *Life and Gabriella*, is that it forecasts the following life of Ellen Glasgow's herself. Similar to Gabriella, Glasgow got disappointed in relationships at early stages of her life. Like Gabriella's potential, Glasgow's talent bloomed when her first engagement collapsed. Both becoming forty realized of shallowness of being aloof from family life. Gabriella, the heroine of the 1916 novel, thought that she found her love (Ben O'Hara), which proved wrong. In 1916 and following years, Glasgow also thought she found her true love (Henry Anderson), which also turned fruitless. Just like Gabriella, Glasgow decided not to continue her relationship with Anderson, and just like her heroine, she cherished in vain the unfulfilled desire of making the broken relationship permanent. As for the affair with Anderson, it eventually transformed into *Barren Ground*'s protagonist Dorinda Oakley's love affair described on the pages of the novel (Richards, 1971).

### **Triple Nature of Dorinda Oakley's Character and Life in *Barren Ground***

Dorinda Oakley's character is very complex and profound. So are the associated themes in the novel. The heroine's character manifests itself through its actions throughout the plot of the novel. Thus, the plot and its action disclose the inherent qualities and motives inside Dorinda's soul. The complexity of heroine's character is multifold. Therefore, its manifestations are to be clustered in thematic groups in order to facilitate the analysis. We deem it necessary to identify three basic thematic groups which are interrelated with each other, creating the mosaic of the novel in which the protagonist takes the leading part. Thus, Dorinda's character and passage can be broken into three areas:

1. Religion;
2. Vocation;

### 3. Love.

The attitude, success, or failure in each of these areas create the picture of the unique life passage of Dorinda Oakley's, her initial fall and eventual rise and triumph over the circumstances. At the same time, we are setting as our task to analyze and synthesize these areas from the feminist perspective to answer some of the dissertation's research questions.

## **Dorinda and Religion**

Considering Dorinda's religious background is indispensable to understand the nature of her victory in the existential reality which she found herself in. Moreover, religion can be viewed as a cornerstone on which Dorinda's mindset is developed in order to bloom further into her practical, business-oriented disposition as well as her controversial but firm conclusions which she eventually makes about men and love.

Dorinda's victory has metaphysical, religious roots. Her victory is fulfillment of her life mission, which she set after frustration from love. Mission is here the key term, the starting point, determining Dorinda's actions in Parts Second and Third. In the book, Dorinda stands out as a missionary which stems from her religious background, parents, and ancestors.

The name of Dorinda's great grandfather, John Calvin Abernethy, speaks of itself. A strict Calvinist, a dedicated Presbyterian, John Calvin retired from his mission in India and Ceylon, and came to Virginia to inherit the property of his Scotch-Irish predecessors. He has earned and became known for great reputation, and proved to be not only a master in preaching, but also a zealous propagator of faith, the quality so characteristic for romantic Presbyterians seeking opportunities of bringing the voice of the gospel to unexplored areas under the principles of the Convent incorporated from Scotland to England and then exported overseas.

John Calvin's piousness was profound and sincere. He was a person of enough composedness, strength, and thriftiness to ensure as many as three generations of his posterity not to decline economically – typical components being some distinguishing signs of Protestant ethics. Soon after his arrival, he settled down next to Pedlar's Mill and initiated the building of a small Presbyterian church. John Calvin was a missionary, so he continued his work in Virginia, talking Methodists into conversion into Presbyterianism, and, as the text says, "the Presbyterian faith sprang and blossomed like a Scotch thistle in barren ground" (*Barren Ground*, p. 29).

John Calvin's granddaughter, Eudora, Dorinda's mother, inherited religious zeal of her grandfather, and repented the original sin which have brought her to marriage with her husband from whom she bore Dorinda.

