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Characterization, character, and moral judgment of the women in "Middlemarch"

Heard, Betty Boyd, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1989

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CHARACTERIZATION, CHARACTER, AND MORAL JUDGMENT OF THE WOMEN IN MIDDLEMARCH

by

Betty Boyd Heard

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1989

Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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HEARD, BETTY BOYD, Ph.D. Characterization, Character, and Moral Judgment of the Women in Middlemarch. (1989)
Directed by Dr. Randolph Bulgin. 190 pp.

This is a detailed study of the methods of characterization used to create the female personages of Middlemarch and an attempt to place those characters historically. The first two chapters include a discussion of the position of women in the growing nineteenth-century middle class, their educational opportunities, marital relationships, financial expectations, and cultural demands. The second chapter takes into account contemporary feminist perspectives on George Eliot and Middlemarch.

Chapters three through six are an in-depth study of the methods of characterization George Eliot uses to create her fictional women. Chapters three and four discuss the novel's two major characters, Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy; chapter five deals with the intermediate characters, Mary Garth and Harriet Bulstrode; and chapter six explains the importance of the minor characters who act as foils and parallels to the major characters. Chapter seven summarizes this extended analysis and draws conclusions based on the study.

George Eliot looks at characters as the product of will and circumstance, showing both as they operate to produce the fictional lives of her women characters. The study includes an exhaustive analysis of the devices of characterization, including physical description, dramatic presentation, gossip, interior consciousness, epithets, authorial intrusion, and narrative distancing, pointing out the relation of technique to various character types.

This study also uses the conduct books and educational treatises of the day to make social and historical connections with the novel. George Eliot's emphasis is always on moral consciousness, and this study demonstrates the way in which the women of Middlemarch reveal the author's moral principles to the extent that they have, or lack, the moral consciousness which is the expected feminine contribution in a patriarchal society.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1

In 1859 George Eliot wrote to her friend Charles Bray, "The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures" (Letters 3:111). It was natural for George Eliot to want to enable readers to feel and imagine character, for feeling and imagination guided her own personal life, and they control her writing. We should not think of the life of imagination as dominated by self-centered wishful thinking if, as Redinger believes, imagination for Eliot was the power to discern, empathize with, and reproduce "the actual drama of the real world" (91). Led by the desire to increase, and to share, this vital power, she determined to reach society's "heart and thereby enlarge its sympathy and tolerance by painlessly removing the blinders which too often accompanied English provincialism" (Redinger 384).

One result of this challenge is Middlemarch, generally considered to be one of the greatest of English novels, perhaps the greatest of all. Geoffrey Tillotson claims that the only way to overrate it is to call it "easily the best of the half dozen best

novels in the world" (7). Calvin Bedient calls it the preeminent English novel because of its "original impulse" to "touch ground: to know things as they are" (70). He claims for the novel a richness of reality which overshadows other novels that are rich in imagination (71), but then he goes on to assert that Middlemarch actually combines imagination and reality; it is rich in "the imagination of reality" (97). He describes Eliot's imagination as having attained a "bareness and directness" that speaks of something so close to real life that the reader does not think of the novel's events as imagined or of the characters as fictional (97); both are experienced as if they were actual. Pearce also emphasizes this sense of actuality (122), and Olcott calls the characters "vividly painted" individuals who leave the "lasting impression as of people we have known" (168). Since these characters have "pains and joys" which we know, we may say that Eliot has realized her wish to make readers "imagine and feel" actual human beings, vivid and alive, but unlike themselves in specific ways.

More than just the vitality of the characters is significant in Middlemarch, however. Bedient attributes the "reality" of the novel's characters to their having moral natures. In all George Eliot's fiction the moral significance of the actions is paramount. This is preeminently true of Middlemarch, which has been called "perhaps the only novel in which we can breathe freely in the mutual presence of [Eliot's] fiction and her moral application of it" (Benvenuto 355). It becomes important, then, to ascertain the

imagined reality of the town of Middlemarch and the moral nature of its inhabitants. In assessing their moral actions, we must judge the characters against the background of their time and place and also relate them to a "universal" or "philosophical" standard. I think we may assume that favorably treated and favorably viewed characters are those who try to make sense of their own times, who adjust to unavoidable change, and who make small changes for the better in their own lives. We cannot rationally expect them to transcend their time and reach their author's own knowledge of the outcome of the issues they confront, but it is actions like theirs, multiplied many times, which produce outcomes. Let us note some facts about the era against which we will see and evaluate the characters of Middlemarch.

2

The time of Middlemarch is just before the complete industrialization of England. The events take place between September 30, 1829 and the end of May 1832. During the first few months of this period the Tories held a majority in parliament and opposed most reform. With the death of George IV in 1830, the Whigs, under the leadership of Lord Grey, gained power, making reform of some kind inevitable. The political history in Middlemarch appears, however, as part of the lives of the characters--not just as history (Beatty History by Indirection 173). Carroll says that the events of the Reform movement form a "shadowy but meticulously planned background"

to the movel's fictional happenings (Vic. Studies 315), which are typical of a society being transformed by the rapid changes in the world just beyond its boundaries. There are even those in Middlemarch who desire reform: Lydgate wants to reform medicine; Mr. Brooke realizes that he must instigate reform on his own land if he hopes for any political support; and Dorothea wants to improve conditions for the poor. But primarily the characters of Middlemarch are not reformers but ordinary citizens who are busy relating to each other and struggling to understand the social changes which are taking place so rapidly during the imagined two years and nine months of the story.

Significantly, Hulcoop describes Middlemarch as a "paradoxical place-name" standing for both "a fictitious town in the Midlands and that ever-expanding section of human society whose marches are contiguous on the one hand with the aristocracy, on the other with the proletariat" (154). The focus of the novel is on that difficult-to-define social group known as the middle class, which was growing rapidly in numbers and in complexity throughout the nineteenth century. The characters we meet in Middlemarch are members of that amorphous middle class who are engaged in trying to create and maintain a sense of community, of communication, in a world that is becoming increasingly complex.

To demonstrate that increasing complexity which was the hallmark of nineteenth-century England, George Eliot sets Middlemarch forty years earlier than the time of her actual writing. She

fabricates

> a fiction of an era on the even of reform in which men could still be nurtured by a sense of social hopefulness. In the world she created the professions had not yet become entrenched, reform was confident of its power to abolish abuses, science had not yet revealed the more frightful secrets of nature, and benevolence still hoped to ameliorate the moral condition of the poor and the heathen. (Mintz 67)

Because these causes were still hopeful enough to dignify individual efforts, the reader believes in the possibilities that exist for idealists like Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate, who hope to make significant changes in their small portion of the world.

3

In this microcosm the focus is on human relations, and the emphases of the plot are on the complications in those relationships that cannot or do not always find resolutions (Ermarth Realism 109-110). So, although the author gives us a "fully conceived and often minutely reproduced society" in Middlemarch (Creeger 5), her primary emphasis is on the problem of the individual and his interaction with other individuals. In summary, the novel is, as Stump says, an exploration of "the imperfectly fulfilled life, what would be necessary for fulfillment, the elements which prevent fulfillment, the attempts which are made, the nature of the failure, and the known extent of the success" (143).

Edith Simcox narrows the focus to make Middlemarch the story of

> two rather sad fatalities, of two lives which, starting with more than ordinary promise, had to rest content with very ordinary achievement, and could not derive unmixed consolation from the knowledge, which was the chief prize of their struggles, that failure is never altogether undeserved. (76)

Dorothea and Lydgate are the protagonists of the two related but distinct main stories of Middlemarch, but winding through the main plots are numerous fascinating subplots peopled with clearly defined, life-like characters who earn our attention, our sympathy, our consternation, and finally our understanding as they too work to mold and sustain marriages and careers while they act as threads which tie the two main stories together. In a realistic way Eliot's creations exhibit "moderate gifts and mixed faults and virtues" (Cooper 29), and some of her most interesting characters are "seriously at odds with their social environments" (Worth 55). Though they are thus historically located and conditioned, they are imaginary illustrations of what George Eliot knew and understood about human beings in general.

4

Whatever our specific response to the individual inhabitants of Middlemarch, the tendency is to respond to these imaginary characters as if they were persons we know or would like to know in our own time. That impression results from the literary conventions of realism, a form of narrative in which "plots are bent to absorb the actualities of historical life, where the traditional characters are bleached and thickened until they become our colorless and undistinguished neighbors" (Price 27). Price explains how the novel provides an imagined

society in which the individual character finds definition (42), that "small-scale structure whose proportions and internal relationships have some analogy with the realities we know" (43). These conventions, assented to by the author and reader alike, are the "fictional contract." In a realistic novel like Middlemarch the fictional world obeys familiar laws, has a simulated literal location, and depicts events caused in the same way as in actual life (Price 2). George Eliot's central concern in that world is with moral decisions that her characters make. These decisions are believable because they grow out of a "long process of egoism and sympathy" (xv) witnessed by the readers.

Even the reader grows since he is continually gaining knowledge which influences his judgments about the characters. In Scenes of Clerical Life George Eliot's narrator tells the reader, "Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull gray eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tone" (81). Characters make decisions too, and each decision that a character makes limits his future options. The same is true for that character's creator; once he places his character among the customs and manners of a particular social group, he sets limits for himself and what he can realistically do with that character. A novelist like George Eliot, who is interested in the psychological processes of her characters, allows the reader to enter into a fictional personage and feel with him while retaining some "power of disengagement" (Price 10). Price describes a

character in fiction as a "form" closely related to the idea of a person in life but made of words and images. A character is mere "language" on one level, but all implication and suggestion of human life on another, forcing the reader to draw inferences (Price 55-57). He cannot "begin to understand the experience the novel presents without some participation in the moral realities within which its characters live" (151). For George Eliot the reader's "moral awareness finds its surest ground in sympathetic feeling" for her fictional characters (151).

While we are caught up in the thoughts and actions of these characters who seem to be actual persons, W.J. Harvey observes that we also enjoy a flexibility of awareness. "We do lend imaginative belief in fiction, but at the same time we know it to be fiction" (215). His mimetic theory is rooted in the proposition that "Art imitates Nature," and from that standpoint he describes Middlemarch as having a "narrow mimetic angle" (16) because it parallels life so closely. Actual life, Harvey says, allows only "intrinsic knowledge of self, contextual knowledge of others; fiction allows both intrinsic and contextual knowledge of others" (32).

This "both/and" kind of knowledge is one of the reasons we enjoy fiction, and we gladly practice the "willing suspension of disbelief." According to Harvey, when we study character as a literary device, we have the "perspective of range" that enables us to see what characters cannot see and the "perspective of depth" that allows even a minor character to achieve fullness as a human being in "one moment

of dramatic intensity" (55). Harvey also discusses the use of an omniscient narrator in the development of character and points out the economy and flexibility which the omniscient narrator has in controlling aesthetic distance in a novel like Middlemarch.

Harvey agrees with Wayne Booth that there is a place for the omniscient narrator in fiction. Booth says that in every novel there is the novelist's "second self"--the implied author even if the omniscient voice is silenced (123). For him the use of the narrator--reliable or unreliable--is an extremely important characterizing device. It is indeed useful in Middlemarch, whose narrator speaks reliably for "the reality that figures in the world of the novel" (Booth 122-123).

In Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster's general theory of characterization also applies to nineteenth-century fiction. His position is a moderate one. The novel must be "sogged with humanity" (43), but must also have formal unity. Certainly Middlemarch fits this theory as it combines human qualities with artistic unity. Forster explains that we can know more about homo fictus than about homo sapiens because the fictional character's creator and narrator are one, and the unified presentation removes the opaqueness of life and opens the character fully to the reader (56).

The theories of Harvey, Booth, and Forster deal with the "vehicle" of characterization as part of the structure of the novel. They are an aid to critical understanding, though they do not, of course, supersede the novel's principal effect, which is made upon the

mind of the cooperative reader. "When we say of a novel, 'Yes, this is the world,' our act of recognition and surrender transcends all our critical theories" (Harvey 183).

Almost all the characters in Middlemarch have universal credibility, but the focus of this study is directed toward the female inhabitants of Middlemarch. Being a woman herself, George Eliot had a natural affinity for her female characters, and whether or not Middlemarch is intended as a feminist novel, the novelist is obviously concerned with the vital "woman question" of her time and its ramifications in the lives of the women of the 1830s and the 1870s. There are also more fully-developed female characters in the novel than male characters, perhaps because George Eliot is most concerned with mankind's moral nature and how intentions and actions demonstrate moral principle, and women were viewed by the Victorians as more moral by nature than men. During the Victorian age it was the rule to associate men with the public sphere and women with the private sphere. Ruskin claims that a man's power is "active and progressive," that he is the "doer, the creator, the discoverer." Woman's power is for rule at home, and her intellect is for "sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision," for moral influence (146-147). Emily Shirreff writes that upper-middle-class girls were expected to act as "civilizers of men" to ward off social barbarism. "What society wants from women is not labour, but refinement, elevation of mind, knowledge making its power felt through moral influence and sound opinions. It wants civilizers of men and educators of the young" (417-418).

Women writers in the nineteenth century often found themselves in conflict over this idea of separate spheres for the two sexes. George Eliot positions herself against this ideology of gender by making her female characters generally more interesting and active than the men, though they fit the Victorian stereotype of being more morally concerned. As we observe each female character it is noteworthy that, whether we are interested in her charm, her idealism, her sharp tongue, or her practical nature, we remain amazingly interested. Why? What techniques has George Eliot used to create women so real that we weep for them, applaud or condemn their actions, but always sense the authenticity of their decisions and behavior?

5

In the creation of any literary character, an author must select from among certain basic methods of characterization. Physical descriptions of person and attire, favorite expressions, and personal mannerisms show us something of a character's personality through her appearance. For example, when Rosamond Vincy is first introduced we are asked to see through a middle-aged bachelor's eyes a blond beauty with a swan neck and a "little devil" (66) in her. And then almost immediately an outsider, new to Middlemarch, describes her as "grace itself," "perfectly lovely and accomplished" (69), "what a woman ought to be," producing "the effect of exquisite music" (70). An early clue to what is important in Rosamond's world is the mention of her ability to get "in and out of a carriage" (71) in a fashion

satisfactory for a Miss Lemon's school graduate. Thus, physical description can be a significant indicator of basic traits.

The dramatic method--dialogue between the character and her family, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers--authenticates what we see developing as the nature of a character. For example, when Mrs. Waule suggests that Mary Garth will undoubtedly repeat a conversation she has just overheard about Fred Vincy, Mary replies, "No, thank you, Mrs. Waule . . . . I dislike hearing scandal too much to wish to repeat it" (79). Her subsequent behavior proves this to be the truth. When Rosamond accuses Mary of going into a rage over their conversation about Fred and quarreling with her, Mary protests, "Nonsense; we have not quarreled. If one is not to get into a rage sometimes, what is the good of being friends?" (86)

Mary's outspoken practical nature is continually emphasized through conversation, as in the scene when Fred claims he will be anything she likes if she will only say she loves him, despite the mess he has made of his life, and Mary responds, "I should be ashamed to say that I loved a man who must always be hanging on others, and reckoning on what they would do for him" (188). Nor will Mary succumb to her obvious emotional attachment to Fred until he proves that he is capable of taking responsibility. Then she admits to her father, "Oh, dear . . . I have always loved him. I should never like scolding any one else so well; and that is a point to be thought of in a husband" (605). By her own words we see that Mary, practical always, yet romantic, has the intelligent woman's sense of irony and capacity for sarcasm.

Gossip--conversations _about_ a character in which she does not participate--tells us much about her position in the community and how she is viewed by those with whom she has social and verbal encounters. Early in the novel, for example, we learn a significant truth about Dorothea from a conversation between Celia and Sir James Chettam. When she says she intends to give up riding, her chief personal pleasure, Sir James says to Celia, "Your sister is given to self-mortification, is she not" (13)? And Celia answers, "I think she is . . . . She likes giving up" (13). Mrs. Cadwallader tells her husband, after Dorothea has announced that she will marry Casaubon, "I throw her over: there was a chance, if she had married Sir James, of her becoming a sane, sensible woman" (45), suggesting that Dorothea has demonstrated little up to that point which would support any claim to such sanity.

In Eliot's writing, as in life, gossip is also a potent force in spreading information. Eliot notes that the world is "apparently a huge whispering gallery" (302). For example, when Fred goes to Lowick parsonage to see Mary, he hears from Henrietta Noble the story of Casaubon's will (which she got from their servant who heard it from Dorothea's maid), and he then tells Rosamond who passes the news on to Will, although Lydgate has warned her not to tell. It is in this roundabout way that Will gains knowledge that he must have for the principal plot to develop. This method also calls attention to "Eliot's brilliant use of characters and details on the periphery of her main action" (Spacks 195).

We have seen already that the omniscient narrator has an important, though unobtrusive, function in the novel generally and in Middlemarch specifically. As a method of characterization, it may be called the exploration of inner consciousness, or "mind-reading," and the use of this device is pervasive in the depiction of female characters in this novel. By opening a character's thoughts and feeling to the reader, the novelist (as narrator) enables us to see what family and friends do not know because that character has chosen, for whatever reason, not to share that information. We can also learn the narrator's degree of sympathy for a character by the distance she maintains from that personage. For instance, Celia's internal response to the idea of Dorothea's marrying Casaubon is described as "a sort of shame mingled with a sense of the ludicrous" (35). The reader tends to agree, to adopt Celia's viewpoint. After the engagement is official, Celia becomes less afraid of "saying things" to Dorothea because "cleverness seemed to her more pitiable than ever" (61). Yet we profit at the same time from Dorothea's internal responses to the same events, and we become more understanding and compassionate toward the youth and naiveté of the protagonist.

Still later, after Celia becomes a mother, she develops "a new sense of her mental solidity and calm wisdom" (359), based entirely on the presence of that "central poising force" (359)--her baby. By this time the reader interprets Celia's thoughts as proceeding from her prosaic mind and self-centered existence, by

contrast with the selfless expansiveness, touching and vaguely comic, of Dorothea's vision. These instances show how a reader's attitudes can be molded and changed through the narrator's use of the interior consciousness of a character.

In George Eliot's writing, as in the works of many nineteenth-century novelists, authorial intervention adds another dimension, a further technique providing knowledge for understanding and judging the characters. Significantly, an early reviewer of Middlemarch defends such intrusions. He says that where George Eliot's

> characters are so slightly sketched that there is no possibility of their taking up a distinct life and body of their own independent of their author, where the author's criticism, be it prejudice or be it insight, is an essential part of the sketch, this power of keen moral anatomy [Eliot's authorial intrusion] adds greatly to the vivacity and humour and life of the picture which is by it compressed into a short space. (Carroll 302)

This device, which the nineteenth century inherited from the novels of the eighteenth century, is the one method which has been summarily rejected by most early twentieth-century novelists as instrusive and destructive of the realistic illusion that makes the events of a novel seem to be happening. Critical opinion has now softened somewhat, however, since the publication of Wayne Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction, and these essay-like passages are seen to have the advantage of conveying the author's view of her creation fully and clearly, yet with a certain economy. They explain the meaning and significance of a character's nature as exemplified in his or her behavior and intentions. Thus we have a more completely realized

figure than the usual modern practice permits, and the damage to the "willing suspension of disbelief" is repaired when the character begins to speak or act. As Booth points out, all fiction is rhetorical anyway.

Eliot is particularly interested in commenting on Dorothea's actions and motives. During Dorothea's honeymoon, the author becomes actively involved in the drama which she is describing: Dorothea in her boudoir in the Via Sistina. In her own voice Eliot continues, "I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone" (142-143). Eliot then goes on to describe the power of "unintelligible Rome" and its possible effects on a sheltered young girl of Dorothea's background.

Having explained Dorothea's frustration and confusion at having "no distinctly shapen grievance" (143) and supposing that the fault lies with unrealistic expectations, the novelist has nevertheless prepared us for Dorothea's next attempted conversation with Casaubon in which she selflessly says, "I hope you are thoroughly satisfied with our stay--I mean, with the result so far as your studies are concerned" (148). What the reader understands, because of the previous authorial intervention, is that Dorothea herself is certainly <u>not</u> satisfied, though she has decided it must be her own fault. The use of authorial intervention in the form of little

essays placed strategically in the story thus provides another dimension to the reader's understanding of the characters' behavior.

6

This study will not attempt to proceed mechanically through a discussion of each method of characterization with each character, but instead will analyze the more notable uses of techniques in creating fictional individuals and will draw conclusions about the intellectual and moral nature of each imagined person. In preparation for that detailed study of technique used in developing the female characters in Middlemarch, it may be helpful to look briefly at some of the critical views of Eliot's methods of characterization and moral development.

Ermarth says that all of George Eliot's novels begin "with a distinct, personalized narrative voice that dissolves into others during a slow shifting process, almost as if an orchestra were being tuned one instrument at a time" (Realism 238). This distinct narrative voice takes on its own personality too and becomes a part of the "constellation of voices" (239) which the author creates. Barbara Hardy credits Eliot with generally introducing her major characters in words that are "analytic, taxonomic, and instructive" (Particularities 87). She calls these characters confident but ignorant, qualities that the reader discovers through the author's didactic analysis as the novel develops (87). Knoepflmacher also points to the misconceptions that often exist in the characters' minds because they are limited in their perceptions (Laughter 169).

Creeger praises Eliot's discursive and dramatic passages as invitations to observe an action and analyze it, always allowing the reader to determine what it all means (9). Ashton also stresses the use of the analytic technique (96), as does Adam, who claims that showing the characters' minds in action gives the author the opportunity to infuse them "with that demonstration of her own interpretive comment" (Particular 35). Creeger comments on the contention of some critics that Eliot is too meddlesome as a writer. He says that her fiction benefits from her meddling, and the pace of Middlemarch even demands it. He further believes that Eliot is more intelligent and more interesting than her characters (9), and we see her in her authorial intrusions as a charming, fascinating addition to the novel. Beer sets up the reader's role as that of a privileged newcomer to Middlemarch, "reading the social scene" (191) as we interpret the characters through "gossip, pithy cross-comments, ironic situation, and physical details of appearance" (191). And Joan Bennett reminds us that "the moral and intellectual qualities of each character affect the reader's perception of the other characters much as one object or one colour mass in a picture affects the perception of every other" (162).

Best of all, in my estimation, is Isaacs' account of the stages in Eliot's pattern of characterization. The first stage is "cold and objective"; it "picks up flaws and peculiarities of person and personality" (26). Isaacs describes the tone of this stage as slightly ironic, with the suggestion that the novelist seems not to

like the characters. The second stage moves into consciousness, helping us to understand the flaws and so to like the characters we have been led to underrate. In the third stage we are not looking at, or into, but down upon the characters with compassion from an omniscient viewpoint. We are told why, in our own humanity, we should sympathize with these other "human beings" (27). Notice that Isaacs does not call them fictional creations. These characters are persons because they have inner as well as outer lives and measure themselves against the world's expectations and conclusions in the same way each of us does.

7

Eliot's characters are so consistent in their natures that they act inevitably "under the irresistible force of their directing principle: so that they are always true to themselves" (Cecil 201). Mary Ellen Doyle explains the rhetoric of character as the way by which each is placed against the others "so that each affects the responses the reader gives to all" (14). Fisher offers an interesting theory about these characters and their relationships. He says that George Eliot came "to picture the social world as an ongoing invention, as, in many ways, science is--a collective, imaginative act that is proposed and tested piecemeal, defeated or established much as hypotheses are, maintained and revised continually by the common force of individual acts of choice and judgment" (4). He says that "individuals author one another and authorize one another's

acts. In _Middlemarch_, the characters make of living a social art because in living together they literally make one another up" (5).

Thale calls this fictional provincial life of Middlemarch "the medium in which character acts and develops" (117), and Schorer describes it as a progress in which "everything strains forward; consciousness is a stream" (552). Heilman points out that the actors in the novel "slide unperceivingly into relations unforeseen" (53) and that the audience "slides unawares from a focus on one apparently independent actor to another close by" (53), revealing a moral near relation, an index of community (54).

This "index of community" is described by Fisher as _experience_, "an epic comprehensiveness that weakens the drama of the self by developing the drama of a 'world,' a comprehensiveness that replaces the single candle with a prismatic, complex way of reading experience that reaches behavior" (185). Weaving individual behavior into the complex interrelating which brings about action is the essence of _Middlemarch_. Doyle finds the results of the process basically benign, for "in a society of commonplace and egoistic values and aspirations, ordinary good people can achieve ordinary happiness" (120). However, "uncommon people are liable to destruction or grave failure, either from their own 'spots of commonness' reflecting society's or from the commonness of the society that overpowers them" (120). These uncommon people must settle for doing good to the individuals closest to them, since their grander attempts are likely to fail.

These opinions concerning the consistency, truth to self, relationship to each other and to the community, of the "human beings" of Middlemarch remind us that the novel is chiefly one of character. It is true that the "uncommon" are the more significant and the more threatened persons in the setting of "commonplace and egoistic values" that is Middlemarch. It is also true that the most interesting characters, both common and uncommon, are women. Hence this study will include an analysis and evaluation of both the unusual and the ordinary women of Middlemarch. It will show them against the background of their time and place and also in their universal aspect, as credible human beings. The investigation will note how George Eliot's powerful imagination creates the sense of reality that sweeps the reader into the minds of these women as well as into the events of their lives. It will demonstrate that women who are at odds with their community nevertheless push on to success, and that those who champion their ideals against life's harsh realities manage to preserve those ideals. The study will examine acts of renunciation as part of character portrayal and try to determine whether the character in question achieves self-knowledge and/or attains greatness, and if so, by whose standards. It will consider the choices Middlemarch women make which determine and develop their relationships, particularly the relationship of marriage.

