

CHAPTER 7 : MIDDLEMARCH.

While much of George Eliot's prior fiction gives the impression of incompleteness on the one hand or of a too narrow completeness on the other, Middlemarch is remarkable in English fiction for the degree to which it combines an intense and varied sense of life with a high degree of imaginative and intellectual coherence. The breadth of her canvas and the firm grip she maintains over her fictional world make this book George Eliot's most powerful philosophical statement.

Thus it comes as a surprise that the evidence of George Eliot's own notebooks and letters strongly suggests that there was no original plan for Middlemarch as a coherent whole.¹ Jerome Beaty is led to assume that 'The first eighteen chapters of Middlemarch are a fusion of the beginnings of two separate prose works'.²

Of those two separate prose works one was entitled 'Middlemarch', and was begun in July 1869, having as its chief character a physician. It was 'without Dorothea, without Casaubon, without Ladislaw'.³ Entries of letters and diary extracts in Cross's George Eliot's Life show that this original 'Middlemarch' languished without much further mention for about five months,⁴ when George Eliot records in her journal for 2nd December 1870 that she has begun another story with the provisional title of 'Miss Brooke':

I am experimenting in a story 'Miss Brooke' which I began without any very serious intention of carrying it out lengthily. It is a subject which has been recorded among my possible themes ever since I began to write fiction, but will probably take new shapes in the development.⁵

Thus, while there are a number of references to the two stories in George Eliot's journal and in her letters, there is no suggestion anywhere that the two stories were originally conceived as complementary parts of the one novel:

The indications of the journal and the manuscript, though neither is in itself conclusive, when combined, strongly suggest that the first ninety six or ninety seven manuscript pages of Middlemarch, nine and one half chapters, are the original draft of what was intended as the beginning of 'Miss Brooke'. Little, if any, that was written as part of that separate story had to be discarded, perhaps only the last page or two of its tenth chapter. These chapters brought 'Miss Brooke' up to Dorothea's departure on her honeymoon and perhaps represented the major portion⁶ of George Eliot's original conception of that story.

At this point in the completed novel the story of Lydgate, the Vincys, the Garths, the Featherstones and Farebrother begins. From Chapter 11 up to Chapter 19, the novel focusses uninterruptedly on Lydgate. The group of characters who provide the environment for Dorothea and Casaubon, that is Celia, Brooke, Chettam and the Cadwalladers, give way entirely to the group of characters among which Lydgate moves. Dorothea does not make another appearance until Chapter 19, when we see her in Rome.

The similarity between the two stories is obvious. Their themes are similar in that each involves an exceptional

hero or heroine, capable of an intense inner life, striving after an outward vision to give it form. In each, the accompanying groups of characters act as foils to the intensity of the respective protagonists, and by embodying the collective negativeness of Provincial Society they provide checks to the pursuit of high ideals. Both stories are set in a Provincial Society, one dealing predominantly with county gentry, the other with the nouveau riche middle class of a manufacturing town. In addition to this, both are set at about the time of the First Reform Bill.

However, though the very close similarity between the two story fragments suggests that they may have been written with the conscious aim of uniting them within a broader framework, neither fragment gives evidence of those qualities of conception and structure which characterize the novel as a whole. Both fragments, though excellently constructed and worked out up to the point at which they finish, seem to be inwardly not outwardly directed. Each seems rather too thoroughly dominated by its respective hero or heroine to be capable of much further development by itself. This may be the reason that 'Miss Brooke' was not thought of as a story which was to be seriously developed or was not even considered with 'any very serious intention of carrying it out lengthily'. One is also tempted to think that this was the reason that George Eliot could not see how to develop the original 'Middlemarch': 'I do not feel very confident that I can make

anything satisfactory of "Middlemarch".⁷

It would appear then that the characteristic structural dynamic of Middlemarch emerges at some point in time after the two story fragments had been conceived and written. This becomes even more likely if we consider that one of the passages in Middlemarch, which best describes what the novel is about, appears from textual evidence to have been written as a structural bridge between the two earlier stories.⁸ The passage appears in the dinner party scene of Chapter 11:

Certainly nothing at present could seem much less important to Lydgate than the turn of Miss Brooke's mind, or to Miss Brooke than the qualities of the woman who had attracted this young surgeon. But anyone watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour. Destiny stands by ⁹ sarcastic with our dramatis personae in her hand.

It is significant that this first explicit mention of the idea of converging lots should also be the first statement about both Dorothea and Lydgate, thus constituting 'a bridge between the two earlier stories even in conception'.¹⁰ Thus it would appear that the genesis of that epic sense of cyclic patterns and converging lots which informs the inner dynamic of the novel, takes place after the individual conceptions of both Dorothea and Lydgate, and after most of the main characters from either story had been conceived.

In what follows I will be concerned with giving an

idea of the vast interplay of character and action which makes Middlemarch so unique. As I have just suggested, I believe that the secret lies in the idea of converging lots, not a new idea in itself, as it plays a prominent role in structuring virtually the whole of George Eliot's fiction. However it is realized here as never before or again; nowhere is the idea so deeply validated, nowhere is it reflected on so many levels throughout so many human lives. In the process of realization, the conception itself is transcended so that we are aware of it not as a guiding idea, but as process, activity, the way in which the world of men works. As the range of characters is vast and their patterns of interaction multiform it is possible to group and analyse them from a number of viewpoints.

Most obviously, we are aware of an ordering of characters with respect to the physical relation they bear to the socio-economic structure of Middlemarch itself. We get a strong sense of the importance of rank. Thus, the county gentry who predominate in 'Miss Brooke' form a distinct community on the edge of Middlemarch. The Brookes, the Cadwalladers, the Chettams and the Casaubons interact very much among themselves, their sense of privilege and rank prohibiting them from regarding the rest of the Middlemarchers as serious human beings. The county gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air:

Dotted apart on their stations up the mountain, they looked down with imperfect discrimination on the belts of thicker life below. And Dorothea was not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height.¹¹

It is the unreality arising from the long habit of aloof isolation which proves to be one of the major checks on Dorothea's aspiration. The sort of self-awareness fostered by such a life is fatally inadequate to any real, transcendent aspiration. The impression of this world is indelibly established in the first ten chapters which once comprised 'Miss Brooke' and George Eliot is fortunate in not having to alter the general structure of interaction among this group of characters as they appear later in the novel. Because it complements the portion of society we find dealt with in the story of Lydgate, the two stories keep their structural identities separate up to a point. The point at which they lose all sense of structural identity and merge completely into a new synthesis occurs approximately after the death of Casaubon. The significance of this will be brought out later in this chapter.

The original 'Middlemarch' dealt pre-eminently with 'the belts of thicker life below', with the nouveau riche bankers and merchants of a manufacturing town, with its lawyers, doctors and coroners, with its churchmen, its dissenters, its borough politics, its shopkeepers, with the sort of men and their wives who bind it into a socio-economic unity. As with the county gentry, status is all important, but in Middlemarch status need not be dependent solely on birth and land, but on economic power and on a general sense of having come from a family with a certain tradition in Middlemarch.

As the novel develops, there is built up an overpowering sense of what it is like to exist in the social fabric of Middlemarch. A character's sense of his position within the social scale structures his entire response to the world. Vincy is looked down upon by Sir James Chettam as 'a coursing fellow'¹² and is dismissed by Mrs. Cadwallader as 'one of those who suck the life out of the wretched handloom weavers of Tipton and Freshitt'.¹³

Due to his sense of position Sir James Chettam finds himself disqualified from having anything to do with nearly the whole of Middlemarch society. He cannot bring himself to speak to Ladislav, and Brooke's foolish though harmless plan to involve himself in borough politics terrifies him.

Each character in the novel has his own opinion about those townspeople with whom he is involved. Consequently each character's opinion about his own worth and importance finds numerous and unflattering comparisons with his neighbour's opinions of him. The original picture we have of Bulstrode is that he sees himself using the resources of the material world for the glory of God. Vincy, the mayor, sees Bulstrode as a grasping, overbearing manipulator, who masks his obvious power lust with sanctimonious claptrap. Bulstrode sees Vincy as irreligious and improvident to the extent of falling victim to his own financial power.