Part One's chapter IV shows the piety of the family by description of family prayers. It says that they provided the "solitary emotional outlet" (*BG*, p. 53) in Dorinda's existence. While reading psalms, her repressed and thwarted natural passions were transforming into spiritual ardor. Eudora would constantly uphold religious fervor in the family: when boys misbehaved, or Dorinda proclaimed that she did not have time for prayers, mother would answer in the best way of the Covenant that it was only religion that sustained her to keep going strong. Oakleys being Scotch-Irish Protestants by their origin, their religious dedication and fervor is additionally demonstrated by mentioning the engraving of John Knox rebuking Mary Stuart and martyrs for true faith, while the citation from the Scripture about the heavens glorifying God as "the firmament sheweth his handywork" (*BG*, p. 54) sounds as if declared by mouth of great Scottish religious reformer himself.

Quintessential is the conversation between Eudora and Dorinda in Chapter VIII, rereading which we learn that Dorinda's life passage actually reiterates that of her female ancestors. Eudora retells the story of Dorinda's great aunts. One of those failed in love and attempted drowning herself, and after having been rescued, married in a less romantic

way. Living as far as her nineties, she was eventually praised for her wisdom. Another of her great aunts, Abigail, was frustrated by unanswered love and nearly got insane and was put in the asylum. When she recovered from the shock, she became a missionary and went overseas. These women were very close to John Calvin Abernethy. These women shared the same fate and all were missionaries. It is amazing that by the doom of fate, or by the will of God or destiny Dorinda repeated their life. However, she did not only repeat their love experience, Dorinda also assumed a mission in her life, and her mission proceeds from her religious background transforming into her business activities, which reform and transform her community. Dorinda's aspiration for the calling higher than simple marriage goes through her female ancestors through her mother. According to Eudora, when she was just sixteen or seventeen, she felt a call to be a missionary, and she craved for that more than for anything else, the idea she conceived after having heard her favorite hymn, being a missionary one. Eudora yearned for a missionary work in Africa or Asia (where John Calvin missioned), and on that ground she got engaged with her first fiancée. Not love but the desire to fulfill God's will drove her to him, as he was going to sail overseas to work there. However, Eudora's zeal was interrupted when he untimely died, and she had to draw the yearning of working in foreign lands out of her mind, especially after John Calvin mentioned that she was too young to know whether she indeed was a person of vocation. Then Eudora got engaged and married with Dorinda's father, and when her son was born, the craving for vocation as a missionary inflamed in her mind with new strength and energy. She was so obsessed with this wish which was never to be fulfilled that she constantly had to substitute it with hard work to turn her mind away from that.

Eudora mentors Dorinda in terms of marriage, expressing belief that her daughter's marriage shall be successful. "You'll be all right married, daughter, if you just make up your mind that whatever happens, you ain't going to let any man spoil your life", says she on page 91, and these words prove truly prophetic later. They echo "the vein of iron in Dorinda's nature" (p. 91) – Glasgow's favorite metaphor. In her soul she agrees with her mother, feeling that not only she can live without Jason (he has not betrayed her yet!), but without any other man. She admires the position of her great aunts and is willing to take after them, and when Eudora applies the phrase "running after men" to other two of her great aunts, Dorinda gets frustrated. She becomes suspicious that people evaluate her relationship with Jason in the same way. She even thinks that Jason thinks about her in these terms. Instantly her romantic feeling, which was as light as a feather, assumes self-consciousness. She reconsiders her rendezvous with Jason scheduled at Gooseneck Creek after sunset as impossible. She cannot allow herself to go to the rendezvous after what she has heard. When Eudora is gone, Dorinda feels that her romantic desire is surpassed by some stronger emotion, which strengthens her resolution. And now, when they have hardly been engaged, her Presbyterian nature prevails over her romanticism, and she decides to avoid him till their marriage as much as possible. That moment and that day Dorinda experiences the struggle between her earthly body and her spiritual soul, and by the end of the day she feels that her soul gained the upper hand over her body. Although she yearns to go to the rendezvous, she stays indoors in her mother's room, meditating over John Calvin's written exhortation on moderation. Upon the coming of the night, she feels that blood turns back to her veins. "In the first fight she had conquered, but it was one of those victories, she knew without admitting the knowledge, which are defeats", says the narration (*BG*, p. 92). These words foreshadow the upcoming events, and prove that Dorinda's religious zeal causing her to avoid Jason till their engagement might have caused the unfortunate output of her unrealized expectations in love. Dorinda puts faith higher than love. And it will be her faith which will subsequently also make her forgive.