In addition to discussing the women of Middlemarch as if they were actual persons in a historical setting, I will have occasion

also to treat them as fictitious characters, showing what method or methods of development George Eliot uses to reveal each character and how method affects our understanding of the character. For example, why does Celia talk to herself? Why is Mrs. Cadwallader developed primarily through gossip? Why is Mrs. Farebrother almost always involved in conversation whereas Miss Noble is pictured almost entirely through the eyes of the narrator? Does conversation give the world one picture of Harriet Bulstrode while the narrator creates another, so that the reader, knowing her deep feeling and moral strength, will accept her behavior at the end of the novel? As I try to answer these questions and observe the application of these techniques, I will arrive at a literary interpretation of the feminine half of the small world of Middlemarch. In the "real" world our moral judgment of persons should be tentative; but in this fictitious counterpart of reality, we are guided by the author and her narrator to form a satisfyingly clear picture of women as individual moral beings.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND FEMINIST CRITICISM

1

George Eliot set Middlemarch at the beginning of the Victorian period, a time of great complexity and change, both in the flood of events and social pressures and in the movement of ideas and values. Scientific developments, such as the geological measurement of time and history as set forth in Sir Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology, and the new conception of man's development, described in Charles Darwin's Origin of Species, gave the thoughtful Victorian a new way to see himself in relation to his universe. And what he saw confused and perplexed him. The cultural signals of the nineteenth century, as Peter Gay says, were "often uncertain and anxiety-provoking: (Education 8). It is this moment, when the English world is on the edge of the most rapid and drastic change in its entire history, that George Eliot chooses for the setting of Middlemarch.

Suddenly the world was not the center of the universe, and man was not the center of his world, but, it seemed, just another animal. And in religion, hitherto steady and reassuring, the image of a God who was responsible for everyone and everything and who kept His creation oiled and running smoothly was losing credence under the onslaught of new knowledge. The church had no convincing or even encouraging answers for those who had moved into the newly developing

industrial cities looking for jobs, security, and a better life and had found instead competition, isolation, and vicious cycles of poverty. Having given up the expansiveness of country living or the often friendly atmosphere of village life, these members of the laboring class had not found a sense of community in the factories of the new industrial cities but only cramped quarters and a sense of personal isolation.

Britons were hard-pressed to keep up with all the amazing inventions and discoveries of the nineteenth century: the steam engine, the railroad, the typewriter, the telegraph, the postage stamp. Yet never far from the optimism and enthusiasm of that progress lurked the anxiety that rapid and extensive change inevitably brings.

The social structure of the period was bending and stretching as the middle class grew and flexed its collective muscles. Those labeled by some as "the bourgeoisie" did not take to the term, partly because it was a French word and partly because it was too difficult to define with any agreement and was seen as negative--unloving and unlovable (Gay, Education 31). "Middle class" had a more positive sound and became the accepted term for those ordinary Victorians who were gaining power in industry and in politics and who were challenging the rule of the aristocracy. Another interesting change in terminology is also associated with this period. In earlier periods "schools" and "sects" had suggested a dependence on a master, intimating unwavering loyalty to him, but those terms were replaced with

"movement" in 1828 as used in the expression "the labor movement," an indication to many of positive change, since "movement" suggested to them freedom to work for personal benefit. So the nineteenth century became the age of movement and movements (Gay, Education 65). The middle class expanded unchecked throughout the nineteenth century. In 1851, 91,000 men worked in commercial occupations in England, whereas by 1911 that number had increased to 739,000. In 1851, there were no women clerks, but by 1911 there were 157,000 (Gay, Education 54).

2

As their numbers and financial influence expanded, the middle class gained in social influence as well. Social mobility was an ever-strengthening new reality. Even though most people worked all their lives just to make ends meet and never thought of moving up the social ladder, many Englishmen made a conscious effort to improve themselves and their positions. Some even aspired to marriage beyond their rank, but, despite the romantic notion that love conquers all, many nineteenth-century men and women were made aware that "well-regulated romantic attachments formed within one's own circle, or aiming only marginally above it, faced the smallest prospects of stern vetoes from the family" (Gay, Tender 98). In education, the middle class increased its literacy and looked to descriptions in novels and romances for the manners of the aristocracy they hoped to emulate. Middle class wives with time on their hands entertained themselves with collections of sermons and Jane Austen's novels of manners. Even

the upstairs maids found time between duties to read about the dilemmas of their own kind in Pamela and more recent fiction.

Middle-class standards stressed the importance of home and family, the haven for the tired man of commerce who worked long hours in the impersonal city where only the bottom line mattered. He needed the rejuvenation of spirit that awaited him in the comfort of a chaste and respectable home, and a wife was expected to provide a refuge for her husband from the hardships of his "life of significant action" (Gilbert and Gubar 24). In fact, the pervasive myth of the Victorian period was the familiar Angel in the House--the wife and mother described in this way:

> Her nature is loving and self-sacrificing; her responsibilities, domestic and maternal. Although she is a delicate creature worshipped and protected by husbands and sons, she not only works hard at home but also provides continuity and moral strength in a rapidly changing society. (Helsinger, III, xiv)

Lower-class laborers, on the other hand, often had little to go home to. They lived in fear of losing their jobs and so worked for low wages and for painfully long hours. These workers also included many women and children who labored under squalid conditions for sixteen or eighteen hours a day. The laissez-faire theory of government offered them no protection, and developing trade unions were a long time gaining enough power to be a significant force to benefit the working class.

Although wretched working conditions and other abuses improved too slowly, man's storehouse of knowledge multiplied at an alarming rate in science and technology. Matthew Arnold once compared the

assault of new information to being knocked down by a wave and being unable to regain a foothold before being overcome by the next one. The question of man's place in this complex world caused a kind of paralysis in many who could only see an ever-widening gap between man and his creator and no unifying system of belief that could make him feel attached to God or to his fellows. Nostalgia for a unified past, a need for someone to guide their thinking and provide some creed worthy of belief, and a desire for an authority they could submit to willingly provided eager readers for the writers of the Victorian age. Reassure us, those readers were saying. Teach us until we become better-educated and can integrate this vast volume of new information into our lives in some positive way. Tell us what to believe and how to behave. That need for understanding and a sense of direction created a group of writers recognized as sages--prophets for an anxiety-riddled people in a rapidly changing world. So with "thoughtful epigrams, small sermons, and philosophical asides" nineteenth-century novelists "performed as moralists" (Gay, Tender 148).

3

George Eliot lived and wrote during this age which saw the triumph of the middle class, an epoch "when faith seemed dying, dead, or about to be reborn" (Thale 1) and writers were expected to furnish guidance. She was one of many novelists who saw it as their obligation to give moral instruction in their work. And she was caught up in the "Woman Question" which became a prominent topic of discussion

among social theorists and intellectuals in the 1830s. Many of them supported women's rights but continued to view woman's "nature" as not only different from man's but also as somehow inferior. As late as 1889 the issue was still prominent. In that year the Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes published The Evolution of Sex, a study of sex-differentiation, in which he determines that men are more intelligent, more independent, and more courageous than women while women are superior in "constancy of affection and sympathetic imagination" (Conway 146-147).

While John Ruskin advocated a society in which woman, because of her love for order and arrangement, sweetly guided and uplifted her more worldly and intellectual mate, John Stuart Mill, a strong supporter of women's right in his famous The Subjection of Women, asserted that there was no way to know what the nature of woman is, since she had been held in such an unnatural state for so long. He consistently advocated "sympathy in equality" (174) as well as legal equality for all people. Millett reminds us, though, that the reviews of Mill's work were disastrous at the time of its publication; "he was denounced as mad or 'immoral,' often as both" (124). Auerbach points out that women were seen as deficient by nature in their incapacity for abstraction, and that even Mill "concedes that women's bent may be for 'the practical' rather than for 'general principles'" (54-55). George Romanes records, in 1887, the fact that a woman's brain weight is an average five ounces less than a man's, assuring a "marked inferiority of intellectual power" (11). And Philip Gilbert Hamerton,

in a meditation published in 1891, states that intellectual women do not exist because a woman cannot conduct any form of intellectual life. He adds that a man should not even attempt an intelligent conversation with a woman because she is so preoccupied with sentimental feeling that she is incapable of accuracy in "matters of fact" (272). Such widely held beliefs caused women to continue to be limited in many areas of their lives.

There was disagreement about what women wanted and needed in the way of education and work. In 1862 Frances Cobbe wrote, "Women need solid mental training, not only to amend their reasoning and open their minds to argument, but also to correct the terribly inaccurate and superficial knowledge they now usually think sufficient" (45). In 1868 Josephine Butler bemoaned the "sad, dreary lives" of women who have no choices because they have no education and so face life like "A wall so blank / My shadow I thank / For sometimes falling there" (73). There were some women who wanted to stay at home but could not; this was especially true of lower-class women. Deirdre David uses testimony given to Parliamentary Commissioners in the 1840s regarding mine and factory conditions and Elizabeth Roberts' account of a working woman's place between 1890 and 1940 to explain how an English working-class wife had to struggle to keep "a decent, private home" to counter the "putative emasculation of her husband" caused by her working outside the home (16-17). Middle-class women were limited to such pastimes and occupations as sewing and teaching, and the diversity and individual natures and capabilities of women were completely ignored (Beer 157-160).

Nineteenth-century women were reared to be submissive and modest, pliant and nurturing--selfless "angels" whose sole reason for existence was to please men (Gilbert and Gubar 23). Wolstenholme-Elmy explains woman's position thus:

> A woman must remain ignorant because, to her, knowledge has no practical, that is, commercial value. She is idle because she is ignorant. She becomes frivolous or vicious because she is idle. And for how much of the misery of the world idle hands and wasted brains are responsible it would be hard to say. (150)

But Mrs. Ellis, author of four conduct books for women published between 1839 and 1844 and the acknowledged Emily Post of her day, defends the idea of pleasing. She says that being agreeable and giving pleasure may seem like superficial ways of doing good but that they open innumerable channels for "administering instruction, assistance, or consolation" (_Women_ 108)--all qualities of "influence," a woman's true realm. This is the kind of behavior being advocated for women in the historical period depicted by George Eliot in _Middlemarch_.

Fragility was a virtue in women during this period; hence women corseted and dieted themselves into actual ill health, sometimes becoming semi-invalids in their desire to achieve acceptable "beauty." According to Gilbert and Gubar, a thinking woman was a "breach of nature" (56). Therefore, the purpose of education for women was often seen as the manufacture of better wives and mothers. Mrs. Ellis recommends that a woman should place herself in a subordinate position as a wife, but that she must always be assured that she will deserve the highest respect as a mother (_Mothers_ 20). She also asks

rhetorically why a young woman cultivates her mind until she marries and then does not try to advance farther--she has, after all, the responsibility of training her children in later life (Mothers 17), a responsibility we briefly see Mary Garth carrying out successfully in Eliot's novel.

4

There was, however, a growing number who championed a woman's right to become more than a housewife and mother. Bessie Parkes, a close friend of George Eliot's and an activist for women's equality with men, once claimed that even the men who approved of the theory of women's rights when it was only a theory tended to become impatient and even hostile when the women wanted to put such a policy into practice and actually go out and earn money (Beer 161). Another of Eliot's friends, Barbara Bodichon, founded Girton College in the 1870s, a women's foundation connected with Cambridge. She hoped to educate women to become wage-earners and argued that there should be work for every human being so that no woman would have to be supported by a man, for such dependence robs her of personal dignity and causes her to "prostitute" herself to the man who supports her, even if he is her husband (Bodichon 11-12). Nevertheless, Bodichon and others like her still had to struggle with the results of the Industrial Revolution. It drove the needy to work and made those at home seem, to many, more vital to society as the "sole preservers of human values which found no place in the modern world of work" (Helsinger, II, 109).

Not only did women lack education and adequate employment opportunities so that they were economically dependent on father, brother, or husband, but also they were kept dependent by laws concerning property rights and divorce. Marriages of convenience, designed to bring two families and properties together--loveless marriages arranged by fathers--were still common in Victorian England. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, women lacked the right to inherit or to own property, and the practice of entail kept them perpetually dependent but usually provided for. For example, Dorothea Brooke's family inheritance is legally controlled by her uncle, who then provides for Dorothea and Celia. And when Mr. Brooke dies, his property does not go to Dorothea, but to her eldest son.

The first significant change in this custom came about in 1855 with the passage of the Married Women's Property Bill. Middlemarch was published serially in 1871-72, after the Property Bill and after the further improvements brought about by the Second Reform Bill, but the setting of the novel is forty years earlier. Thus from the standpoint of a later climate of thought, George Eliot deals with the politics of the time of the First Reform Bill and with long-practiced customs and laws which insured the subordination of women. After Middlemarch it became more difficult "to talk about woman's failure at abstraction, her inability to depict psychological struggles other than her own, or her refusal to deal with large social and intellectual issues" (Helsinger, III 78) because George Eliot had dealt with them so well. The passage of time had freed her to explore a series

of connections and analogies between present and past, and to make implied use of the unmentioned interval between the two triumphs of reform legislation, the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Second Reform Bill of 1867. In one sense, the whole period of the growth of the women's movement is excluded from the novel. In another, "as narrative discourse and as readers' retrospect, it becomes the matter of the novel's irony and of its melancholy idealism" (Beer 162).

5

There is no general agreement as to whether George Eliot was a feminist or even whether her writing deals with feminist issues. Beer quotes from the first reviewers of Middlemarch, indicating that they were aware that women's issues of the kind being debated in the 1850s and 1860s were implicit in the novel, hidden behind the primary issues of political and medical reform (148). Millett says George Eliot lived the revolution but did not write about it. She sees Dorothea as a fine mind pleading to be allowed an occupation, but going no further than the mere petition. Dorothea marries Will for companionship and becomes a secretary, no more; thus she is less than a positive model for aspiring women (139).

However, Kathleen Blake claims that Eliot clearly deals with feminist issues in Middlemarch, including women's natures, their need for work, men's presumption of superiority and the destructive consequences of that presumption (287). She mentions specifically the "Prelude" to the novel as concerned with the nature of women,

comparing St. Theresa, who had something specific to work for--the reform of a religious order--to women of Dorothea's day who had nothing to work for and so were severely limited (288). Rowbotham records that women became active in charity work during this period just to have something useful to do (48). Wilt also emphasizes the need for the discipline of work that is apparent in Eliot's novel, which repeatedly indicates that "yokelessness is one of the worst ills that can befall a person" (206). How can the ladies of Middlemarch feel productive when all they have to occupy them is embroidery and gossip?

Beer asserts that although George Eliot did not set out to write feminist novels (2), there is no doubt that Dorothea is a character who would like to reform the social order; however, the limitations imposed on the women of her time cause a long postponement of Dorothea's realization of her own oppression, although the reader senses the truth from the beginning. Beer points to the first chapter of Middlemarch in which the narrator reminds us, "Women are expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was that opinions were not acted on. Sane people did what their neighbors did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them" (7). Conduct books were very specific about women's expressions of opinion: "Be content to be inferior to men--inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (Ellis, Daughters 8).

However, the women in Middlemarch are not inferior, except in legal power and social expectations. Lerner sees Middlemarch as a thoroughly feminist novel. He says, "The Prelude makes it fairly clear that this is to be a book about woman's lot . . . . If Dorothea (let us put it at its crudest) could have become a doctor or a teacher, she wouldn't have needed Sir James Chettam's help to build the cottages; and she wouldn't have married Casaubon" (266-268). Patricia Lundberg suggests that a feminist perspective is demonstrated by the "nasty" things that happen to the male characters in Middlemarch, either directly or indirectly, by their actions or at the hands of submissive women (274-277). Examples include Dorothea's rebellion in the library as possibly hastening Casaubon's death; Featherstone's will being thwarted by Mary Garth; Bulstrode's being helped by the innocent Mrs. Abel to commit murder, which comes back to haunt him; and especially Lydgate's falling victim to Madame Laure and then to Rosamond, who destroys his spirit, and even to Dorothea, who has to save him both morally and financially.

Lundberg interprets these events as the author's ways of venting her anger at the lot of the typical nineteenth-century woman (274). Ringler thinks that feminists should be happier with George Eliot when they consider the influence Dorothea had over Casaubon, Lydgate, and Ladislaw, all of whom seek her help at some point in the novel. Still, she personifies Mrs. Ellis' definition of woman's strength, which she says is in a woman's influence. Her faculties are a "quickness of perception, facility of adaptation, and acuteness of

feeling" (Daughters 9), qualities which Dorothea exemplifies in various degrees throughout the novel. She goes on to note "an impressive personal dominance" by Rosamond, Mary, and Harriet over their husbands and to claim that little respect is shown for any of the men in the novel (57,59). Although there is some support for these allegations, the last one is refuted by the facts. George Eliot obviously holds great respect for Caleb Garth, despite his tendency to be weak in financial matters--a fault which gains our sympathy, not our condemnation.

And considerable respect for Reverend Farebrother is also demonstrated: he has sacrificed his personal ambition to follow his interest and talent for study and discovery in natural science and has become a clergyman in order to give his mother, aunt, and sister a secure and stable, though not affluent, position in the community. He also sacrifices his own best interests to the other woman in his heart, Mary Garth, whom he helps direct into the arms of Fred Vincy instead of trying to woo her himself; he recognizes that her deep heart's wish is to marry Fred, in spite of her practical understanding of Fred and his problems. It is also true that many of the male characters who do not inspire "respect" are treated indulgently or tolerantly rather than judgmentally. Neither Sir James Chettam's chauvinism nor Mr. Brooke's foolishness is roundly condemned. There is, then, evidence that can be interpreted as proof of a feminist perspective in Middlemarch, but there is also room for argument about George Eliot's intention, for the book is primarily a novel of character, not a treatise on women's grievances.

One of the critics who does not regard Eliot as a feminist is Ellen Moers, who believes that her "aim as a novelist was not to argue for a diminishing of the social inhibitions and a widening of the options that affect the lives of ordinary women." On the contrary, she describes Dorothea as "good for nothing but to be admired. An arrogant, selfish, spoiled, rich beauty, she does but little harm in the novel" (194). This is an extreme interpretation of Eliot's heroine and few even of the most devout feminists condemn her so roundly, but there is among critics a general disappointment in Dorothea's ultimate decision to marry Ladislaw and settle more or less happily into a subordinate and less than challenging role.

6

Certain of George Eliot's actions and her personal correspondence illuminate her position on women's issues. Suzanne Graver, citing her letters (175), argues that Eliot consistently maintains a belief in "woman's peculiar constitution for a special moral influence." Eliot writes thus to Emily Davies:

> We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character, than we can afford to part with the human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman--which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history. (IV 468)

She further contends that Eliot strongly supported the need to provide women with higher education even though she was afraid their "high and generous emotions" might be weakened by advanced learning (VI

287). Eliot realized tht "it is not likely that any perfect plan for educating women can soon be found, for we are very far from having found a perfect plan for educating men. But it will not do to wait for perfection" (V 58).

Although George Eliot hesitated to speak out on the "Woman Question," feeling "too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women," and therefore feeling "more inclined to hold my peace and learn" (V 58), she did believe in the obligation to work. She insisted that the one constant for men and women alike was that the task of each be done well (Graver 178). She certainly would have approved Mrs. Ellis' concept that cleverness, learning, and knowledge are desirable traits when they are "conducive to woman's moral excellence," but she might have argued with the final phrase "and no farther" (Daughters 74).

In 1853 she was still unsure about giving women the right to vote because she did not think she was ready herself (II 82), but she had changed her mind by 1867 and personally supported female suffrage. Nevertheless, when Mrs. Peter Taylor asked her to speak to that issue publicly, she responded:

> My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher--the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge. It is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings; another to say, "This step, and this alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities." (VII 44)

These comments demonstrate George Eliot's concern for feminist issues, but they also show that she was willing to admit that she was not

always sure what was best, and she recognized that her own scandalous relationship with George Henry Lewes put her in an awkward position to be taking stands on issues as volatile as those surrounding the "Woman Question."

It is also true that in her own life Eliot found particular enjoyment in her relationships with men. Men apparently found her fascinating and charming, despite her rather homely appearance. She always preferred the company of men to that of women and had no instinctive quarrel with the male sex, as did some of the feminists of her day. In fact, the central topic in her writing is relationships between men and women; as Beer says, she treats the sexes as "unlike yet bound together" and "this contradiction--difference and connection--sustains the tension of her work" (14). Wilt stresses that Eliot's literary concentration on the interdependence of the sexes was difficult to achieve and then difficult to sustain (206).

7

As a writer George Eliot was drawn, early in her intellectual life, to the possibility of a uniquely female tradition in literature, characterized by the maternal sensations and emotions peculiar to women that "might well produce distinctive forms" (Gilbert and Gubar 482). Gilbert and Gubar maintain that the message to women was always one of personal submission and literary silence. It was best that they not write at all, for men preferred silence--no pen and no story

from women (36). There had always been and still was a literary culture based on a patriarchal system. Acceptance of that system insured that even a bright, highly intelligent young woman like Dorothea Brooke would never even _dream_ of doing more than assisting a man--a "scholar" like Casaubon--in his great work. Some nineteenth-century women writers felt a strong impulse to struggle free from this confinement, despite the overriding belief that writing was a male domain, right down to the metaphorical comparison of pen and penis (6-7). Some were able to overcome the "anxiety of authorship" they had been taught (59), though female writers dealt with their anomalous situation in different ways. Even years later Virginia Woolf claimed a woman had only two choices when it came to self-identification: admitting she was "only a woman" or claiming to be "as good as a man" (64-65).

In Eliot's time, the latter choice was not available; some women apologized for their efforts, some published anonymously, some assumed male pen names, some confessed their limitations by dealing with lesser subjects, and some simply accepted the ostracism they knew to expect (Gilbert and Gubar 64). Women were not allowed the "status of artist" but were instead "supposed somehow to become works of art themselves" (450). For a long time George Eliot saw herself as an editor and translator, taking no credit at all for her translation of Strauss' _Das Leben Jesu_ and being willing to do much of the work on the _Westminster Review_ while giving the credit to John Chapman. She demonstrates her understanding of the notion of woman as a work of

art even in Middlemarch when Will tells Dorothea, "You are a poem" (166), and the novelist finally adopted a pseudonym for her writing, using "male impersonation to gain male acceptance of her 'intellectual seriousness'" (Gilbert and Gubar 65).

She obviously would have wished better for her female characters, but her familiarity with the ideas and writings of the women's movement led Eliot to create women characters in Middlemarch whose lives are limited by cultural expectations and available opportunities, and to imply that too little had been done to change the situation even by the early 1870s. Colvin points to both the "Prelude" and the "Finale" as examples of George Eliot's insistence upon "the design of illustrating the necessary disappointment of a woman's nobler aspirations in a society not made to second noble aspirations in a woman" (151). He adds that Dorothea does not suffer from yielding to the pressure of social opinion but from finding out that she married Casaubon under "ideals of delusion" and that society nurtures those ideals (151-152). She never sees herself as Milton but as "one of Milton's dutiful daughters" (47), content to be taught by the debilitated Miltonic Casaubon. But alas, her chosen teacher disappoints her both intellectually and sexually in her pursuit of an "education." Beer sees Dorothea's problem as wanting to know beyond what she has been taught and to do beyond what society thinks appropriate for her (173).

Having money does not give Dorothea independence because she is still controlled by Casaubon through the codicil attached to his will.

In fact, money causes her so many problems that she finally relinquishes Casaubon's fortune in a search for freedom from his ghost. At the end of the novel, she accepts dependence on Will Ladislaw. Like Dorothea, several other female characters in the novel seek some level of independence, but none find it completely. Rosamond and Dorothea both want to get away from provincial life and so choose husbands they believe can help them escape its "confinement," but each is disappointed and feels imprisoned by her marriage (Gilbert and Gubar 514,516). Mary Garth achieves a certain independence by refusing to succumb to Featherstone's demand that she destroy one of his wills, but actually she remains dependent on her father until Fred Vincy straightens himself out and she can shift her dependence to him as "an acceptable husband" (Beer 170).

Even Will Ladislaw's family background emphasizes the economic oppression of women in a patriarchal society. His mother ran away when she found out about her family's disreputable business dealings, and Will's grandmother was dispossessed because she chose to marry the man she loved, both suffering as a result of their choices (Gilbert and Gubar 529). And finally Blake points to Letty Garth, "whose life was much checkered by resistance to her depreciation as a girl" (417) and who has to argue with her brothers and then hear her mother confirm that girls are good for less than boys. She seems to exist in Middlemarch so that the feminist theme can be reiterated occasionally, "her feeling of superiority being stronger than her muscles" (609). But Letty is only a little girl, and Blake suggests

that those feelings cannot last when women get no credit and no one has high expectations of them (289).

8

The spirit of the Victorian *Zeitgeist* is everywhere apparent in *Middlemarch*; and the time included major changes in scientific knowledge, in legal rights, in commerce and industry, in faith and doubt, in class distinctions and social mobility, but little significant change in the place of women, especially middle-class women. Although George Eliot does not directly deal with feminist questions as major issues in *Middlemarch*, there is no doubt that social community and moral intensity, the only significant themes for George Eliot, are associated primarily with her female characters. Nor can there be doubt that the women she has imagined so vividly are burdened by the limitations imposed upon them. They are, however, transitional figures, human persons moving in decreasing ignorance toward the freedom of full and equal humanity. The bearers of George Eliot's significant themes are, at the beginning and at the end of a forty-year period, on the way to significant change.

CHAPTER III

DOROTHEA BROOKE

1

"Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (5). Thus George Eliot introduces Dorothea Brooke, thought by many to be the ultimate embodiment of beauty, aspiration, and moral dignity in George Eliot's work. "Theoretic" of mind and "enamoured of intensity and greatness" (6), this youthful heroine has been the object of much critical attention since she was introduced to readers in 1871. At that time Henry James claimed that George Eliot's heroines "have always been of an exquisite quality, and Dorothea is only that perfect flower of conception of which her predecessors were the less unfolded blossoms" (George Eliot's Middlemarch 82). Describing "an indefinable moral elevation" as the sign "of these admirable creatures," he adds:

> To render the expression of a soul requires a cunning hand; but we seem to look straight into the unfathomable eyes of the beautiful spirit of Dorothea Brooke. She exhales a sort of aroma of spiritual sweetness, and we believe in her as in a woman we might providentially meet some fine day when we should find ourselves doubting of the immortality of the soul. (82)

James considers the effect of this character on the reader to be the book's greatest achievement.

Arnold Kettle describes Dorothea as a sensitive, intelligent young woman, belonging to the English landed class of the early

nineteenth century, bursting with "half-formulated dissatisfactions with the fatuous, genteel life of the women of her class, seeking something beyond the narrow 'selfishness' of her acquaintances and turning towards a religious Puritanism and a high-minded philanthropy to satisfy her unfulfilled potentialities" (166). Described by Milner as the ultimate in "healthy, vigorous youthfulness" (71) and by Hutton as a specimen of the "unconventional, warm-hearted girls whom alone George Eliot likes" (405), Dorothea obviously has the respect of her creator (Zimmerman 220).