This sort of interplay is reflected right down through the social scale from Hawley, the lawyer, Hackbutt

the tanner, the Plymdales and Mr. Caius Larcher to Mrs. Waule and the rural Featherstones. In particular, the practice of medicine in Middlemarch resembles a theatre wherein the doctors are engaged in a continual drama of comparison. Lydgate enters a professional arena dominated by the polarities of Dr. Sprague and Dr. Minchin. Dr. Sprague is large and gangling, hard-headed and dry-witted; 'rugged and weighty'.¹⁴ Many of these attributes are associated with the widely-held belief that he is a godless man:

But somehow Middlemarch tolerated this deficiency in him as if he had been a Lord Chancellor; indeed it is probable that his professional weight was the more believed in, the world-old association of cleverness with the evil principle being still potent in the minds even of lady-patients who had the strictest ideas of frilling and sentiment.¹⁵

On the other hand, Dr. Minchin, 'soft-handed, pale complexioned and of rounded outline',¹⁶ was fortunate in that

His religious sympathies were of a general kind, and such as gave a distant medical sanction to all serious sentiment, whether of Church or Dissent, rather than any adhesion to particular tenets.¹⁷

Dr. Sprague's lack of this kind of tact is not his forte:

In short he had weight, and might be expected to grapple with a disease and throw it; while Dr. Minchin might be better able to detect it lurking and to circumvent it. They enjoyed about equally the mysterious privilege of medical reputation, and concealed with much etiquette their contempt for each other's skill.¹⁸

The same sort of ritual comparison establishes the professional credentials of the lower order of practitioners,

Wrench and Toller:

The strengtheners and the lowerers were all 'clever' men in somebody's opinion which is really as much as can be said for any living talents. ¹⁹

The capacity of the Provincial World for creating imaginative contrasts, for match-making, for forming parties, or for painstakingly developing imaginary mutual antagonisms, is a profoundly ingrained habit of mind. Unrelieved by any broader habits of mind or generosity of instinct, it can lead to extreme egoism. Consider this image of its purely selfish manifestation in Rosamond:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection... The scratches are events and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent - of Miss Vincy for example. ²⁰

The beginnings and ends of such a mind do not seem to involve an inner human being, but rather the teeming mindless activity that a nineteenth century biologist would have observed in a smear of bacteria under a microscope. Mrs. Cadwallader's compulsive match-making is imaged in these terms:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves to be making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures

actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs. Cadwallader's match-making will show a play of minute causes producing what may be called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she needed.²¹

These are images of the sort of activity that George Eliot meant to examine when she said that the purpose of Middlemarch was

...to show the gradual action of ordinary causes rather than exceptional and to show this in some directions which have not been from time immemorial the beaten path - the Cremorne walks and shows of fiction.²²

To a great extent it is according to such a mechanism, seemingly inhuman though it may be, that the 'ordinary causes' regulating individual and social activity are structured. It is after patterns such as these that the vast sweep of converging lots is worked out in all its bewildering indirection. The web of ordinary causes intimately involves the individual egoism of a Rosamond or the well-meaning compulsiveness of a Mrs. Cadwallader with the unsure aspirations of a Lydgate or a Dorothea, as part of the broad movement of Provincial Culture as a whole:

Old Provincial Society had its share in this subtle movement: had not only its striking downfalls, its brilliant young professional dandies who ended by living up an entry with a drab and six children for their establishment but also those less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse and begetting new consciousness of interdependence. Some slipped a little downward: some got higher footing: people denied aspirates gained wealth, and fastidious

gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves surprisingly grouped in consequence; while a few personages or families that stood with rocky firmness, amid all this fluctuation, were slowly presenting new aspects in spite of solidity and altering with the double change of self and beholder.²³

Like the clouded vision of the egoists, the vision of Provincial Culture as a whole is firmly tied by a compulsive human blindness to the treadmill of present existence in Middlemarch. The contours of the outside world which shape the economic and political destiny of Middlemarch appear but dimly:

With the glow-worm lights of country places, how could men see which were their own thoughts in the confusion of a Tory minister passing liberal measures, of Tory nobles and electors being anxious to return liberals rather than friends of the recreant ministers, and of outcries for remedies that seemed to have a mysteriously remote bearing on private interest and were made suspicious by the advocacy of disagreeable neighbours.²⁴

Statements such as this, when combined with the image of Mrs. Cadwallader's mind or of Rosamond's egoism, or with the vain rituals of the medical profession, recall the low estimate of society which strikes us in The Mill On The Floss, Romola and Felix Holt. The 'glow-worm lights of country places' recalls 'the emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers' of The Mill On The Floss. We are also reminded of Felix Holt's prediction that the infant Job Tudge will grow up to become a representative monstrosity of the working class - a blind force within a blind society.

But before drawing any conclusions from this, it would be well to consider how the main characters, that is those whose consciousness is understood in great depth and subtlety, interact within the seemingly inhuman totality of Provincial Society.

The Prelude to the novel refers to Dorothea alone, making no mention of other characters who are to be developed almost as much as she. It compares her to St. Teresa whose 'passionate ideal nature demanded an epic life';²⁵ whose aspiration was after 'some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self'.²⁶ But Dorothea's aspiration is doomed to find expression in no 'epic life'. She and women like her can only expect

...perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity.²⁷

The cause lies in their vision and in the environment which shapes it:

With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul.²⁸

It is left indefinite whether one should explain the consequent failure of such lives in terms of the aspiration itself or in terms of the 'tangled circumstance' of a debasing environment.

As Dorothea's portrait develops up until her marriage to Casaubon her own aspiration is so much a part of the 'tangled circumstances' of her world that we find some difficulty in considering her opposition to it as real and tragic. Consequently we find it difficult to vehemently devalue the society which thwarts her. What is admirable in her is so much involved with her self-ignorance that we find her a little ridiculous. We regard them as heroic and find it all the easier to despise the society which would not acknowledge them. The degree of irony with which Dorothea is presented ensures that readers will not idealize her. The people she moves among are perfect foils to her and the total effect is more comic than tragic. Thus while Dorothea comes to have a greatness of soul that would bear comparison with Maggie or Romola, the ironic perspective in which she first makes her appearance gives her a dimension that Maggie and Romola lack. Initially we see her in a comedy of manners, acting the part which Jane Austen would have given to 'the enthusiast'. The very prose in which she is described gives a sense of a wide range of indirect, ironic perspectives:

And how should Dorothea not marry? A girl so handsome and with such prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer, or even might lead her at last to refuse all offers. A young lady of birth and fortune who knelt suddenly down on a brick floor by the side of

a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the time of the apostles - who had strange whims of fasting like a Papist, and of sitting up at night to read old theological books! Such a wife might awaken you one fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with the application of political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship. Women were 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 neighbours did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them.²⁹

The continually shifting sense of persona places both Dorothea and the society which judges her within an ironic perspective. The same flexibility can be felt in the development of situations in which Dorothea plays out her role beside her foils - Celia, Brooke, Chettam, Mrs. Cadwallader and Casaubon.

The scene in which Celia and Dorothea divide their mother's jewels is an excellent example of this. Though Celia can appear 'a pink and white nullifidian' on the one hand, or a harmless little creature 'no more in need of salvation than a squirrel' on the other, she has a penetrating if low-minded insight into her sister's inconsistencies. The comedy of the jewel scene derives largely from the painstaking subtlety with which Celia plans her diplomacy to get what she wants with Dorothea's consent and acknowledgment. Celia is aware that Dorothea has ignored even considering how to divide the jewels. She is also aware that by proposing to divide them she will be taking on her role of materialist, to

which Dorothea will respond with high-minded indifference. This is mortifying to Celia and when Dorothea remarks that it would be improper for either of them to wear the jewels Celia makes an exasperated defence of the propriety of wearing jewels:

Celia coloured and looked very grave. 'I think, dear, we are wanting in respect to mamma's memory, to put them by and take no notice of them. And,' she added after hesitating a little with a rising sob of mortification, 'necklaces are quite usual now; and Madame Poinçon, who was stricter in some things even than you are, used to wear ornaments. And Christians generally, surely there are women in heaven now who wore jewels'. Celia was conscious of some mental strength when she really applied herself to argument.³⁰

Dorothea's reaction is just what Celia should have foreseen:

'You would like to wear them?' exclaimed Dorothea, an air of astonished discovery animating her whole person with a dramatic action which she had caught from that very Madame Poinçon who wore the ornaments.³¹

Dorothea's high mindedness is not without its posturing. A moment later when the sunlight falls on the gems, she is trying to justify her delight in their colours by 'merging them, in her mystic religious joy'.³²

Dorothea's generally vague sense of the reality of the people and circumstances around her is emphasized by her failure to recognize the obvious advances of Sir James Chettam. But if this is so it is also true that the people about her have an imperfect sense of her reality. Dorothea is continually exasperated by Mr. Brooke's facile assumption that, because she is a 'young lady', she would be incapable of any serious

intellectual application. It is a part of the irony of events that Dorothea's disgust with the triviality and purposelessness of her lot is hardened by a feeling of particular frustration with every one of her circle of acquaintances just at the time when Mr. Casaubon should become an object of her fantasy. Celia's objections to Mr. Casaubon's physical appearance makes her seem small and vicious to Dorothea. Mr. Brooke's bumbling condescension to herself and his miscellaneous ramblings suddenly seem less amiable to Dorothea when set against Mr. Casaubon's calm considerateness. The very thought that Sir James Chettam should have considered her as his bride makes her more eager to rebel against the expectations of her position. Mrs. Cadwallader's biting wit suddenly seems shrewish. In this way

All Dorothea's passion was transfused through a mind struggling towards an ideal life; the radiance of her transfigured girlhood fell on the first object that came within its level, the impetus with which inclination became resolution was heightened by those little events of the day which had roused her discontent with the actual conditions of her life.³³

The comedy ends when Dorothea marries Casaubon. Away from the environment which had served as a dramatic prop to Mr. Casaubon, Dorothea's eyes begin to open and suddenly Mr. Casaubon's presence no longer gives her the feeling of far reaching purposes. It is not Mr. Casaubon who has changed but the light which has changed:

...to have been driven to be more particular would have been like trying to give a history of the lights and shadows.³⁴

Rome itself is an ontological shock for Dorothea which all but topples her narrow Puritanical faith:

This stupendous fragmentariness heightened the dream-like strangeness of her bridal life... The weight of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs to whom it formed a background for the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society; but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions. Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves upon her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion.³⁵

However, George Eliot is careful to emphasize that Dorothea's sudden and traumatic awakening is not especially tragic. The shock of waking from a pleasing delusion is all too usual:

Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrels heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well-wadded with stupidity.³⁶

Thus George Eliot makes it quite clear that because 'the best of us are well-wadded with stupidity' there can be no facile division between the limiting conditions of society on the one hand and an intense individual nobility on the other. Her best art is adjusted to this vision of things happening in varying degrees of lighting and shade. Development towards a kind of enlightenment or sense of self and of purpose is possible but only as an organic process. The outcome is not preconceived but dependent on the validating process of the art itself - a true state of negative capability. At this point the true inner beauty and strength of Dorothea's nature reveals itself in her resolve not to become bitter towards Mr. Casaubon:

Permanent rebellion, the disorder of a life without some loving reverent resolve, was not possible to her; but she was now in an interval when the very force of her nature heightened its confusion.³⁷

She never acquires the selflessness or perspicacity to fully understand her husband or the tact to avoid arousing his deep paranoia, but the resolve to be good and useful in spite of the destruction of her dreams remains. Her life with Casaubon cuts her off from more than just her vague dreams, it cuts her off from 'the sense of connection' with the world which her full and generous nature demands. She has lost the liberty to choose and she is still a gentle-woman:

Meanwhile...there was the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world where everything was done for her, and none asked for her aid - where the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies.³⁸

Consequently her life appears to her to have become 'a moral imprisonment',³⁹ from which there can be no escape.

If Dorothea's 'moral imprisonment' brought on by her own actions gives her a despairing sense of finality and hopelessness, Casaubon's form of 'moral imprisonment' is far more shocking because he is incapable of realizing it.

We are introduced to Mr. Casaubon as an actor in the comedy of manners which was 'Miss Brooke'. We see him largely from the outside, through the eyes of Dorothea's circle of acquaintance and perhaps mostly by way of detached authorial comment. We get a sharply etched picture of monumentally ridiculous egoism. Other people have no existence at all for Mr. Casaubon except in their capacity of rendering chance service for the fulfilment of his divine mission. Dorothea exists for him chiefly as an agreeable opportunity for relaxation and a means of leaving an heir. In order to allot a little time for the purpose of courting Dorothea he consciously postpones labour on his 'Key to All Mythologies' and determines 'to abandon himself to the stream of feeling'.⁴⁰ But he is surprised to find 'what an exceedingly shallow rill it was'.⁴¹ Here the author intercedes in her own voice to

expand our understanding of the reasons for this perplexing fact beyond Mr. Casaubon's admission:

As in draughty regions baptism by immersion could only be performed symbolically, so Mr. Casaubon found that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion.⁴²

George Eliot often expands the range of an image originally employed by Mr. Casaubon for another purpose, and so presents him within a continuous ironic dialectic. From this passage Mr. Casaubon goes on to dwell with pleasure on the prospect of a submissive wife and musingly considers whether or not the shallowness of his own desire could be attributed to some shortcoming in Dorothea herself. But, as he searches in vain for a shortcoming in Dorothea, he concludes that the exaggeration of tradition is responsible. Thus, slowly and indirectly we get an impression of the ingrained capability for rationalization whereby Mr. Casaubon adroitly avoids any contact with reality.

However, our response to Mr. Casaubon deepens into real sympathy and broadens as we come to realize the capability for his kind of egoism within ourselves. He is surely the most moving portrait of a hopeless egoist in any of George Eliot's novels. Suddenly, as Dorothea realizes her mistake, the portrait of Casaubon moves into a new dimension of immediacy. But the preparation for taking Mr. Casaubon seriously had been made earlier:

Suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity: with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labours; what fading of hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles with universal pressure, which will one day be too heavy for him, and bring his heart to its final pause.⁴³

Continually throughout the novel we are reminded that everyone is 'the centre of his own world'⁴⁴ and that in each of us the grouping of events in lighting and shade is made with a certain difference of emphasis. The degree to which a miserable creature like Casaubon can be made real and immediate to us, is a further indication that in Middlemarch the intense experience of a fine nature and the restricted experience of commoner and perhaps degraded natures, is not presented in terms of a polar opposition.

When George Eliot turns from orientating the whole of the 'Miss Brooke' material around the experience of Dorothea, Mr. Casaubon becomes known with an almost equal degree of thoroughness and sympathy:

To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr. Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying.⁴⁵

However there is something frighteningly remote about a person who has reached a complete dead end in the development of any interpersonal experience:

His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity. ⁴⁶

It is significant that, for all the sympathy George Eliot has for Mr. Casaubon, he is described most intimately in terms of images suggesting a remote inhuman activity. We are reminded of the image of Mrs. Cadwallader's mind but with Mr. Casaubon the implications are far more terrifying because the image embraces his full human dimension. Mrs. Cadwallader remains largely a comedy of manners figure with a strong suggestion of Jane Austen.

It is perhaps misleading to imagine Mr. Casaubon as representative of the nineteenth century desire to 'explain' the meaning of Life as we find it in 'the higher criticism' for example, as someone who, having striven after a vision in his 'Key to All Mythologies' should have failed in the manner that Dorothea and Lydgate fail. His key involves nothing beyond the limits of his extreme egoism:

...Mr. Casaubon's immediate desire was not for divine communion and light divested of earthly conditions; his passionate longings, ⁴⁷ poor man, clung low and mist-like in steady places.

Any kind of objective, purposive vision cannot co-exist with an advanced state of egoism such as Mr. Casaubon is trapped in. Egoism is not only 'a moral imprisonment' but the outward aspect of a consciousness which would disintegrate on contact with reality. For George Eliot there is no division

of ways of knowing into subjective and objective. One's personal subjective intelligence and generosity of spirit determines what one sees, even in a scientific sense. Mr. Casaubon's approach was

...a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together. ⁴⁸

Apart from his work, Mr. Casaubon's life consists of a constant attempt either to assert or to defend his sense of his own importance, upon which depends his sense of his very being. He is incapable of relating to any human being except in terms of paranoia. With Dorothea he is incapable of mastering the suspicious dread that comes with the consciousness that she can judge him:

His discontent passed vapour-like through all her gentle loving manifestations, and clung to that inappreciative world which she had only brought nearer to him. ⁴⁹

In the innocent relationship of Will with Dorothea, he finds a concrete embodiment of fears which had formerly existed in a more rarefied atmosphere. Impression reinforces impression until Casaubon deeply resents Dorothea's naive innocence and generosity of temperament and comes to fear the scorching effect of her occasional candour. As Dorothea's stronger, healthy conscience reacts by recognizing the hollowness of her previous hopes for herself and determines to build a life out of the present situation, Casaubon's

weak untrusting nature constricts the universe into a perpetual bitter resentment. The distance between them grows and Dorothea's damning perception of the reaction her best efforts evoke in Mr. Casaubon is almost enough to crush her.

Though Casaubon's experience with Dorothea and Ladislav has the effect of seriously impairing his already mutilated consciousness by turning it ever more upon itself, even he has a moment of intense experience of a reality totally alien to the fog which he is accustomed to move in. This is brought about by Lydgate's informing him of his impending death:

One of those rare moments of experience when we feel the truth of a common place, which is as different from what we call knowing it, as the vision of waters upon the earth is different from the delirious vision of the water which cannot be had to cool the burning tongue.⁵⁰

Lydgate's announcement virtually confirms a suspicion that Dorothea, acting as a dupe of Ladislav, is in some way involved in a conspiracy to use Mr. Casaubon's money for Will after his death. But after a day's brooding on the matter, when he emerges from his library, Mr. Casaubon seems touched by finding Dorothea waiting for him:

'Dorothea!' he said with a gentle surprise in his tone, 'Were you waiting for me?'
'Yes, I did not like to disturb you.'
'Come, my dear, come. You are young and need not to extend your life by watching.'

When the kind melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the

thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a loved creature. She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together. ⁵¹

It is in passages like this that the true greatness of Middlemarch is evident. The hard-eyed analysis which characterizes much of the Casaubon portrait suddenly gives way to a new dimension - an almost mystical sense of the elemental power of life which can bring insight and humanity to a Casaubon if only for an instant. In these moments George Eliot is fully the equal of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.