## Dorinda and Vocation

Dorinda viewed her mission as spirituality in love, but the destiny prepared another mission for her. Her ancestors including her mother considered their vocation as converting the infidel into true faith (Presbyterianism). She herself had never thought about that, although had been brought up in the strict Presbyterian manner and style. She thought that pious life combined with righteous behavior and relationship within marriage would be her true mission. But either voluntarily or involuntarily, she had to follow the footsteps of her genetic predecessors, although in the different field.

During one of her first meetings with Jason at the red gate of Five Oaks, Jason approaches Dorinda singing an old Christian hymn and soon they start discussing the life at Five Oaks and nearby farms. Although in the novel Jason is seen as Dorinda's antagonist, his role in shaping her vision regarding her part in making changes at Pedlar's Mill and Five Oaks is determining. Besides being a doctor, the occupation he is not satisfied with, Jason is a missionary as well, a lay preacher, working to convert the locals into the religious denomination he represents (although we don't know exactly Jason's religious affiliation from the novel). During their meeting, Jason complains to Dorinda that his efforts in awakening local residents are apparently fruitless ("I thought when I first came back that I might be able to wake up the farmers, but it is uphill ploughing to try to get them out of their rut" – *BG*, p.64). And when they meet at that very place the next time, Jason is more specific: first he criticizes the tenant system which obviously ruined the area; then he says that the farmers are no way better than tenants; and, finally, Jason declares what, in his opinion, is the solution for the situation, what this country is best suited for: stock or dairy farms:

If I had a little money, I could make a first rate dairy farm out of Five Oaks or Old Farm.  
(*BG*, p. 96)

There is a lot of pasture, Jason says, for the cattle. Yet, he sighs, farmers are all reluctant to do that because of the old-fashioned and fruitless crop system that they are used to. And this is exactly what Dorinda will implement later on her own.

Thus, Jason, Dorinda's antagonist in the novel, actually shapes her initial vision over the future of the farms, which subsequently will convert into her actual vocation. By this fact, Glasgow pays credit to Jason's role in shaping Dorinda's ultimate success, thus acknowledging the role of the man in the success of the woman. That is the thing which dissociates the novel from the future radical feminist perception, and brings it closer to moderate, liberal feminism.

While being in New York, after having experienced the accident, Dorinda thinks about the futility of life (the loss of "vital" interest in life). It seems to her that "there is nothing to expect and nothing to lose" (and it is here when she comes up to the two key ideas making her personality in the novel: (1) She is finished with love; and (2) She has to do something to fill her life. She tells about the first to Doctor Farraday, and when she is asked what she is going to do with the second, first she laughs at shortsightedness of men, and then she announces her program, saying she is going to fill her life with something better than broomsedge, meaning something better than the trouble in her life, her lost and unfortunate love with Jason, followed by pines – on the one hand, the allegory for the pines in her heart, and, on the other hand, the allegory for the struggle for better life she has yet to do. An idea of creating a cow farm surrounded by grazing meadows on the places of broomsedge and parts covered by pines starts embracing her mind, an idea of struggle toward success. And, finally, life-everlasting glimpses in her mind as the symbol of the eventual victory and peace.

In order to achieve all that, Dorinda asks for theoretical means of enriching her knowledge, and Doctor Burch informs her about the upcoming series lectures to be delivered by a professor from Wisconsin (Burch refers to it as "chemistry" hinting at his feeling to Dorinda), and underlines that, still, practical experience is always the best teacher. However, Dorinda does not believe in the practical experience of her people followed by generations. At the same time, she

alludes again to her mother who used to say that had she been given a choice, the only piece of land she would cultivate was Canaan, where – “generous fruits that never fail, on trees immortal grow!” (*BG*, p.180). This is exactly what Dorinda will do – convert the barren ground of Old Farm and Five Oaks into a kind of ‘promised land’. Dorinda goes to library and asks for a list of books on dairy farming. She attends the lectures regularly studying the methods which she thinks may be useful one day. The project of the dairy Farm overwhelms her mind. She just needs a little money to begin. She knows that if she she can buy the cows and hire some extra labor, she will be successful.