Readers and critics alike often fall in love with Dorothea Brooke and sing her praises unreservedly, though the character has her detractors. Some critics point specifically to the similarities between Dorothea and George Eliot, noting that each seeks "sober answers to moral and philosophical problems"; each tries to harmonize her life and her surroundings and becomes an illustration "of the unresolved problems of life"; and each leans on others for guidance and discovers that some of these guides are "false" or "fallible," while others prove "authentic" (Warner 4462-63).

Some critics emphasize the irony in Eliot's portrayal of Dorothea, even while noting her resemblance to the author. For example, Gerald Bullett claims that George Eliot portrays something of her younger self in Dorothea, except "there is no humor in Dorothea," just "exquisite humor in her portrayal." Bullett describes her as beautiful, idealistic, and ardent, but also as "a sad prig." At twenty she is already "opinionated, innocent, saintly," and the

reader is "equally conscious of her beauty and her absurdity" (232). The truth is that little of Bullett's description of Dorothea sounds like George Eliot, young or old, except perhaps the ardent nature. It is true, however, that George Eliot often paints Dorothea with ironic brush strokes, yet still manages to gain sympathy and admiration for her. Gordon Haight insists that Dorothea is _not_ George Eliot, "who resembled her in little more than the common Victorian urge to be useful, and had neither her birth, fortune, nor beauty, and certainly not the lack of humor that caused most of Dorothea's trouble" (_George Eliot_ 191). What author and character clearly have in common is the desire to improve the world through their own individual efforts.

Richard Lyons sees Dorothea primarily as an inspiration to the other characters in the novel, for "by her presence she shakes people out of their egoism into a new awareness of other selves" (44). Certainly we can see that Will, Lydgate, and even Rosamond recognize that kind of power in her. What she wants seems simple enough, yet it is grand and unattainable. "I should like to make life beautiful--I mean everybody's life" (162), she says. However, Vicimus reminds us that women in Dorothea's day were encouraged to do good but were "prevented from effecting real change" (xi). Bedient asserts that Dorothea does not win the fame of a St. Theresa or lead an epic life because her ambition is too vague ("Middlemarch" 79), and yet her plan includes specific projects which she works toward: better living conditions for the laborers in the form of comfortable cottages and a village school to provide an education for their children.

Dorothea's goals are worthy, her looks are charming, her personality is winning; she is almost too good to be true, and yet she seems very real. Fernando suggests that "in creating Dorothea, it was not so much that George Eliot proceeded from abstract to concrete or vice versa, as that she came as close as she ever was to come to establishing easy commerce between the two, between the moral ideal and the artistic reality" (89). He says that both are present in Dorothea, as Eliot intended, because she is a type, "an idealized type portraying what a woman _could_ be" (89).

2

Whatever stand we may take on Dorothea Brooke, our tendency is to think of her and speak of her and respond to her as someone we know or would like to know--as a person. Whether we are interested in her charm, in her idealism, or in her short-sightedness and naiveté, we are amazingly, intensely interested. Why? What techniques has George Eliot used to create a protagonist so real that we weep for her, trust her, and occasionally want to warn her away from danger? Why do we feel that the author has indeed rendered "the expression of a soul" in this beautiful, spirited young woman?

From the first sentence, George Eliot begins to create an attractive but vague visual image of Dorothea Brooke, a nineteen-year-old beauty with finely formed hand and wrist, a dignified bearing, and a penchant for plain dress which only enhances her beauty. A handsome heiress with large eyes described as "too unusual and striking" (7) for most, Dorothea moves through the early pages of the novel with

only this briefest description of her appearance. Is she light or dark, tall or short, full or slim of figure? The narrator's lack of detail about these physical facts indicates an apparent lack of their significance in our coming to know the novel's protagonist.

Instead of supplying a full description, the narrator shifts emphasis immediately to Dorothea's personality. Declared clever, of "good" background, and theoretical of mind, Dorothea glows with Puritan energy. It seems important for the reader to know that she is "open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring" (7). Certainly men admire her, especially on horseback, and she enjoys horseback riding, in a "pagan, sensuous way." This comment by the narrator seems paradoxical when juxtaposed to that Puritanical, sacrificing nature until we learn that "she always looked forward to renouncing it" (7), which Hardy notes as Dorothea's attempt to be an ascetic (Particularities 21). Kucich, among others, describes this conflict between Dorothea's sensuous and ascetic desires in terms of her mother's jewelry. The young woman cannot reconcile the attraction of her mother's emeralds with her "spiritual passion" (143), though she tries to justify her delight in them by pointing out that "gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John" (10). Nevertheless, she is disturbed by the contradiction she finds in her emotional response to the gems' beauty, and Celia also considers her inconsistent in her behavior.

The narrator, however, generally dwells on the contradictions in Dorothea's personality in an approving way (Kucich 139). For

example, those wary of her religiosity "found that she had a charm unaccountably reconcilable with it" (1). And other men are attracted to her because of the conflicts in her personality. Lydgate sees "the piquancy of an unusual combination" (10); Will calls her "one of Nature's inconsistencies" (9) but expresses a fascination with her; and the artist Naumann calls her "a sort of Christian Antigone--a sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion" (141). These conflicting forces within Dorothea have the effect of making her more real, more human, and more vulnerable in her relationships and therefore more attractive to others.

There is always a tension in Eliot's novels between ethical ideals and emotional needs (Bolstad 980), and Dorothea personifies that conflict in Middlemarch. As Jones says, the ways George Eliot presents her characters and the ways we apprehend them are closely related to "habits of concern and care for actual people" (64), and we come to care for Dorothea as if she were alive. Yet we also do not hesitate to judge her as if she were alive, since the author, the narrator, and the people of Middlemarch also judge her. There is a delicate balancing of irony and sympathy in the author's presentation of Dorothea which expresses "the simultaneous presence of the detachment that makes judgment possible" (Jones 63), but there is also an attachment that suggests that not only Dorothea but also the other inhabitants of Middlemarch are human beings worth judging (63).

3

Knoepflmacher calls the novel a "work about the imaginative act of relating" (Nineteenth Century Fiction 78), and Dorothea is trying to find a principle that will "unify the fragmentariness which this structure of the novel postulates" (Carroll, "Unity" 306). She discovers that principle in the nature of human relationships as the novel develops, but she must grow in self-knowledge through disenchantment and suffering before she finally formulates a realistic moral system that is acceptable to her. In a "society built on change, selves in process of growth and transformation" (Fisher 173), Dorothea is a prime example of the process of change.

Two subjects occupy much of Dorothea's story: marriage and altruism. George Eliot wastes no time in introducing both topics, assuring the reader from the novel's beginning that Dorothea will be a good match for the right man. She has her own inheritance, and should she marry and have a son, he will inherit her uncle's estate also. In a brief moment of foreshadowing, the narrator warns us that "with all her eagerness to know the truths of life," Dorothea "retained very childlike ideas about marriage" (7). For her Hooker or Milton would have made an ideal husband, since they had brilliant minds and she yearns to be helpful to a man in accomplishing some great work. She sees the "really delightful marriage" as one in which the "husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" (8). Unfortunately, because she and Celia are orphans who have been reared by a loving but rather dim-witted bachelor uncle, she has very

little personal knowledge of a father and so must rely on imagination to create both the ideal father figure and the perfect prospective husband. And her first marriage is the "fruit of her immature idealization of the past" (Hurley 677). It is the supreme example of the perils of "precipitous infatuations, unsuitable alliances, marital irregularities" which Gay says always end in unhappiness (Tender 151).

With the idealism of inexperience, Dorothea has seen life as "a walled-in maze of small paths" (21) that lead nowhere until Casaubon enters her life, promising to take her along the "grandest path" with him (Stump 159). The problem, of course, is that they cannot walk together, for each has an unrealistic idea of what life's walk should mean. Casaubon has been "unconsciously wrought upon by the charms of a nature which was entirely without hidden calculations" (37), making her seem childlike and "according to some judges, so stupid, with all her reputed cleverness" (37). With this comment the narrator makes us stop short and consider a possible deficiency in Dorothea's charm. Yet as soon as we recognize what some call her weakness, in the next sentence we are called on to sympathize because she is so anxious to be "good enough" for Casaubon. The dry theologian is taken in, then, by a young woman he perceives only as a devotee and potential secretary who will idolize him and never make demands.

He is therefore not prepared for an intelligent woman who actually expects to see The Key to All Mythologies proceed toward publication, and he is terrified of her demands. In describing a

woman's role in the England of 1864, John Ruskin is still advocating knowledge for a woman only to the extent that she can understand and aid "the work of men: and yet it should be given, not as knowledge,--not as if it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge" (81). And Dorothea has "conceived of knowledge as a substantial object of understanding rather than as the process of understanding, just as she has mistakenly given a substantial characterization to Casaubon that fails to account for the varying aspects of his character over the course of time" (Cottom 179). Her picture of life with him is the work of her imagination, as the narrator informs the reader, which lacks both knowledge and understanding, and that picture provides "a way to fulfill her wish to contribute in a significant way which reality denied her" (Paris 183). Casaubon, on the other hand, has turned to her for satisfactions "which the resisting and threatening otherness of the world had failed to provide" (183).

That Dorothea is a problem for Casaubon is hinted at through gossip about him between Sir James Chettam and Mr. Brooke and between the always outspoken Mrs. Cadwallader and her husband and Sir James. His difficulty with her is suggested by the response of Celia to Casaubon's looks and personality. And it is intimated by Casaubon's letter of proposal to Dorothea, though she is too overawed to recognize its formal, cold civility and lack of deep-felt affection. Casaubon cannot give what Dorothea wants: he cannot provide knowledge or greatness in the intellectual sphere, nor can he satisfy her

desire for sexual intimacy or for simple conjugal caring and sustaining.

4

Unfortunately, Dorothea's dilemma is also multifaceted. As the narrator says, she desires "to be wise herself" (47). From a historical perspective this would have been a potentially dangerous wish. In 1864 John Ruskin delivered a lecture in which he described a woman's true place and power.

> She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise--wide, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service--the true changefulness of woman. (79)

For Dorothea, in her setting more than thirty years earlier, this would have been an accurate description, despite the fact that her bright mind and innate capabilities could have taken her far beyond this subservient position in another place and time. But it is not another place and time, and the gentlemen in Dorothea's life are certain that men are superior to women. Sir James Chettam delights in Dorothea's cleverness but believes that a "man's mind . . . has always the advantage of being masculine" (16) and that "even his ignorance is of a sounder quality" than a woman's (16). The narrator adds satirically here that this idea may not have originated with Sir James, but that "a kind Providence furnishes the limpest personality with a little gum or starch in the form of tradition" (16), thus

accentuating the stupidity of the widespread belief in male superiority.

That Mr. Brooke accepts this conventional wisdom is evidenced by his description of women as "too flighty" (14), an irony since that is an accurate picture of Mr. Brooke. In conversations he describes woman as a problem hardly less complicated "than the revolutions of an irregular solid" (31), but he is sure that woman is seldom a lover of knowledge except as that love "comes out in the sons" (33). He believes that "there is a lightness about the feminine mind--a touch and go--music, the fine arts, that kind of thing--they should study those up to a certain point, women should; but in a light way, you know" (48). He refuses to argue politics with ladies, explaining to Mrs. Cadwallader, "Your sex are not thinkers, you know" (40). It is obvious to everyone, however, that it is Mr. Brooke who is not the thinker; thus any position he supports about women in general or his niece in particular is discredited.

The nineteenth century ideal of the "perfect lady" was the one brought up to be "perfectly innocent" and "sexually ignorant" (Vicinus xi). A woman's "sole function was marriage and procreation" (x). Therefore, it seems perfectly normal that a middle-aged Middlemarch bachelor like Mr. Chichely would say that a woman's reason for being is simply to look beautiful and please a man; for this astute reason he rejects Dorothea and admits his choice of feminine frailty to be Rosamond Vincy (if he were in the market for a wife, which he is not), because of her blond hair and swan-like neck, and because her personal

behavior suggests that she understands and accepts man's expectations of woman. A much more significant opinion about a woman's limitations is the one held by Edward Casaubon, which he does not express openly until sometime after his marriage to Dorothea, when the honeymoon has proved a disappointment, as has his wife. She has shown herself in his view to be a "cruel outward accuser" and a "spy watching everything with a malign power of inference" (149).

By the time Dorothea suggests that Casaubon should make Will Ladislaw inheritor of half his estate, Casaubon has developed a deep jealousy over the friendship between his young cousin and Dorothea, and has reached the end of his patience with his young wife. In a dramatic conversation he says, "Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope" (275). Thus he suggests an automatically limited "female scope." In The Daughters of England, Ellis' conduct book for young ladies in the early and middle nineteenth century, she advises a young married woman that her "highest duty is so often to suffer and be still" (73). However, this is not the natural response for a bright, open, intense young woman like Dorothea. And the truth is that this is the only concrete subject about which Casaubon can condemn Dorothea and her attitudes and judgments, as he needs to do, for having her become a critical wife instead of a trusting, ardent follower has made him constantly aware of, and fearful about, his own failures. We recognize his remarks as an outlet for these fears and frustrations, not

as an accurate judgment of Dorothea's mental abilities. And the narrator quickly adds that it is only Dorothea's fear for Casaubon's health that makes her remain silent, despite her feelings of resentment over his accusation. A few pages later the novelist intrudes to inquire and respond in brief, "Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self" (307). Casaubon, then, is in his own way. He is most disturbed at Dorothea's opinion because she is so often right.

Even Lydgate, who recognizes a difference between Dorothea and other women, describes her as too earnest, claiming she does not look at things from a "proper feminine angle" (70). Although many readers and critics alike would like to have seen Dorothea marry Lydgate instead of Casaubon or Ladislaw, Lydgate lacks a "sufficiently pure and lofty nature to appreciate at once her noble independence and exalted views" (Woolson 86). Instead, he demonstrates his lack of understanding of the intelligence and abilities of such a woman when he ponders, "It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste" (69). Of course, by the end of the novel Lydgate is much relieved to have this same woman depend on her moral sense, which compels her to defend his innocence in the Bulstrode/Raffles incident and to come to his rescue with Rosamond and with the community. Dorothea offers him both verbal and monetary support.

With some clues from the narrator and novelist, we have been noting examples of the conversations Eliot creates to provide the reader with information about Dorothea, women, and marriage and about the habits of thought of Middlemarchers on these subjects. These conversations, which reveal male attitudes about women in general and Dorothea in particular, yield more information about the speakers than about those whom they describe. In fact, little information about the Dorothea the reader comes to know so intimately is actually provided through gossip. What becomes apparent is that neither the townspeople nor her family and friends really understand Dorothea Brooke and her choice of marriage partners or other significant actions she takes.

5

Since Middlemarch is about personal relationships, perhaps we should be able to know Dorothea through her conversations with other people. But do we? Instead, what we come to understand by being privy to those exchanges is how little Dorothea really knows about herself throughout much of the novel. She knows what she wants ideally, to make people's lives better. Her idea of a way to do that has been to build cottages for the poor laborers on her uncle's land. When she sees Lowick and its surrounding farms, Dorothea is surprised to find herself disappointed that they lack for little. She admits to Casaubon that she almost wishes "the people wanted more to be done for them" (57). She tells him, "I have known so few ways of making my life good for anything. Of course, my notions of usefulness must be

narrow. I must learn new ways of helping people" (57). And this is a lesson she <u>will</u> learn. Thus we see an early example of naiveté combined with a compassionate heart and the sincere desire to do good.

Dorothea tries to extend her knowledge through her husband, Edward Casaubon. When he takes her to see the great art works of Rome, she tries to appreciate what he appreciates and learn to be wise by absorbing his wisdom. Her question to Edward is always, "But do you care about them" (146)? The reader realizes that he cares about little and can only provide dreary information based on others' opinions--another early indication that Dorothea will benefit little from her marriage to him. She discusses the same frescoes and paintings with Will Ladislaw, and in her open, forthright way admits her ignorance about art, claiming, "It must be my own dulness. I am seeing so much all at once, and not understanding half of it. That always makes one feel stupid. It is painful to be told that anything is very fine and not be able to feel that it is fine--something like being blind, while people talk of the sky" (153).

Despite the fact that the stated topic of this conversation is art, the reader understands that subconsciously, at least, Dorothea is also describing her marital experience. Yet there is no one whom she can question about that--or complain to. Her main impression of art, as explained to Will, is that its "immense expense," which seems "somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world" (162-163) pains her. She cannot enjoy anything which most of the world is shut out from because of cost. Will calls that Dorothea's

"fanaticism of sympathy," accusing her of believing in the virtues of misery and wanting to make her "life a martyrdom" (163). Dorothea's disclaimer that she is basically a happy, not a melancholy, person, reminds the reader that she may not be morose or sad by nature, but she is somber and far too serious for one so young and eager to learn.

As a manifestation of her seriousness, we see a determined Dorothea test her will against Casaubon's only once after their clash of tempers in Rome. In this conversation we see that Dorothea can defend herself when she feels unfairly judged. They are discussing a possible visit by Will Ladislaw to Lowick. What we learn here is that Dorothea has a sense of justice which she will not see ignored, and by this point in their marriage, she no longer considers Casaubon to be beyond criticism or reproach. When he subsequently suffers his first heart attack, however, Dorothea immediately sets aside her own feelings and opinions, fearing only for him. In one of the few episodes when Dorothea allows an inner impulse to spill out in conversation, she begs Lydgate as Casaubon's physician, "Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been labouring all his life and looking forward. He minds about nothing else. And I mind about nothing else--" (214). Lydgate always remembers this "involuntary appeal--this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully-illuminated life" (214). This conversation begins the change in Lydgate's attitude toward Dorothea, although he cannot provide an adequate response to help her at the time.

As Dorothea continues to grow and accumulate knowledge in her associations with others as well as to gain self-knowledge, she admits to her uncle, "I find it is not so easy to be learned as to plan cottages" (284). Planning cottages is limited and concrete, and it does not require the give-and-take of personal relationships. But we see that she has learned the power of sly manipulation as she assures Mr. Brooke, through his weakening protests, that she knows he will repair and improve his lands and cottages "because you mean to enter Parliament as a member who cares for the improvement of the people" (285). As her early nebulous desire to "help people" takes more concrete forms, she also develops positive methods for occasionally shaping desires into realities, though there are always obstacles thwarting her plans.

6

As Dorothea matures, she gathers facts and develops understanding through her conversations with family and friends. She explains to Will her one comforting belief: "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" (287). She claims this belief to be her life. "I have found it out, and cannot part with it" (287). We recognize this credo as what Dorothea is striving for at this point in her life, but in her striving she is learning many lessons, some of them painful.

After Casaubon's death and before Will temporarily leaves Middlemarch, Dorothea tells him,

> Two years ago I had no notion of that--I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. 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. (397)

The reader understands from this speech that Dorothea has reached the point at which she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness to protect Will and his reputation from the repercussions of Casaubon's will. These examples of Dorothea's own words about herself provide more realistically "telling" information about her than the metaphoric or extravagant descriptions by other characters, like Caleb Garth's claim for her of a "voice like music" (402) and Will's assertion to Rosamond that Dorothea is the "perfect woman" (318).

It is also through conversations in which Dorothea participates that we learn of her loyalty to friends and her outspoken support of them. A prime example of this trait surfaces when Mrs. Cadwallader gossips about Will to Dorothea and Sir James. Dorothea responds, "I will not hear any evil spoken of Mr. Ladislaw; he has already suffered too much injustice" (460). And in case the reader is prone to dismiss this as favoritism because of Dorothea's feelings for Will, let us look at her response to the gossip about Lydgate. She tells Reverend Farebrother, "You don't believe that Mr. Lydgate is guilty of anything base? I will not believe it. Let us find out the truth and clear him" (536)!

She then goes on to express to Farebrother another of her beliefs, which sets her apart from most of the inhabitants of Middlemarch: "I believe that people are almost always better than their neighbors think they are" (537). To Pearce this trait is not so much loyalty as faith in her intuition about people (137). She assures Lydgate that she knows he "would not do anything dishonourable" (558), an assertion which temporarily boosts his heavy heart and flagging confidence when no one else has even tried. This is the same assurance that Dorothea provides for Will when he tells her that he has refused Bulstrode's financial assistance, knowing she would not like that connection, and she replies, "You acted as I should have expected you to act" (592). These kinds of conversations, as Dorothea strengthens, mends, intensifies, and otherwise develops her relationships with friends and family, provide much of the significant information about her character that makes her subsequent actions believable.

7

Adam says that because Eliot was a psychological novelist, she could suggest "a profound sense of the inner life which determines outward actions" ("George Eliot" 34). It is the glimpses of that inner life through the narrator's explanations and the author's intrusions which blend with the novel's seemingly mundane public and private conversations to provide us finally with the moral implications of the characters' actions. Schorer calls all action moral, "an

individual choice that entails individual responsibility," despite the fact that "human life exists in interdependence" (14).

What do those inner glimpses provide to help the reader _know_ Dorothea Brooke and accept the reality of her actions and choices? When Dorothea announces her engagement to Edward Casaubon, the people of Middlemarch are surprised and even a little horrified, but the reader is not (at least not surprised), because the narrator has already explained Dorothea's motives for her actions and her susceptibilities. Kucich stresses that "this kind of nondramatic presentation diminishes the narrative engagement of Eliot's characters with each other, aesthetically focusing our attention on internal emotional development" (138). And we experience Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon with her, as we are privileged to know her thoughts and emotions through the months following his death as well. Foster calls marriage "a kind of moral agent through which characters' actions are evaluated" (222), and we certainly can and do evaluate Dorothea by her actions in the relationship with Casaubon as well as that with Will Ladislaw. If, as Mintz claims, there are two methods for arriving at the moral value of a character--contributions to society at large and contributions to the "personal moral life" of those he is close to by renouncing self-interest (114), then certainly Dorothea is valuable. She is willing to sacrifice self and self-interest on behalf of Casaubon and Will (Tucker 2723; James Bennett 74); this is what makes her virtuous and admirable (Austin 144).

In 1885 Henry James observed accurately that there is nothing finer in George Eliot's genius than "the combination of her love of general truth and love of the special case" ("George Eliot's Life" 184-185). In each "special case" the author stresses "the necessity for full awareness of personal integrity and morality in the close relationships of men and women" (Ferguson 514). Sometimes the results of their moral actions are less than morally successful, and a character's choices may be limited by circumstances (Price 223-224)--for example, by Dorothea's background and education. But Dorothea's moral actions are the result of her thoughts and feelings, which are shared with the reader by the omniscient obtrusive narrator who guides him through this subtle, complex character's experiences. This sophisticated narrator shows us Dorothea growing painfully from "adolescent illusion to a fuller understanding of herself and the world" (Milner 72). Redinger describes Eliot as the "not herself" half of Mary Ann Evans, who critically analyzes characters and controls her best writing (334). Redinger credits the omniscient narrator with allowing the reader to know more of the inner and outer nature of a character than even the character can know or articulate (334). Isaacs also emphasizes the omniscient point of view, explaining that the author not only speaks directly to the audience and makes judgments but that she also has "complete knowledge of all characters and events--past, present, and future--and may read minds, motives, and portents from any vantage" (30). He adds, however, that Eliot never gives the impression that she is pulling the strings of mere

puppets. "Her direct statements to the audience reveal her knowledge, not her power, and no matter how general or abstract or philosophical the remark, it always is applicable to these people whom she knows and is revealing to us" (31).

Mary Ellen Doyle explains the reader/narrator relationship in this way: "'You' becomes 'anyone' or expands into a genuine 'we' that binds narrator and reader in a shared knowledge and opinion and in a sympathy for even the least lovable characters in our common human lot of dim vision and much disappointment" (134). Beer says that Eliot's use of the pronoun "we" woos the reader to her point of view by making him feel chosen; each reader is included in the world that Dorothea and the other characters know (28-29).

8

There is general agreement among critics that Eliot does not take advantage of her position as author or narrator to force certain judgments from the reader. Even her authorial intrusions seldom take the form of direct judgment. As Hardy says, "They are offerings, observations made, sometimes with a hint of tentativeness, towards assessing a predicament" (Critical Essays 120). And Oldfield qualifies this by saying that Eliot sometimes tells us only what we cannot think, not what we must (67). The characters, like the plot, develop organically, and one of Eliot's tools for that development is the omniscient, benevolent narrator.

Freadman refers to a crucial paragraph in Middlemarch as Eliot's statement of narrative intention:

> But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over the tempting range of relevancies called the universe. (105)

Freadman concludes that the use of the inclusive "we," and the "images of omniscience as empirical inquiry ('all the light I can command')" works "to diffuse the impression of transcendence, to offer the narrating persona as an empirical rather than a transcendental presence in the work" (138). There is a sense, then, of human limitation associated with the narrator which makes her seem wiser and more real to the reader, even when she draws on omniscience's "special dispensations" (138), thereby claiming knowledge of what human beings simply cannot bear to know, as in this timeless maxim from Middlemarch:

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (144)

The reader expects the narrator to be wise enough to understand the "facts" of the novel and to be consistent in her judgment and sympathy, supplying different angles and viewpoints on episodes and characters so that the reader can avoid the pitfalls of the narrow

vision into which the characters themselves often fall. Eliot's narrator allows the reader to know all the "notions" available. She then intervenes to integrate those facts and opinions and guides the reader in forming his judgments. As Miller points out, the narrator in Middlemarch moves from a close-up to a panoramic view, shifting from one character's point of view to another's, in order to present a "multidimensional picture of what is really there" (Bloom, George Eliot 108). For example, after the reader has seen the courtship, marriage, and honeymoon of Dorothea and Edward from Dorothea's point of view, supplemented by the opinions of family and neighbors, the narrator interrupts the story to say, "--but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to the marriage?" (205), and then turns to a sympathetic, insightful look at Casaubon's expectations and disappointments.

9

Despite the author's desire to appear objective by presenting various viewpoints, the reader finds himself focusing on Dorothea whenever she is present in the narrative and wondering about her when she is not. Dicey was mistaken when he reviewed Middlemarch in 1873 and said that there is no single character in the novel on whom one can center his interest (76-77). So was Cockshut, who pronounced the town, not Dorothea, the central character in the novel (16). Even before Dorothea appears in the story, the narrator tells us about her, outside of any dramatic context. The narrator informs us that

Dorothea "felt sure that she would have accepted the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony" (7). Here are the protagonist's "very thought processes outside the framework of events" (Kucich 138). And we often learn of Dorothea's inner conflicts in this way. The narrator achieves a certain amount of objectivity and neutrality about Dorothea through much of the novel by alternating irony and sympathy in her presentation (Ferris 199).