Nowhere is George Eliot more exacting and discriminating than in her portrait of Lydgate and her plotting of his inevitable 'historia calamitatum'. Whereas Dorothea's aspiration is a vague longing, Lydgate's aspiration has been planned and directed. From the beginning he is more consciously aware of what it involves in terms of personal sacrifice and in terms of the sort of opposition he is likely to meet. Indeed, he is over-confident:

Lydgate's conceit was of the arrogant sort, never simpering, never impertinent, but massive in its claims and benevolently contemptuous. ⁵²

Lydgate is quick to see through the pretensions of Bulstrode and is discerning enough to recognize the unassuming, generous hearted merit of Farebrother while inwardly censuring him for the 'infirmary of will' which accepts futility so readily. In many other cases besides these two, Lydgate's discernment is so exacting that George Eliot seems to be

wholly endorsing his judgements; however Lydgate's consciousness is never elevated above the other characters. George Eliot is very careful not to exalt him over Farebrother for example. Lydgate's judgement of Farebrother, though true, is itself a part of the irony of events. His awareness is lacking from the beginning in certain specific areas:

Where lay the spots of commonness in a man so well-bred, so ambitious of social distinction, so generous and unusual in his views of social duty?...

...Lydgate's spot of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which in spite of noble intentions and sympathy were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons. ⁵³

In spite of his experiences in France with Laure and his encounters with continental social theories and French medicine, Lydgate retains much of the structure of feeling peculiar to an English gentleman:

In warming himself at French social theories he had brought away no smell of scorching. We may handle even extreme opinions with impunity while our furniture, our dinner-giving, and preference for armorial bearings in our own case link us indissolubly with the established order. ⁵⁴

Lydgate's first opportunity to define himself in relation to Middlemarch comes with the meeting of the hospital board at which he hopes to put forward some ideas on running the new infirmary which Bulstrode wants him to supervise. However Bulstrode has made it clear that he expects loyalty

from Lydgate by voting for his candidate, Tyke, as chaplain. Lydgate prefers to remain aloof and judge for himself. He opens a friendship with Farebrother, the other candidate, and is impressed by Farebrother's frank admissions of his own shortcomings as a man of the cloth and by his lucid and disinterested exposé of the party politics in which Lydgate must soon become involved. However, Lydgate refuses to admit that party politics have anything to do with him: 'The shortest way is to make your value felt, so that people must put up with you whether you flatter them or not'.⁵⁵

We get the impression that Farebrother's estimate of the danger of Provincial narrowness is probably more accurate than Lydgate's, but we tend to identify with Lydgate rather than with Farebrother because his options are still open and he is conscious of the strength needed to make them good.

For Lydgate the vote represents a conflict of means with end and he is therefore keenly aware of the example set by Farebrother's 'pains...to warn off rather than to obtain his interest'.⁵⁶ He also appreciates Farebrother's selflessness in keeping his mother and sisters - a financial burden which has kept him from marrying:

Few men who feel the pressure of small needs are so nobly resolute not to dress up their inevitably self-interested desires in a pretext of better motives.⁵⁷

Besides such an example, Lydgate's facile assumption

that by gratifying Bulstrode, he can achieve his own ideal end, comes to seem rather sordid. He shrinks from openly admitting to himself that he must compromise with Bulstrode. Instead he begins to dwell on Farebrother's admitted faults. George Eliot's genius for indirect narrative makes it clear that Lydgate is desperately rationalizing imagined opinions to answer to a disposition which remains stubbornly in the dark. His internal monologue assumes a problematic tone:

Certainly... Then, again there were reports...
And as to...besides... Nobody had anything to say
against Mr. Tyke except that they could not bear him,
and suspected him of cant. Really from his point of
view, Bulstrode was thoroughly justified. ⁵⁸

Previously, it would not have occurred to Lydgate to consider a question by an appeal to Bulstrode's point of view, his own disinterested judgement would have answered:

For the first time, Lydgate was feeling the
hampering thread-like pressure of small social
conditions and their frustrating complexity. ⁵⁹

He is incapable of making up his mind and goes to the meeting undecided, in the hope that the question will be decided in a way which will not require him to show his preference. It is ironic that he is given a casting vote and that his decision for Tyke is prompted not by any honest facing of the problem but by indignation that Bulstrode's 'enemies' have already branded him as Bulstrode's man.

The memory of this incident rankles with Lydgate but his reaction to it goes no further than resignation or a disgust with 'the petty medium of Middlemarch':⁶⁰

How could a man be satisfied with a decision between such alternatives and under such circumstances? No more than he can be satisfied with his hat, which he has chosen from among such shapes as the resources of the age offer him, wearing it at best with a resignation which is chiefly supported by comparison.⁶¹

This indirect exploration suggests a mood of exasperation and defeat in Lydgate. We see he is too ready to blame society for what has happened rather than admit that the cause is as much within himself. Farebrother's humility has an intelligence that Lydgate lacks:

By dint of admitting to himself that he was too much as other men were, he had become remarkably unlike them in this - that he could excuse others for thinking slightly of him, and could judge impartially of their conduct even when it told against him.⁶²

By recognising his own insufficiency, Farebrother can see where the myth of heroic individual resolve is lacking. He is aware of the profound truth of human interdependence: 'I suppose one good resolve might keep a man right if everybody else's resolve helped him'.⁶³ But Farebrother's bluff self-effacing commonsense is gratuitous in its tendency towards 'that low estimate of possibilities which we rather hastily arrive at as an inference from our own failure'.⁶⁴

Lydgate is right to see 'a pitiable infirmity of will',⁶⁵ in Farebrother, but he is superficial in his appreciation of the conditions which lead to it. Farebrother's insight into these conditions is penetrating but yet it is not entirely trustworthy because one feels it as a personal apology.

The mechanism which leads to Lydgate's voting for Tyke rather than for Farebrother, creates the conditions for his marriage to Rosamond. In this case a number of insignificant misunderstandings are woven by self-ignorance into a net strong enough to put an end to Lydgate's independence.

The report of Lydgate's careless flirtation with Rosamond eventually reaches Mrs. Bulstrode, who visits Rosamond with the intention of discovering whether or not she is engaged to Lydgate. During her interrogation, she forces Rosamond into the position of either confessing engagement to Lydgate or admitting that she has allowed her fancies to be trifled with. Up to this point Rosamond has been quite content to respond to Lydgate's flirtation in kind, while confidently weaving webs of fantasy as to its possible issue for herself. Thus she cannot bring herself to admit to mere flirtation as this would put an end to her web-spinning. To live up to her own fantasy, she must give the impression of loving 'at once and without change'⁶⁶ and of expecting engagement. But this frightens Rosamond because it means that Lydgate has to actually make her an offer.

Lydgate too comes to hear of the gossip his flirtation has aroused, both from Mrs. Bulstrode and from Farebrother. The impression that he has been making a fool of himself and 'behaving so as to be misunderstood' exacerbates his irritation with the interfering, gossiping Middlemarchers. However his native chivalrous stupidity towards the fair

members of the opposite sex ensures that he does not regard Rosamond on the same level as her family and friends. Instead, in the absence of any real knowledge of her, he has a gratuitous regard for her tact.

Lydgate's ten day absence from the Vincy home so increases Rosamond's discomfort and alarm at the possibility of losing her dream that when, in spite of himself, he enters the house he is faced with a desperate woman. His pity for her distress and his admiration for her exquisitely natural attitudes bring him to enfold her in his arms and comfort her, almost as if he were calming a patient. But this succession of vague impulses is associated with a very definite effect which is that he is now a committed man, in spite of his resolution to remain single until he is financially secure:

'In all failures, the beginning is certainly half of the whole'.⁶⁷

Lydgate's 'love' for Rosamond is a result of the same sort of indirection which leads to Dorothea's 'love' for Casaubon. In both cases, the 'love' involves a state of mind pathetically out of touch with reality:

Young love-making - that gossamer web! Even the points it clings to - the things whence its subtle interlacings are swung - are scarcely perceptible; momentary touches of finger tips, meetings of rays from blue and dark orbs, unfinished phrases, lightest changes of cheek and lip, faintest tremors. The web itself is made of spontaneous beliefs and indefinable joys, yearnings of one life towards another, visions of completeness, indefinite trust.⁶⁸

As with Dorothea and Casaubon, the closeness of marriage

destroys 'the gossamer web' by confronting Lydgate with what Rosamond actually is:

He had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was - what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network, aloof and independent.⁶⁹

In his marriage Lydgate is shown in his very real commonness of fibre in a very common situation. The qualities of mind he had expected to bring to medicine are sadly out of touch with his life. But Rosamond is no more to blame than he:

Between him and her indeed there was that total missing of each other's mental track, which is too evidently possible even between persons who are continually thinking of each other.⁷⁰

For Rosamond, the contact of marriage is quite as unpleasantly bewildering as for Lydgate:

The Lydgate with whom she had been in love had been a group of airy conditions for her, most of which had disappeared, while their place had been taken by everyday details which must be lived through slowly from hour to hour, not floated through with a rapid selection of favourable aspects.⁷¹

The relationship between Lydgate and Rosamond can only deteriorate and under the pressure of Lydgate's debts it turns into an ugly mutual frustration. To his credit Lydgate really tries to bridge the gap between himself and Rosamond by admitting to himself that he was foolish to put her in a position of financial insecurity in the first place. He is shamefully aware that he has been the occasion of a considerable shock to her expectations. But he is horrified

by the unresponsive hardness of her egoism, by the fact that she sets no store by what he says or what plans he makes. He endures her but he cannot escape the bitterness of impotence:

...his endurance was mingled with a self-discontent which, if we know how to be candid, we shall confess to make more than half our bitterness under grievances, wife or husband involved. It always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstances had been less strong against us. Lydgate was aware that his concessions to Rosamond were little more than the lapse of slackening resolution, the creeping paralysis apt to seize an enthusiasm which is out of adjustment to a constant portion of our lives. ⁷²

While the most vividly realized experiences of Dorothea, Casaubon and Lydgate are of defeat due to self-ignorance and the prosaic conditions of Provincial Society, the tone of the novel is never entirely pessimistic. Parallel to the experiences of defeated aspiration and blind egoism, is a growing awareness of deep social strength of a kind of enduring virtue most fully realized in Caleb Garth. Like Lydgate, Caleb Garth had been early in seeing his vocation, which is to contribute to 'The indisputable might of that myriad-headed, myriad-handed labour by which the social body is fed, clothed and housed'.⁷³ There is no question of excessive claim on his part or of egoistic gratification to be derived from work or position. The vision engrosses him entirely:

The echoes of the great hammer where roof or keel were a-making, the signal-shouts of the workmen, the roar of the furnace, the thunder and splash of the

engine, were a sublime music to him; the felling and lading of timber, and the huge trunk vibrating star-like in the distance along the highway, the crane at work on the wharf, the piled-up produce in warehouses, the precision and variety of muscular effort wherever exact work had to be turned out - all these sights of his youth had acted on him as poetry without the aid of the poets, had made a philosophy for him without the aid of philosophers, a religion without the aid of theology. ⁷⁴

Garth's single-minded devotion to work and duty puts us in mind of the idealism of Carlyle and Ruskin which saw 'work' as the panacea for England's social ills and for the human condition itself. The usefulness of his life is accompanied by a singular control over his own destiny, as is suggested by the motto to Chapter LVI:

How happy is he born and taught
That served not another's will?
Whose armour is his honest thought
And simple truth his utmost skill?
This man is freed from senile hands⁷⁵
of hope to rise, or fear to fall.

While George Eliot is too shrewd to make Garth an obvious exception to the law that no individual life is not greatly determined and to some degree compromised by the collective errors of society, he does appear somewhat of an anomaly. There is no suggestion by the author herself that Garth's own social situation may be fraught with irony, and may tend to blinker him by dulling his awareness of the true nature of the processes he represents. This is apparent in his encounter with the labourers who, in their own blundering way, try to hinder the progress of the railroad. Garth's apology for

progress as something that the working man had better accommodate himself to as best he can, rather than oppose, leaves something to be desired. It is left to one of the labourers to make the necessary reprimand 'But yo're for the big folks, Muster Garth, yo' are'.⁷⁶ George Eliot excuses Garth on the strength of his feeling for the workers' immediate welfare rather than reprimanding him for his hasty siding with the forces of 'progress'. While Garth does not exactly lack a social conscience, he does lack what might be called a broader social intelligence, which George Eliot does not hesitate to expose in a rather acidly ironical fashion with the bumbling political enthusiast, Brooke, for example.

I think it is quite valid to say that this uncritical handling of Garth's social and historical awareness constitutes a definite weakness in the novel. Were Middlemarch concerned only with a situation which was in no way representative of broad historical processes, as is the case with Silas Marner for example, the criticism would not apply. But Middlemarch is patently concerned with establishing a broad historical perspective though the direct concern for political and social issues which characterizes Felix Holt, has no place within this more thoroughgoing vision of social and human indirection. Nevertheless the uncritical acceptance by George Eliot of the ahistorical and inadequate idealism of 'work' which we find reflected in Carlyle and Ruskin, involves an inadequate picture of the processes which the novel is to analyse. On the whole however, the steadfast virtue of the Garths is convincing and

authentic in spite of George Eliot's obvious identification with them. One is quite ready to believe that the creation of Caleb Garth was inspired by her own father, Robert Evans.

Garth's characteristic strength of purpose whereby he avoids the compromising entanglements that plague all of the other characters, with the exception of his wife and daughter, depends on his following, without question of personal inconvenience, 'a clear feeling'⁷⁷ or conviction of the way in which he should act. Thus, by his very existence he has a meaningful and beneficial influence on the lives of those around him. The most obvious instance of the ultimate validity of his approach is where, against the scepticism and caution urged by his wife, he resolves to help Fred Vincy learn a useful trade and become the sort of man Mary would consent to marry. We are asked to weigh the two approaches 'Which would turn out to have more foresight in it - her rationality or Caleb's ardent generosity?'⁷⁸

Of course Garth's generosity would be wasted if Fred were not really determined to work and sacrifice his extravagant habits. Even then it may have been wasted had not Farebrother sacrificed his expectations of marrying Mary by admonishing Fred to stick to his resolve just when he seemed likely to break it.

In this novel nothing is unqualified, not even virtue. We are aware of the essential fragility of virtue in terms

of altering the course of events in a world where the motive forces of human interaction are overwhelmingly of a mixed character. Farebrother's acute awareness of the fragility of human goodness and happiness, which is evident in his early talks with Lydgate, complements Garth's faith when he makes it possible for Fred to be happy. Farebrother himself has already benefited from a conscientious effort on his behalf by Lydgate who had recommended to Dorothea that he be installed as presiding clergyman in the Lowick parish. Lydgate is careful not to give Dorothea a false picture of Farebrother and so he makes amends for his previous shoddy treatment of the vicar when he voted for Tyke. Fred and Mary are believable creations but are not greatly developed in terms of character beyond being the inheritors of the good fortune that others have set in motion.

We can see that the plot-line involving the Garths and Fred Vincy which had been distinctly minor and somewhat isolated in the earlier portion of the novel, has now expanded to involve Farebrother. This whole section grows in importance as we realize its thematic similarities and causal connections with the merging plot-lines involving the major characters. It is important to realize that the sense of regeneration is not confined to this plot-line but that it takes root in the very nexus of plot which reveals 'the workings of ordinary causes' in the defeat of aspiring hopes; in that inevitable

process of being yoked to a common level of mediocrity.

The climax of the sense of regeneration is the eventual marriage of Dorothea and Ladislaw, which is the last of an increasing number of small victories over folly and despair won by a more chastened sort of human being.

While yet married to Casaubon, Dorothea finds herself drawn more and more towards Will, towards involvement in the world and away from her own strict sense of duty:

Everything seemed dreary...all alike were as flat as tunes beaten on wood...even the sustaining thoughts which had become habits seemed to have in them the weariness of long future days in which she would still live with them for future companions. It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that Dorothea was hungering for, and the hunger had grown from the perpetual effort demanded by her married life.⁷⁹

It is plain that if she had been compelled to live her life as Casaubon's companion and helper she would have been wasted. Had Casaubon not died before she could assent to his wishes her sense of duty and her own compassion for him would have driven her to promise to carry on his work after his death. She would have said 'yes' to her own doom out of a sense of defeat and passivity:

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. If that were weakness, Dorothea was weak.⁸⁰

It is significant that George Eliot recognizes the basic ambiguity in the conflict between duty and a love which would not retain its purity were the sense of duty violated. That she was certainly under no illusions herself about the value of pointless sacrifices, is evident from a letter she once wrote to Charles Bray criticizing the obligation Rochester feels to his mad wife in Jane Eyre:

All self-sacrifice is good - but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase.⁸¹

Like Maggie, Dorothea's sense of duty threatens to cripple her life but unlike Maggie she is rightly sceptical of its absolute claim on her behaviour and is fully aware that by submitting to Casaubon's will, she is surrendering her own sense of identity. Duty is no longer a value determining plot but has been brought into open question by the plot.

It is ironic to consider that because of her own rigid sense of propriety Dorothea might never have married Ladislaw at all were it not for the slander on herself and him implied by the provision of Casaubon's will. Just as the narrow-minded interference of Brooke, Chettam, Celia and Mrs. Cadwallader had been instrumental in arousing Dorothea's indignation on behalf of Casaubon and so hastening her marriage to him, their attempts to discredit Ladislaw inspire in her a resistant belief in him. Gradually, Dorothea's convictions that Ladislaw is good becomes aligned with her affection for

him. After Mrs. Cadwallader's sneering reference to him as 'an Italian with white mice',⁸² Dorothea is impressed by Lydgate's casual mention of Ladislaw's kindly concern for little old Miss Noble:

...on the contrary, he was a creature who entered into everyone's feelings and could take the pressure of their thought⁸³ instead of urging his own with iron resistance.

The difference between her championing of Ladislaw and her championing of Casaubon is that, in Ladislaw's case she is more deeply affected by the slanders against him and is far more sensitive to the evidence for and against him, rather than oblivious to all estimates that differ from her own, as she had been with Casaubon.

Ladislaw's own sense of honour which disqualifies him from directly making love to Dorothea because of the dishonourable figure he feels he would make in the eyes of Middlemarch, when combined with Dorothea's sad resignation and her fervour on his behalf, tend to bring about poignant meetings between them which only serve to intensify their feelings for each other. The gradual bringing together of Will and Dorothea, then, is not an outgrowth of plot but becomes intimately connected with the general movement of events which determines the fates of Bulstrode, Lydgate, Rosamond, Fred and Mary.

However, the plot is not always so responsible to George Eliot's philosophical sense of character and destiny.