The night before her death, Eudora compliments Dorinda that her great-grandfather (John Calvin Abernethy) was not only a missionary but a great scholar too and that it is there where Dorinda got most of her sense. Eudora considers Dorinda as a missionary who possesses scholarship as well.

After her mother’s death, Dorinda cannot remember anything but work. Her prosperity as if comes out of the fog of toiling. She turns the eighteen-acre field of barren ground into pasture, builds new dairy premises and cow barns. Gradually, her initial farm of seven cows grows into a herd. Of course, there have been failures and falls as well such as blight falling on the cornfield and she having to buy fodder from another farmer; or losing several cows because of contagious abortion. But then the business goes uphill: first she reclaims the fields next to Poplar Spring; then her best bull wins the prize of three blue ribbons. Then the fertility of the soil returns, which strengthens her heart and mind and makes her work with double force. She has been working tirelessly, and that is the type of work which she enjoys, and the greatest enjoyment lies in the fact that she manages to convert the barren ground into the fertile land. As the novel says, “in a changed from her mother’s frustrated passion to redeem the world was finding concrete expression” (*BG*, p.245).

## **Dorinda and Love**

Dorinda’s success comes after the failure in love. Her failure in love stimulates her to achieve great things in business life and triumph over circumstances. The beginning of her pathway to success is marked with huge disappointment in her former sweetheart and in male gender in general. The hardest thing she experiences is not even the ruin of her happiness but losing any significant interest in life whatsoever. She feels emptiness, unwillingness and incapability to divert herself with anything and the idea of quitting any romance possesses her totally: “I’ve finished with love”, it hammers in her head, “I’ve finished with love, and until I find something else to fill my life, I shall only be an empty shell...” (*BG*, p. 171), she keeps saying to herself. When Doctor Faraday, who is so considerate to her, patronizingly tell her that she is young and beautiful and needs love, she repeats that statement to him: “I’ve finished with all that sort of thing” (*BG*, p. 176), and, in response to his question how she is going to fill her life, she (observing how little men know) repeats metaphorically that she will fill it with something greater than broomsedge, replacing it with pine, and then – with life-everlasting, meaning she is going to fight and achieve great success. She expresses her disappointment in romantic relationships to Doctor Faraday soon after he offers to lend her money for her ambitious project, saying again – “I’m through with it” (p. 183).

However, Dorinda cannot erase Jason out of her mind, indeed she never can. Upon her return to the Old Farm, while she talks to Nathan, she understands that “in some subtle fashion” (which she despises) she and Jason are joined together forever. Later, when the community congregate in local church together, her eyes meet Jason’s and she feels again with resentment that “he would remain always an inseparable part of her being” (*BG*, p. 260). Thus, although she is “through” and “done” with love, she is still not “through” with Jason however she resents him, as he still remains the

only man who held her in his arms!

Dorinda's feminism becomes expressed when she, during one of their encounters on the road, refuses to look at him. When she finally forces herself to meet her eyes, a regret that she had not killed him the night of her rejection pierces her. Jason complains that she never gave him a chance to speak out and explain why he did what he did. If she only knew what he had suffered! In response, she looks at him "now with merciless eyes". "For this *thing* (the italics are ours – *Aut.*) she had ruined her life!" Yet, it is interesting that, according to her thoughts, both her feelings and mind are free from the former passion during his presence; as for during his absence – "Yesterday he had had power over her senses; to-morrow he might have power again over her memory" (*BG*, p. 221). This confirms that Jason still has power over her despite her feminist neglect of his personality. And this power will eventually lead her to her forgiveness of Jason when she is fully capable of enjoying her revenge.