Again, the ongoing relationship between Dorothea and Casaubon provides many examples of this effective presentation of the inner drama in Dorothea which produces her outward actions. The reader sees the absurdity of a young girl who believes that a man like Casaubon, who has "not two styles of talking at command" (18), could understand her "at once" (18). How can a vibrant young woman like Dorothea believe that a man more than twice her age whose "face was often lit up by a smile like pale wintry sunshine" (19) might be the apotheosis of her all-knowing dream husband? And the irony is apparent in Dorothea's early sense of _joy_ that "almost everything he had said seemed like a specimen from a mine or the inscription on the door of a museum" (24).

To keep the reader from concluding that Dorothea is nothing but an ignorant, immature child, the narrator does admit that despite her hope and excitement, Miss Brooke is "visited with conscientious questionings whether she were not exalting these poor doings above measure and contemplating them with that self-satisfaction which was

the last doom of ignorance and folly" (25). As soon as the narrator warns us that Dorothea wants more than a wise husband, that she wants to be wise herself, she immediately adds that Dorothea "constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance" (47). And as soon as we are convinced that Dorothea is interested in reputation and glory from her marriage to Casaubon and his "higher initiation in ideas" (63), both of which the narrator says Dorothea understands with only "dim conceptions" (63), she reassures us that "it would be a great mistake to suppose that Dorothea would have cared about any share in Mr. Casaubon's learning as mere accomplishment" (63). The narrator continues, "All the eagerness for acquirement lay within that full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were habitually swept along" (64). And so it is that every ironically presented flaw, error in judgment, and immature response is quickly and carefully explained or excused with sympathetic understanding.

Dorothea's inability to understand or appreciate the sensual art of ancient Italy is excused in the narrator's contrast between "the gigantic broken revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism" (143). Her movement from selfishness to selflessness in her relationship with Casaubon, of which her response to Italian art is an unconscious projection, is a process that involves Dorothea's and Edward's entire life together.

From the beginning, the narrator tells us that Dorothea "was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers: she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his heart-beats, but only felt that her own was beating violently" (148-149). The yet in that description provides the hope that her self-preoccupation may yield to unselfish concern. And it is not long before that change comes. Upon learning that Casaubon's lack of knowledge of German scholarship makes his own work valueless, Dorothea feels a "new alarm on his behalf which was the first stirring of a pitying tenderness fed by the realities of his lot and not by her own dreams" (155). Again a single word, first, suggests the probability of additional generous responses. More and more the narrator emphasizes Dorothea's growing awareness that Casaubon has "an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference" (157).

Dorothea faithfully defends Edward to Will when the latter suggests that his cousin may have failed in his life's work. Dorothea responds, "Failure after long perseverance is much grander than never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure" (165). A weak argument, perhaps, but it emphasizes Dorothea's continuing loyalty to, and support for, her husband despite her rapidly-growing realization of all his failures. She still hopes for some duty to "present itself in some new form of inspiration and give a new meaning to wifely love" (202). Perhaps the narrator steps back here to remind us of Dorothea's unrealistic view of marriage, but the reader

understands that no one can go on without hope and without dreams, no matter how unrealistic.

10

As her own marital problems increase, however, Dorothea comes to identify with the miniature of Edward's Aunt Julia (Will's grandmother), a young woman who had made an unfortunate marriage and whose face gazes at her steadfastly from its ancient frame. Dorothea comes to endow the picture of Julia with life, imagining her as someone who understands and sympathizes with her own situation. Dorothea desperately needs a response, a companionship, someone to empathize with her misery. But, as Paris points out, she gives compassion in addition to receiving it in this imagined relationship (186). She thinks, "What a wrong, to cut off the girl from the family protection and inheritance only because she had chosen a man who was poor" (272). The reader comprehends the dramatic irony of this reflection fully only when the codicil to Casaubon's will emphasizes the tie between Julia and Dorothea even more. For the time being it is an example of Dorothea's extending her vision and her sympathy as she moves a little beyond herself.

Dorothea's expanding pity and concern attempt to encompass Casaubon too, even though her "mind was innocently at work towards the further embitterment of her husband" (272). Her plan to help Will by sharing Casaubon's wealth with him, because she sees him as rightful heir to the inheritance which Julia unjustly lost, is perceived by

Edward as another example of the growing emotional ties between Dorothea and Ladislaw. Hard upon the narrator's warning that "she was blind, you see, to many things obvious to others--likely to tread in the wrong places" (273), comes the defense that ". . . her blindness to whatever did not lie in her own pure purpose carried her safely by the side of precipices where vision would have been perilous with fear" (273). Although we see Dorothea's innocent actions misunderstood and misdirected, the narrator reassures us that Casaubon suspects only Will, not Dorothea, of duplicity.

Nevertheless, after Dorothea learns of Casaubon's fragile health and devotes herself completely and submissively to meeting his every need, he convinces himself that she is judging him and that "her wifely devotedness was like a penitential expiation of unbelieving thoughts" (306). As his coldness toward her grows, Dorothea's anger surfaces once again, and she promises herself that she will tell him how she feels and demand to know what she has done wrong. But before that interview can take place, she has time to meditate on _his_ fears, his sorrows, his pain, and she resolves to submit, realizing even as she does that she can never expect any response from him but a cold one.

This narrative of the inner event of a moral crisis demonstrates Dorothea's change in feeling from concern for herself to deep sympathy and concern for someone else. The subsequent scene in the hallway provides the only gentle, almost loving exchange between the two lonely intimates. When Casaubon tells Dorothea, "Come, my dear,

come. You are young, and need not to extend your life by watching" (314), the narrator explains, "She felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature" (314).

Yet despite the fact that Dorothea "was always trying to be what her husband wished," she was "never able to repose on his delight in what she was" (348). As the narrator shares Dorothea's increasing awareness that she "was to live more and more in a virtual tomb" (348), she also informs us that Casaubon is coming to trust Dorothea's promises implicitly and to trust "her power of devoting herself to her idea of the right and best" (349). He therefore tries to force her commitment to his wishes after he is gone, but this would amount to shackling her remaining years to a worthless project. As Dorothea tries to reach her decision, the narrator again shows us the inner conflict that brings about the outward action. In her thoughts Dorothea fluctuates between pity for her own dreary future if she submits and the pity she feels for her husband and the pain she knows she will cause if she refuses. Finally she decides:

> Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this--only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage. She saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers. (353)

II

Fate saves her from the consequences of her moral sensibility, but Edward Casaubon's dead hand continues to hold Dorothea's living

one. Repulsed by the codicil to her husband's will, Dorothea nevertheless determines to abide by it for Will's sake. She defends Ladislaw against gossip, treasuring him in the privacy of her heart, but she reacts outwardly with indignation and anger at what she *thinks* she sees in Rosamond's sitting room. The narrator allows us to hear Dorothea admit to herself for the first time that she loves Will, and she tells us of her anger toward him, which "was not easily spent," and of the lack of pity arising "from the midst of scorn and indignation and jealous offended pride" (576).

In the chilly hours which follow that initial reaction, the narrator affords us a detailed recounting of Dorothea's painful acceptance of her "irremediable grief" and her movement beyond self-pity to a wider and more compassionate view, represented by the man, woman, and baby walking past her window. Again we learn from the narrator's intimate knowledge of Dorothea's character that she finally "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" (578). Dorothea resolves to save Lydgate, Rosamond, and Will, if she can, despite her own losses. She puts on her new dress, renouncing mourning clothes on the very day she feels most widowed, acknowledging "that she had not the less an active life before her because she had buried a private joy" (578).

When the truth comes out and Dorothea and Will are happily married, there are still many who do not know Dorothea who observe "that she could not have been 'a nice woman'" (612), or she would not have married either Casaubon or Ladislaw. But they have not been privileged to know her as we do, to eavesdrop on thoughts that can only result in those actions. Even the narrator, who knows Dorothea better than anyone else--even herself--admits that the "determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful" (612). Yet in the midst of judgment, there is the compassion and sympathy for one whose acts "were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion" (612). And she brings Dorothea even closer to our hearts by comparing her life to our "insignificant" ones, reminding us that ours "may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know" (612). While this may be true, it sounds like a moral judgment on each of us that might have left us defensive and angry if she had stopped there. But she does not; she gives hope--for our view of Dorothea and of ourselves: "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" (613).

CHAPTER IV
ROSAMOND VINCY

1

The reader's introduction to Rosamond Vincy comes first through town gossip. It is the middle-aged bachelor, Mr. Chichely, who prefers the mayor's daughter to Dorothea Brooke as an example of a "woman who lays herself out a little more to please us. There should be a little filigree about a woman--something of the coquette" (66). That description of Rosamond's manner, along with her blond hair, "a certain gait, and a swan neck" (66), provides the first hint that the new character, though equally beautiful, is Dorothea Brooke's antithesis. However, the critic Bethell suggests that the emphasis on Rosamond's "nymph-like figure and pure blondness" makes her, unlike Dorothea, featureless (Stang 44). We also hear Tertius Lydgate expressing his immediate response to the charms of the man-pleasing Rosamond: "She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be" (69). As the novel develops, it is difficult to believe in the power which Rosamond comes to wield over Lydgate because "between the covers of a book, she loses all the advantage of her beauty" (Liddell 135). We are not moved by it as Lydgate is because a book cannot keep beauty constantly before us.

2

Critical opinions about Rosamond, like the opinions of the townspeople, differ to some degree. In one of the earliest criticisms of Middlemarch, Edith Simcox calls Rosamond a "well-conducted domestic vampire" (Haight 77). Hutton describes her as "the finest picture of that shallowness which constitutes absolute incapacity for either deep feeling or true morality" that he has ever seen in English literature (Critical Heritage 305). A third early critic defines Rosamond's nature as "thin, gently selfish, and obstinate under a veil of perfect delicacy and refinement" (Spectator 1262-64). These early interpretations of Rosamond's character coincide with those of many modern critics as well.

Tomlinson calls her a shallow snob, one of those persons "upon whose hearts and minds the vicissitudes of a thousand years would not have the slightest effect" (328). Ermarth says that her mind is "not large enough for luxuries to look small in" (118). Liddell alludes to the reference in Middlemarch which describes Rosamond as an actress (87), and adds that she certainly has an actress' temperament, loves appearances, and therefore has nothing to sustain her when she is by herself, since then she lacks an audience (136). Bullett says, "Rosamond at her best and loveliest is a monster of self-love, in whose softness and sweetness lies concealed an utterly ruthless resolve to have her own way in everything" (237). He finds her the embodiment of self-will who is successful at getting her way because of her feigned weakness and "sensual luxuriance" (244). This same

critic, however, calls her a victim of her own temperament and believes that we must therefore understand and forgive her for being what she is (239).

Another critic tries to be fair to Rosamond by describing her as a satire on the ideal woman of the 1830s. He explains what "woman's work" was and what "a woman's influence" might be (Beer 153), using Rosamond as his example. He points to her incessant chainwork and embroidery as a useless waste of time (woman's work), and explains that Rosamond's influence, as was true of any wife, was exercised in private as she used her superior insight to "correct" and "change" her husband. Beer sees George Eliot mocking this kind of wifely insight in Middlemarch, for the novelist emphasizes "the simplicity with which Rosamond sees straight through every issue to what concerns herself" (153-154). And Daiches emphasizes her cold selfishness, her lack of "sympathetic imagination," and her "incapability of understanding others," but believes these are character flaws which should elicit compassion from the reader instead of judgment (53). Other more sympathetic assessments include those of Bennett, who claims that Rosamond is "merely incapable of understanding any values more altruistic than her own" (168), and Henry James, who does not judge her, but calls her simply a "rare psychological study" (Galaxy 424-428).

More recently a few critics have even defended Rosamond's actions. Blake suggests that she thinks only of achieving her desires because she lacks anything more worthy to occupy her time (301).

Kudich describes Rosamond as "ensnared" by Lydgate's failures (151), and Patrick blames the "process of socialization" which taught Rosamond how to trap a husband but not how to relate to him after he was caught (227). And certainly Rosamond's character is sketched with the "Woman's Questions" of the day in the novelist's mind: what rights and responsibilities does a woman have? what good is her educational training? how dependent is she on the men in her life? Unable to own property, admired for what a woman should know, "goodness and selflessness" (Ellis, Women 85), but not for intelligence, Rosamond's character suffers from the prevalent social mentality that held a woman's mission to be one which brought, "as with one mind, their united powers to bear to stem the popular torrent now threatening to undermine the strong foundation of England's moral worth" Ellis, Women 51). That power supposedly came through a woman's influence over her husband and children. And Rosamond does demonstrate influence. But she is not motivated by selfless, moral integrity, an important fact we learn as we watch her character unfold. And how does that character unfold? What methods has George Eliot used to create this woman of "cold-blooded egoism" and "forget-me-not" eyes (Ferguson 511)?

Having met Rosamond briefly and learned of her beauty and charm through the gossip of two Middlemarchers, the reader learns little more about her from that source. In fact, some of the information about Rosamond that we glean through gossip is inaccurate, incomplete, or concerned only with her appearance. We are told that most men in

Middlemarch call her "the best girl in the world" (124), or "an angel" (83), hardly an accurate appraisal of the woman we come to know. The women seem to understand slightly more about the flaws of the young beauty: the narrator reports Mrs. Plymdale's remark that Rosamond "had been educated to a ridiculous pitch" (124), and even her Aunt Bulstrode hopes that she may "show a more serious turn of mind" as well as find a husband "whose wealth corresponds to her habits" (124).

3

Only late in the novel is there any other reference to Rosamond through "gossip." A passing remark is made by Lydgate, who is not even aware of how much he is telling in his brief mention of his wife. After the unfortunate incident with Bulstrode and Raffles, and on the heels of his desperate financial struggles (which Rosamond refuses even to acknowledge for a long while and then will not help to alleviate or alter), Lydgate tells Reverend Farebrother what his future plans are. He says he will set up a surgery, an idea he has fought from the beginning of his medical practice, and will, "if Rosamond will not mind," take an apprentice (524). Then, in case the reader has not recognized the significance of that remark, the narrator steps in to explain, "Poor Lydgate! the 'if Rosamond will not mind,' which had fallen from him involuntarily as part of his thought, was a significant mark of the yoke he bore" (524).

Cockshut points out that to Rosamond, "a profession is like a dress; a change does not involve any fundamental change" (36), whereas to Lydgate his devotion to medicine is an essential part of his character. Unfortunately, since Reverend Farebrother does not understand the reality of Lydgate's marriage, he also does not understand that he is talking to a defeated idealist who has lost his war of principles "on a moral battlefield where there can be no truce" (Hardy, Novels 98) to an enemy with "terrible tenacity" (427)--his wife. This weakness in Lydgate is one of what George Eliot calls his "spots of commonness"; those spots are exploited by various pressures in society (Allott 103). For example, he fails to make his own decision about selecting Tyke or Farebrother to be chaplain of the new hospital, voting instead the way he knows he is expected to vote. And financial difficulties cause him to set aside his principles and accept money from Bulstrode under what he knows are questionable circumstances. But Rosamond's pressure is the strongest and the most devastating.

When the Bulstrode scandal becomes public knowledge, the ladies of the town criticize Rosamond more and express less pity for her than they do for Harriet Bulstrode, but they do regard her as "one of the good old Vincy family who had always been known in Middlemarch" and who had become a "victim" by marrying an "interloper" (544). Nevertheless, Mrs. Plymdale says, "She needed a lesson" (545). She adds that Rosamond exhibits "that kind of lightness about her" which she got from her mother (546), Mrs. Plymdale's way of pointing out a lack of depth and judgment in Rosamond. This is not an accurate

assessment of Rosamond, however, who controls the situations surrounding her life and who knows her mind and judges herself right with a regularity her mother could never achieve. Nevertheless, the women of Middlemarch understand the real Rosamond better than the men do and even provide the reader with some accurate and valuable information about her character, but if their gossip were the only method of characterization available to us, we might well attribute most of it to a bad case of sour grapes.

4

However, Rosamond's own conversation reinforces the impression made by much of the gossip. When her brother Fred comes late to breakfast in an early scene in the novel, Rosamond berates him for his thoughtlessness and for wanting to eat "disagreeable" smelling grilled bone. Fred's rejoinder is that what is disagreeable is the "sensation in your little nose associated with certain finicking notions which are the classics of Mrs. Lemon's school" (74). Fred's summary of the effects of Rosamond's finishing school continues to be an accurate appraisal of the basis for her behavior throughout the novel. The daughter of a "comfortable, unpretentious family" (Cooper 28), Rosamond sees Lydgate, the young medical man, as a means to climb the social ladder and so sets out to capture him as she assumes she always captures the hearts of all men who know her. Pritchett says that her desire to rise in society "was not vulgar until she supposed that freedom from crude middle-class notions of

taste and bearing could only be obtained by marriage to the cousin of a baronet; and was not immoral until she made her husband's conscience pay for her ambitions" (211), a concise and accurate interpretation of Rosamond's shallowness and ambition as well as her selfishness.

Before the ill-fated marriage takes place, there are only five brief superficial conversations between Rosamond and Lydgate. Those conversations, along with her beauty and polished manners, are enough to deceive the unsuspecting gentleman about her motives; but we are not deceived, for we know the conversations she has had with her mother, her brother, and Mary Garth (Doyle 152). Speaking of the new man in town, she says to her mother and Fred, "It always makes a difference, though, to be of good family" (75). The narrator then adds that "Rosamond felt that she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. She disliked anything which reminded her that her mother's father had been an innkeeper" (75).

And before she ever meets the young man in question, Rosamond plans a "chance" meeting at her uncle Featherstone's with the new doctor and allows herself time before Lydgate's arrival to ask Mary Garth how she likes him. Mary answers, "There is no question of liking at present. My liking always wants some little kindness to kindle it. I am not magnanimous enough to like people who speak to me without seeming to see me" (85). This answer, instead of sounding negative to Rosamond, pleases her. "Is he so haughty?" asks Rosamond, with "heightened satisfaction." "You know that he is of good family?"

(85). And a few speeches later she adds, "I rather like a haughty manner" (85), betraying a telling weakness of her character.

In her campaign to win Lydgate, Rosamond carefully alters her account of where she has been and what she has seen on a trip to London, emphasizing her "country girl" (118) image in order to make Lydgate think she is in awe of him and his continental background, thereby boosting his ego and making him admire her good taste and desire to be educated. By the time Rosamond suggests, "You are a bear, and want teaching by the birds," and Lydgate replies, "Well, there is a bird who can teach me what she will. Don't I listen to her willingly?" (200), Rosamond Vincy has achieved her goal and considers herself as good as engaged.

And when her father decides not to allow the wedding to take place because Lydgate has only his family name and position to recommend him, Rosamond assures her mother that "Papa does not mean anything of the kind . . . and I shall marry Mr. Lydgate" (252), to which Mrs. Vincy admits, "You always do manage everybody" (252). The two ladies, young and old, then continue making wedding plans, proof that Rosamond _is_ indeed used to manipulating every situation and getting what she wants. She tells Lydgate, "I never give up anything that I choose to do" (257), a declaration which should have warned him what he could expect in the future, but he is too smitten to comprehend the significance of that attitude.

5

In another significant conversation which takes place not long after Rosamond and Lydgate are married, she tells her husband, "Do you know, Tertius, I often wish you had not been a medical man," a comment which is like a knife in the dedicated young doctor's heart. Medical doctors in that period did not enjoy the prestige which they do today, and it was very unusual for a gentleman's son to choose medicine. Lydgate had chosen to be a doctor in order to change the profession and benefit the world through research. To be a surgeon in the early nineteenth century was to perform surgery, "skilled manual labor" (Peterson 9) and to learn those skills through apprenticeship. A surgeon was a step below the status of a physician, who was educated to practice internal medicine, and only a step up from the apothecary who could only dispense medicine. Most surgeons were practical men rather than researchers and theorists (10). In fact, however, many men with medical training became general practitioners and practiced in all three areas. Lydgate's dream has been to settle in a "provincial town as a general practitioner, and resist the irrational severance between medical and surgical knowledge in the interest of his own scientific pursuits" (108). And most people see him as "something rather more uncommon than any general practitioner in Middlemarch" (105). However, it is not a profession with social status, and Lydgate's dream is beyond Rosamond's understanding. She tells him, "You are clever enough for anything; you might easily have been something else. And your cousins at Quallingham all think you

have sunk below them in your choice of a profession . . . . I do not think it is a nice profession, dear" (335). Here is an example of the lack of support which Lydgate comes to expect of Rosamond.

However, at no time does her selfishness have a more chilling effect on both Lydgate and the reader than when he tries to enlist her help in curbing and reducing their debts, only to have her say, "What can _I_ do, Tertius?" (434). The narrator explains that the inflection of her voice threw into the words "as much neutrality as they could hold. They fell like a mortal chill on Lydgate's roused tenderness" (434). It is not until this moment that Lydgate finally realizes the burden his marriage has brought him, and the reader understands the depth of Rosamond's selfishness and determination to have what she wants.

In a later conversation, when financial matters have become critical, Rosamond tries to tell Lydgate how to alleviate the situation by altering his medical practice. She knows that doctors depend on the families that use their services on a regular basis and on the laymen who control hospital boards. And being a "game player" herself, she understands the importance of playing by the accepted rules. "You should be more careful not to offend people, and you should send out medicines as the others do. I am sure you began well, and you got several good houses. It cannot answer to be eccentric; you should think what will be generally liked" (475). This little speech, which gives clear insight into Rosamond's moral nature, is followed by Lydgate's angry but controlled response, "What I am to do in my practice, Rosy, it is for me to judge" (475).

Patrick believes that society shares the blame for Rosamond's and Lydgate's failures because they are "socialized to view the world in a way that inhibits mutuality" (237). Lydgate believes, as nearly all men did in the nineteenth century, that women have no business in matters of business. And women have been taught that it is right to use wifely influence to make necessary "changes" in husbands in the privacy of the home. Thus George Eliot has supplied dramatic evidence of her recognition of the moral implications of "gender stereotyping" (237). He continues that thinking of men and women as belonging to different species inhibits "the growth and effectiveness of both sexes" (237). It also manages to keep them too far apart in their expectations ever to find a meeting point.

Rosamond manages to keep her house from going to Ned Plymdale and his bride by lying to Ned's mother when she asks Rosamond, "You don't happen to know of any other [house] that would be at liberty?" (478). And the young woman replies, "Oh no; I hear so little of those things" (478), despite the fact that she knows Lydgate is counting on selling their house to Ned to try to eliminate some of their heaviest debt. Lying is perfectly acceptable to Rosamond's way of thinking if it means getting what she wants, although honesty was advanced in conduct books as a sterling moral quality. According to Mrs. Ellis, "Let truth be the principle of every thought, the echo of every word, the foundation of every act" (Wives 44). But Rosamond "always acted for the best--the best naturally being what she best liked" (487).

To demonstrate her complete mastery of Lydgate, Rosamond manipulates him with feminine tears, weeping gently and quietly when he admonishes her for acting without his knowledge and consent and against his wishes, reminding him pathetically of "the hardships which our marriage has brought on me" (488), and crowning her performance with, "I wish I had died with the baby" (488). His defeat is complete.

6

The one conversation which has drawn the most discussion from critics and general readers is that which takes place between Rosamond and Dorothea after the embarrassing intrusion of Dorothea into a private tête-à-tête between Rosamond and Will, a meeting which Dorothea completely misinterprets. Convinced that the two are romantically involved, Dorothea nevertheless returns to Lydgate's house the next day to speak to Rosamond on Lydgate's behalf. It is Rosamond, however, who saves Dorothea in this meeting, which is the climax of Middlemarch (Gilbert 518).

The crucial question is this: Does Rosamond experience a change in her basic nature as a result of the overwhelming emotion which she experiences? Does she exhibit a part of her moral nature that she has never had occasion to call forth before? Is it possible that Rosamond Vincy Lydgate can be more concerned for another person than for herself? The answer finally must be no. It is true that she tells Dorothea about Will's absolute devotion to Dorothea, giving

the young widow hope for a happy future, but the key to Rosamond's outburst is her self-exculpation: "But now I have told you, and he cannot reproach me any more" (584). The narrator reinforces the truth of Rosamond's reason for speaking by explaining,

> Rosamond had delivered her soul under impulses which she had not known before. She had begun her confession under the subduing influence of Dorothea's emotion; and as she went on she had gathered the sense that she was repelling Will's reproaches, which were still like a knife-wound within her. (585)

When Rosamond gives Will the note explaining what she has told Dorothea, she again says, "You will have nothing to reproach me with now" (589).

Ermarth says that Rosamond, compared to Dorothea, is unsusceptible to influence and has no "power of sympathy" (118). This assertion seems accurate since a major reason for her behavior is self-concern, and self-sacrifice is not part of her character. Rosamond does not subscribe to Ellis' recommendation to the women of England that

> So entirely do human actions derive their dignity or their meanness from the _motives_ by which they are prompted, that it is no violation of truth to say, the most servile drudgery may be ennobled by the self-sacrifice, the patience, the cheerful submission to duty, with which it is performed. (_Women_ 49)

May Tomlinson describes Rosamond as "one of those persons who carry to the grave, without modification or enlargement, the nature with which they were born" (328). She believes that for Rosamond to have changed would have required self-knowledge and self-criticism and that "there can be no self-knowledge where the image of self so

completely blocks the vision" (325). There is no evidence that there is any permanent change in Rosamond as a result of her encounter with Dorothea. It is, however, another example of the significant use of dramatic presentation in George Eliot's creation of Rosamond Vincy Lydgate.

7

As a literary technique, authorial intrusion is used less than others to characterize Rosamond, but it reinforces what we learn through other methods. The first time Eliot speaks in her own voice about Rosamond follows the narrator's statement that Rosamond considers the "piquant fact about Lydgate" to be

> his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers, and presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people, and perhaps at last associate with relatives quite equal to the county people who looked down on the Middlemarchers. (123)

These county people are, of course, the gentry, those who enjoyed the distinction of being called gentlemen by right of their ownership of land. These are the people Rosamond is anxious to impress. Yet as soon as the narrator has convinced us that it is base to be clever enough "to discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank" (123), George Eliot steps in to reprimand our quickness to judge. She says,

> If you think it incredible that to imagine Lydgate as a man of family could cause thrills of satisfaction which had anything to do with the sense that she was in love with him, I will ask you to use your power of comparison a little more effectively, and consider whether red cloth and epaulets have never had an influence of that sort. Our

> passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but, dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together, feeding out of the common store according to their appetite. (123-124)

This concise comment is important as the kind of reminder which George Eliot and her narrator employ at intervals throughout the novel to remind us of our own flaws and moral shortcomings and hence to soften our censure, not just of Rosamond but of all the "human" characters whom the novelist creates. Often the narrator accuses Rosamond while withholding harsh judgment at the same time. While commenting on the perfection of Rosamond's manners and detailing her silly accomplishments, honed for the conquest of an unsuspecting male, the narrator issues an injunction: "Think no unfair evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide" (198). Significantly, this expression of "support" for Rosamond ends with an irony of the deadliest kind.

