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Hirai, Masako, "Review of Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in 'Antigone', 'Middlemarch', 'Howard's End' and 'Women in Love'" (1998). *The George Eliot Review*. 331.
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**Masako Hirai, *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in 'Antigone',
'Middlemarch', 'Howard's End' and 'Women in Love'*
Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1998). pp xii x 221. ISBN 0 333 73145 X.**

While the main theme of this book is clear and easily grasped, there is an unevenness about the treatment which at times is disconcerting. Biography and critical argument sit uneasily together, some of the statements are outside the frame of current criticism, and there are some subjective and questionable assertions. Take this about the relationship between George Henry Lewes and George Eliot: 'Yet even Lewes, I think, was more superficial (sometimes even disloyal) than her nature demanded, having a journalistic rather than an academic mind, and taking a broad interest in everything. Understandably, he could not share her deepest struggle, which she fought while she wrote her novels' (19). Not only does this suggest that Masako Hirai has not read any Lewes, it also perpetuates a dated Lewes myth and states what cannot be known. There is also repetition, for instance, on 3 and 30, of Lawrence's statement about Eliot taking 'two couples and developing their relationship' ... 'Most of George Eliot's are on that plan'. Stylistic clichés are repeated: 'surmount the gap' is followed by 'fill the gap' on 19, perhaps inevitably becoming 'bridge the gap' on 41, while we are told on 43 that 'There is a gap between the life of a Spanish saint and that of Dorothea Brooke'. The discussion between Dorothea and Celia has a variant — 'the chasm between the two minds' (56), but twenty pages later gap has been restored. There is a gap between Henry Wilcox and Margaret, and also one before the beginning of *Women in Love*. Eliot's names are examined, and of Lydgate we are told 'He means to be a gate'.

Throughout there is too much summary, and at the end of the book, which lacks a binding conclusion, we are left in a kind of Lawrentian limbo. The particular headings mark the progression of this thesis-like treatment, the Antigone connection is kept well in mind, but I'm not sure that it takes us very far. Masako Hirai's investigation is an earnest and serious one, and I don't mean that in any patronizing or dismissive way. It gets caught up, not in theory but in the practice of positive evaluation. Did Eliot, Forster and Lawrence *consciously* use the Antigone variants or did they merely start with two (contemporary to them) sisters, like Jane Austen before them in *Sense and Sensibility*. Masako Hirai has done a lot of reading. I think she is stronger on *Howard's End* than on Eliot or Lawrence. The passages she chooses as evidence from *Middlemarch* and *Women in Love* are the relatively obvious ones. Her book is somewhat strained at times, particularly in style. What she says is often on a different level, a much different level, from what she is writing about; she must, and I say this not unkindly, be more mindful of the gap.

Graham Handley