The reappearance of Raffles after his brief appearance in connection with Joshua Rigg-Featherstone, the inheritor of Stone Court, brings with it a revelation that Bulstrode's hypocrisy disguises a prior connection with an organization of thieves. We also learn that he came into his fortune by deceitfully excluding the rightful heir. The revelation is the end product of a series of accidents carried on from the line of plot which had seemed to culminate in the death of old Peter Featherstone, and thereby exhausting its main relevant connection to the plot as a whole in the disappointment of Fred Vincy's hopes of inheriting a good part of the Featherstone fortune. Joshua Rigg is originally introduced with fine dramatic and comic effect to frustrate Fred Vincy and Peter Featherstone's unsavoury relatives. Thereafter he is introduced as Joshua Rigg-Featherstone for the purpose of selling Stone Court to Bulstrode and of introducing Raffles who is himself used rather too exclusively as a means of publicly humiliating Bulstrode and of providing Will Ladislaw with a sense of an 'inherited blot'. A whole chapter is devoted to the meeting of Raffles with Will.⁸⁴ Not only does the plot become cumbersome at this point, with so many chance circumstantial connections to be made, but two characters, Rigg, as Rigg-Featherstone, and Raffles have been created virtually for the sake of making these connections.

Furthermore though George Eliot's superb phenomenology

does not fail her in depicting Bulstrode's agonizing dilemma, the whole revelation does not add a great amount to our understanding of the character of Bulstrode which was not already evident. We learn now, in explanation of the conduct of his early life that

He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with these beliefs.⁸⁵

But this trait had already been obvious in the delight he took in dominating others and in his not over-scrupulous regard for the worldly interests of those with whom he does business. Vincy is quite aware of this discrepancy after Bulstrode's cheap dyes have rotted his fabrics. The powerfully developed sense of Bulstrode's constant equivocation, the recurring habit of dressing self-interest in a pretext of other-worldly motives, which leads ultimately to the death of Raffles could have been developed in connection with less lurid and sensational wrongdoings. The petty evil of this man, displayed in his daily actions; for example, in his gratuitous refusal to clear Fred of the charge of boasting about his inheriting Featherstone's land which he knows to be untrue; would have provided sufficient opportunity for the vivid characterization of him which does emerge though at the cost of the unwieldy and distracting fable of Raffles.

Nevertheless, once set in motion, events hasten

inevitably to a doom which Bulstrode's equivocation with himself and virtual murder of Raffles compounds rather than hinders. After the ponderous connection has been made between Ladislaw's parentage and Bulstrode's past, the plot tends to regain the strength which can only come from a genuine sense of converging lots.

It is especially humiliating for Bulstrode when Garth discontinues business with him. In his dealings with Bulstrode we are presented with a model of behaviour for a straightforward independent man. Consequently we are provided with a perspective from which to view Lydgate's eager acceptance of Bulstrode's offer of financial assistance only shortly after he had applied to the banker for a loan and had been refused in no uncertain terms. Of course Lydgate is not to know that Bulstrode has an ulterior and dishonest motive for offering him the money, but the contrast with his earlier independence of spirit is obvious:

But as he put his hack into a canter...there crossed his mind with an unpleasant impression, as from a dark-winged flight of evil augury across his vision, the thought of that contrast in himself which a few months had brought - that he should be overjoyed at being under a strong personal obligation - that he should be overjoyed at getting money for himself from Bulstrode. ⁸⁶

By surrendering his independence even to this degree, Lydgate has again become vulnerable to the greater 'cunning of things in general', when he had thought to extricate himself from debt by 'winking'. His uneasiness increases

after the death of Raffles and he suspects 'that Bulstrode's motives for his sudden beneficence following close upon the chilliest indifference might be merely selfish'.⁸⁷ We wonder why he does not inquire more closely into this uneasiness, when it is such that he cannot relate the circumstances of the loan to Farebrother. Lydgate therefore, is not entirely blameless of the humiliation which is visited upon him as a consequence of this connection with Bulstrode. It is ironical that the facts which most tend to give impetus to the rumour which Raffles has spread concerning Bulstrode's past (apart from his own death) are Garth's admission that he had severed business ties with Bulstrode, and Lydgate's loan from Bulstrode. It is ironical that Garth, of all people, the character least inclined to intrigue, should be so instrumental in giving credence to the rumour. And it is ironical that Lydgate, whose initial intention was that he should remain free of intrigue, should now be directly involved in a scandal.

Lydgate however shows a true nobility by bending only so far under misfortune. Bulstrode is accused at the committee meeting and is visibly crushed by his inability to directly refute the accusation. Lydgate is shocked by the realization that he must seem a party to Bulstrode's guilt. He does not react with frantic efforts to dissociate himself from Bulstrode but rather goes to his aid even though this can only confirm

the feeling against himself. By this action, Lydgate fully accepts the consequences of his inadequacies.

Bulstrode however, with his integrity eaten away by a lifelong habit of egoistic rationalization, is incapable of facing the calamity which comes upon him. After his vicious counterattack against his 'detractors', he is crushed forever. He is incapable of facing his wife and admitting to her that he has been living a lie. When his wife has her worst fears aroused by Vincy, her brother,

There darted into her mind the idea of some guilt in her husband - then, under the working of terror came 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 unrepenting fellowship with shame and isolation. ⁸⁸

This passage surprises us. Previously we were content to regard Mrs. Bulstrode as a feminine version of her husband. We know that her tendency to sermonize is mixed with a pride of nature and a delight in personal appearance that make her almost as insufferable as her husband. And so now 'Her honest ostentatious nature made the sharing of a merited dishonour as bitter as it could be to any mortal'.⁸⁹ We would expect her to react like Rosamond with a cold self-righteous reproach for the man through whom she is disgraced, 'But this imperfectly-taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her'.⁹⁰ Her resolution to 'go down

to her unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow'⁹¹ is touching and entirely believable. Again, as with the scene in which Dorothea and Casaubon walk up the stairs together, we get a sense of epic richness, complexity and mysterious unpredictability of life. It is a great strength rather than a weakness in the architectonic of the novel that this event should have come upon us so unexpectedly. In real life we are continually amazed by unexpected strengths in people whose weaknesses we have felt secure in condemning for years. It is quite likely that George Eliot herself had evolved a fuller sense of Mrs. Bulstrode's potentialities in the act of writing and making creative departures from the plan she had made.⁹²

Lydgate's fate seems bleaker than Bulstrode's in so far as he finds no comfort in Rosamond and sees no hope of clearing himself in the eyes of others, when he is in fact innocent. We find that even Farebrother is not prepared to deny the possibility that he may have been forced by extreme necessity into accepting a bribe from Bulstrode. We see this in the caution with which he greets Dorothea's ardent championing of Lydgate:

'Character is not cut in marble - it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing and may become diseased as our bodies do'.⁹³

Dorothea's misfortunes have refined and strengthened her natural sympathy with other people which, in this case,

gives her an awareness that Farebrother lacks:

Some of her intensest experience in the last two years had set her mind strongly in opposition to any unfavourable construction of others...She disliked this cautious weighing of consequences, instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy which would conquer by their emotional force. ⁹⁴

We are reminded of the contrast between Garth's generosity and his wife's scepticism. Dorothea is right in so far as her faith in Lydgate and her desire to help him really is justified and appreciated:

The presence of a noble nature generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. ⁹⁵

Lydgate is immensely eased by Dorothea's help:

'...you have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you'. ⁹⁶

But he remains pessimistic with regard to his own lot: "I am simply blighted - like a damaged ear of corn - the business is done and can't be undone."⁹⁷ Dorothea's earnestness still retains something of its old idealism and pathos in her passionate resistance to Lydgate's admission of defeat: "I cannot bear to rest in this as unchangeable."⁹⁸ But the earlier passion and idealism is impossible now and both Lydgate and Dorothea come to realize it. Lydgate proves right when he accepts the consequences of his failures and sees that he must sacrifice his ideals and ambition in adjusting his

life to the circumstances he has helped create: "I must do as other men do."⁹⁹

However Dorothea's trust in Lydgate, shown in her financing of the hospital and her further efforts at clearing his name, is like a beacon which gradually influences the thoughts of some others. To this extent it is not just a 'moral victory' but a victory over those hard, intractable worldly conditions which had ruthlessly crushed both her's and Lydgate's dreams.

The effect of her generosity does not stop here, but sets in motion a series of events which indirectly benefit a number of characters and culminate in her own marriage with Ladislav. Her visit to Rosamond, to whom she intends to clear Lydgate of the imputations against him, makes it seem that Ladislav has compromised himself with Rosamond. Consequently she loses faith in Ladislav, and Ladislav shatters Rosamond's egoistic fantasy world which drives her closer to Lydgate and increases his comfort. Dorothea is confronted with the full effect of her latent feelings for Ladislav in the jealousy she feels of Rosamond. But she is able to overcome this and arrive at a fuller sense of the world:

'What should I do - how should I act now, this very day if I could clutch my own pain and compel it so silence, and think of those three!'