George Eliot indulges in more heavy irony when she speaks of Lydgate's perception of his relationship with Rosamond. The author tells us that Lydgate "relied much on the psychological difference between what for the sake of variety I will call goose and gander: especially on the innate submissiveness of the goose as beautifully corresponding to the strength of the gander" (261). The reader already knows that his "goose" is not submissive, nor is the comparison in the least original, and the tragedy that develops results from the lack of strength in the gander in direct proportion to the lack of submissiveness in the goose.

When Rosamond admonishes Lydgate for his choice of profession, George Eliot draws the reader in as another knowledgeable moralist by employing the plural pronoun: "We know that she had much quiet perseverance in her opinion" (335). And "we" <u>do</u> know it, and all of her actions preceding and following this incident support what <u>we</u> know. In the only other authorial intrusion in the novel involving the young Mrs. Lydgate, George Eliot comments on Rosamond's duplicity about selling the house. She avows that Rosamond "had no consciousness that her action could rightly be called false," a reminder to the reader that certainly it is morally wrong. Rosamond does not operate under the same moral system as the rest of us. Eliot continues, "We are not obliged to identify our own acts according to a strict classification, any more than the materials of our grocery and clothes. Rosamond felt that she was aggrieved, and that this was what Lydgate had to recognize" (488). Again the only fact of significance is the one that affects her, and so Rosamond chooses to ignore a truth that is the basis for a civilized society: each man or woman is obliged to recognize and adhere to an acceptable moral system. A common moral judgment is expressed or implied each time the author intrudes.

8

George Eliot's usual spokesman, the narrator, provides explanations and reinforcements of conversations of all kinds, but she also supplements the knowledge gained from the novel's dramatic

presentations. It is the narrator who describes Rosamond's eyes of heavenly blue as "deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings an <u>ingenious beholder could put into them</u>, [emphasis mine] and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite" (83). So Rosamond's inner beauty as represented by her gorgeous eyes may exist only as a projection of the beholder, and the criticism is that the reality is less than admirable. Rosamond's outward actions are often misinterpreted, as they are, for example, when she first meets Lydgate, behaving with perfect grace and showing Mary Garth "so much good-natured interest" that Lydgate sees "an adorable kindness in Rosamond's eyes" (87). Mary, of course, understands the calculated effect that Rosamond is striving for and resents the feigned interest used to achieve effect; the reader, knowing Mary, knows what Lydgate does not--why she "from some cause looked rather out of temper" (87).

To make sure the reader knows Rosamond's self-justification for her romance with Lydgate, the narrator shares this information:

> And a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond's social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegoom who was not a Middlemarcher, and who had no connections at all like her own: of late, indeed, the construction seemed to demand that he should somehow be related to a baronet. (88)

All Rosamond needs to be happy is a body to match her mental image. When the victim is caught in the intricate blonde plaits, he finds her habit of smoothing those braids "as pretty as any movements of a kitten's paw" (118). But the narrator confides that she was not at all like a kitten: "she was a sylph caught young and educated at

Mrs. Lemon's" (118)--educated only to have perfect manners and exhibit all the social graces.

To give insight into her mind, the narrator announces Rosamond's favorite poem to be Lalla Rookh, which is a series of four oriental verse tales connected by a prose narrative, written by Thomas Moore and published in 1817, hence almost contemporary with the time of the novel. Moore's enveloping prose story is about the daughter of an emperor who travels to a faraway land to marry a king. She is entertained during her travels by a young poet with whom she falls in love, and who turns out to be the king in disguise. Rosamond would certainly enjoy melodrama in verse with oriental coloring because that kind of literature was fashionable in her day. And the social schemer in her likes to associate in her mind with emperors' daughters and rulers of imaginary kingdoms.

The narrator warns that Rosamond "did not distinguish flirtation from love, either in herself or in another" (197), and though we condemn her lack of discrimination, we are immediately told of a misconception of her young suitor's that can (and does) cause problems: "He held it one of the prettiest attitudes of the feminine mind to adore a man's preeminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in" (197). And even more hopeful, he pictures a love "who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment" (258). How little

he knows of the object of his affections! How ironic that he specifically mentions money management!

Still, his expectations are the expectations of the nineteenth-century husband who seeks in his companion "an influence like the gentle dew, and the cheering light, more felt throughout the whole of his existence, in its softening, healing, harmonizing power; than acknowledged by any single act, or recognized by any certain rule" Ellis, Wives 38). It is no wonder that reality is such a shock. It is the narrator who tells us of Rosamond's "perfect obstinacy" (252), of even her father's being "a little afraid of doing what his daughter would not like" (253). It is the narrator who tells us of the Lydgate baby's premature birth and death because Rosamond determined she would ride horseback against her husband/doctor's orders. The narrator tells of her discovery "that women, even after marriage, might make conquests and enslave men" (319), which she tries to do with Captain Lydgate and with Will Ladislaw, caring not at all what her flirtations suggest about her marriage to her would-be conquests or to the town of Middlemarch.

9

While Rosamond is busy defying Lydgate's wishes and ignoring his pleas for help to ease their financial troubles, outwardly things seem serene. Reverend Farebrother sees the couple together and does not perceive "the total absence of that interest in her husband's presence which a loving wife is sure to betray" (469). It never

occurs to Farebrother that Lydgate's marriage is unhappy:

> He believed, as the rest did, that Rosamond was an amiable, docile creature, though he had always thought her rather uninteresting--a little too much the pattern-card of the finishing school; and his mother could not forgive Rosamond because she never seemed to see that Henrietta Noble was in the room. (468)

The reader knows what the priest does not: Henrietta Noble will never be able to do anything to benefit Rosamond and therefore cannot demand her attention.

After we are told that "Poor Rosamond for months had begun to associate her husband with feelings of disappointment" (484), we are saddened but not surprised to be told of Lydgate's pain--"the pain of foreseeing that Rosamond would come to regard him chiefly as the cause of disappointment and unhappiness to her" (513). This attitude goes against a basic tenet of Mrs. Ellis' conduct book, which recommends "maintaining through all the little incidents of daily intercourse a true and faithful heart towards her husband" (Wives 54). Still, it is "poor" Rosamond who looks at the shattering pieces of Lydgate's personal and professional life and "even this trouble, like the rest, she seemed to regard as if it were hers alone. He was always to her a being apart, doing what she objected to" (555). If her lack of support and loyalty are not sufficient reasons to call forth judgment against Rosamond, add to them the fact that we must see her held up for comparison with the novel's real heroine:

> There are natures in which . . . we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us . . . . Dorothea's nature was of that kind: her own passionate faults lay along the easily-counted open channels of her

> ardent character . . . . But that simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the great powers of her womanhood. (565)

Against that kind of selflessness and high moral aspiration, any other woman would seem less praiseworthy. But Rosamond consistently disappoints. Yes, her education is slight and her skills are limited; yes, there seem to be in her world and time few <u>worthy</u> goals to occupy the feminine mind; and yes, Lydgate does make decisions without consulting Rosamond while demanding that she not do the same. But despite all attempts to justify her behavior, we keep coming back to selfish actions which result from selfish thoughts, and finally we have to agree when Lydgate calls her a basil plant which flourishes "wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (610).

CHAPTER V

MARY GARTH AND HARRIET BULSTRODE

1

In Character and the Novel, W. J. Harvey describes those characters who fall between the protagonists and the background characters as intermediate characters (58). These characters are "more fully delineated and individualized" than background characters, but they exist primarily to "serve some function" (58). They are more a means to an end rather than an end in themselves (58). In Middlemarch Mary Garth and Harriet Bulstrode perform this kind of function. They are women who make moral decisions and exemplify moral strength but within a limited sphere, thus adding emphasis to the wider scope and moral superiority of Dorothea Brooke. They are examples of the technique George Eliot uses for playing one character against another in order to reveal both.

If Rosamond Vincy and Dorothea Brooke are opposites, then it seems fair to say that Mary Garth is, in a different way, the antithesis of Rosamond. Both Rosamond and Mary are feminine, but in Mary femininity is an admirable quality. She has, in the words of F. R. Leavis, "good sense, quick intelligence, and fine strength of character," as well as "poised liveliness, shrewd good-humored sharpness, and direct honesty of . . . speech" (Scrutiny 17). Robert

Liddell disagrees with this assessment, however, saying that Mary displays "heavy-footed" charm like that of a "coy elephant." He also says that her "archness, roguishness and girlish mocking ways are quite as annoying as Dorothea's exaltation--and less excusable because more fully conscious" (148).

Whether Mary's "ways" charm or offend, they are quite different from Rosamond's. She lacks the beauty of her distant relative and old schoolmate. Knoepflmacher calls Mary "the provincial ugly duckling who does not turn into a swan" (Laughter 176). When the two characters stand together before the mirror in Mary's room at Stone Court, the narrator shows us Rosamond, the "nymph," juxtaposed to Mary, who "had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it was not true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues" (83). Even Mary describes herself as "a brown patch" next to the beautiful, elegant Rosamond (83).

Mary's unfavorable comparison of herself to Rosamond's beauty is an example of the extraordinary range of characters' voices, words, and movement which Adam says George Eliot uses to develop the natures of the individual woman (57). When Mary compares herself unfavorably to Rosamond and her beauty, Rosamond's response is revealing:

> "Oh no! No one thinks of your appearance, you are so sensible and useful, Mary. Beauty is of little consequence in reality," said Rosamond, turning her head towards Mary, but with eyes swerving towards the new view of her neck in the glass.
> "You mean my beauty," said Mary, rather sardonically. (84)

This brief exchange tells much about both women. Mary rather wryly

accepts her own plainness, but she still suffers the sting of Rosamond's careless "uncompliment." And Rosamond's pride in her own beauty is accentuated by the unkindness of words like _sensible_ and _useful_ to describe Mary while disclaiming beauty's consequence as she admires her own loveliness in the mirror. Besides Mary's deficiencies in physical grace, the narrator adds, Mary demonstrates some of the "peculiar temptations and vices of plainness" (83). It seems that her shrewdness "had a streak of satirical bitterness continually renewed and never carried out of sight, except by a strong current of gratitude towards those who, instead of telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her so" (84). And yet, immediately we learn that

> Rembrandt would have painted her with pleasure, and would have made her broad features look out of the canvas with intelligent honesty. For honesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue; she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when she was in a good mood she had humour enough to laugh at herself. (84)

David Carroll admires Mary's sense of reality, which "springs ultimately from her unique refusal to refashion the world according to her own wishes" (_Victorian Studies_ 313), as the reference to avoiding illusions confirms. And Kucich suggests that Mary's "very integrity lies in her contradictions" (140) since her sharp tongue is an attempt to compensate for her lack of physical beauty, an honest and realistic response. This early glimpse of Mary is another instance in which the narrator tempers the flaws of a newly introduced character with other truths about her--the ones which are important because they

deal with moral character, the most significant aspect of any life to George Eliot.

Mary has a more prosaic view of the world than either Rosamond or Dorothea; she has, in fact, been compared to George Eliot herself in this respect (Hulcoop 160). Pearce describes Mary as the one character whom George Eliot depicts with "almost unreserved regard"; she is perhaps a simpler version of Marian Evans herself. Mary enjoys the novels of Sir Walter Scott as Marian Evans did, and she can "smile at folly without condoning it" (124). Haight agrees that Mary is more like George Eliot than even Dorothea, for she is a land agent's daughter who wants to do good but tempers that desire with "prudence, sound common sense . . . and a lively sense of humor" (From Jane Austen 191).

2

Mary Garth is the major-minor character in Middlemarch "who stays in the provinces, who is loyal to a father, who accepts the world's limitations, who has no epic pretensions to give up" (Knoepflmacher "Fusing" 65). It is interesting to note how little gossip there is about Mary Garth, as compared to that about the "ardent" Dorothea and the beautiful but obstinate "pattern card of the finishing school," Rosamond. No one talks much about Mary because she lacks the beauty, the charm, and the position to make her "worthy" of Middlemarch conversation. Yet, whenever she is the topic at hand, what is said casts a positive light on Mary's character.

On two occasions Fred Vincy and Peter Featherstone briefly discuss Mary. In the first instance, the conversation involves Mary's fondness for reading, a pastime which Fred obviously encourages by bringing her books. Because we do not like Featherstone's overbearing treatment of Mary, we applaud Fred's action all the more because the old man tries to curtail it for his own selfish reasons. "She's got the newspaper to read out loud. That's enough for one day, I should think. I can't abide to see her reading to herself" (83). Mary's uncle wants all her attention, to have her always at his beck and call. During the second of Fred's visits, Featherstone has Mary summoned, saying impatiently, "What business had she to go away?" (99). Yet when she is present she seems always afraid "that something would be thrown at her" (99). Mary finds herself in the thankless position of being a blood relative (she is Featherstone's niece) who is being paid to nurse the sick old man and is therefore treated like a hired servant. Her position often makes her the victim of Peter Featherstone's bad temper, a fact that gains our sympathy and respect for her behavior, which is always correct and respectful.

The only other negative comment about Mary is delivered by Fred's mother, Mrs. Vincy, who is afraid (and rightly so) that her son is going to insist on marrying Mary Garth, if the young woman will have him. In response to a comment by Mrs. Farebrother, who calls Mary "a delightful young person" (471), Mrs. Vincy replies, "Yes. It is a pity she is not better looking" (471). To this shallow but truthful remark, Mrs. Farebrother answers decisively, "I like her

countenance. We must not always ask for beauty, when a good God has seen fit to make an excellent young woman without it. I put good manners first, and Miss Garth will know how to conduct herself in any situation" (471). Surely the tender feelings of the less-than-beautiful George Eliot are particularly apparent in that comment. And, of course, Mrs. Vincy comes to accept and appreciate Mary in spite of her wish for a more advantageous match for her precious Fred.

When Peter Featherstone's vulture-like relatives speculate over what Mary can expect to inherit from her uncle in greedy anticipation of <u>their</u> possible share, Mrs. Waule calls Mary "very proud" (for she has refused to be servile before that grasping woman) and further informs the listeners that "my brother has always paid her wage" (231), suggesting that Mary has gotten all she deserves of <u>their</u> inheritance. She has to admit that Mary is "so deep that she could be found out in nothing" (226)--the word <u>deep</u>, added in the last draft of the manuscript, implying an envious respect which Mrs. Waule hates to admit (Hulme 113). Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, Featherstone's advisor and second cousin, who "had been treated by him with more amenity than any other relative" because of his usefulness, defends Mary in this scene, calling her "a sensible girl" (231). It is unfortunate that he then proves himself to be another example of the typical nineteenth-century male chauvinist by declaring that the ideal wife is the one who is a good nurse, thereby recommending Mary. Despite its source, this is a legitimate recommendation of her loyalty and ability nevertheless. The blindness and prejudice displayed by

those who talk about Mary have the effect of strengthening our affinity for her.

3

Fred Vincy calls Mary "the best girl I know" (89). He is in love with her, a fact which she knows and which he openly shares with Reverend Farebrother when he is trying to enlist the minister's help in finding out whether he (Fred) has a chance with Mary. He says earnestly, "I have never been without loving Mary. If I had to give her up, it would be like beginning to live on wooden legs" (377). This is ironic since Camden Farebrother is in love with Mary too. He is the most sensible, selfless, caring man in the novel, so we believe what he says and we like whom he likes. In conversation with Lydgate soon after the young doctor arrives in Middlemarch, Farebrother describes Mary to Lydgate, who has hardly noticed her (a mark against him, since he notices only the beautiful Rosamond). The minister notes Mary's observant nature: "Oh, she gauges everybody." He then admits that "she is a favorite of mine" (130).

Throughout the rest of the novel, we learn just how much Camden Farebrother cares for Mary--and why. He recognizes in her the qualities which shallower personalities tend to overlook, but which the reader is privileged to share from overheard conversations and from the omniscient narrator. In the first words we hear Mary speak, she defends herself against Mrs. Waule's assumption that she will tell what she overhears at Stone Court. "I dislike hearing scandal too

much to wish to repeat it," Mary retorts, an assertion which proves to be true, as does her later declaration that "I never say what I am afraid of having repeated" (86). We discover that Mary can hold her own even with the polished Rosamond, defending Fred and his educational decision, judging Lydgate and his manner accurately, and explaining that friends should be able to "get into a rage sometimes" without labeling it a quarrel.

In a scene with Fred in which he suggests to Mary that John Waule is in love with her, she expresses vexation that in a girl's life "there must always be some supposition of falling in love coming between her and any man who is kind to her, and to whom she is grateful" (101). She exhibits a realistic approach to her marriage prospects by admitting, "I have no ground for nonsensical vanity of fancying everybody who comes near me is in love with me" (101), a very different attitude from that of Rosamond who assumes that, indeed, every man prefers her to every other woman. When Mary's natural good humor returns--and it always does very quickly--she says something to Fred that indicates just how bright she is and to what extent she understands how she has been limited in opportunities to learn because she is female. She admits to being angry with the ways of the world, saying, "I do like to be spoken to as if I had common-sense. I really often feel as if I could understand a little more than I ever hear even from young gentlemen who have been to college" (101). She is teasing Fred, but there is a serious undertone of truth to her remark.

Mary recognizes her own shortcomings: she is not fit for teaching because her mind wanders, but she has proved her capacity for nursing with Peter Featherstone and does not hesitate to tell Fred of her confidence in her skill as a nurse. Allowed little education herself, she provokes Fred and is sarcastic about his idleness in studying, demonstrating her sharp wit in reply to his claim to be ten times cleverer than many men who pass their college examinations to go into the priesthood. She says, "That accounts for the curates like Mr. Crowse. Divide your cleverness by ten, and the quotient--dear me!--is able to take a degree. But that only shows you are ten times more idle than the others" (104). Mary has a genius for moral accounting, and she is not willing to be a part of Fred's choosing the wrong profession just to say he has finished and is prepared to do something--even if it is obviously the wrong thing for him and for those near and dear to him. Bradley calls Mary Fred's "moral tutor" (50), and she is. Blake further claims that Mary "is the audience whose demand for the best supplies his deficiency of self-activating enterprise" (178).

Mary wants Fred to succeed, for she loves him and wants to marry him, but when Fred admits the monetary disaster he has brought down on all the Garths, Mary's first concern is not for her lost money or the fact that she will have to take a teaching position or the loss of her marriage hopes, but rather for her parents and what all this means to them. And though she speaks passionately to Fred when he seeks her sympathy, she quickly controls her temper, saying,

"My anger is of no use" (187). However, when Fred tries to make Mary pity him in his misery, she again exhibits both her observant nature and her common sense by explaining, "There are other things to be more sorry for than that. But selfish people always think their own discomfort of more importance than anything else in the world; I see enough of that every day" (187).

In this assertion Mary is not only defining Fred's selfishness but she is also reminding us of all she has seen and learned from the ethical poverty of Featherstone and his selfish relatives. Fred begs for a indication that Mary has not given up on him and his ability to change, but she answers mournfully:

> As if it were not very painful to me to see you an idle frivolous creature. How can you bear to be so contemptible, when others are working and striving, and there are so many things to be done--how can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful? And with so much good in your disposition, Fred,--you might be worth a great deal. (188)

Almost immediately her smile returns, though, because she loves Fred, and that smile gives him hope and encourages him in his determination to do better--to be better.

In contrast to her daily environment at Stone Court, we are privileged to see Mary with her family too. She is Caleb Garth's favorite child (a possible reference to Mary Ann Evans' relationship with her father, who serves as the model for the character of Caleb), and he admires her for having "more sense than most" (190), but he worries about her and her fondness for Fred. She assures her father that she could never engage herself to "one who has no manly independence" . . . . You and my mother have taught me too much

pride for that" (190). Kettle says that Mary and her family reject the more distateful aspects of nineteenth-century morality, like the money grabbing of Featherstone, but they accept the "fundamental set-up of Middlemarch" as "proper and inevitable." Thus Mary forces Fred to work hard and be honest within the framework of the status quo (173).

4

Mary expects honesty because she is honest herself. When Featherstone wants her to burn one of his wills, she refuses to take money or do what he asks without someone else present, recognizing her untenable position and yet aware that she might be costing Fred his inheritance--a fear which proves to be true. It is not until later that Reverend Farebrother can ease Mary's mind about the will and assure her that burning one will would have nullified the other, thus freeing her from feelings of guilt. During that same conversation, Camden Farebrother speaks to Mary on Fred's behalf, despite his own feelings for her. She shares with him her sentiments: "I could not love a man who is ridiculous," as she thinks Fred would be if he became a clergyman since he is totally unsuited for such a calling. She understands that his "being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility" (379). This declaration reinforces the reader's appreciation for Mary's talent for seeing straight to the

heart of a matter. Yet she admits,

> I have too strong a feeling for Fred to give him up for any one else. I should never be quite happy if I thought he was unhappy for the loss of me. It has taken such deep root in me--my gratitude to him for always loving me best, and minding so much if I hurt myself, from the time when we were very little. (380)

Thomas Pinney argues that this scene sums up Mary's character, and he goes on to say, "An active and untroubled memory is the infallible sign of moral health" ("Authority" 47). Mary is strongly influenced by her memories and affections, for these define duty for her, and it is her long-established relation to Fred which makes her choose him, not because he is the best choice, but because of her strong feeling for "something known and loved" (49). The narrator emphasizes this truth later by explaining, "When a tender affection has been storing itself in us through many of our years, the idea that we could accept any exchange for it seems to be a cheapening of our lives" (423). Still the reader's heart is stirred for Camden Farebrother, who relinquishes Mary with this thought: "To think of the part one little woman can play in the life of a man, so that to renounce her may be a very good initiation of heroism, and to win her may be a discipline" (496). He realizes the sacrifice he makes in giving her up, but he also understands that living with Mary Garth--or any woman--would not always be easy.

Some critics have suggested that the Mary-Fred-Farebrother triangle is too obvious and manipulative to give interest to a subplot (Liddell 148), but it is reasonable to think that Mary might have appealed to Camden Farebrother, who so clearly saw her moral strength.

Perhaps Reverend Farebrother understands Mary best, appreciating all the down-to-earth, maternal, commonsense nurturing of which she is capable. At the same time he acknowledges what a husband can expect from someone of Mary's high morality and biting tongue. More than is the case with any other female character in Middlemarch, we come to know Mary Garth primarily through this sharing of thoughts, feelings, and expectations in conversation with friends and family. The narrator acts only to reinforce what we have already seen and heard, as in Mary's "having early had strong reason to believe that things were not likely to be arranged for her peculiar satisfaction," and so

> she wasted no time in astonishment and annoyance at that fact. And she had already come to take life much as a comedy in which she had a proud, nay, a generous resolution not to act the mean or treacherous part. Mary might have become cynical if she had not had parents whom she honoured, and a well of affectionate gratitude within her, which was all the fuller because she had learned to make no unreasonable claims. (232)

We already know these things about Mary from her behavior, but the narrator's comments connect her internal musings with those external actions.

We are delighted most by Mary Garth's honesty in word and in deed. And we understand and applaud the reasons for her response to Peter Featherstone's health. "Her thought was not veined by any solemnity or pathos about the old man on the bed . . . . To be anxious about a soul that is always snapping at you must be left to the saints of the earth; and Mary was not one of them" (233). And at the Vincys' New Year's Day party we are glad to know that "Mary was particularly bright" because we want Fred's mother to be impressed by

her. We are not surprised that she is glad "for Fred's sake" that his family and friends are "getting kinder to her," and we are charmed with a nature that is "quite willing that they should see how much she was valued by others whom they must admit to be judges" (469). These are believable responses from a character we have come to know as a vivid and believable person.

5

When fate finally provides Mary and Fred their chance for a life together, Mary's unfailing humor carries us along. She tells Caleb, "I have always loved him. I should never like scolding any one else so well; and that is a point to be thought of in a husband" (605). When she wonders if any other girl "thinks her father the best man in the world" for securing Fred a solid and honorable position, Caleb says she will think her husband better. Mary replies, "Husbands are an inferior class of men, who require keeping in order" (606). We are certain Mary will do that with wit and integrity.

In Daughters of England, a nineteenth-century conduct book, Sarah Ellis says that the happiest of all family situations are those in which daughters are "too happy in the exercise of their affections, to think of self" (191). She then describes the result of that behavior: "Happy is the man who chooses from such a family the companion of his earthly lot!" (191). So we are not surprised to learn that Fred always felt sorry for the men who could not go home to Mary after a day's work, or that her three boys "liked nothing so well as

being with their mother" (609). In fact, Mary actually meets Ellis' criteria in another of her books, The Mothers of England, which claims that a mother's sacred duty is "to guard against any weakening of the bonds of family affection--to see that the fountain of love is kept fresh, and pure, and perpetually flowing" (89). Somehow it seems unlikely that Mary Garth Vincy would ever have studied such a volume, but this theme of duty fits her natural inclination.

In Suffer And Be Still, Martha Vicinus claims that most successful marriages in Victorian novels are those in which the woman deviates from the narrow definition of femininity set forth in the conduct books and that often those marriages are between people who have known each other from childhood when "codes of behavior were more natural" (x), meaning a time before the couple was restricted by the inflexible adult rules. This is true of the marriage of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy; their relationship is successful because she is true to herself and her strong sense of moral integrity from beginning to end.