Dorinda's marriage with Nathan has nothing to do with love – it is done out of pragmatic considerations. Dorinda's soul is devoid of the sense of love, as, however despised, Jason still remains the only man for her. She does not love Jason anymore, and she cannot love Nathan yet, if ever. "Though she could not love, she had chosen the best substitute for love, which is tolerance" (*BG*, p. 271). Tolerance for male gender to which she cannot experience feelings anymore – a very feminist sentiment (Catapano, 1989). Five years of her marriage with Nathan pass, but for her he remains nothing more than the chief worker on the farm. She smiles at his jokes and she respects him but he has no part, and he had never had the one in her life. She realizes that her sexual part evaporated and left her. Sexual instinct became substituted by the self-preservation instinct, the very instinct which made her decide at a very young age that there should be no man to spoil her life. She has won over sex, and in terms of a relationship in the couple she feels that she is stronger. After all that she has gone through, Dorinda is a middle-aged woman now, but this is the middle age of "triumphal independence".

The triumph of her independence becomes even more evident when Dorinda compares herself with other women. Paradoxically, they don't seem happier in love than herself. Of course, having married their chosen ones, they apparently received some dividends, but, at the same time, they look very worn-out and disillusioned. Those women who married out of love, seem most dissatisfied of all to her. Dorinda has no desire at all to change her destiny for theirs. She is the loneliest, the most hurt, but at the same time, the most independent and successful of all women around. Dorinda has created her feminist present and is looking forward to her feminist future. When Doctor Kettledrum visits the already ruined Jason, he mentions to Dorinda that she "carries her years" well, and she replies that this is because she does not think about her age. If other women want their youth to come back, she does not that at any price, and that the worst years of her life are behind her, and the best ones are ahead. The same idea is repeated in her thought in the epilogue of the novel when everything is over, Jason is dead, and she is admired by every man. But throughout her success, Dorinda has overcome not only the trauma, not only hardship, not only trials, not only humiliation imposed by the male gender, but she has overcome gender itself. When in the final scene her stepson mentions her prospects of getting married successfully, she just says once again: "Oh, I've finished with all that... I am thankful to have finished with all that" (*BG*, p. 360).



## Conclusion

The way from Ellen Glasgow's first novel to *Barren Ground* is paved with different setting and characters. However, basic themes and ideas concerning novel's protagonists remain the same, especially concerning female heroines. *The Descendant* acts as a programmatic novel setting the main leitmotif which is reiterated in many subsequent books: the struggle of a heroine between her desires and duties, the heroine facing a dilemma, which path to choose: submission to responsibilities in family or romance or following the path of one's vocation. The row of the alternatives is often broken by neglecting the former, when the heroine sacrifices her personal life at the expense of dedicating herself to her professional aspirations. There are a lot of vivid and bright characters, of whom the most striking ones are those appearing in 'women's trilogy', three novels focusing on feminist themes and attitudes, the strongest of which is *Barren Ground*, the novel recognized by most literary experts as the climax of Ellen Glasgow's work. The novel is quintessential in terms of reiterating themes and scenes appearing in previous novels as well as portraying one of the most meaningful and striking female characters, that of Dorinda Oakley, which makes it Magnum Opus of the writer. While reading the novel, one may identify three main facets of Dorinda's character, dealing respectively with religion, vocation, and love. Dorinda's Presbyterian family and strongly religious Presbyterian ancestors has been possessed by missionary passion of bringing the message of the truth of the gospel to people both around and overseas. Brought up in religious spirit, Dorinda inherited this ardor, which would later transform into of vocational mission, the idea of which was given to her by her fiancée who would eventually betray her. This mission would take the shape of converting the barren ground of old farms covered with brooms edge into a large, prosperous dairy farm, a venture which no male in the area dared undertake because of stubborn reluctance to change outmoded local practices. Dorinda, a woman, managed to do that at the expense of her happiness in love, which she would consciously reject throughout the novel after her unhappy engagement. Having achieved the heights of vocational and financial success and stating that she 'is through with all that' (love), Dorinda gives an example of a character that any female would be proud to possess, and acts as a heroine capable of and calling for the woman's liberation.

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