It had taken long for her to come to that question, and there was light piercing into the room. She opened her curtains and looked out toward the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary palpating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.¹⁰⁰

Again we feel the extraordinary power of this novel which can make such mysticism coextensive with the cruelly restricting web of cause and effect. These two vastly different senses of life, the one rigidly deterministic, even fatalistic, and the other full of a joyous mysticism are causally related, the one growing out of the other. Thus both are validated and reconciled at the deepest level of character and plot.

Dorothea's resolve to suppress her own pain and try to make things easier for Lydgate and Rosamond, leads to her visiting Rosamond and again causing a revolution within Rosamond's little world. Rosamond's shock that Dorothea could be anything other than coldly vindictive moves her to clear Ladislaw of all blame in Dorothea's eyes, and so make it possible for them to meet and show their true feelings for each other.

We can see that the successful conclusion to Dorothea's and Will's love for each other has not been an

arbitrary development but has involved a web of life quite as elaborate as that which gives such deep credence to her experience of failure.

However while the love of Dorothea and Will provided a high point for Victorian readers, it has not met with great enthusiasm with critics since Dr. Leavis, for whom the whole affair is an exercise in fantasy and self-indulgence. One cannot but admit some sympathy with his snorting dismissal of

Those impossibly high-falutin' tête à tête - or soul to soul - exchanges between Dorothea and Will which is utterly without irony or criticism.¹⁰¹

One must bear in mind though, that he dismisses Dorothea herself as the product of the same day-dream.

As I have taken trouble to illustrate how meticulously prepared for the affair is at the level of plot I cannot accept that it is a complete failure. The quite substantial difficulty, I think, arises from George Eliot's failure to make it apparent that Dorothea's niceness with regard to Will and to what she regards as her 'duty', is not necessarily a 'noble' quality at all. This is particularly so because we know that Dorothea has called her 'duty' into question à propos of Casaubon's attempt to force her to carry out his will, and realized that it springs from weakness rather than strength.

The other difficulty arises from the character of

Ladislaw himself which seems to be largely an amalgam of the sort of tiresome niceties which we find in Dorothea. The affair would have been far more convincing had George Eliot made it clear that the lovers owe the success of their affair largely to chances which they could have been independent of had they simply recognized their feeling for what it was and had they honestly avowed it in a mutual declaration. One feels that Klesmer and Catherine Arrowpoint in Daniel Deronda display far more honesty, insight and maturity in conducting their socially unacceptable affair than do Will and Dorothea. It is not a weakness that Will and Dorothea are less aware and mature but it is a weakness that their immaturity lends itself so readily to idealization as the way to carry on a love affair. Were it not for this lapse of objectivity, I feel that readers would have been able to perceive far more readily the essential process of 'meliorism', the largely indirect way in which society carries on in spite of itself. As it is, the hard won and perfectly valid sense of affirmation is easily confused with the vague naive Romanticism of Dorothea and Will.

Middlemarch demonstrates quite clearly that an unshrinking acceptance of the hard conditions and continual frustration of life, if lived through with 'conscious clear-eyed endurance' should not lead to despair and meaninglessness

but straight to a heightened sense of responsibility. Its tremendous heuristic value lies in the realization that neither faith in an ultimate good, nor despair at remote deterministic sequences, are justified, because the fate of mankind is constantly in the balance and his future is constantly being denied or affirmed by every one of our actions. No human action is impotent, for humanity is in a constant state of becoming: 'Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending'.¹⁰²

1. J. Beaty, Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel, op. cit.
This book provides by far the most exhaustive analysis
of the evidence for this opinion. Similar views are
held by (a) Joan Bennett, George Eliot Her Mind and
Her Art, ed. cit., p. 160, and (b) Gerald Bullet,
Introduction to Middlemarch, ed. cit., p. V.
2. Beaty, op. cit., Foreword, p. vii.
3. Ibid., p. 3.
4. George Eliot's Life, op. cit., pp. 451-3.
5. Ibid., p. 466.
6. Beaty, op. cit., p. 9.
7. Cross, ed. cit., p. 453.
8. Beaty, op. cit., p. 12. 'There is no contradictory
evidence. There is a great deal of confirming evidence'.
9. George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. I, 81.
10. Beaty, op. cit., p. 12.
11. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. I, 286.
12. Ibid., 287.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 158.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 159.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 123.
20. Ibid., 232.
21. Ibid., 48.
22. Cross, ed. cit., p. 473.

23. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. I, 81
24. Ibid., 314.
25. Ibid., xiii.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 3.
30. Ibid., 4-5.
31. Ibid., 6.
32. Ibid., 7.
33. Ibid., 34.
34. Ibid., 171.
35. Ibid., 169-170.
36. Ibid., 171.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 241.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 51.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., pp. 70-1.
44. Ibid., 71.
45. Ibid., 246.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 376.

48. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. II, 44-5.
49. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. I, 370.
50. Ibid., 375.
51. Ibid., 378-9.
52. Ibid., 130.
53. Ibid., 130-1.
54. Ibid., 306.
55. Ibid., 152.
56. Ibid., 155.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 157.
59. Ibid., 158.
60. Ibid., 164.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 165.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., 262.
67. Ibid., 265.
68. Ibid., 304.
69. Middlemarch, Vol. II, ed. cit., 138.
70. Ibid., 139.
71. Ibid., 207.
72. Ibid., 140.
73. Middlemarch, Vol. I, ed. cit., 220.

74. Ibid.
75. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. II, 107.
76. Ibid., 115.
77. Ibid., 120.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 41.
80. Ibid., 47.
81. G.E.L., I, 268.
82. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. II, 61.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., Chapter LX.
85. Ibid., 170.
86. Ibid., 249.
87. Ibid., 256.
88. Ibid., 286.
89. Ibid., 287.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Beaty, op. cit., p. 101, offers evidence in support of this view - that George Eliot may have evolved a fresh attitude to the entire incident - from his reading of the plans for this section of the novel in the notebooks:
'...though the notebook makes provisions for a scene in which Mrs. Bulstrode is informed of the scandal affecting her husband, at first it was to occur immediately after the "Sanitary Reform" meeting...and she was to have had knowledge of Lydgate's part in the scandal.

It is also significant that, from the point of view of the effectiveness of Lydgate's going to Bulstrode's aid 'nowhere is it suggested in the notebook that Lydgate as physician and warm-hearted man goes to the side of the stricken Bulstrode'.

93. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. II, 273-4.
94. Ibid., 272.
95. Ibid., 298.
96. Ibid., 300.
97. Ibid., 299.
98. Ibid., 300.
99. Ibid., 303.
100. Ibid., 321.
101. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, op. cit., p. 89.
102. Middlemarch, ed. cit., Vol. II, Finale, 357.

CHAPTER 8 : FROM MIDDLEMARCH TO DANIEL DERONDA.

Ever since Adam Bede George Eliot's novels had enjoyed considerable popularity, but the publication of Middlemarch marked a unique phase in the evolution of the relationship between George Eliot and her public. Gordon Haight has noted that the decision to publish the novel in eight parts over a whole year 'developed a remarkable rapport between George Eliot and her readers', and that 'enthralled by her accurate perception of human nature, many felt she was writing especially for them'.¹ He cites the letter of one young man from San Mateo, California, who has recognized himself in Fred Vincy:

I almost know that even I who have played vagabond and ninny ever since I knew the meaning of such terms, may reform to find my Mary too - perhaps. You who are a great lady yet know so well how all the little fishes struggle, may smile a moment at my folly which dares to love you for your goodness and inspiring handiwork.²

From this letter and from many others it would seem that the relation between author and audience has become more dynamic in that readers have had time to identify with a novel written about lives not so far removed from their own. In this sense Edith Simcox thought that it marked

...an epoch in the history of fiction in so far as its incidents are taken from the inner life, as the action is developed by the direct influence of mind on mind and character on character...but chiefly as giving a background of perfect realistic truth to a profoundly imaginative psychological study.³

Significantly, perhaps, this lucid review was written before Edith Simcox had met George Eliot.

Nevertheless the guiding hand of George Eliot herself was recognized in Middlemarch, and appreciated all the more for its tactful mastery in seeming, at least, to share with her readers responsibility in determining fates as consequences of the moral complexions of her characters. A peculiar kind of intimacy develops, a living relationship in which the public began to look from the novel to the author for a type of guidance. Surely something quite exceptional might be demanded of the woman who could reveal to them their own ordinary yet all-important lives, their inmost secrets and motions of the heart, so sensitively and yet so shrewdly.