6

Mary knows herself from the start, and her development is consistent, but the other major-minor female character in Middlemarch, Harriet Bulstrode, discovers her own deep well of moral strength late in the novel. She has been "conventional, unprofound, more than a little smug, a pillar of the church and the Middlemarch bourgeoisie" (Kettle 169). But when she learns of her husband's disgrace, she has

her "moment of tragic grandeur in which she rises to the moral plane on which Dorothea habitually moves" (Bennett 171-172). Before that scene, however, there is little about Harriet Bulstrode that would seem to place her in the morally superior company of Dorothea Brooke or Mary Garth. She is not prominent in the action of the novel and seems rather common and shallow during much of the time when she is present. She fits Helene Roberts' description of "the sweet, passive, obedient wife, busy within her domestic setting, showing her concern and appreciation for her masculine protector, apprehensive for his comfort and safety, ever watchful of his reputation" (50). This same critic claims she is the kind of woman who "brought a throb of emotion to the manly breast of Millais and his Victorian contemporaries" and made a new kind of painting popular during this period (50). The reference is to John Everett Millais, a founder of the Pre-Raphaelite movement along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and W. Holman Hunt. These artists sought to portray truth and beauty through almost photographic detail, and Millais finally developed into a fashionable portrait painter who would have taken pleasure in capturing the loveliness, charm, and serenity of a Harriet Bulstrode.

This model of Victorian femininity is Rosamond's and Fred's aunt, sister to their father, Mayor Walter Vincy, and the narrator tells us that Harriet Bulstrode "had a true sisterly feeling for her brother; always thinking that he might have married better, but wishing well to the children" (216-217). Here we observe her shallow preoccupation with Middlemarch's social ladder, but it is juxtaposed

to a deep and sincere interest in her brother's family. This honest concern for family causes her to encourage her husband to write a letter on Fred's behalf, assuring Peter Featherstone that Fred has never borrowed money on the prospects of his inheritance from Featherstone. Harriet also feels compelled to warn Rosamond, when she hears from her good friend Mrs. Plymdale that the young woman is engaged to Tertius Lydgate, that she "must not think of living in high style" (219). A woman with a "good honest glance" who "used no circumlocution" (218), she tells her niece, "You are turned twenty-two now, and you will have no fortune . . . . Mr. Lydgate is very intellectual and clever . . . . But the profession is a poor one here . . . . And you are not fit to marry a poor man" (218). She has earlier expressed her hope that Rosamond might "meet with a husband whose wealth corresponded to her habits" (124), a hope which the proposed alliance would destroy.

Rosamond is a match for her aunt in this exchange as she assures Harriet that she is not engaged to Lydgate, but that she would never, under any circumstances, give her heart to her aunt's choice for her, Ned Plymdale. The comedy of this scene is enriched by the fact that neither of the two women, in the midst of their conversation, can keep her eyes off the finery worn by the other. Leavis stresses the "unspoken interappreciation of attire" which "accompanies the verbal fence" (Scrutiny 17). For Harriet, "the quilling inside Rosamond's bonnet was so charming that it was impossible not to desire the same kind of thing for Kate, and Mrs. Bulstrode's eyes, which were

rather fine, rolled round that ample quilled circuit, while she spoke" (218), while "Rosamond's eyes also were roaming over her aunt's large embroidered collar" (218).

When this interview does not end satisfactorily, Harriet feels obliged to go directly to Lydgate, speaking to him in general terms that still leave no doubt about the specific relationship that disturbs her. She concludes, "'I think it is a heavy responsibility, Mr. Lydgate, to interfere with the prospects of any girl.' Here Mrs. Bulstrode fixed her eyes on him, with an unmistakable purpose of warning, if not of rebuke" (220). Because this gesture does not bring the desired results, she then raises the problem with her brother, showing real concern for Rosamond's future. Unfortunately, Harriet is easily distracted, "losing her clue in the intricacies of the subject," and thus ending this conversation between siblings "at a point as far from the beginning as some recent sparring between the brothers-in-law at a vestry meeting" (254). Her motives are the best, but her apparent flightiness and inconsequentiality make the reader wonder if she should be taken seriously.

The narrator stresses the comedic aspects of a relatively minor scene in which Harriet talks with Mrs. Plymdale, and in it the reader learns that the friends have "nearly the same preferences in silks, patterns for underclothing, china-ware, and clergymen" and that

> various little points of superiority on Mrs. Bulstrode's side, namely, more decided seriousness, more admiration for mind, and a house outside the town, sometimes served to give colour to their conversation without dividing them: well-meaning women both, knowing very little of their own motives. (217)

The equal importance given to underwear patterns and clergymen or to admiration for mind and the location of one's house highlights the absurdity of human character even as it yields significant information about Mrs. Bulstrode and Mrs. Plymdale. These scenes must have provided at least part of the reason for Henry James' description of Nicholas Bulstrode's "comely wife" as "the happiest reality" in Middlemarch (424-428).

7

More serious clues for the reader's evaluation of Harriet Bulstrode may be sought in opinions held in the community about her, though comparatively little gossip is used in Eliot's development of this character. The narrator tells us that Lydgate thinks of Harriet's "naive way of conciliating piety and worldliness, the nothingness of this life and the desirability of cut glass" as insufficient relief from the weight of Nicholas Bulstrode's "invariable seriousness" (198). Neither warrants too many evenings spent visiting their home.

Except for this brief insight, there is only one other scene in the novel in which Harriet Bulstrode is the subject of anyone's thoughts or conversation. Nevertheless, that scene provides important information about her position in the community and the perceived conception of who and what she is. After the facts and speculations begin to circulate concerning Bulstrode's background and the suspicious nature of Raffles' death, the townspeople begin to wonder what

Harriet's response will be to the bad news, and what this revelation will mean in her life. Because she "was not an object of dislike, and had never consciously injured any human being" (543), Harriet is pitied by the women to whom "she's as honest as the day--she never suspected anything wrong in him, you may depend on it" (543). Still, Mrs. Hackbutt (whose name simply <u>has</u> to have significance) seems pleased to proclaim, "She has always been showy" (544), making fun of her "putting her religion forward," a remark followed by Mrs. Toller's equally snide insinuation, "I have never seen that her religion made any difference to her dress" (545). Both of these women make themselves small by their comments and increase our sympathy for Mrs. Bulstrode.

Most of the gossips' harsh words are saved for Harriet's husband, and they are plentiful. Finally Mrs. Plymdale speaks up, defending her friend as a good wife who always thought her husband "the first of men" (545), and reminding the other ladies that the gentleman in question, though he might be guilty of many things, "has never denied her [Harriet] anything" (545). This comment could suggest that Mrs. Bulstrode has always brought out Nicholas' best self. It is ironic that Harriet's best friend sees as an example of her friend's wishing "to do right" having the feather on her bonnet dyed to march her dress, "to be consistent" (545). She also anticipates Harriet's response to the terrible news: "If ever a woman was crushed, she will be. I pity her from my heart. And with all her faults, few women are better. From a girl she had the neatest ways,

and was always good-hearted, and as open as the day" (545-546). Mrs. Plymdale does not give her friend enough credit, but in fairness it should be remembered that there has never before been a calamity in Harriet's life to test her moral strength.

Even the narrator sympathizes with her position, labeling her "poor Mrs. Bulstrode," explaining her ignorance of the situation but saying that she had "cried in private from the conviction that her husband was not suffering from bodily illness merely, but from something that afflicted his mind" (546). This fact, like most of those about Harriet Bulstrode, is supplied by George Eliot's omniscient narrator. Barbara Hardy says that Harriet's emotional life is presented "simply, from the outside," (Particularities 179). She is the topic of conversation only once in the novel and participates in only seven brief conversations in it. The rest of the time she is "explained" by the narrator--George Eliot's chief moral character--who never judges harshly and who treats even the weakest "sinner" with compassion. And in the narrator's judgment, Harriet Bulstrode proves herself to be anything but weak when calamity comes.

She is the last to know of her husband's disgrace, however, and has to go to any number of "friends" before her brother finally explains the grim realities of the situation to her. Lydgate is evasive, "feeling it was not for him to make the painful revelation" (547). More convinced than ever that "some calamity had befallen her husband," she calls on Mrs. Thesinger, who is away, and then on the irritating Mrs. Hackbutt, who wants to pretend not to be at home but

who also has a "strong desire within her for the excitement of an interview in which she was quite determined not to make the slightest allusion to what was on her mind" (547).

The reader hurries on, hoping that Harriet will not have to find out the truth from Mrs. Hackbutt. Ironically it is to this woman whom Mrs. Bulstrode confides about Middlemarch, "I never saw the town I should like to live at better," to which Mrs. Hackbutt replies, "I am sure I should be glad that you always should live at Middlemarch, Mrs. Bulstrode . . . . Still, we must learn to resign ourselves wherever our lot may be cast. Though I am sure there will always be people in this town who will wish you well" (548). This condescending response only intimates the severity of Mrs. Bulstrode's dilemma without helping the poor woman learn what she must know. She finds herself unable "to pursue her brave purpose" (548) and leaves quickly, determined to go to her best friend, Selina Plymdale. Nor would this have been an unusual way for a lady to gain information, even about her own family, in the towns of the English midlands in the 1830s.

To her surprise Harriet discovers that "an old friend is not always the person whom it is easiest to make a confidant of," for she fears being pitied and realizes that Selina has been "long wont to allow her the superiority" (548). Again she leaves in nervous haste, going finally to her brother, Walter Vincy, who assumes that she already knows everything. It is at this moment that we see the raw and unprotected Harriet Bulstrode. She is utterly vulnerable. Before

she knows a single damning fact, she senses "some guilt in her husband," followed by "the image of her husband exposed to disgrace--and then, after an instant of scorching shame in which she felt only the eyes of the world, with one leap of her heart she was at his side in mournful but unreproaching fellowship with shame and isolation" (549). In the flash of a moment she moves beyond shame and the world to unreproaching fellowship: Harriet Bulstrode takes her place among the moral victors of George Eliot's fiction.

8

She realizes, nevertheless, that she must have time alone to adjust to everything that this terrible knowledge means. She judges Nicholas in the privacy of her heart for his concealments, his deceit. Her faith is shaken and her new position is bitter, but "this imperfectly-taught woman . . . had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her--now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him" (550). Still, it takes time to gather her strength and "sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her life" (550). Daiches compliments Harriet's "splendid loyalty and duteous merciful constancy" (36), a response which he sees as a clear parallel to "Dorothea's response to her awareness of Casaubon's failure as a scholar and as a human character" (36). Liddell calls Mrs. Bulstrode's actions in this scene the finest behavior in the novel (151). Austin points out that

because the central moment in all of George Eliot's characters' lives is the moment "when fellow-feeling conquers self," that moment occurs for Harriet in this scene, for here she exchanges her preoccupation with bonnets and collars for the offer to share her husband's disgrace (560).

She removes all her ornaments, an action Cooper describes as "mourning the life of respect and importance she has shared with him" (28). She puts on a simple black gown as a sign that "she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation" (550). This is the opposite response to that of Dorothea, who covers her sadness by putting off her mourning clothes in favor of colorful finery, and yet, as Hardy says, their actions reveal that morally the two women resemble each other. "Each act is imbedded in character" (Novels 104).

9

When Harriet is finally able to go to her husband, we see her as heroic. For this apotheosis, the author has skillfully composed a scene in which

> the moral and emotional basis of a personal relationship is explored with an insight and a sympathy wholly admirable. And we are moved not simply because George Eliot's moral concern is so profound and sure but because the scene with its many ramifications (including the implicit comparison with the attitude of Rosamond), is presented with so deep a sense of the social interpretation that makes up life. (Kettle 170)

The sight of her husband, looking withered and shrunken, causes "a moment of new compassion and old tenderness" to go through Harriet,

and they weep together over all that is lost. The narrator tells us that his "confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent . . . . She could not say, 'How much is only slander and false suspicion?' and he did not say, 'I am innocent'" (551). The pain and fear of one and the guilt of the other are made apparent by the use of the verbs could and did. Pritchett calls this portrayal of Bulstrode's inability to confess "a picture of dumb human despondency." In the silence the reader observes "the wearing down of two lives that can cling together but dare not speak . . ." (61).

Sadly, they never can speak openly about all the facts, since Bulstrode is not sure that even Harriet could maintain both her sympathy and her moral character if she suspected him of murder. In their final scene in Chapter 85, Harriet's suffering is shown to be more lacerating than her husband's, when he winces under her suggestion to try to do something to help her family, whereas the letter from Lydgate rejecting any service from Bulstrode "seemed to cut Mrs. Bulstrode severely" (603). Nevertheless, his realization of her pain "exacerbates his own" (Hardy, Particularities 180).

Some good comes from evil, however, for Harriet's faithfulness to Bulstrode leads him to do the one thing he can do to make amends to her and her family by putting Fred in charge of Stone Court (176). When that is accomplished, she prepares to leave Middlemarch with her husband, to live out the remainder of her days "in that sad refuge, the indifference of new faces" (602).

CHAPTER VI.

MINOR CHARACTERS

1

We have now looked at the most fully-developed female characters in Middlemarch. However, there are still a few minor characters who are significant because of their influence on the main action of the novel, because they serve as foils to the major characters, or because of the interest of the techniques used to characterize them. These are characters whom we do not see often as the plot develops. Yet we feel we know them because George Eliot is so skilled in realizing a character with just a few carefully chosen descriptions and conversations. These Middlemarch women personify the differing values and social expectations of a Midlands town of the 1830s. They help to point out the interdependence among the people of any community, and they also serve as further examples of Eliot's effective use of different methods of characterization.

2

Celia Brooke is a deliberately simplified and natural character, "depicted neatly and deftly as an uncomplicated but charming and sincere young girl who likes jewelry, a husband, and children" (Ferris 197). Her most complex feelings are expressed in a "mixture of criticism and awe" (11) toward her older sister. Her failure to

understand and approve of Dorothea is not surprising, for Celia and her sister are the epitome of sibling opposites. The people of Middlemarch generally prefer Celia, since she is amiable and innocent-looking and has "more common sense" than Dorothea, whom they view with some suspicion because of her "plans" and her determination to make a difference in the world. Celia is realistic about society (Beaty, "Study" 50) and does not exhibit any of her sister's ardent, idealistic tendencies which make people uncomfortable. She differs only slightly from Dorothea in the matter of religion, acquiescing in her sister's sentiments, "only infusing them with that common-sense which is able to accept momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation" (5).

Discovering early that the judgments of the townspeople are not always accurate, the reader tries to decide about this character from Celia's conversations with others and from what the narrator shares about her. What we finally realize is that sweet, agreeable little Celia is basically a "sympathetic character" (Liddell 141), but that she lacks those qualities which set Dorothea apart and make her a morally superior personality. In fact, Beaty emphasizes Celia's concern for appearances and her suspicion of all enthusiasm, claiming that George Eliot's attitude toward her may be guessed early in the novel by the changes she made in the manuscript. A sentence in Chapter 3 at first ran, "When people talked with energy and emphasis she watched their faces and gestures merely, and she never could understand how anyone consented to sing and open his mouth in that

ridiculous manner" (50). The final version of the scene, however, reads:

> When people talked with energy and emphasis she watched their faces and features merely. She never could understand how well-bred persons consented to sing and open their mouths in the ridiculous manner requisite for that vocal exercise. (24)

The final version suggests a more snobbish, more Rosamond-like response through the use of the phrase "well-bred persons" and the more condescending attitude of one who describes not just a "ridiculous manner" but "the ridiculous manner requisite for that vocal exercise." Also it is easier for an observer to judge "gestures" than "features." So perhaps George Eliot does intend to put us off from Celia, at least in the early part of the novel, since she often gives us reason to see a character's flaws before we move in closer to see and appreciate the positive qualities.

Very early in the novel Celia brings in the girls' mother's jewelry to be divided. It is obvious that these ornaments mean little to Dorothea, who tells Celia, "They are all yours, dear . . . take away your property" (9). Of course, we are learning Dorothea's weaknesses too, and we are surprised to find her fascinated with the emeralds; she even lets Celia persuade her (without much struggle) to keep them. Yet when Celia asks if she plans to wear the jewels in company, Dorothea "glanced quickly at her sister. Across all her imaginative adornment of those whom she loved, there darted now and then a keen discernment, which was not without a scorching quality" (10). Dorothea recognizes that Celia wants the emeralds too, along

with everything else, and so answers sarcastically, "I cannot tell to what level I may sink" (11).

It is at this point that we see for the first time a method of characterization that George Eliot uses most often in developing Celia: the interior conversation. Celia tends to comment mentally. She says to herself that Dorothea has no reason to be haughty with her and that there is no reason for her to be bound by Dorothea's opinions, though Dorothea certainly should be bound by them herself. Celia concludes, "But Dorothea is not always consistent" (11), an uncomfortable fact for her, since she obviously has already decided that the "emeralds would suit her own complexion" (10). In these judgments Celia does not use her pet name, "Dodo," for her sister. Further, Zimmerman emphasizes the vanity which is apparent in Celia's attitude (217) towards the jewelry. These become the facts and impressions that the reader can put together by using Celia's interior conversations to produce a fairly clear picture finally of who she is.

We learn very early that Celia is perceptive. Without understanding that Dorothea is attracted to Edward Casaubon, Celia nevertheless realizes that her sister is not interested in Sir James Chettam. She also sees that he is very much interested in Dorothea, a fact Dorothea has failed to notice. Celia says to herself, "Dorothea quite despises Sir James Chettam; I believe she would not accept him" (15). She is, of course, right in her assumption, but we have reason to suspect, as her thoughts about Sir James develop in subsequent scenes, that she thinks that is "a pity" because she is herself

interested in him. Later she observes to herself:

> He thinks that Dodo cares about him, and she only cares about her plans. Yet I am not certain that she would refuse him if she thought he would let her manage everything and carry out all her notions. And how very uncomfortable Sir James would be! I cannot bear notions. (24)

Celia is always there as a critic of Dorothea's "notions." It is relatively easy to follow the workings of Celia's mind since everything is so simple from her perspective; still she is often right in her conclusions. Austin suggests that Celia's character has a narrow vision, a "hawk-like perception of the trivial" (560), and that is why she notices the mole on Casaubon's cheek and the way he eats his soup. But she also notices that the desiccated clergyman is not right for Dodo, and she is correct.

Celia observes and deplores the things about Dorothea which disturb her--for example, her feeling that "her sister was too religious for family comfort" (15), and later her conviction that Dorothea is making a mistake in marrying Casaubon since "I am sure Freshitt Hall would have been pleasanter than this" (54)--<u>this</u> referring to Casaubon's dark house, Lowick Manor. Still later, after Casaubon's death, she determines that Dorothea "is being much too sad" (357) over her loss. But each of these opinions Celia keeps private in an effort to be fair and not to cause arguments.

Celia does not like to argue. Even as a child it had been her nature "never to quarrel with anyone--only to observe with wonder that they quarreled with her, and looked like turkey-cocks; whereupon she was ready to play at cat's cradle with them whenever they recovered

themselves" (34). Celia complains that Dorothea always finds fault with her sister's words, "though Celia inwardly protested that she always said just how things were, and nothing else; she never did and never could put words together out of her own head" (34). Celia is rather charming even in this interior conversation as she admits that she is not a thinker. The narrator explains that Celia's mind "had never been thought too powerful," but that she "saw the emptiness of other people's pretentions much more readily" than Dorothea (47).

The correctness of her negative impressions is the weapon Celia uses in trying to protect her sister, even if it is from herself. As an antidote to Dorothea's "notions," Celia "had an indirect mode of making her negative wisdom tell upon Dorothea, and calling her down from her rhapsodic mood by reminding her that people were staring, not listening" (24). The narrator tells us that Celia is not impulsive like Dorothea and that she always speaks with the "same quiet, staccato evenness" (24). Liddell thinks that voice is "charming" and "often deflates the solemnity of Dorothea" (156), but it is difficult to be comfortable with a person who never feels strongly enough about any issue to become "ardent" about it--the word George Eliot often uses as a kind of epithet for Dorothea. On another occasion, the narrator says of Celia, "To have in general but little feeling, seems to be the only security against feeling too much on any particular occasion" (47). The novelist does not intend this as a recommendation, since she is so obviously partial to Dorothea's ardent idealism. For George Eliot, not to feel deeply is not to live completely.

Celia is concerned that Dorothea "likes giving up" (13), that her sister renounces things she cares about. She upbraids Dorothea for "never looking just where you are, and treading in the wrong place. You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain" (27). And, of course, she is right about Dorothea's shortsightedness about many things, and so we think it very appropriate that Celia calls her sister Dodo--an endearing but telling and accurate comparison.

And when she hears of Casaubon's illness, her response is for Dorothea, and it is an honest one: "Poor dear Dodo--how dreadful! . . . . It is very shocking that Mr. Casaubon should be ill, but I never did like him. And I think he is not half fond enough of Dorothea; and he ought to be, for I am sure no one else would have had him" (210). And she is right again. But when she continues, "Poor Dodo never did do what other people do, and I think she never will" (210), the reader hopes that she is right about that too.

If Celia feels confident about being quietly right much of the time early in the novel, she becomes more certain and outspoken when she becomes a mother. Baby Arthur seems to bring with him the answers to most of the problems of his mother's world. By this point the reader has come to understand Celia's usefulness as a foil to her sister's character. The largeness of Dorothea's own character is emphasized by her descriptive, diminutive endearments for Celia: "cherub," "squirrel," "Murr the Cat" (26). Jones says the squirrel label suggests Celia's "natural wholeness, her fortunate exemption

from destructive opposition between the life of the spirit and her biological destiny as a woman" (89-90). This reading may seem a little far-fetched, but as a means of emphasizing the difference between Celia's and Dorothea's goals, it is appropriate. Celia is a measuring instrument used to make the reader aware of the changes taking place in Dorothea, for she herself remains static throughout the novel. Colby calls her a part of "settled society" (297), which Dorothea is not.

Middlemarch chronicles Dorothea's efforts to learn how to live, but Celia learns little of importance in the course of the novel, though with time she becomes more secure in her own nature, as adults do. Even with Arthur she only participates in the playful, happy moments of his life, turning him over to his nurse whenever she tires of her maternal role. In fairness to Celia, we realize that a nineteenth-century lady was expected to behave in just that way, leaving the actual rearing of children to nurses and governesses. Zimmerman calls her an "ornamental woman" who exchanges her gems for the more "matronly jewels" of children (222). Mansell comments on Celia's remark that "the commonest minds must be rather useful" (36). He says that, in the end, Celia, like many of George Eliot's commonplace, unheroic characters, "is blissfully surrounded by fine silverware and gurgling children" because "the common mind is not agitated by feelings that interfere with the prudent calculation of results" ("Tragedy" 167).

By "prudent calculation" Celia does get what she wants: Sir James, position, baby Arthur, most of her mother's jewels, and Sir James' adoration and protection. Ruskin could have used Celia as the ideal nineteenth-century woman: one who is loved and therefore does not complain, one who stays at home and is treated like royalty by a faithful husband (85). This is the kind of thinking which causes Houghton to call Ruskin's work "the most important single document I know for the characteristic idealization of love, women, and the home in Victorian thought" (343).

Celia is also representative of Mrs. Ellis' conduct book definition of women's leading defect of character in the early nineteenth century: "the fact that they are so occupied with what is obvious on the surface of things, that they will not look beyond" (Women 206). Celia does not think deeply, and she does not feel deeply (except perhaps as she is expected to about baby Arthur). She is a kind of sweet, docile pet for Sir James to protect and direct, and the reader understands exactly why Dorothea will not try to explain to her sister how she arrived at her decision to marry Will Ladislaw. She knows that Celia cannot understand the deep feeling, the force of motivation which inspires a more complex person's outward actions. Dorothea says to her beloved sister, "No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know" (602).

3

Another character who makes only an occasional appearance in *Middlemarch* is Elinor Cadwallader. But what an appearance she makes each time we see her! Unlike Celia, who spends little time thinking, Mrs. Cadwallader is always thinking, and every idea that comes into her head seems to come directly out of her mouth. She is an inveterate gossip, knowing all about everyone in the community, but she is developed as a witty, charming woman whose appearance the reader looks forward to. A personality with a mind "as active as phosphorus, biting everything that came near into the form that suited it" (Hutton 1528-1529), she livens up every scene she appears in. Mrs. Cadwallader is part of the "not-so-silent majority" of Middlemarch (Hulcoop 164). She is really interested in the people she talks about and talks to, and the Middlemarchers have come to recognize the good sense and accurate accounting of a situation that are often found behind her sharp words.

Well-born herself, Mrs. Cadwallader "stepped down the social ladder by marrying an impecunious and unaristocratic curate" (Knoepflmacher *Laughter* 196). This is, in fact, just one of the many examples of marriages in *Middlemarch* based on social inequality at a time when social rank was unusually important and marrying out of class was frowned on. Mrs. Cadwallader is close-fisted of necessity, having married the poor country parson, and we first meet her bargaining with Mrs. Fitchett for chickens, using as an argument for buying them cheap Mrs. Fitchett's admission that the chickens have started

eating their eggs. Mrs. Cadwallader says, "Oh the cannibals! Better sell them cheap at once" (38)--to her, of course. While the reader is still chuckling over Mrs. Cadwallader's cleverness, the narrator provides some significant facts about "the Rector's lady" (38):

> . . . of immeasurably high birth, descended, as it were, from unknown earls, dim as the crowd of heroic shades--who pleaded poverty, pared down prices, and cut jokes in the most companionable manner, though with a turn of tongue that let you know who she was. Such a lady gave a neighbourliness to both rank and religion, and mitigated the bitterness of uncommuted tithe. (38-39)

She is one of the characters mentioned specifically in an early review of Middlemarch as "a bright bit of worldly common sense always welcome in the county circle we get pleasantly familiar with" ("Review" 733-734). With all of George Eliot's dramatic skill at her command, Mrs. Cadwallader makes her mark every time she speaks, and her trenchant way of putting things is nearly always right on target. Allen claims that she is a woman of no vast insight (270), yet she demonstrates over and over again keen understanding of both character and situation.

After the narrator introduces Mrs. Cadwallader, there is little need for authorial explanation about her; her speech tells it all. Gossip is the predominant mode of development for this character, but it is gossip by her rather than the usual method of gossip about her. In her book Gossip, Patricia Spacks isolates two modes of gossip: one that issues from malice or that is characterized by "idle talk," and the other called "serious," which takes place in the context of trust (5). Participants in "serious" gossip use "talk about others to

reflect about themselves, to express wonder and uncertainty and locate certainties, to enlarge their knowledge of one another" (5). Mrs. Cadwallader is never malicious, and her gossip usually grows out of real concern for the person being discussed. Her talk also tells us as much about her as it does about the people she mentions. For example, Dorothea has selected Edward Casaubon to be her husband because, she tells Celia, he has a great soul. Celia complains to the rector's wife, "Oh Mrs. Cadwallader, I don't think it can be nice to marry a man with a great soul" (41). Mrs. Cadwallader replies, "Well, my dear, take warning. You know the look of one now; when the next comes and wants to marry you, don't you accept him" (41). Here, as is often the case with Mrs. Cadwallader, wise counsel is tempered with humor.