Professor Haight notes that 'The Great Teacher that readers discovered in Middlemarch brought George Eliot more letters than any other aspect of the book'.⁴ He then quotes part of F.W.H. Myers' first letter to George Eliot, which he was inspired to write by Middlemarch and which marks the beginning of their acquaintance. The relationship with Myers, along with a number of other relationships established at this time and on somewhat the same basis, seems to have an important bearing in influencing that complex self-relation which informs the tone of Daniel Deronda. Professor Haight notes that Myers cared most for the scenes between Ladislav and Dorothea - 'noble love making' which is hardly ever described truly:⁵

Life has come to such a pass - now that there is no longer any God or any hereafter or anything in particular to aim at - that it is only by coming into contact with some other person that one can be oneself...and you seem to be the only person who can make life appear potentially noble and interesting without starting from any assumptions.⁶

Indeed, Myers' praise of George Eliot's Feuerbachian ability to 'make life appear potentially noble and interesting without starting from any assumptions' has a paradoxical corollary which becomes obvious in his account of a conversation with George Eliot. Their meeting inspired that famous account of George Eliot pronouncing upon God, immortality and duty at dusk in the grounds of Cambridge. The paradox is that Myers should elevate George Eliot into a personified Fate from whom he expects (and receives) an almost divinely authoritative confirmation of his own rational scepticism:

She stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet calls of men - the words God, immortality, duty - pronounced with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable was the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never perhaps have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing law. I listened and night fell; her grave majestic countenance turned towards me like a sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates. And when we stood at length and parted, amid that columnar circuit of the forest trees, beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be gazing like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty halls, - on a sanctuary with no presence to hallow it, and heaven left lonely of a God.⁷

Professor Haight has rightly described this account

as overdramatized, but the germ of Myers' paradoxical attitude can be seen in his first letter. First he writes that since there is no God, there remains only self-realization through contact with 'some other person', a notion implicit in George Eliot's own approach to life and therefore likely to strike a sympathetic chord within her. However, the identity of another person is associated with what one expects of that person, and Myers (along with many others) was interested in finding assurances in George Eliot. Such a relation could tend to become exclusive in that 'some other person' will become a thinly veiled abstraction for George Eliot, 'the only person who can make life appear potentially noble and interesting'. This relation is markedly one-sided, and since on our side there is no longer that peculiar mixture of idealism and a despairing acquiescence in 'undeviating law' which determined what Myers should seek in George Eliot, we can view the relation as outsiders at best. George Eliot herself, formerly a prey to acute anxiety and fits of self-doubt, was in Lewes' eyes beneficially affected by the adulation of Myers and others, and in ours infected with the limitations it implies.

Apart from Myers, Middlemarch inspired a most extreme form of adulation in many people of varying backgrounds and intelligence - most commonly women, some of whom came to be referred to as George Eliot's 'spiritual daughters'. Their attitudes to George Eliot range from the dumb devotion of Elma Stuart to the passionate undeclared love of Edith Simcox.

George Eliot was aware of this and (in Edith Simcox's case) discouraged it, but as Professor MacKenzie has suggested in Edith Simcox and George Eliot, she may not have been wholly unsusceptible to it.⁸

Perhaps more typical of the relationships which George Eliot became involved in after Middlemarch is that between herself and the Hon. Mrs. Henry Frederick Ponsonby, who was introduced to George Eliot at a gathering on 16th March 1873. Mrs. Ponsonby felt that George Eliot was 'in possession of some secret' which made it possible for her to combine a rigorous acquaintance with modern scientific thought with 'a warmth of approval for moral greatness and beauty and purity in the high ideals [she] would set before us'.⁹ Shortly afterwards Mrs. Ponsonby received a letter from George Eliot dated 10th December 1874 and written as Daniel Deronda was being created. We may assume from its tone that Mrs. Ponsonby had fallen victim to the nihilistic vacuum of faith which negates all human differences and equalizes all human values in nullity:

My books have for their main bearing a conclusion the opposite of that in which your Studies seem to have painfully imprisoned you. - a conclusion without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life - namely that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man: and that the idea of God insofar as it has been a high spiritual influence is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e. an exaltation of the human).

Have you quite fairly represented yourself in saying that you have ceased to pity your suffering fellow-men, because you can no longer think of them,

as individualities of immortal duration, in some other state of existence than this of which you know the pains and the pleasures? - that you feel less for them now that you regard them as more miserable? And, on a closer examination of your feelings, should you find that you had lost all sense of quality in actions - all possibility of admiration that yearns to imitate - all keen sense of what is cruel and injurious - all belief that your conduct (and therefore the conduct of others) can have any difference of effect on the wellbeing of those immediately about you (and therefore on those afar off), whether you carelessly follow your selfish moods, or encourage that vision of other's needs which is the source of justice, tenderness, sympathy in the fullest sense? I cannot believe that your strong intellect will continue to see, in the conditions of man's appearance on this planet, a destructive relation to your sympathy: this seems to me equivalent to saying that you care no longer for colour, now you know the laws of the spectrum. As to the many combinations through which life is manifested and which seem to present themselves to you as a hideous fatalism, which ought logically to petrify your volition - have they in fact any such influence on your ordinary course of action in the primary affairs of your existence as a human, social, domestic creature? And if they don't hinder you from taking measures for a bath, without which you cannot secure the delicate cleanliness which is your second nature, why should they hinder you from a line of resolve in a higher strain of duty to your ideal, both for yourself and others?'¹⁰

The realistic humanity of this advice is consistent with George Eliot at her most acute - as the author of Middlemarch.

The demands of Mrs. Ponsonby and others appear to force George Eliot into the position of assuming responsibility for finding an integration and meaning in the midst of chaos. She is expected to provide a working answer and, above all, an assurance, a personal guarantee. This she strives to do. Shortly after the publication of Daniel Deronda she writes to Mrs. Ponsonby:

Oh that we were all of one mind and that mind good! is an impossible to be realised wish and I don't wish it at all in its full extent. But I think it would be possible that men should differ speculatively as much as they do now and yet be 'of one mind' in the desire to avoid giving unnecessary pain, in a desire to do an honest part in the general well-being, which has made a comfortable nidus for themselves in the resolve not to sacrifice another to their own egoistic promptings. ¹¹

Similarly Benjamin Jowett notices in the George Eliot of this period a commitment to altruism in spite of complexities, as a means of reconciling them and living humanly within the chain of 'ordinary causes':

She wanted to have an ethical system founded upon altruism; and argued that there was no such thing as doing an action because it was right or reasonable, but only because it accorded with one's better feelings towards others...Her idea of existence seemed to be doing good to others. ¹²

There is a world of difference between these statements and the vision of human moral fate which emerges from Middlemarch. There it is revealed that though men and women are more than likely to fail in integrating the currents of their lives with some sense of moral purpose or of achievement, the good which they do, almost in spite of themselves as much as because of themselves, acts in unforeseen ways to give the world and 'the republic' of men a meaning. The tone is finally one of acceptance in spite of a recognition of tragic (or semi-tragic) blindness and failure. In this letter to Mrs. Ponsonby and the altruism that Jowett speaks of, the tone has changed, in that though she is still aware of the

anomalies of life, her standpoint seems to be less in the actual world than in an ideal world such as that of Comte's 'religion of humanity'. The regret is the regret of an ideal mind for the failure of the real: it is a looking down at failure rather than, as in Middlemarch, a looking up from failure to the possibility of salvation. I think this habit of mind begins to grow more prevalent as the urgency of her concern for the fate and salvation of humanity grows upon her. She must hope that men will become 'of one mind' and unanimously desire goodness. She realizes that it is not the case, yet longs that it may be. The habit of mind, the yearning, tends towards exploring the possibility inherent in the 'may be' rather than the possibility inherent in the existent.

The structure of feeling underlying most of these relationships is dictated by sympathy. George Eliot gives of herself to other people, but she is not called into question by them. In her earnest attempts to reconcile to the world those who demand assurances of her, George Eliot speaks of duty and sympathy and altruism in a religious manner. But to the degree that it is religious, it is perhaps less qualified by that understanding which had already shown the highest feeling for 'duty', 'sympathy' and 'altruism' failing of direct effectiveness in the personality of Dorothea Brooke. In the early parts of Middlemarch, George Eliot seemed to realize only too well that sympathy is not a thing, but an action which

only becomes valid and real in a human relation. It can never be abstracted from the state of affairs in which it is called forth and made into a true description of the meaning of relations in general.

Herein lies an essential difference between the earlier and the later vision. Whereas Middlemarch evolved around a number of interlocking and mutually qualifying relationships, Daniel Deronda, for all its vastness and wider sweep of reference, is built around a single relationship. The relationship is one of sympathy on the one hand and spiritual dependence on the other, and as such recalls the relationship between George Eliot the teacher and those who depend on her.

It is this relationship between Deronda and Gwendolen which is to reconcile those two vastly different edifices of plot, design and character which readers respond to as the 'English' section and the 'Jewish' section. Hence the following discussion of the novel is basically in terms of this relationship.

1. George Eliot: A Biography, op. cit., p. 447.
2. Ibid., p. 447.
3. Edith Simcox in The Academy, January 1st 1873, in
K.A. MacKenzie's Edith Simcox and George Eliot, op. cit.,
p. 84.
4. Biography, op. cit., p. 451.
5. Ibid.
6. F.W.H. Myers to George Eliot, December 8th 1872, quoted
in Biography, op. cit., p. 464.
7. F.W.H. Myers, Century Magazine, November 23rd 1881,
quoted in Biography, op. cit., p. 464.
8. K.A. MacKenzie, op. cit., p. 91.
9. Biography, op. cit., p. 454.
10. G.E.L., VI, 98-9.
11. Ibid., 407.
12. E. Abbott and L. Campbell, The Life and Letters of
Benjamin Jowett in 2 Volumes, 3rd edition, Vol. II,
John Murray, London, 1897.