At times her wit is even aimed at herself. She tells Celia that young people should consider their families when marrying, explaining that she herself "set a bad example--married a poor clergyman, and made myself a pitiable object among the DeBracys--obliged to get my coals by stratagem, and pray to heaven for my salad oil" (41). There is no self-pity in this confession, however, nor is there ever any indication that Elinor Cadwallader regrets her decision to marry the amiable Humphrey Cadwallader.

She has plenty to say, however, about Dorothea's choice of husband, and what she says is caustic. To James Chettam, her choice of husband for the elder Miss Brooke, she calls Casaubon's "great soul" "a great bladder for dried peas to rattle in" (43). She adds

that "marriage to Casaubon is as good as going to a nunnery" (43). This is the first suggestion that there will be no heir from that union, a prediction that proves accurate.

And when Sir James says that Casaubon has no good red blood in his body, Mrs. Cadwallader answers, "No. Somebody put a drop under a magnifying glass, and it was all semicolons and parentheses" (52). And at a social gathering where she and Lady Chettam are discussing "drying remedies" for certain diseases, she whispers to her friend when Casaubon enters the room, "He does not want drying . . . the bridegoom . . . he has certainly been drying up faster since the engagement: the flame of passion, I suppose" (67). The sarcasm is not lost even on Lady Chettam. Although her remarks seem unkind, the reader is aware that Elinor Cadwallader recognizes Casaubon as a opportunistic old fool who is taking advantage of Dorothea and who should never have proposed to her.

Having given up on Dorothea and wishing her "joy of her hair shirt" (45), she immediately sets out to match Celia and Sir James, a plan which proves more successful. Because Celia is more pliable and less independent by nature, Mrs. Cadwallader becomes a kind of mother figure to her. She warns her about making a wise choice of husbands, and Celia allows herself to be guided. Mrs. Cadwallader counsels Celia about honeymoons, saying that newlyweds should not go on long journeys. "She says they get tired to death of each other, and can't quarrel comfortably, as they would at home" (204). Again Mrs. Cadwallader expresses her realistic view of the world and her willingness to share from her own rich experience.

On another occasion she explains to Celia how a realistic approach to life has helped her in her own adjustments as a wife. When Peter Featherstone dies, she tells Celia, who protests that she does not like funerals:

> Oh, my dear, when you have a clergyman in your family you must accommodate your tastes. I did that very early. When I married Humphrey I made up my mind to like sermons, and I set out by liking the end very much. That soon spread to the middle and the beginning, because I couldn't have the end without them. (238)

This is an example of the witty and positive way in which she seems to deal with all of life's situations.

Hardly democratic in her estimate of rank and wealth, "she believed as unquestioningly in birth and no-birth as she did in game and vermin" (44). A DeBracy reduced to poverty she would have seen as an example "of pathos worth exaggerating," and his "aristocratic vices" would not have horrified her (44). "But her feeling toward the vulgar rich was a sort of religious hatred: they had probably made all their money out of high retail prices, and Mrs. Cadwallader detested high prices for everything that was not paid in kind at the Rectory" (44). This may be seen as Mrs. Cadwallader's version of Mrs. Ellis on the same subject in her unctuous The Wives of England:

> . . . the most powerful and widely prevailing cause of that moral and intellectual degradation--that downward tendency of the mind, and that groveling of the spirit among material things, which is so much to be lamented over in the wives of the present day, arises out of . . . vain and fruitless ambition with regard to worldly things. (112)

Mrs. Ellis, however, is an idealist; Mrs. Cadwallader is a realist.

As a realist she sees, and speaks out about, the changes in society that come from the ever-increasing power of the manufacturing middle class. Her comment about Mayor Vincy, whom she sees as a representative of the manufacturing interests in Middlemarch, is that he is "one of those who suck the life out of the wretched handloom weavers in Tipton and Freshitt. That is how his family look so fair and sleek" (239). She is not, however, a fighter for social justice and does not even have "plans" for improving the lot of the laborer, as Dorothea Brooke does; but the weaver's plight is one of the almost limitless number of moral topics about which she expresses a keenly perceptive opinion.

Another is politics. When Mr. Brooke decides to stand for Parliament, Mrs. Cadwallader warns him that "a man always makes a fool of himself, speechifying" (39), and this is her way of trying to dissuade him from such a misfortune because she knows that he will embarrass and disgrace himself. When he persists in his campaign, she describes it as "frightful--this taking to buying whistles and blowing them in everybody's hearing" (277). She claims that "he may not know his own opinions, but he does know his own pocket" (280); hence she tries to get Brooke to back out by telling him how expensive campaigning is: "I thought the most expensive hobby in the world was standing for Parliament . . . . They said the last unsuccessful candidate at Middlemarch--Giles, wasn't his name?--spent ten thousand pounds and failed because he did not bribe enough" (281). Even that ploy does not work, however, and Mrs. Cadwallader must wait to see her

prophecy to her husband and Sir James fulfilled: "If you put him a-horseback on politics, I warn you of the consequences. It was all very well to ride on sticks at home and call them ideas" (283). She understands Mr. Brooke's weaknesses better than even his best friends do.

Mrs. Cadwallader's interest in Mr. Brooke's niece continues, too, despite her disappointment in Dorothea's choice of Casaubon. Although she claims to have washed her hands of the marriage, her interest remains lively. When the Casaubons learn suddenly of Will Ladislaw's continuing presence in Middlemarch, "Mrs. Cadwallader's eyes . . . saw a good deal of dumb show which was not so intelligible to her as she could have desired" (240), so she asks questions until she finds out who the "very pretty sprig" is (241).

Having figured out--accurately--the situation among Dorothea, Edward, and Will, she suggests that Will's being a problem to Casaubon is the well-off priest's own fault for not having used his influence to get Will made "an attache or sent to India" (279). Later, Dorothea hears that Mrs. Cadwallader, "the guardian of the old social order" (Daiches 43), has compared Will to an Italian with white mice, a phrase which Daiches interprets as "tradition defending itself from innovation, the establishment hitting back at alien infiltration" (43). Dorothea is upset by this remark because she sees it as an example of the general attitude her friends seem to have about Will as a foreigner and as an object of Casaubon's charity.

After Casaubon's death, Mrs. Cadwallader tries to advise Dorothea about her future. She warns her against living alone, saying, "We have all got to exert ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same names as other people call them by" (391). When Dorothea protests that she has never called everything "by the same name that all the people about me did," Mrs. Cadwallader replies, "But I suppose you have found out your mistake, my dear" (392). She allows herself only that reproof, but says later to Humphrey, "I see clearly a husband is the best thing to keep her in order" (392). As she begins to plan a proper match, her own husband protests her interference. Mrs. Cadwallader warns, "If her friends don't exert themselves, there will be a worse business than the Casaubon business yet" (392). And she is right again, at least as Middlemarchers see Dorothea's decision to marry Will. Mrs. Cadwallader upbraids the others for not seeing the inevitability of a relationship between Dorothea and Will. "Mr. Casaubon had prepared all this as beautifully as possible. He made himself disagreeable--or it pleased God to make him so--and then he dared her to contradict him. It's the way to make any trumpery tempting, to ticket it at a high price in that way" (598).

When she discusses Will's background, she says that "his blood is a frightful mixture," but she adds, "he is a pretty sprig" (599). This is an example of what David Carroll calls Mrs. Cadwallader's "myth of blood," that system of beliefs, not limited to religion, by which she lives. He claims that for George Eliot there is always a

core of human affection at the center of any mythology ("Silas" 199-200), and there is truly a core of affection in Elinor Cadwallader, beneath layer upon layer of wit, shrewdness, perceptiveness, and common sense, all dispensed with a sharp tongue.

4

Social relationships are a basic theme of Middlemarch, and many kinds of connections occur among the characters. One of them is friendships of the kind the Cadwalladers, the Chettams, and the Brookes enjoy. Another is family ties. The connection between the Garth and the Vincy families is a tenuous version of these family ties, held together by the children rather than the parents. Peter Featherstone provides the two families with a slight legal connection through his marriages--first to Caleb Garth's sister and then to Lucy Vincy's sister. However, "Mrs. Vincy had never been at her ease with Mrs. Garth, and frequently spoke of her as a woman who had had to work for her bread--meaning that Mrs. Garth had been a teacher before her marriage" (170). Susan Garth sees that episode as one of her finest accomplishments, and she continues happily to teach her own children. A woman of the same "curly-haired, square-faced type as Mary," Susan Garth is "handsomer, with more delicacy of feature, a pale skin, a solid matronly figure, and a remarkable firmness of glance" (180). The narrator says that looking at the mother, "you might hope that the daughter would become like her" (180).

Mrs. Garth believes in education, but she also believes in being useful. She is an example of the thinking of the Mrs. Ellises of the day, for she professes to believe that woman "was framed to be entirely subordinate" (179). And one critic describes her specifically as Caleb Garth's "properly subservient helpmate" (Bradley 43). For that reason, the narrator says, Susan Garth has a tendency "to be a little severe towards her own sex" who often call her "proud or eccentric" because she refuses to pour "any pathetic confidences into the ears of her feminine neighbours concerning Mr. Garth's want of prudence and the sums he might have had if he had been like other men" (178-179). In truth, however, "she rarely forgot that while her grammar and accent were above the town standard, she wore a plain cap, cooked the family dinner, and darned all the stockings" (179).

Every detail of this kind which we learn about Susan Garth, from her conversation or through the narrator's asides, reinforces our picture of a woman of exceptional moral strength. She expects the best of herself and her children, is equally prepared to reprove and to forgive, and believes that every person must learn to do his duty in this life.

Susan Garth has "that rare sense which discerns what is unalterable, and submits to it without murmuring" (178), including husband Caleb's "incapacity of minding his own interests" (178). So when Caleb's lack of business acumen involves him in Fred Vincy's bad debt, Mrs. Garth quickly offers her savings to help pay it off, even though she has been saving to pay for her son Alfred's schooling. The

narrator admits that "a nice ear might have discerned a slight tremor in some of the words" (183), but there is no hesitancy to her sacrifice.

Having always felt motherly toward Fred, Mrs. Garth does not scruple to make him feel "for the first time something like the tooth of remorse" (183). Fred stammers that he will pay the money back--"ultimately."

> "Yes, ultimately," said Mrs. Garth, who having a special dislike to fine words on ugly occasions, could not now repress an epigram. "But boys cannot well be apprenticed ultimately: they should be apprenticed at fifteen." She had never been so little inclined to make excuses for Fred. (183)

Even though her sense of right will not allow Fred to escape unscathed, she is surprisingly merciful to Caleb, who has resisted telling her about the note, knowing she would not approve. When he says that he has been a fool, she agrees, but she continues, smiling, "But I should not have gone to publish it in the market-place. Why should you keep such things from me . . . . If I had only known I might have been ready with some better plan" (184). And the reader is fairly sure she would have been. But since Caleb did not confide in her, and since Fred's note is apparently just another example of Caleb's financial stupidity, it is fortunate that Susan Garth and her family do not mind living "in a small way" (186).

Bradley says that George Eliot intended the Garths' conception of love, their values, and their attitudes toward money and work to be examples of what is right (49). Goldfarb adds that this Middlemarch family offers the "standard whereby the failings of the

other marriages can be measured" (18). The Fred Vincy episode demonstrates why these are accurate assessments. Each of the Garth children learns the importance of "doing his duty" from both Caleb and Susan, although Caleb admits to Mary, "A woman, let her be as good as she may, has got to put up with the life her husband makes for her. Your mother has had to put up with a good deal because of me" (190). And we sense that Susan would agree, although never out loud. When it looks as if Mary will have to go to York to take a teaching position because of the Garths' financial difficulties, and Caleb wishes plaintively that she could remain at home, Susan tells him, "'Mary would not be happy without doing her duty' . . . conscious of having done her own" (293). Susan Garth, more than any other female character in Middlemarch, personifies the Victorian concept of duty.

We also come to appreciate Mrs. Garth's respect and demand for honesty when she hears second-hand about Peter Featherstone's demand that Mary help him destroy one of his wills. Learning that the last will would have benefited Fred Vincy handsomely, and that for that reason Mary feels unhappy about the incident, Susan Garth says, "Mary could not have acted otherwise, even if she had known what would be the effect on Fred . . . . It seems to me, a loss which falls on another because we have done right is not to lie upon our conscience" (298). It is this kind of straight thinking, of clearly worked out and shared moral values, which provides the basis for Mary's own high moral standards.

The narrator tells us about some of Susan Garth's other attributes. For example, we are allowed to know that the Reverend Mr. Farebrother "always told his mother that Mrs. Garth was more of a lady than any matron in the town" (295). And that is a choice compliment since we know that Camden Farebrother is a very discriminating gentleman.

We see how Mary has developed a sense of duty and honesty like her mother's, and we also recognize the same sharpness of speech--even Caleb says, with some enjoyment, "She gets her tongue from you, Susan" (297). We also see that Susan Garth's adherence to the ideal of female subordination is seldom practiced with any consistency, and Mary follows her mother's practice--not her preaching. "On ninety-nine points Mrs. Garth decided, but on the hundredth she was often aware that she would have to perform the singularly difficult task of carrying out her own principle, and to make herself subordinate" (411).

We see that hundredth time when Caleb determines to give Fred the management of Stone Court, thereby putting him in a position to propose to Mary. Susan Garth thinks it "a pity" because "she might have had a man who is worth twenty Fred Vincys" (412), meaning Camden Farebrother. Caleb defends Fred by saying, "'But you took me, though I was a plain man.' 'I took the best and cleverest man I had ever known,' said Mrs. Garth, convinced that <u>she</u> would never have loved any one who came short of that mark" (412). The irony of that remark lies in the fact that Caleb <u>is</u> short of the mark when it comes to business sense just as Mary's choice of a husband has been short of the mark

when it comes to that same business sense. The comparison carried to its logical conclusion suggests happiness for the younger pair to match that of the elder, and happily the example of Susan and Caleb Garth does provide the positive family model for the next generation.

5

Another mother who tries to assure happiness for her children is Lucy Vincy. Mother of Fred and Rosamond, she is a forty-five-year-old woman of placid good humor whose face shows "neither angles nor parallels" (72)--the implication being that she seldom worries. She projects "the air of a very handsome good-humoured landlady, accustomed to the most capricious orders of gentlemen" (75). The narrator's description here is ironic, since Mrs. Vincy is quite conscious of rank and would have been offended at such a comparison. She looks down on Mrs. Garth for having once been a governess, a position on approximately the same social level as that of a landlady.

Generally described in terms of the "too volatile pink strings floating from her fine throat" (117), she is a typical and regrettable example of nineteenth-century femininity. She demonstrates the kind of love Mrs. Ellis recommends in woman:

> The love of woman appears to have been created solely to minister . . . it is the natural characteristic of woman's love in its most refined, as well as its most practical development, to be perpetually doing something for the good or the happiness of the object of her affection. (Wives 28)

Fond of gossip, doting on her children, never willingly at odds with

her husband, and demonstrating no useful skills, Mrs. Vincy spends her days doing aimless needlework and trying to keep peace among her children. She has loved her children sincerely and excessively, giving them too much, seldom punishing them, and doing all in her limited power to assure them successful lives in Middlemarch.

The dramatic irony is apparent when she tells Rosamond, "You are the sweetest temper in the world" (72), and when she tries to explain that Rosamond "must allow for young men. Be thankful if they have good hearts. A woman must learn to put up with little things. You will be married some day" (73). Little does she understand that Rosamond will "allow" for no one and will not put up with <u>any</u> thing, little or big, that does not suit her.

The docile Mrs. Vincy is not even offended when Rosamond tells her mother what she sould say and what she should not. Instead, Mrs. Vincy concedes, "I never was a good speaker . . . . But with your education you must know" (73). Her gentleness, good humor, and stupidity are brought into relief even more effectively in the scene in which Lydgate compares the mother and daughter. Referring to her "blooming good-natured face" and "her cheery manners to husband and children," the young doctor considers her "among the great attractions of the Vincy house" (117). Ironically, however, his feeling that "the tinge of unpretentious, inoffensive vulgarity in Mrs. Vincy gave more effect to Rosamond's refinement" (117) makes the reader think that Lydgate's comment should be construed as a compliment to Mrs. Vincy instead of to Rosamond, who is more snobbish than refined.

In the only other scene in which Mrs. Vincy is present with Lydgate and Rosamond, she embarrasses her daughter. Rosamond has manipulated Lydgate very carefully to persuade him to take her to meet his aristocratic relatives while the two of them are away on their honeymoon trip. Mrs. Vincy almost spoils Rosamond's assumed image of a young aristocrat by saying to Lydgate, "I hope your uncle Sir Godwin will not look down on Rosy, Mr. Lydgate. I should think he would do something handsome. A thousand or two can be nothing to a baronet" (261). The narrator tells us that "Mama had a little filial lecture afterwards, and was docile as usual" (261). Mama regards the Vincys' social position as higher than that of most people in Middlemarch, but Rosamond does not wish to have Lydgate reminded that she is a tradesman's daughter. The conduct books of the day speak to the issue specifically. In 1843, Mrs. Ellis describes the character of a tradesman like Mayor Vincy in this way: "The business of shopkeeping, as it is generally conducted, has little tendency to ennoble the character; and that perpetually striving to please for purposes of self-interest . . . is lowering to the dignity of a man, to say nothing of a gentleman" (Wives 68). It is then necessary to consider the shopkeeper's wife's position:

> As the chosen companion of such a man, is it possible then that an English woman . . . should blush to acknowledge herself a tradesman's wife? . . . It is not the bare acknowledgment that she is so, which can in any way be made to answer the demands of duty, but a perfect willingness to adapt herself in every respect to her situation, so as to answer its various requirements to the satisfaction of all around her. (69)

Poor Lucy Vincy has not only adapted to her situation, but seems also not to have understood that her position is not one to be envied. Her distorted conception of family position causes problems for her children too.

Not selfish in the same way Rosamond is, Fred has the flaws of youthful thoughtlessness and indecision. His mother's "baby," he has been pampered and spoiled since childhood. Fred is sincerely fond of his mother, calling her "his notion of a pleasant woman" (74), but she has not instilled in him a sense of responsibility. Instead, Lucy Vincy dotes on her son, making excuses for him even when he makes serious mistakes, yet she vehemently opposes his choice of a wife, which is the wisest decision he ever makes. There is a rich irony here. Mrs. Vincy wants only the "best" for Fred, and Mary Garth is neither beautiful nor socially prominent. Early in the novel she says in Fred's presence, "I think Mary Garth a dreadful plain girl--more fit for a governess" (76), and she does not change her mind when she discovers Fred's affection for Mary. She is inconsolable at the

> certainty that Fred would marry Mary Garth, that her life would henceforth be spoiled by a perpetual infusion of Garths and their ways, and that her darling boy, with his beautiful face and stylish air "beyond anybody else's son in Middlemarch," would be sure to get like that family in plainness of appearance and carelessness about his clothes. (415)

We see where Rosamond gets at least some of her snobbish attitude and concern for position, and it is inconceivable to Mrs. Vincy that her lovely boy, whom she has nursed so faithfully through typhoid fever, terrified that he might be lost, could be saved only to make such a dreadful choice. But choose Mary he does.

It is not easy for Mrs. Vincy to adjust to his decision, but it is to her credit that she makes some effort at a subsequent Christmas party "to fancy herself caring about Mary's appearance in wedding clothes, or feeling complacency in grandchildren who would 'feature' the Garths" (469). She is won over finally, as much as she will ever be, because Mary is so good to the younger Vincy children, completely enthralling them with her storytelling magic.

There is more irony, however, in the last glimpse we have of Lucy Vincy in the finale of Middlemarch. Of Mary and Fred's three children--all boys--Mrs. Vincy takes comfort that two of them

> were real Vincys, and did not "feature the Garths." But Mary secretly rejoiced that the youngest of the three was very much what her father must have been when he wore a round jacket, and showed a marvellous nicety of aim in playing at marbles. (608-609)

The reader rejoices with Mary that there is hope for another morally upright man of Caleb Garth's stature when the youngest Vincy reaches maturity.

6

Another Middlemarch mother, the last to be considered, is Mrs. Farebrother. Her significance lies in her being responsible for producing, rearing, and molding the most sympathetic male character in the novel. Camden Farebrother's mother is described as old-fashioned but genuinely respectable. Holloway calls her "proud," "kindly," and "distinguished," stressing the fact that she is "a reliable authority" (279) in moral and social matters. White-haired,

"befrilled and kerchiefed with dainty cleanliness, upright, quick-eyed and still under seventy" (125), Mrs. Farebrother is "accustomed to tell her company what they ought to think, and to regard no subject as quite safe without her steering" (125). The use of kindly humor to introduce this chief talker in the Farebrother house prepares the reader for each subsequent appearance of Mrs. Farebrother. We smile and expect to be charmed each time she speaks, and George Eliot never disappoints us.

We actually know little about Mrs. Farebrother's background or life or hopes and dreams, but the little we do know is so clear and so pertinent that we tend to flesh out the gaps with what we _think_ we know about her. Here George Eliot's art, so often ruminant and expansive, is suggestive and economical. We know that Mrs. Farebrother has never had any trouble with the question of right and wrong, and the changing world disturbs her, for "if you speak out of the Prayer-book itself, you are liable to be contradicted" (126). We know how much she loves her son and how proud of him she is: "He will compare with any preacher in this kingdom, not to speak of this town, which is but a low standard to go by" (126). That brief opinion also warns us what she thinks about the local clergy and how readily she is willing to share her views.

We learn that she advocates a certain amount of pride and self-esteem when she tells Lydgate, "You don't know my son: he always undervalues himself. I tell him he is undervaluing the God who made him, and made him a most excellent preacher" (127). We know the

depth of the tenderness she has nurtured with her son when even Lydgate recognizes that "very few men could have been as filial and chivalrous as he was to the mother, aunt, and sister, whose dependence on him had in many ways shaped his life rather uneasily for himself" (131).

Treated realistically by the novelist, Mrs. Farebrother is not above a little gossip, and comes home telling Camden that she has heard that Lydgate is Bulstrode's son. Her response to that possibility is, "I should not be surprised at anything in Bulstrode, but I should be sorry to think it of Mr. Lydgate" (194). Her feelings for Bulstrode are quite apparent, and we know that her aversion to him is based primarily on Nicholas Bulstrode's failure to support the Reverend Mr. Farebrother for the hospital chaplaincy.

When Farebrother is given the living at Lowick after Casaubon's death and on Dorothea's recommendation, Mrs. Farebrother's only comment to her son is, "The greatest comfort, Camden, is that you have deserved it" (374). When she expresses her gratitude to Dorothea for making this dream come true, she commends her son for having followed in the footsteps of his grandfather on *her* side of the family. She goes on to explain that Camden's father "was in the law--most exemplary and honest nevertheless, which is a reason for our never being rich" (393-394). Mrs. Ellis mentions the lawyer, in comparison with the tradesman, as one who almost holds "the destinies of his fellow-creatures in his hand," yet sometimes "cringes to his wealthy client, and often works his way to distinction by concealing his real

sentiments, and pretending to be other than he is" (Wives 69). Obviously, Mrs. Farebrother could never have loved that kind of lawyer. Nevertheless, the lawyer's profession is "esteemed more honorable, and consequently more eligible, than any kind of trade" (69); hence Mrs. Farebrother has never had reason to be ashamed of her husband--at least in Mrs. Ellis' haughty estimation.

Honest and realistic to a fault, Mrs. Farebrother does not hesitate to tell her son, when he hints jokingly for a compliment about his looks, that "you are a handsome man, Camden: though not so fine a figure of a man as your father" (374). When Camden's sister Winifred suggests that he propose marriage to Mary Garth and asks her mother for support for the choice, Mrs. Farebrother says, "My son's choice shall be mine" (374). She is not at all like Lucy Vincy in her campaign to direct Fred away from Mary Garth.

The word which George Eliot uses most often to describe Mrs. Farebrother is decisive. She has a decisive look; she speaks decisively. There is a telling example of her decisive manner when Mrs. Vincy at the Christmas party bemoans the fact that Mary Garth is not better-looking. Mrs. Farebrother replies decisively that she likes Mary's countenance, her good manners, and her gift to "know how to conduct herself in any station" (471). Mrs. Farebrother has lived a long time and she has learned what is important in life. She has taught those things to her son and feels justifiably proud of the exemplary man he has become--with her guidance. And she herself is that rare creature, a lady.

7

Miss Henrietta Noble, Mrs. Farebrother's meeker sister, is the personification of her name, as her noble activities demonstrate. Tiny in size, she is interesting partly because of the diminutives with which George Eliot chooses to describe her. When she is furtively confiscating and hiding sugar cubes in her basket to give to the poor children in the neighborhood, she makes "a small innocent noise as of a tiny timid quadruped" (125). She also shares her own "more portable food . . . . Fostering and petting all needy creatures being so spontaneous a delight to her, that she regarded it much as if it had been a pleasant vice that she was addicted to" (125). George Eliot adds, "One must be poor to know the luxury of giving," and from the description of Miss Noble's own worn and mended garments, she obviously knows <u>great</u> luxury in giving. Joan Bennett calls these "small charities done by stealth . . . a comical counterpart of Dorothea's unsatisfied thirst to do good" (174). And though we smile at her neat small actions and her little noises, we admire her for her goodness no less than we admire Dorothea for her great "plans." In truth, Dorothea is never able to carry out her great plans; Miss Noble is actually able to carry through with her good intentions.

She is always <u>little</u> Miss Noble with her <u>little</u> basket distributing her "<u>small</u> filchings" (340), and it should not seem odd that Will Ladislaw is often seen escorting her on her rounds, since she seems like a smaller version of Dorothea. Miss Noble, like Dorothea, adores Will. When the ladies in the Farebrother household

first hear of the codicil to Casaubon's will, "Miss Noble made many small compassionate mewings" (437), and when she momentarily loses a tortoise-shell lozenge-box that Will has given her, she is distraught. "'I fear the kitten has rolled it away,' said the tiny old lady, involuntarily continuing her beaver-like notes" (575). Finally the box is found and her family teases her lovingly about her attachment to Will. Mrs. Farebrother tells Dorothea that her "small sister" is like a dog when she forms an attachment to anyone--"she would take their shoes for a pillow and sleep the better," to which Miss Noble replies, "Mr. Ladislaw's shoes, I would" (575).

So it is not surprising that Miss Noble agrees to speak to Dorothea on Will's behalf, asking if she will see him. Described as the "little lady," "the timid little woman," and the "little old lady" in this one brief scene, Miss Noble nevertheless carries out her duty with noble determination. "Do see him, Mrs. Casaubon . . . else I must go back and say No, and that will hurt him" (590). In this way Miss Henrietta Noble becomes the agent by which Dorothea and Will are finally united to live "a life filled . . . with a beneficent activity" (610). It would seem appropriate, then, to say of Henrietta Noble as much as of Dorothea Brooke at the novel's end:

> 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. (613)

These are the common and the uncommon women of Middlemarch. Each has her own concerns, her own sense of duty, her own values and

expectations. Each character is developed using limited methods of characterization, which instead of limiting them makes each one uniquely alive and worthy of our sympathy and understanding.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

1

The female characters of _Middlemarch_ are clearly defined and lifelike; they earn our sympathy and our tempered judgment. However, we do not know them all in the same depth or completeness, and the reason is not merely how often they appear or how necessary they are to the plot. It is primarily a matter of _how_ they are presented and how the methods of characterization work singly or in combination to give us women as simply portrayed as Lucy Vincy and as intricately developed as Dorothea Brooke.

The narrator's different techniques of characterization position us differently with regard to the various characters. For example, gossip distances the reader from a character because of its remoteness from that person and because the gossip is often incomplete or inaccurate. Again, physical description usually distances the reader from a character and suggests an impersonal handing out of facts, though occasionally the specific choice of detail or connotative diction may imply something more intimate and significant, as in the early comparisons between Dorothea and a "Madonna" or "the Virgin Mary."

Dramatic presentation, on the other hand, gives the feeling of immediacy by suggesting that what a character says and does is only

the outward completion of an internal thought, whether random or deliberate. The most intimate mode of characterization is the sharing of a character's internal musings by an unobtrusive narrator, since this method allows the reader to know what the world does not--the secrets of inner consciousness and motive. Finally, at times George Eliot uses authorial intrusion to defend a character, to temper the reader's almost certain criticism of an action, or to remind the reader why he should show compassion for the weakness of a fellow human being. Perhaps most important of all, she also uses the intrusive technique to move beyond the individual and speak to the universality of a situation. In these instances the novelist moves closer to the reader, engaging him as a kind of partner, drawing him closer to a character in knowledge, sympathy, and compassion. By the judicious use of different methods, she brings us finally to sympathize with all of her female characters, both simple and complex, for in the end we are asked to sympathize even with Rosamond.

2

Miss Henrietta Noble is a simple character who is presented primarily through the epithets of the narrator. Always referred to as "small," "tiny," and "little," in both size and effect, she appears to us only in a few actions, and yet we perceive that the repetition of such actions makes up her whole life. The diminutive epithets remind us constantly of the smallness of her world and power, and of the moral refinement of her actions. Her problems consist of

determining how to sneak treats and sweets out of her own small portion of food to the children of her neighborhood and to the truly poor. Her consistent moral decision has been to sacrifice for others, even though she must do so in a limited way.

The novelist is obviously sympathetic toward Miss Noble and the good she does, although in the larger world that good is very minor. The narrator stresses the contrast between the smallness of the person and the moral force of a goodness that is actually translated into deeds. And George Eliot gives this fluttery little lady the responsibility for setting up the meeting between Dorothea and Will which ends in their marriage--an "irremediable act" on Miss Noble's part, performed with fear and trembling but from the purest of motives and leading to a happy ending. The habitual set of Miss Noble's mind toward doing good, along with her renunciation of her own desires for someone else's benefit, demonstrates how the simplest character, presented briefly but realistically, can be more fully realized and significant than her few brief appearances would suggest.

3

Mrs. Farebrother is also simply characterized, but in her case the principal method is dramatic, through the use of witty and satiric dialogue. Mrs. Farebrother has already made the important decisions in her life and is perfectly satisfied with them. She has learned a great deal and almost too readily shares her knowledge and wisdom with anyone who is receptive. Dialogue is almost the only technique which

George Eliot uses to develop Mrs. Farebrother, and it becomes the perfect choice for portraying an honest and forthright woman who says exactly what she thinks. The reader does not have to guess her thoughts, for she shares them all in speech. She is not at odds with her community but is integrated into it. She has kept her moral standards high throughout her marriage to a lawyer and happily manages her son's life from the privacy of their home, as a Victorian lady of a certain kind was expected to do. We do not have to be told that she is respectable; instead we see her behaving respectably. We do not have to be told that she is loyal; we hear her loyal support of Camden and his beliefs. Her narrow view of the small world of Middlemarch does not diminish her as a force for justice and moral right, as George Eliot emphasizes through Mrs. Farebrother's conversations with her family and friends.

4

Dialogue is also one of the two predominant techniques used to develop Susan Garth's character, the other being comment by the narrator. Most of what we know of her comes through the narrator's explanations of conversations that Susan has with her family and with Fred Vincy. We feel the immediacy of her pleasure in telling Fred that she has saved the money necessary to send her son Alfred to school even while the dramatic irony of Fred's improvidence and folly makes us ache for her. Her later decision to offer that money to repay his loss, despite her disgust with Fred, is an example of

Darrel Mansell's assertion that "no act in [George Eliot's] universe is without far-reaching consequences, however remote and seemingly incalculable" (159). It is Susan's wifely duty to support her husband, and so she does. Happily this action eventually causes Fred to give up the idea of becoming an Anglican priest, and good timing puts him in the right place to take over the management of Stone Court. But the series of events leading to Fred's new vocation shows that George Eliot was aware that "not only the repeated choices which become habit, but also wholly external events, influence the development of character" (New 135). Chance is one of the players in the drama of Middlemarch; though in this case it helps Fred to understand what it means to be selfless, to demonstrate more concern for someone other than himself. It is Susan Garth, however, who remains his primary instructor in ethical matters.

Her other conversations provide important information about her character. We learn of her hopes for her children; we come to understand her realistic approach to life; and we discover that she has outwardly adapted to what society before and during the reign of Victoria demands of a wife--subordination. She knows that her influence is in the home and that according to the world she must bend to her husband's will, but she and Caleb have built a secure and happy, morally strong family doing what they do best--being satisfied to live in "a small way," indifferent to the great world and its ambitions. This couple represents the moral standard against which George Eliot measures all the other families in *Middlemarch*.

5

The narrator's exploration of a character's interior consciousness is especially important in the portrayal of Lucy Vincy. In contrast, we learn from her conversation only how much she loves her children. Everything else the narrator tells us directly through psychological analysis and aside: Mrs. Vincy's sense of place in Middlemarch, her acceptance of what a woman "has to put up with," her vague sense of rank (which Rosamond has developed to an art and an obsession), and her basic happiness with her simple, though shallow, life. The nineteenth-century world expected women to be quiet and submissive, to "suffer and be still." It follows that this injunction automatically limited dramatic presentation as a method for developing female characters--a point which cannot be overemphasized. They are not allowed to say much, and most audiences outside their families (or inside) do not listen to them or take them seriously. In compensation, Victorian authors often resorted to the psychological presentation of women characters, for social repression stimulated the twists and turns, the insights and evasions of psychological processes.

6

Elinor Cadwallader is a character who is not at odds with her community but has found her place there, even though she has stepped down the social ladder by marrying the rector at Freshitt. She appears in the novel more often than those named earlier in this

chapter, but she is not more complex than they. Her mind does not gravitate toward complicated decisions. For her, there is not even a question of <u>whether</u> to match-make, but only <u>whom</u> she should match. Her decision is not <u>whether</u> she should interfere with Mr. Brooke's plans to stand for Parliament, but <u>how</u> to persuade him not to stand. Her problem with Dorothea is not <u>whether</u> to counsel the young widow but <u>how much</u> pressure to exert on her. The predominant mode of development George Eliot uses for Mrs. Cadwallader is gossip--not <u>about</u> her but <u>by</u> her. This sharp-tongued but charming woman exposes herself as she exposes others. And she gossips from interest and concern at least as much as from simple curiosity--a reminder that not all gossip is self-serving and morally reprehensible. We learn her position on many topical subjects--on medical questions and on the vulgar rich, for example--from her discussions of the views of the other characters. She talks about herself with the same openness and caustic frankness that she employs in discussing others. Her position as a rector's wife gives her perhaps more authority than most women of her day enjoyed, but her determination to be heard has been justified and authenticated by her strong, intelligent arguments and the numerous occasions when she has been proved right. Her insight and her determination win her a limited but faithful audience, which includes both other Middlemarchers and ourselves as readers.

7

Celia Brooke is one who listens and learns from Elinor Cadwallader, but she does not become a gossip. Her conversations are primarily internal ones. She talks silently to herself, usually after the fact, as a means of convincing herself that some action on her part has been appropriate. Celia is a much simpler character than her sister. And George Eliot uses mainly the traditional method of dialogue to emphasize the shallowness of her thinking and the absence of complication in her actions and decisions. She is a charming paradox, both superficial and, more often than not, right. In fact, although she and her sister Dorothea look at the world differently, they are both usually right; the difference is that Dorothea operates on a higher level. Dorothea rejects gossip because she wants to "find her own way to the good," but Celia wants to hear what people say because that is practical: Other people's opinions "affect the possibility of action" and might even bring a reality to light that might otherwise go undiscovered (Spacks 198).

Sweet and good-tempered, Celia talks about the moles on a man's face or the color of his hair rather than about what he stands for or what he believes. She cannot see Dorothea's interest in cottages as anything more than a _fad_ because her mind cannot transcend what she understands of her place in society. She worries over how the community will view her because of Dorothea's idiosyncrasies, how unhappy staying at Lowick as a bridesmaid will make her, and how Dorothea's "notions" will upset Sir James. She is "right thinking" and convention personified, and an exemplar of the wisdom of the stupid.

Growth and renunciation are not part of Celia's character; she is passive by nature. Unenterprising and complacent, Celia spends her time rethinking events and justifying her own words and actions as appropriate for a young woman of her station as youthful ward, bride, or mother. The wife of an amiable and adoring baronet, a woman who has few duties around the house and whose baby is cared for by the nurse, has plenty of time to sit and think while she waits for her husband to return to the sanctity of his home, to think while someone else rears her child, to think still more while she sits quietly embroidering useless fripperies or petting the dog. With a limited education and no love for learning, Celia deserves our sympathy for having so much time to think and so little to think about. Her internal musings, along with a smattering of narrative explanation and gossip, emphasize Celia's interest in those she loves and in appearances, the chief concerns of her life. But it is important to remember that she is not a bad woman, and there are times in the novel when she reminds us that the more complex characters might be hell to live with. She is a triumph of George Eliot's moral fairness.

8

Like Celia Brooke in her concern with family and appearances, Harriet Bulstrode is not so simple a character. A woman who, like every mother in the novel, sees herself as moral and upright, Harriet finds herself in an awkward and ugly position in which both appearances and those she loves demand a decision from her. Early in the

novel, Harriet is portrayed through dialogue to show how she appears to the world, but when her life becomes morally complicated and her respectability is threatened, the narrator steps in to point out the accuracy of Harriet's self-evaluation and to prepare us for her actions.

Before the Raffles episode is disclosed, Mrs. Bulstrode speaks knowingly and caustically about her brother's family, content to believe that she has the answers to everyone's problems. She seems as shallow as her friends in their conversations. But in that part of the story in which Harriet Bulstrode becomes a significant actor, George Eliot relies almost totally on her narrator to explain the psychological process by which Harriet prepares to make a terrible decision and take outward action. Because hers is a moral decision of great consequence, we must be able to experience with her the internal changes that she goes through in order to believe her final mute but heroic action. For that reason George Eliot gives Harriet Bulstrode in her final scenes as full and sympathetic a treatment as she does Dorothea in her more complete and fully-developed emotional journey.

Harriet Bulstrode knows the gossip about her husband and Raffles even though she does not hear it; she talks to Nicholas, but only about helping to relieve her nephew's and her niece's problems, not about the depth or degree of her husband's culpability; she renounces, through her decision to stay with Nicholas, her former life of happiness and social position for a life of anonymity and pain.

Yet she gains the admiration of the reader as well as that of the novelist, who believed that a person _is_ the decisions she makes, the sum of the actions that grow out of her moral struggles--an ethical and ontological notion that anticipates in some ways modern existentialism. In a unique fashion Harriet Bulstrode remains true to her ideal since Nicholas has been that ideal. According to the view of most Middlemarchers, her religion is built on the evangelical connections and the pious dedication of her husband; his religion is her religion, and it turns out to be a religion of guilt. But her decision to sacrifice everything to remain loyal to Nicholas separates her from his warped beliefs and unctuous actions; it elevates Harriet Bulstrode to a level far superior to that of the naive, shallow woman we met at the beginning of George Eliot's novel.

9

Unlike Harriet, Mary Garth does not change during the course of the novel. She does not need to. Mary is faithful to her ideals despite life's harshness; what is right and best is always more important to her than what would make her temporarily happy. Mary Garth has learned strength of character and moral integrity from her parents, and neither Peter Featherstone's death-bed demands to help him destroy one of his wills nor Fred Vincy's adoration can sway her to do what she knows is not right. Even more than Dorothea, Mary is not influenced to behave as the community expects; she must satisfy herself. Mary's moral nature gives her character depth, and the fact

that that nature is already in place and well-developed when the novel begins makes Mary a simpler character than Dorothea, who grows and develops throughout Middlemarch.

Mary has self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are commendable qualities, especially for a young woman described repeatedly as a "brown patch." For her, life's decisions are clear-cut, if not always easy. She refuses Fred, whom she loves, until he comes to her on her terms--as a man of responsibility, who chooses a job which gives him pleasure and a sense of accomplishment without regard to position. Moral fairness and duty are the predominant passions of Mary's life, and happily her willingness to renounce her own wishes brings her everything good. The world's view of Mary is presented through gossip, her friends' and family's view through dialogue in which she participates, and Mary's own interpretation of others' motives and actions through the narrator's voice: these techniques taken together yield a clear, sympathetic and essentially simple portrait of a morally superior and vital young woman. And it is historically interesting to note that Mary Garth finds her literary work, based on the Lives of Plutarch, credited to her husband because he is the one who has been to the University "where the ancients were studied" (608). Perhaps one of the reasons George Eliot has such a fondness for this character is that, like the novelist herself, Mary is an example of the intelligent nineteenth-century woman limited by a patriarchal culture.

10

Rosamond Vincy is also the product of her pre-Victorian conditioning. But she has not struggled to overcome artificial and arbitrary limitations as Mary and Dorothea do. Outwardly, in fact, she is the ideal; beautiful, compliant, charming, Rosamond is the perfect hostess and the perfect wife. Men admire her and women envy her. She is at odds with her community only in the sense that she hopes to leave Middlemarch behind and bask in the aristocratic glory of Lydgate's family. Renunciation is beyond her practical scope or imaginative grasp, but persistence finally assures Rosamond of success--by the world's standards. But George Eliot steps in to defend even Rosamond's behavior--a generosity of spirit beyond many of her readers' understanding. She reminds us not to judge Rosamond too harshly for being enamoured of rank since most of us are impressed with the trappings of authority and prestige. She assures us that Rosamond had no awareness of being false to Lydgate in hindering the sale of their house. And she claims that Rosamond is not mercenary, that she never even thinks about money. But having used this intrusive and tendentious technique to come to Rosamond's defense, she immediately adds an ironic comment to each of those defenses that distances us from the character: Rosamond has never _needed_ to think about money because it has always been provided; in her view a woman is not required to see her own character and to judge it in the same light she uses to judge others; and finally she is occupied with

Lydgate only as he relates to her and joins the numberless rank of young men who always fall in love with her.

So the novelist uses authorial intrusion to temper compassion with judgment. She employs all the literary techniques in developing Rosamond's character, but from the beginning it is apparent that the decisions Rosamond will make will not be appropriate responses to the important questions she should face squarely and answer honestly. Should she ride a horse while pregnant, even if her husband disapproves? Is it acceptable to flirt after marriage? Is it all right to lie if it means achieving what is right--by her standards? The problem in Rosamond's case is that her decisions are invariably solipsistic and selfish, so that she decides wrongly in every case. Nevertheless, the narrator is always there to explain Rosamond's reasons, to blunt our desire to criticize her too harshly, and to remind us that Rosamond is the product of her time and education, the creation of society's expectations.

Eliot has a way of leading us to compare and contrast characters by placing them in similar situations. Rosamond, Susan Garth, and Harriet Bulstrode all have to respond to their husbands' problems. Mrs. Garth and Mrs. Bulstrode selflessly support their husbands while Rosamond asks innocently, "What can _I_ do?" Dorothea and Rosamond make decisions about marriage, both with the hope of changing the direction of their lives. The difference is that Dorothea chooses Casaubon in order to have a part in a work that she thinks will benefit mankind, whereas Rosamond chooses Lydgate in order to

benefit herself. Dorothea decides to sacrifice herself in order to carry on Casaubon's work, while his failure is from his own vast deficiency; on the other hand, Rosamond sacrifices nothing and Lydgate's research is aborted because of her worldly ambitions. Rosamond and Mary make conscious decisions based on the influence they have over Lydgate and Fred. Rosamond contributes to Lydgate's failure; Mary leads Fred to success. These pairings and contrasts do not appear obvious, but they do contribute to the unity of the novel. Doyle says that they communicate "the sense of a thick and enmeshing social medium that pressures many characters in similar ways" (128). Obviously the response the various characters make to those pressures are quite different.

One of the social pressures that relaxes for Rosamond after her marriage is the stricture that calls for close supervision of a young woman in the company of a gentleman. The nineteenth-century _bourgeoise_ became freer after marriage than before since, in strict propriety, she could not entertain a man alone while still single. Once married, Rosamond finds herself with nothing but free time while Lydgate struggles with the world of hospital politics, patients, and financial burdens, and she is free to flirt with Lydgate's dashing aristocratic cousin and to spend countless hours in the company of Will Ladislaw, who she mistakenly believes is in love with her. Heedlessly, she practices her feminine wiles on both men and in the end invites gossip and suffers embarrassment because of them.

George Eliot's practice in dealing with Rosamond Vincy is the use of the distancing effect of dramatic presentation and gossip, counterbalanced by authorial intrusion, and narrative explanation. Each compliment is followed by a carefully-chosen negative until finally we almost, but not quite, give up trying to see her as anything but a vain, selfish opportunist. Reva Stump sums up this kind of character and her actions: "Petty and selfish private actions which are the result of moral stupidity and lack of vision constitute a friction which retards the forward movement of mankind" (137).

11

Stump also points out a contrasting truth about character in Middlemarch and in life: "Kind and loving but unheralded actions which are the result of growing vision do not perfectly fulfill the life which seeks heroic channels but do nevertheless contribute to the moral evolution of mankind" (137). This is a succinct description of George Eliot's heroine, Dorothea Brooks, a morally complex character whose portrait requires all the techniques available to the novelist. She is shown always at odds with her community, viewed as strange, intense, fanatical, and finally as less than respectable and right thinking because of her choices and in spite of her wealth. To her family her mistake is a willingness to appear something other than "a nice woman" (612) to the people of Middlemarch. Despite the fact that she grows and changes throughout the novel, she never fits in, nor would we wish her to since she has an innate strength of

character which her moral choices reinforce and her actions consistently demonstrate. These raise her finally to an ethical height which warrants her being called George Eliot's greatest heroine.

Dorothea begins as a naive idealist much like Tertius Lydgate, though she lacks his commonness and erotic susceptibility. Dorothea and Lydgate each have an important work to do to benefit mankind. Dorothea's benign ambition is acceptable even according to the conduct books of the day, which advocate doing good deeds that keep middle-class ladies busy and therefore out of mischief. Dorothea's problem, however, is the tremendous scope of the good she hopes to accomplish: better housing for the Middlemarch poor and a school for their children. But whereas the pressures of a contingent world weigh down and finally crush Lydgate, Dorothea learns to adapt, to compromise when necessary, without surrendering her ideal. Her expectations change as she matures. She gives up expansive, vague, global aims for the more realistic, if less grand, achievements which her social and educational limitations permit.

In view of Dorothea's inevitable renunciations, the same question must be answered that we have answered about George Eliot's other female characters: does Dorothea Brooke achieve greatness? Is her life a success? In her case, more than in that of any other character, the answer is a resounding _yes_ because she is successful beyond the boundaries of her household. Mary Garth and Harriet Bulstrode exert their moral influence within their own homes, but Dorothea succeeds beyond the expectations of nineteenth-century

society, even though her world does not see her as successful. Granted, some critics consider her a failure because she settles for life with Will Ladislaw, but Will provides Dorothea with the means and the support to reach _some_ of her goals and make the world better. He becomes an "ardent" public man--this is the same epithet George Eliot uses repeatedly to describe Dorothea, and it implies their similarities, the light they share, their common generosity of spirit. Will works tirelessly for reform, and Dorothea is fulfilled through her connection with him. Admittedly it _is_ a pity that this rare creature should be "absorbed into the life of another," but the partial failure is not Dorothea's primarily, but the limitation imposed by society.

What Dorothea has to achieve before she can accept this narrower success is the growth and self-knowledge acquired through maturation. As is usual for George Eliot's favorite characters, Dorothea has "a capacity for recognition and sympathy" which occur simultaneously; she gains knowledge which "begets sympathy and compassion and pity" (Freadman 147). Perhaps this is why Dorothea is George Eliot's heroine: she is the character who most fully experiences moral growth. Celia, who does not grow, does not recognize the change in her sister; when Dorothea says she will marry Will, Celia says that her sister has not altered over the intervening two years but is just being difficult. And Mrs. Cadwallader interprets Dorothea's decision as spite inspired by Casaubon's punitive will. No one in her world understands her attitude or the change which has made her accept responsibility for her own actions or her resolve to do what is right (Stallnecht 147).

Her actions are the fruits of her thought, and when Dorothea Brooke appears in the novel, we are usually introduced into her mind. Proportionately, there is little external description of her, and what there is reveals her cleverness, her theoretic mind, her sober thoughtfulness--characteristics which emphasize the importance of Dorothea's inner life. Each of her conversations, each of her actions is the result of carefully thought-out decisions. Because we often see Dorothea in ethical debate with herself and because her actions are based on the stern contemplation of her internal consciousness, she is the female character in Middlemarch whom we come to know the most intimately, despite her complexity and the multiplicity of techniques used in her characterization. We are prepared for her actions as her friends and family are not because we have shared her struggle to reach the kind of moral decision that is realized in an "irremediable act."

The complex nature of the decisions Dorothea must make is mirrored in the technical complexity of her characterization. The dominant passion of her character--and of George Eliot's art--is the importance Dorothea gives to moral choice. She learns that she must look to herself for the justification of her decisions, and she chooses to sacrifice the epic life of her youthful aspirations to whatever "beneficent activity" (610) her world will allow. This again inspires incomprehension among her acquaintances, for each individual's judgment about Dorothea is always incomplete, and only the complete novel achieves the complete judgment that individuals

cannot--a triumph at once of technique and moral insight. And the novelist is consistently compassionate and understanding about Dorothea, providing a sympathetic exemplar of the moral complexity in human choices. "And in so far as Dorothea is fully imagined, we respond to her choices and actions almost as if we were reading about a real person, so that the moral complexity exists in our own response and is not just displayed in the novel for us to look at" (Jones 71).

Novelists are not critics; there is a spontaneity and a sureness about the great writer's art that is neither explained nor explained away by our analysis. It is nevertheless instructive to consider how the judicious use of the traditional techniques of characterization, singly and in concert, has provided us with a world of women engaged with a less vivid world of men in a great novel written by a woman. These female characters are made noteworthy and memorable by an emphasis on their similar and contrasting behavior in parallel situations. Such contrasts, and with them the whole range of George Eliot's technical resources, are naturally used more fully for the presentation of complex personages than for that of the simple. But even the one-trait characters do not seem "flat"--little Miss Noble is convincingly "noble" and has her simple dignity along with her privations. In George Eliot's novels, as in much of the best fiction, "complexity" tends to mean human behavior in a complex social setting inhabited by characters with a capacity for ethical discrimination and moral growth. That kind of complexity reaches its outer limits in George Eliot's portrayal and development of Dorothea Brooke, one of the greatest characters in literature.

12

In the preceding chapters we have seen how George Eliot looks at character as the product of will and circumstances, joining the worlds of "inward propensity and visible circumstance" (Lanier 243) and showing both as they operate to produce the fictional lives of the believable women characters in her most notable novel. Although a great body of criticism exists on Middlemarch, no exhaustive analysis has been made of the important device of characterization as it operates to give us the novel's female characters. Also, though the major characters in all of Eliot's novels have been treated exhaustively, little has been done in the way of explaining the significance of her intermediate and minor characters or of categorizing her methods of characterization. No one has systematically shown the relation of her techniques to her various character types. This study has also tried to achieve a fuller exploration of the nature of each of these lesser characters than has been reached before in order to emphasize how vitally they are needed in the novel as parallels, foils, and contrasts to its major figures.

Again, the study has shown that George Eliot's treatment of character is a complex system of inner and outer relationships. Accordingly, it has used the conduct books of the period to make social and historical connections with the novel which have not been made before. George Eliot is realistic in that she has made her female characters behave in accordance with the social rules of their

day or else suffer the adverse judgment of their neighbors. Educational treatises of the period have been related to the characters and situations of Middlemarch to show once again that the modern reader needs to consider the novel in the light of the time in which it is set.

Adopting recent feminist arguments as well as earlier readings, this study has tried to demonstrate that George Eliot, while obviously concerned with the "Woman Question," and distressed that opportunities for women were so limited, has treated sexual inequality as an underlying and temporarily accepted reality rather than as an outrage to be protested. Her moderation concerning the feminist cause is a subtle reminder that the issues confronting women in the time-frame of the novel were still unresolved, though more often discussed, at the time of its writing. George Eliot's primary theme is human relationships, especially relationships between men and women; and the women of this novel are able, within the conventions of their time, to form meaningful and usually successful relationships with men. George Eliot's emphasis is always on moral consciousness; and the women of Middlemarch reveal the author's moral principles to the extent that they have, or lack, the moral consciousness which is the expected feminine contribution in a patriarchal society.

The comments of contemporary and recent critics on the characters of Middlemarch have been helpful and useful in forming the new categories and emphases which this study has tried to establish. The time in which Dorothea Brooke "lived" and the time when her creator

looked back and wrote about her world are both near enough and remote enough to be made clearer by new light from the twentieth century.

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